"Ought" irreducible —
p. 247

F. E. SPARSHOTT

AN ENQUIRY INTO GOODNESS

and related concepts; with some remarks on the nature and scope of such enquiries

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NOTE

REFERENCES to sections of this book made in ordinary type are to the numbered section only; references in bold-faced type are to the numbered section and all its subsections. Thus, in "Section 7.21" the reference is to the section numbered 7.21 only; but in "Section **7.21**" the reference is to the sections numbered 7.21, 7.211, 7.2111, 7.2112 and 7.212.

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AN ENQUIRY INTO GOODNESS

would be a sad thing if important problems were altogether abandoned by those best fitted to deal with them. But this has never happened, and is not likely to happen; and it is foolish to ask priests to pose as prophets; and there are many excellent people whose talents are most suitably employed on technical minutiae; and there is no reason to suppose that the demand for quick results, so ruinous everywhere else, will be less ruinous here; and the prospect of the thousand members of the Mind Association (not to mention the hordes of the American Philosophical Association) all setting up as prophets for themselves is what no man can view with equanimity.

2 THE NATURE OF ETHICS

ETHICS MAY BE DEFINED as that part of philosophy which is concerned with human conduct. And since questions about goodness only become pressing (and possibly, as we shall see, only become intelligible) within the context of human action, the present enquiry may seem to fall within the general scope of ethics.

If, as was argued in Section 1, philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom, ethics will then be the pursuit of wisdom in conduct, and in judging or discussing conduct; and professional or technical ethics will be whatever contribution can be made to that pursuit by discussing and criticizing and pondering. That contribution will necessarily be small: the kind of clarity that such methods at best can hope to achieve is certainly not sufficient to make a person act wisely and judge wisely, and equally certainly is not indispensable to that end. But there is a possibility that some may be helped by it to become wiser than they would otherwise have been, or to achieve some measure of wisdom more readily than they would otherwise have done.

No more is really necessary to define the scope of ethics; but in the following sections we will deal more elaborately with the differentiation of ethics from other branches of philosophy (Section 2.1); with the distinction between questions of action and questions of judgement (Section 2.11); with the characterization of certain of the problems with which ethics deals (Section 2.2); and with the relationship between ethics and certain other subjects which have a bearing on human action (Section 2.3).

2.1. *Goodness and Duty*

When we spoke of "that part of philosophy which is concerned with human conduct" there must have been many who felt that we were going altogether too fast. Is there a place for a separate branch of philosophy to deal with problems of human conduct? Such a question as this can only be answered, in the long run, by assuming the validity of certain classifications and distinctions and making them work: the precise scope of any branch of study is one of the last things which that study discovers. But the following remarks may be taken as a fairly plausible

and cheerful account of how it might come to seem natural to think of ethics as a field of enquiry.

There is an old threefold classification of human activities: thinking, doing and making. So long as one is doing what has to be done, making what has to be made and thinking about what demands attention, there is no occasion to reflect on any one of these three. But men are sometimes at leisure, and then they become puzzled.[1]

In the matter of thinking, then: when a man is trying to fill out an income-tax form, or wondering how to live for a week on fifteen dollars or roll up a garden hose, he is not tempted to ponder on the nature of his activity. When a problem confronts one, one solves it in any way one can, and that is that. But some people are restless and go out of their way to find problems to solve. It is when one is engaged in the gratuitous enquiries of scientific research, or wonders how the universe got to be the way it is, that the question arises: what is the aim of intellectual activity when it is not aimed at the solution of an immediately pressing problem? What, in fact, is truth, and how do we know when we have it? And why is this aim an aim?

With making, likewise, there is in the sphere of necessity no problem. One stitches one's fig-leaves, and that is that. But when one spends more than the minimum time necessary for digestibility in the preparation of food, or for sturdiness in shaping a chair-back, problems arise. Which of the indefinitely many types of sturdy chair-back shall I make? What kind of consideration determines the mind in making such a decision? How are such decisions to be justified to those who question them? What, in fact, is beauty?

The reader will now know what is to be said about action. While one earns one's living, does the shopping, washes and perhaps shaves, one has no occasion to reflect on why one should do these things. When one is standing on a railroad track and a train is approaching, one gets off the line without more ado. In such a context problems only arise when there are two incompatible things one should be doing at once. When one is simultaneously due to walk the dog and wash the car, the question

[1]Cf. Norman Douglas, *Siren Land* (Penguin ed.), p. 249: "And leisure is the *primum mobile* of the universe. Without leisure, the sun, moon, and stars would not have been created, for it stands to reason that the Creator could not have carried out this idea if He had been busy at the time. Are not mankind and all the beasts of the field also products of leisure moments?" Cf. also C. Elton, *Animal Ecology* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1949), p. 55: "All cold-blooded animals and a large number of warm-blooded ones spend an unexpectedly large proportion of their time doing nothing at all, or at any rate, nothing in particular."

arises, which? And how should one decide? Where does my duty lie, and how do I know it lies there? Such problems may perplex, and a good part of ethics is concerned with them; but the difficulties are ones of estimation rather than of principle, and by the time it is too late to perform either duty they are found to have solved themselves. But what when one has time to spare? One is then faced with the more deeply baffling problem: what shall I do, now that I have nothing to do? How should one spend one's time when one has a say in the matter? What is the aim of practical activity, in so far as its aim is not simply to meet the inescapable requirements of a particular situation? And how is such an aim to be determined? What, in short, is good, and how are we to decide what things or deeds are good?

It would thus appear that problems of duty and obligation arise in contexts quite different from those which give rise to problems of goodness: here are two sorts of question about action for ethics to deal with, and it is not to be expected that one set could be reduced to terms of the other. But one may reflect that duties and practical necessities are determined by one's social no less than by one's physical environment. And this social environment may also be expected to affect one's answer to the apparently more open question of what actions are good: a Bella Coola Indian is hardly likely to answer this question in the same way as an Edmonton Eskimo. Whether there is any theoretical link between goodness and obligation to correspond to this practical one is a question which must be left to Section 8.

2.11. *Action and Judgement: A Threefold Dichotomy*

The last section sought to make out a *prima facie* case for marking off problems of ethics and aesthetics from each other and from all other problems. But within each of the three categories of doing, making and thinking there is a further distinction to be made: that between action and judgement.

In the field of thinking, with its problems of truth, the distinction is perhaps not an easy or natural one. The distinction here is between the putting forward of a new hypothesis and the testing or criticism of one already made; also between the assertion of facts and the discovery of which among supposed facts is true.[2] It is not to be supposed that these

[2]The proper function of logic has occasionally been obscured, when it has been regarded as belonging on the wrong side of this dichotomy: as a guide to what assertions to make, rather than as a means of testing the validity of assertions already made. This is now generally held to have been a mistake: for example,

cause it can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to such other words as we have mentioned. Yet the word is not *treated* as a dummy; the discussion is carried on in terms of how this particular word, and no other, is used. For the discussion would be even more likely to mislead and less likely to enlighten us if it were carried on in the light of what it was supposed to illuminate.

3.5111. *Philosophers' Dummies*

We have said that the word "good" in ethics is a "philosophers' dummy," used for the sake of simplicity. There are many such dummies. Existential propositions, for example, often serve this purpose. From some works on the philosophy of religion one might receive the impression that religious people are continually affirming that "God exists"; whereas, in fact, they seldom if ever do. They are unlikely to say anything less complex than "We have a loving Father in Heaven," or "God's justice is tempered with mercy." But it is confusing to start by discussing such statements as these, since we are likely to find ourselves arguing simultaneously about whether we have a Father, where Heaven is, whether Heaven is where our Father is, whether He is loving, and so on. So we start with "God exists," which is the simplest thing we can say about God, even though it is so simple that it is not really worth saying. Another example is the predicative use of adjectives: one seldom actually says "The grass is green," but philosophers often discuss what one means when one says it. This again is simply because this is the simplest form of sentence in which the word "green" can occur, so that it makes clarity easier to achieve. As a final example we may mention the frequent requests (to which we have alluded in Section 3.41) in recent philosophy to "consider how a child learns to use the word. . . ." No child is ever produced so that we can watch it learning, and we may surmise that the learning by any child of how to use any word is in fact a very complicated and often gradual process. But this does not trouble the philosopher, who wants us only to consider the simplest possible way in which the word could conceivably be learned by one who was neither acquainted with any language nor able to use a dictionary.[32]

[32]Unfortunately, some philosophers want to do more than this, to imply that the word could be learned in no other way. Since this negative use seems to me to be quite illegitimate, I have ignored it.

4 SOME OTHER OPINIONS

4.1. *Method*

I NOW GIVE, with brief criticisms, some interpretations of goodness put forward by other philosophers. Section **7** will state briefly the points at which my own analysis seems to me superior to these others. The purpose of these sections is partly to show on what lines a discussion between these philosophers and myself might proceed, and partly to bring in certain questions which either do not seem to me to arise until they are dragged up, or else seem worth discussing although the natural course of the present enquiry does not suggest them.

The sketchiness of the treatment and the manner of it must be explained. First, the treatment is very brief because for the most part these men do not share my interests and I do not share theirs. Second, no care has been taken to provide a fair or accurate account. This is not an historical work, and the views discussed are discussed solely because of their apparent relevance to my own line of thought. Moreover, my argument rests on the theories as they are here stated, not as they are in fact; if my interpretation were quite false, the argument would not be at all affected. It would be absurd for anyone to come to a work of this character for an account of the opinions of others when they have expressed their opinions in books which are readily obtainable; indeed, it would show a certain lack of judgement to read this book at all before reading certain of those others. This is not to deny that fairness and accuracy are in themselves virtues; but if they should render a treatment less suited to the work for which it is meant, they would cease to be such.

Whatever distortion may here creep in, accuracy of one kind is preserved by quoting particular writers wherever possible, rather than sketching "types of theory." In matters of this kind the precise detail of a formulation may be of great importance; an author may suggest an analysis of the correct type only to reject it owing to unnecessary anomalies in its working-out produced by his own carelessness in the detail of its statement. On the other hand, the whole merit of a theory may lie in its detail rather than its outline: the wisdom of a writer's *obiter dicta* may lend his theory a plausibility which its main structure would not warrant. In such a case a false impression would be given by any attempt to trace the main outline of the theory.

Finally, the choice of authors must be defended. Here again the sole criterion has been suitability to their place in the argument: those only are brought in who seem either to fail conspicuously at some point where I hope to have succeeded or to fling out some challenge which I must meet. Those writers considered are, first, the ancients upon whose foundations we still build; and, second, contemporary writers in the English language—contemporary because they are engaged in a continuing discussion in which I join, in English because this study approaches thought through its medium of language and does not wish to raise too high the problems of philosophical translation.

4.2. *The Opinions*

4.21. *The Ancients*

In discussing Greek opinions, one runs a certain risk. The Greek concept of *to agathon* does not coincide precisely with the English concept of goodness (cf. Section 3.211). If one looks, for example, at the sophistic *Dissoi Logoi*, one sees plainly that *agathon* and its opposite, *kakon*, are applied to things and to people, but not to actions: for good and bad action, the terms *kalon* and *aischron* are used instead. And again, the man whom we should call "good" is more likely to be called *dikaios* than *agathos* in Greek: we should expect to find an *agathos anēr* public-spirited and courageous rather than indeterminately "good." If in spite of this we proceed as if *agathon* were a precise equivalent of "good," it is because Greek philosophical discussions in which the term plays a major part have decisively affected, both directly and indirectly through medieval sources, modern philosophical discussions of goodness.

However imperfectly "good" may render *agathon*, it is too late to do anything about it now: the thought of Plato and Aristotle has become the common property of Europe on the assumption that *agathon* may be fairly translated by "good," *gut*, *bon* and the like, and so long as students continue to read Greek philosophy in translation the assumption must stand. Indeed, some British philosophers become easier to follow if one bears in mind that when they say "good" they mean *agathon*. This situation could of course not have arisen were the difference between Greek and English conceptual schemes so great as to lead to much actual confusion. In fact, the differences in use between *agathon* and "good" are no greater than those between "good" in one philosopher's usage and "good" in another's.

4.211. *The Socratics*

Since Aristotle does little more in the matters which concern us than develop Plato's hints, and since neither has a single consistent theory of the meaning of "good," it has not seemed worth while to treat their accounts separately, but rather to speak loosely of "the Socratics" and thus make it possible to cite Xenophon as an additional witness. In the works of the composite monster thus formed we find no less than four different accounts of goodness. At the one extreme we have Plato's conviction (*Republic* 505 ff.) that there exists a "Goodness Itself," knowledge of which will enable one to understand everything in the universe, since all things derive not only their goodness but also their reality from it. Attempts to unravel this fascinating and complex notion must always be inconclusive, and I shall only state my belief that such an endeavour would yield nothing relevant which is not dealt with in Section **4.21**. At the other extreme we find Aristotle's statement (*Topics* 107 a 5) that the term "good" is ambiguous because " 'good' in the case of food means 'productive of pleasure,' and in the case of medicine 'productive of health,' whereas as applied to the soul it means to be of a certain quality, e.g., temperate or courageous or just; and likewise also as applied to 'man.' " But it is clear that Aristotle has been brought to this pessimistic conclusion by confusing (as so many people do) the meaning of "good" with the criteria for its application to certain types of situation (cf. Section 6.33). Apart from these extreme views we find clearly implied interpretations of "good" in terms of function and of desirability. To these we now turn.

4.2111. *Goodness and Function*

Aristotle (*Ethics* 1097 b 26) writes: "In general, the good and the well are thought to reside in the function of whatever has a function or a job; and the same would seem to be true of man, if man has a function. Are we then to say that carpenters and cobblers have functions and jobs, but that man has none and has been made to no purpose? Or that, just as eye and hand and foot and in general each of his members seems to have a function, so man too, over and above all these, has some function? Well, then—what ever would it be?"

Xenophon (*Mem.* III. 8. 6) writes, after asserting the identity of the good and the beautiful: " 'All the things which men use are esteemed beautiful and good with regard to what they are useful for.'—'Is even a

slop-pail beautiful, then?' asked the other.—'It most certainly is,' he replied, 'and a golden shield is ugly, if the one has been made beautifully and the other badly for their respective functions.' "

In a more diffuse passage (*Republic* 352E ff.), upon which that quoted from Aristotle may well be based, Plato attributes "functions" to eyes, ears, pruning-hooks, horses and souls; observes that "the function of each thing is that which it alone can do, or which it can do better than anything else" (353A); and implies (353B-C) that goodness is attributed to things in respect of their satisfactory performance of their functions.

When applied to artefacts, artisans and parts of the body, such an account of goodness serves excellently. A good chisel certainly is one which fulfils its function efficiently, and a good carpenter is one who does his job efficiently. And if the goodness of the former is goodness *for* a task while that of the latter is goodness *at* a task, it may well be that this distinction can be made to vanish. Equally, the function of the eye is certainly vision, and a good eye one that sees efficiently. Difficulties begin when we turn to horses and men: what is it that "only a horse can do"? The only possible answer, "be a horse," does not seem to get us much further. More pertinently, what is it that only a man can do? The stock answer, "think," may be correct but is useless here, since goodness in men is certainly not mere efficiency in thinking. And Plato's attempt (*loc. cit.*) to make the soul's function "living" and make "living well" equivalent simultaneously to "living efficiently" and "living virtuously" is a glaring and notorious sophism.

The Xenophon passage suggests an alternative (and much more natural) definition of function in terms of purpose. On this definition, a thing's function belongs to it not in its own right but in virtue of its relation to something else: to some purposive being. The function of a chisel is the job it was made for and is used for, and the job of a carpenter is that part of his activities which he is called on to perform in his capacity of carpenter and in virtue of which he is given the name of "carpenter." But man does not make horses, and begets other men with no purpose for them in mind. Nor is the name of "man" or "horse" bestowed in virtue of any specific purpose or use. It would seem, then, that on this interpretation the notion of "function" has no clear application to objects other than artefacts (which are made for a purpose) or artisans (who are named for a purpose). To these we may add parts of an organism, whose contribution to the maintenance and well-being of that organism is readily interpreted as if it involved purpose: we find

no difficulty in understanding the question, "What is the function of the vermiform appendix—what is it *for*?" This relationship finds no clear analogue in man's relationship to his environment, nor is "man" the name of a tool or a trade. Aristotle is none the less able to speak of man's "function" because he believes (*Politics* 1252 b 3) that "Nature . . . makes each thing for a single use." But it is certainly possible to speak of "a good man" without referring to, or subscribing to, any such theory of nature; and one who speaks of "a good horse" seems to be referring, not to any supposed purpose of nature, but rather to some human purpose such as ploughing or racing. This suggests that we cannot speak of *the* function of a horse, but that a horse has as many "functions" as there are purposes it is used for, so that if we are asked "Is that a good horse?" we cannot answer unless we know what it is supposed to be good *for* or *at*. Since to the question "Is he a good man?" the counter-question "Good at what? good for what?" is obviously inappropriate, the "functional" interpretation of goodness even in this modified form seems to fail us at this crucial point.

4.2112. *Goodness and Desirability*

When Plato and Aristotle use "good" adjectivally they usually define it in terms of function. But they also use "the good" (*to agathon*) as a substantive.

Aristotle writes: "The good has rightly been said to be that at which all things aim" (*Ethics* 1094 a 1), and assumes elsewhere that "the good" is "the object of pursuit and love" (*ibid.* 1096 b 10; cf. *Metaph.* 996 a 25, *Rhet.* 1362 a 23). This is also the implication of Plato *Philebus* 60A. For Aristotle these statements appear to be synthetic, but universally believed and indubitably true; to deny them is nonsensical or irresponsible (*ouden legein*, *Ethics* 1172 b 35).

These statements seem to be formulated quite independently of those involving the concept of function, but are not necessarily incompatible with them. It might seem natural that one should pursue or desire that which fulfils its own function: obviously a man who wants a car wants one that works. Everything that functions well is thus likely to be desired by someone. But it is not obvious that the concept of function is applicable to everything that is desired.

As the concept of function is too narrow, so that of desirability is too broad. Different people desire different things, not all of which can be called good. A person may wish to smoke a strong tobacco which is

neither good tobacco nor good for him. To say that it *seems* good to him before he smokes it may be true but is not relevant unless one equates being good with seeming good; and such an equation, as Aristotle recognizes, does violence to the meaning usually attached to "good." To safeguard the distinction between being and seeming good, Aristotle distinguishes between appetite and rational wish, between any desire taken at random and correct desire: "The apparent good is the object of appetite, and the real good is the primary object of rational wish" (*Metaph.* 1072 a 27). But what makes goodness is not then being desired at all, but being the object of a correct or rational desire. Correctness or rationality becomes the true criterion. What then makes the desire correct or rational? We are told only that the correct desire is that which the good man feels (*Ethics* III. 4), and that rationality involves taking the long view (*de An.* 433 b 5). But this, though doubtless correct, is far from adequate.

4.212. St. Thomas Aquinas

The statements about goodness as such and about the goodness of God made by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa contra Gentiles* embody what is serviceable of Plato's obscure notion of "goodness itself."

Aquinas writes: (1) "That in virtue of which a thing is called good is its own proper excellence. . . . But excellence is a kind of perfection; for we say that a thing is perfect when it attains its own proper excellence. Thus everything is good which is perfect. Hence it is that each thing desires its own perfection as its own good." (*Contra Gentiles* I. 37)

(2) "Goodness and being are really the same; they differ only in idea. . . . The essence of goodness consists in this, that a thing should be desirable.[1] Now it is clear that a thing is desirable in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual." (*S. Th.* I. 5. 1)

(3) Aquinas explains that to be perfect a thing must have form and therefore "limit, species and order" (*S. Th.* I. 5. 5). But these do not belong to God, who is the *cause* of limit, species and order (*S. Th.* I. 6. 1 ad 1). "Good is attributed to God . . . inasmuch as all desired perfections flow from Him as from the First Cause" (*S. Th.* I. 6. 2).

(4) "The perfections of all things are in God. . . . No excellence

[1]Cf. *Contra Gentiles* III. 3: "It is the very notion of good to be the term of appetite."

which may be found in any genus is lacking to Him." To meet the objection that different things are perfect in different ways, and that these different perfections are incompatible, Aquinas cites a simile from pseudo-Dionysius (*S. Th.* I. 4. 2).[2]

These remarks embody two conflicting attitudes towards goodness. From (1), (2) and (3) it appears that there can be no such thing as complete or perfect goodness "in the abstract": if anything is good or perfect, it can be so only as a good or perfect specimen of a particular kind or species of thing. Thus to say that a man is good is to say that he is good *as a man*, and his goodness can only be judged in relation to the concept of humanity. This is a connoisseur's notion of goodness: the goodness of a man or of a wine lies in the possession of certain qualities which the connoisseur of humanity or of wines knows and looks for. It is also a metaphysical notion of goodness, since goodness is defined with sole reference to an object's nature: without reference to the desires or attitudes of any actual or hypothetical person or persons, and without reference to any use which might be made of the good object.

Alongside this metaphysical notion of goodness lies in (1) and (2) a notion of goodness conceived in terms of desirability. An attempt is made to reconcile the two, but it fails. It is not true that *all things* desire their own perfection. There is no sense in which a good wine desires its own goodness. It may be held that good wine is desired by men as contributing to the perfection of their own existence, which they desire; but this is neither what Aquinas says, nor easily compatible with his association in (2) of perfection with actuality. Nor is it easy to see in what sense vegetables may be said to desire their own perfection, although there is certainly a difference between good carrots and inferior carrots. A flower as it develops from seed may be said to achieve its own perfection, but one cannot seriously maintain that this achievement is a realization of the flower's desires.[3] One may say the same of the ontogenesis of animals, including men. Yet it is to this development that the argument refers in its Aristotelian origins, and it is hard to see what other application it has.

The former of these two notions of goodness differs from the latter in that it applies only to substances. But this limitation has no warrant, as Aristotle remarked (*Ethics* I. 6). One may speak of a good seat at

[2]Aquinas has also an "analogical" theory of the goodness of God, notice of which is deferred to Section 6.331.

[3]Cf. *Contra Gentiles* III. 3: "The natural agent . . . does not determine its end for itself, since it knows not the nature of end, but is moved to the end determined for it by another." See also III. 24.

a football match, or a good day's hunting, or of having a good time, but it is not clear in what sense the goodness of these could be said to be related to their own proper excellences, or to their actuality.

We should note finally that the notion of perfection outlined by Aquinas is flatly incompatible with the attribution of all perfections to God, since according to this notion the perfection of a thing lies in its possession of the excellence peculiar to that thing and no other. It does not add to a man's perfection to smell like a rose, nor to have a trunk like that of even the best-formed elephant. *A fortiori*, we cannot attribute to God the perfections of all His creatures. We can say only that in some way which we must not expect to understand He is the cause of all these perfections, since nothing has any other cause than God. And this seems to be Aquinas' real meaning: (4) is simply an inaccurate and illegitimate formulation of (3).

4.22. *The Moderns*

The contemporary works to which we now turn are mostly books devoted entirely to the nature of goodness and related topics. It is obvious that the relative merits of their and my treatments cannot be decided in a few paragraphs. Examination at length of the rivals might enable the reader to say that one was superior to another, in that it accommodated more phenomena with less embarrassment and had a higher ratio of illumination to distortion; but it is also likely that any account on such a scale will at some point be superior to every rival. The present work therefore is meant to correct and supplement its predecessors, but does not claim to supersede them.

4.221. *R. B. Perry:* General Theory of Value[4]

Professor Perry writes (p. 115): "That which is an object of interest is *eo ipso* invested with value"; and this seems to be as close as he comes to defining "value." "Interest" is further defined thus (*ibid.*): "It is characteristic of living mind to be *for* some things and *against* others. . . . It is to this all-pervasive characteristic of the motor-affective life, this *state, act, attitude or disposition of favor or disfavor*, to which we propose to give the name of 'interest.' "

The term "value" thus introduced is an entirely technical one. As that term is customarily used, to say that someone or other is for or against something is certainly not to imply that it has value: it makes

[4]New York: Scribners, 1923.

sense and may be true to say that someone desires or treasures a valueless object (cf. Section 4.2112). The broad usage which Perry introduces may be of very great use in the analysis of the basic concepts of ethics and aesthetics, and the importance in this connection of the "characteristic of living mind" to which he refers is great. But his usage corresponds no more to the normal usage of "good" than it does to that of "value": that someone or other is *for* something is no reason at all for thinking that that thing is good. This is so obvious as to require no argument; anyone with doubts is invited to reconsider them after studying Section **6** of the present work. It would therefore not have seemed relevant to mention Professor Perry's views, were it not that he states (p. 21) that he takes "value" to be the equivalent of "good or bad" without the unfortunate specific connotations of those words; and even goes so far as to use his concept of *value* as a yardstick in terms of which some of Aristotle's remarks about *goodness* are found to fall short (p. 115).[5] It might perhaps be thought that although Perry's concept of value is quite different from the concept of goodness it is nonetheless a more useful or less confusing concept, and that philosophers and other serious-minded people would do well to stop talking about goodness and start talking about "value" as thus newly defined. But such a suggestion is quite unacceptable. The goodness and badness of things is a matter of great, obvious and universally recognized importance; but whether or not a thing has value in Perry's sense is of no importance to anyone: indeed, one supposes that everything or almost everything has value in this sense.

Perry's extraordinary supposition that in newly defining value he has been correctly defining goodness becomes slightly (but very slightly) easier to understand when one gathers (as one may from p. 117, n. 6) that in the context of his definition Perry has assumed that what is desired is the same as what satisfies desire: that, in fact, people who are "for" things are never under a misapprehension about the nature of what they are "for," and thus never suffer disappointment. But, as Section **6** will seek to show, it is the very fact that pro-attitudes can be misdirected that makes the concept of goodness so useful.

In a later paper[6] Perry clears up this confusion between being desired and satisfying desire, and claims that the notion of "satisfaction" is irrelevant to value; and his language shows that he believes himself not

[5]In his recent *Realms of Value* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 13, Perry acknowledges that (on his definition) a thing is good if *anyone* is interested in it.

[6]"Value as Election and Satisfaction," *International Journal of Ethics*, XLI (1930–1), 429–42.

to be legislating for the use of a new concept of value but to be explaining what value really is.[7]

"The term 'satisfies,' " he writes in this paper (p. 436), "may be used to mean that which agrees with interest, as distinguished from what is opposed. In this sense any object of interest, anything that *M.* is interested in, would be said to satisfy him. This ambiguity has no doubt led to confusion of which I am myself not guiltless." But, perhaps owing to the vagueness of the term "agrees with," the confusion is not here dispelled. For the term "interests," as Perry defines it, must cover both approval and desire.[8] Now, if a man approves of something, no doubt he *is* satisfied with it, and it may be said to "agree with" his interest and satisfy him. But if his interest in a thing takes the form of desiring it or wishing for it, it can plausibly be said to "agree with" his interest only if it *would* satisfy him if he had it. In *this* sense an object of interest might be "opposed to interest"; and this is what Perry does not consider. For he goes on to object that to define value in terms of satisfaction excludes "objects of unfulfilled desire," unrealized ideals and perfection. This is a decisive objection to the equation of the valuable with what *does* satisfy or *has* satisfied desire; but does not preclude an account in terms of what *would* satisfy desire.

Having rejected the notion of satisfaction as thus conceived, Perry turns (p. 437) to another interpretation: " 'Satisfaction' is often taken to mean the termination of interest. According to this meaning, that event would satisfy an interest which closed it." But it is not true that "satisfaction" is ever so taken, unless we are to equate desire with interest; and this equation is not compatible with Perry's definition of interest, although for the remainder of the article he writes as if the equation held. Even if we make the equation, the account of "satisfaction" suggested is bizarre: for an interest may be terminated by killing the interested person, but no one would say that this event, in closing the interest, satisfied it. To satisfy a desire is indeed to terminate it, but to terminate it in a particular way: by providing that which (in Perry's phrase) "agrees with" the desire. Thus what Perry takes to be two alternative interpretations of satisfaction, one suitable only to interest in the form of approval or liking and the other suitable only to interest in the form of desire, are in fact the two necessary and inseparable aspects of satisfaction as commonly understood; and this concept of satisfaction

[7]In *Realms of Value* (p. 2), however, Perry acknowledges that his definition of value is prescriptive.

[8]In *Realms of Value* (p. 3), he defines interest as "a train of events determined by its outcome," although on page 7 he equates interest with "attitudes of favor or disfavor." Perry plainly regards these as somehow equivalent, but how they can be so he does not explain.

requires an interpretation of interest in terms of *both* desire *and* liking.[9] To satisfy a desire is indeed to terminate the desire, but not necessarily to terminate the interest—to think otherwise is to reduce *all* pleasure to the pleasure of anticipation, and to deny the very existence of enjoyment. Perry seems to be half aware of this consequence, for he writes (p. 436): "Even in enjoyment or contentment . . . there is a forward look." This seems to me to be simply false, although it is true that contentment may be increased by the certainty of its continuance; and if it is meant (as in the context it seems to be) that the forward look is the chief component in enjoyment and contentment, it is absurd. Thus, when Perry denies (p. 439) that his theory makes value always "flee into the future" he is able to do so consistently only by his dexterity in juggling the three specially defined terms—"interest" (i.e., desire), "satisfaction" and "value": "When an object is an object of an existing interest its value exists because its value consists in the interest taken in it. It is the satisfaction which flees, since the moment it arrives the interest of which it is the satisfaction ceases, so that it is left in the parlous state of a satisfaction which satisfies nothing." This statement sounds interesting because we naturally take the terms involved in their usual senses; but (as we have seen) if we do so it is not even plausible. If we make the statement true by taking the terms in their special senses it becomes trivial.

Perry says (p. 440): "Satisfaction is the terminal moment of the interest, belonging to its nature *qua* interest, and is not that in which the interest is taken." If this is true, value cannot be equated with satisfaction. But this is another piece of verbal jugglery. The term "satisfaction" is ambiguous: it may mean either the state of being satisfied, or the state of affairs which satisfies. Perry's argument holds only if it is taken in the former sense—a sense which he nowhere expressly takes into consideration. It is of course true that the "object of interest" is that which does or would satisfy the interest, not satisfaction in the abstract; but this is not the point which Perry wishes to make.

Perry recognizes that the concept of satisfaction is introduced as a means of distinguishing "the object I ought to desire or like, as distinguished from what I actually desire or like, or merely take to be good for me." But he objects that "My satisfactions may be as false, or as contrary to my 'real interests,' as my desires and likings." This is true, although a false satisfaction and a misdirected desire would seem to be

[9]Perry has failed to distinguish between the fulfilment of an anticipation and the termination of a painful lack. Those who deny this distinction usually assimilate the latter to the former (cf. Plato's remarks, *Republic* IX); Perry takes the unprecedented step of assimilating the former to the latter.

"contrary to my 'real interests' " in very different ways. But the objection holds only against the simple equation of the good (or "value") with the satisfactory; it does not follow that the concept of satisfaction must or can be excluded from an explanation of goodness or value.

4.222. *H. J. Paton:* The Good Will: A Study in the Coherence Theory of Goodness[10]

It seems certain that the sense in which a knife is called a good knife is in some respect fundamentally different from that in which a man is called a good man; and yet it seems equally certain that the two senses are not unconnected. Professor Paton does justice to both convictions: both senses are related to the will, one as active and the other as passive. He writes (p. 20): "To be good is to will (or to be willed) coherently, and different kinds of goodness depend upon the different ways of willing or of being willed." Thus (p. 54) "We may speak of a knife as a good knife, but it is so only as an instrument for cutting, that is to say as an instrument which someone may will to use." This as applied to things other than men approximates to the "functional" interpretation already examined (Section 4.2111), with its characteristic difficulties: in speaking of an animal as a good specimen of its kind "we seem to be postulating some sort of purpose either in it or in its creator" (p. 181). Professor Paton does not hesitate to accept this consequence of his theory, which we have already criticized.

That which is really good is distinguished from that which only seems so (p. 187): "A thing is really good or bad, not by its relation to a momentary whim, but by relation to a firm policy and especially to a policy of life." This accounts very well for the distinction between a good plan and a plan which only seems good at the time; but a quite different basis must be found for the distinction between a good pudding and a pudding that only looks good, on which considerations of firmness of policy seem to have no bearing. The proof, as we all know, is in the eating: the pudding which only looks good either looks as if it would eat well or (less commonly) presents a pleasing appearance. It might be possible to argue that the pleasure of eating is more closely related to a firm policy of life than this aesthetic pleasure; but this does not seem to be what we mean by the distinction. Perhaps even a good pudding (proved by eating) would not be *really* good in Paton's sense unless in some way it tied in with a policy; but again this distinction does not seem quite right in this context.

[10]London: Allen and Unwin, 1927.

Paton recognizes that an object may be good and yet not be an object of will because its goodness is unrecognized, but implies that it is good only because if its goodness were recognized it would be an object of will (p. 205): "It is true that we may judge things to be good for a person . . . when they are not actually willed. . . . But such judgments are always in relation to what may be called a need and a need is a sort of potential will." But this notion seems inadequate. To say that a need is a *potential* will seems here to be equivalent to saying that people do not in fact always will what they need, but they ought to do so. This is no doubt true, but does not amount to a reduction of needing to willing, which seems to be what is intended. A potential will is not a will at all.[11]

Unlike the Socratics, Paton does not try to apply the "functional" notion of goodness to men. For him moral goodness lies, not in being willed coherently, but in willing coherently: "A man is morally good, in so far as he wills to live his life in the service of the most all-inclusive whole of which he feels himself to be a member" (p. 362); which of course presupposes that a man should have a formed character, that his will should be *internally* coherent (p. 124). This is certainly part of what we mean by moral goodness; but the stress on all-inclusiveness disguises the fact that moral goodness is usually manifested in the performance of specific actions within specific groups to which the good man belongs: that his duties are not equal to all members of the "most all-inclusive whole of which he feels himself to be a member," as the example of Mrs. Jellyby shows. Paton has not overlooked this fact: indeed, his detailed discussion of the multiplicity of relationships and communities within which each man lives is the best I know. But the notion of "moral goodness" which he proposes does seem either to ignore or to be meant to change the fact that for a man to be called morally good he must not only will to live in the service of the widest community to which he feels himself to belong, but also perform his particular duties within particular groups. It would be very odd to say of a man that he is morally a good man but is a very neglectful husband and parent.

4.223. *C. L. Stevenson:* Ethics and Language[12]

Most of the authors thus far discussed have treated "good" as to some extent ambiguous. The Socratics give two unrelated accounts; Aquinas

[11]Cf. R. B. Perry, *I.J.E.*, XLI, p. 438: "when the object is not the object of any present interest, but is nevertheless good, then it is the object of some latent interest; or . . ." etc. We are not told what a latent interest is; one suspects it of being a non-existent entity conjured into being to save the theory.

[12]New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944.

tries but fails to reconcile accounts in terms of desire and in terms of perfection; Paton finds goodness in a variety of relationships to the will. This tendency to fragmentation is not necessarily to be deplored: it may well be unavoidable, as the only way to account for the facts of usage and the requirements of moral and other evaluation. The tendency is carried to an extreme by Professor C. L. Stevenson, who recognizes only one basic meaning of "good" but admits that there are other meanings. These he enumerates but does not discuss, which seems a grave defect of method.

Stevenson provides a "working model" of a definition, which he concedes is over-simplified, and which he later expands but nowhere abandons or seriously modifies: " 'This is good' means *I approve of this; do so as well*" (p. 21). The latter clause of this "working model" is intended as a crude approximation to the hortatory and emotive effect of the use of the word "good," which can be described but has no verbal equivalent (chapter IV). The former clause is meant to be taken as the expression of an attitude rather than a report on introspection.

On page 207 Stevenson offers the "general form" of a "second pattern of analysis": " 'This is good' has the meaning of 'This has qualities or relations X, Y, Z . . .' except that 'good' has as well a laudatory emotive meaning which permits it to express the speaker's approval, and tends to evoke the approval of the hearer." The connection between the "X, Y and Z" and the "approval" is left obscure. It appears that for Stevenson the "X, Y and Z" might be any qualities taken at random, and that such definitions are always persuasive in function.

Stevenson specifies that "good" may have "much the same use" as "effective," "in accordance with the customs of the times," "almost universally approved" or "approved by members of our community" (pp. 83–4), but the implications of these near identities are not explored. This lack of correlation, together with his concentration on the rarer predicative uses of "good" and his neglect of the commoner epithetical uses (see Sections 5.211, 6.1632), suggests that Stevenson is less concerned with the actual meaning and use of the term "good" than with certain general characteristics of the argumentation used in persuasion and in reaching joint decisions. This impression is borne out by the content of the book as a whole, whose title and programme are misleading.

Stevenson has been criticized by Mr. R. M. Hare (in lectures) for his use of the word "approve" in the basic "working model," on the ground that "I approve of this" simply means "I think this is good" and thus is an unsuitable word for the expression of an attitude. Stevenson

claims (p. 92) that he is not committed to this word, but he probably needs it. If we render "Brimlow is a good pickpocket but a bad citizen" as "I approve of Brimlow as a pickpocket but not as a citizen: do so as well," the rendering is tolerable only if it is regarded as an intellectual judgement of Brimlow's competence in fulfilling his two roles, not as an expression of emotional attitude; for the facts about Brimlow which make me think him a good pickpocket and a bad citizen are likely to be the same facts, and to give rise to a single emotional attitude.

According to Stevenson (p. 11), "The central problem of ethical analysis . . . is one of showing in detail how beliefs and attitudes are related." But on this problem he sheds no light at all. He recognizes (pp. 28 ff.) that attitudes may be supported by reasons which may be good or bad, relevant or irrelevant; but on the nature of this support, and on the distinction between goodness and badness, relevance and irrelevance of reasons, he has nothing to say.

It is to Stevenson's credit that he makes the interpretation of a particular ascription of goodness depend on who is talking, though he wrongly infers from this (p. 86) that if "This is good" is not taken as an expression of attitude, the *meaning* of "good" must be different on each occasion of its use. This does not follow. Words may mean the same though different people mean different things by them (see Section **3.3331**), and this holds true of "good" (see Sections **6.15**, **6.16** and **6.22**). It is also to Stevenson's credit that he recognizes the close bearing of judgements of goodness on action, and sees that the question "Is this good?" is often a request for guidance as to what attitude to adopt. But here we must be cautious. If Peruquerian asks Wiggery the anxious and difficult question whether a particular piece to which both have listened was "good music," he does not want to discover either Wiggery's personal attitude or what attitude he wants Peruquerian to adopt. If Peruquerian is interested in anyone's likings, it is the likings of *those persons whom he himself wishes to be like*, and of whom Wiggery is in this instance taken as typical. It is indeed Wiggery's knowledge rather than his attitudes that is in question: he may be bored stiff with both Peruquerian and the music they have heard, but this is not likely to affect his answer.

One of the great weaknesses of Stevenson's account is that it makes judgements of goodness refer to the speaker and not to the object, and that it entails (p. 170) that they cannot be either true or false in any usual sense. But surely our initial repugnance to this implication is justified. Surely it is extravagant to suppose that a dealer who says of one of his wares that it is "a real good car" is expressing, or wishes to be

taken to express, his own attitude, rather than conveying some information (however vague) about the car; and surely it is logically possible that he is lying. Surely also it is possible that a car should be a good car even if, through ignorance or prejudice or mistake, *no one at all* approved of it. And surely an ill-informed person looking at an array of chisels in a shop window and wondering whether they are any good is not deliberating what attitude to adopt or wondering what anyone's attitude is, but wondering about the chisels themselves. One wonders how Stevenson's "working model" would apply to the assertion that the chisels were not so good as they looked. Stevenson seems about to concede these points when he says (p. 107) that " 'This is good' is more nearly approximated, in its full meaning, by 'This is worthy of approval' than by 'I approve of this' "; but he dismisses his own suggestion with the astonishingly lame explanation that " 'worthy' has an emotive strength which 'approve' lacks."

4.224. *A. C. Ewing*: The Definition of Good[13]

At the end of a long and careful discussion of alternative views, Dr. Ewing concludes (p. 152) that "good" means "fitting object of a pro attitude," and that this "approximates as closely as a philosophical analysis ever could to an exact definition of a commonsense term." He adds (p. 166) that "If my definition is right, it will in fact explain why the word is used in so many different senses. For the sense will vary according to the particular pro attitude or attitudes the fittingness of which we intend to assert."

Ewing improves on Stevenson and Aristotle in that his "pro attitude" is a more flexible term than "desire" or "approval": it is intended to include choice (p. 166). But he leaves us with the same problem as Aristotle: "fitting" is an evaluative word, whose implications are not discussed. We therefore pass on without discussion to Mr. R. M. Hare, who avoids this defect.

4.225. *R. M. Hare*: The Language of Morals[14]

Mr. Hare sets out not to find a verbal equivalent for "good," but to describe the ways in which it is used and the function it performs. Its primary use is to commend (p. 79) and to guide choices (p. 28).

Mr. Hare regards the epithetical and not the predicative use of "good"

[13]Cambridge University Press, 1947.
[14]Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952.

as primary. He points out (p. 133) that if someone points and says "That's a good one," it is appropriate to ask not only "What makes you call it good?" but also "A good what?" The epithetical use of "good" thus involves reference to a "class of comparison." And this, we may interject, is probably the best way to preserve what is true in the "functional" notion of goodness (cf. Section 6.1632). As Aristotle remarks (*Metaph.* 1021 b 18), "In the case of bad things we speak metaphorically[15] of a perfect thief—since we even call them *good* (e.g., 'a good thief'). Excellence is a kind of perfection; for each thing is perfect, and each substance perfect, when no part of its natural stature is lacking according to the form of its proper excellence." To speak of a "good" thief is not to praise him indiscriminately but to say that he manifests clearly those properties characteristic of a thief. The "functional" interpretation of goodness takes into account only those cases where the characteristic properties of the "class of comparison" are manifested in a single type of activity.

Since the criteria for the goodness of any class of objects remain more or less stable, Hare affirms (p. 114) that the word "good" in a particular context does convey information. But these criteria, and hence the information conveyed, are not precise; and the conveying of this information is not normally the primary function of the word: "If the evaluative meaning of a word, which was primary, comes to be secondary, that is a sign that the standard to which the word appeals has become conventional" (p. 121). That seems to be true, but it has an unfortunate corollary, for the word "good" may also be used with reference to standards to which the user does not adhere; this is described by Hare as an "inverted-commas" use (p. 124). This description seems to imply that if a tippler and a teetotaller both say of Brighton Cheese sherry that it is a very good sherry, referring to the same features of the drink in question, they mean quite different things or are using the word in quite different ways. Hare, in fact, goes on to say (*ibid.*) that by calling a building "good Gothic revival" one may mean that it is "the sort of Gothic revival building about which a certain sort of people—you know who—would say 'that is a good building.' . . . We are, in this use, not making a value judgment ourselves, but alluding to the value judgments of other people." This shows the limitations of the account; for a person who, while disliking Gothic revival, spoke of a good Gothic revival building, *might* be thus alluding in a sneering and sarcastic way to the standards he rejects; or he might simply be recognizing that the

[15]The dodge of calling inconvenient uses "metaphorical" or "inverted-commas" uses, so that one can ignore them, is once more fashionable.

building conforms to those standards. Shopkeepers, one supposes, know which of their wares are good or bad of their respective kinds, but do not necessarily discriminate openly between the kinds of vegetables they approve of and those they personally think unfit for human use. On Mr. Hare's theory some of the greengrocer's uses of "good" are authentic and some are "inverted-commas" uses, but no customer who does not know the merchant intimately is likely to be able to tell which is which.

A definition of goodness in terms of "defining characteristics" must prevent us, according to Hare (p. 84), "from commending something which we want to commend"; that is, from commending an object for possessing those characteristics. "Value terms have a special function in language, that of commending; and so they plainly cannot be defined in terms of other words which do not perform this function; for if this is done, we are deprived of a means of performing the function" (p. 91). This assertion presents a challenge which we shall have to meet, but it does involve a very strange doctrine. It states that *words* commend, rather than that people use words in commending; it implies further that this function of commendation *must* be carried by individual words *per se*, and is not just one function which words may be used to perform. But why should this be so? One can persuade without using a special vocabulary of persuasion, and protest without using special words of protest; why should commendation be impossible without a characteristic terminology? This is not to deny that a consideration of the uses to which a term is most characteristically put (a branch of study which has been most fruitful in recent years) is of value for the understanding of that term, but to insist that a single word can be put to the most various uses (cf. Section 3.333). With this theory Hare's theory of the meaning of "good" loses its main justification.

Hare writes: "If we admit . . . that it must be a part of the function of a moral judgment to prescribe or guide choices, that is to say, to entail an answer to some question of the form 'What shall I do?'—then it is clear . . . that no moral judgment can be a pure statement of fact" (p. 28). This implies that what would be an appropriate answer to "What ought I to do?" would always also be an appropriate answer to "What shall I do?" but this is very doubtful (cf. Sections 6.332, **8.2**, 8.4). And how can guiding choices be equated with entailing imperatives, as Hare in effect here does? Obviously statements of fact may guide choices: for example, "That woman is married." Hare purports to deal with this objection in chapter 11. But there he considers only "ought" and not "good"; and it is far more plausible to say that statements of obligation entail imperatives than that statements about goodness do. Nor does he

anywhere defend his equation of "guiding" with "entailment" (and apparently also with "being a reason for": "A judgment is not moral if it does not provide, without further imperative premises, a reason for doing something" (p. 31)).[16] In the end, Hare extends his account to include all "value judgments" (the term replaces "moral judgments" on page 168) and decides to make it true by definition. The result is sheer confusion; yet it is clear that assertions of goodness do have a special bearing upon action, and one must make plain what this bearing is.

For Hare, it is the purpose of commendation ("The primary function of the word 'good' ") "at least indirectly, to guide choices" (p. 127). Things called good are always called so with reference to some standard; and the purpose of standards is to enable us to choose. Thus we have no standards for things among which we do not have to choose (p. 128). Value judgements may be related to standards in various ways: they may "inform the hearer that the object conforms to the standard," or be used to teach a new standard or to express adherence to an existing one, and so on (pp. 135–6). With all this we concur.

4.226. G. E. Moore: Principia Ethica[17]

Professor G. E. Moore's contention that good cannot be defined would seem to rule out the attempt made in the present work. Normally, it would not be worth while to attend to anyone who denied that what one was doing was possible: by doing it, one proves him wrong. But in this instance Moore's contention is that, though we may appear to succeed in our undertaking, this appearance must be deceptive.

Moore writes that philosophy "has no concern with" verbal questions (§2). "How 'good' is to be defined," he writes (§5), "is the most fundamental question in all Ethics"; but "my business is not with its proper usage, established by custom . . . my business is solely with that object or idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word is generally used to stand for. What I want to discover is the nature of that object or idea. . . . My answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter." (§6) Moore commits himself to the preposterous proposition that the word "good" *stands for* some "object or idea" in the same sense that the word "table" *stands for* tables or "horse" for horses (his own

[16]Cf. A. Edel, "Ethical Reasoning," American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, *Papers*, II (1953), 140: "It is a simple fact that when men are helped to see clearly what they want and what activities will bring what they want and what the consequences of their actions will be and what they will want in the subsequent conditions, then they have received guidance."

[17]Cambridge University Press, 1903.

examples in §6 and §8), as though an adjective were a kind of noun.[18] By renouncing concern with verbal questions he prevents himself from giving any reasons for this belief, and even from saying what he means by "stands for" *in* this context and how a word can "stand for" an idea in the same sense in which it can "stand for" an object. Nor, of course, does he say how he proposes to discover what a word "stands for" without considering how the word is used. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that he should arrive at the conclusion that the entity for which "good" stands "is not composed of any parts" and cannot be defined by saying how it is composed (§8): for since there is not the least reason to suppose that the word "good" is used to "stand for" any "entity" at all, one must expect a disconcerting answer if one insists on asking what kind of entity it stands for.

Moore states (§8) that the word "good" is *not* undefinable in the sense that one cannot say how it is used; hence this part of his objection to the present undertaking would not be that it is impossible but that it must be trivial—a charge whose validity must be left to the judgement of the reader. He adds (§4) that " 'The good' must be the substantive to which the adjective 'good' will apply," and that *this* is not undefinable in the sense that one cannot say what things are good or how they are mutually related. What is undefinable is (§10) "That quality which we assert to belong to a thing, when we say that the thing is good."

The word "good," then, for Moore (§13) "does denote a simple and undefinable notion." "Far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties [sc., those "belonging to all things which are good"] they were actually defining good. . . . This view I propose to call the 'naturalistic fallacy' " (§10). "That a thing should be good, it has been thought, *means* that it possesses this single property: and hence (it is thought) only what possesses this property is good . . . those who make it [sc. this inference] fail to perceive that their conclusion 'what possesses this property is good' is a significant proposition" (§24). This celebrated challenge is one that all writers on this subject must face; in Section 7.226 we shall see whether we have been able to evade it in Section **6**.

The positive part of Moore's work seems to rest upon a fundamental error, if not upon the commission of his own "naturalistic fallacy." For he derives important consequences, not indeed from a definition of good, but from the fact that it cannot be defined. Thus he writes (§60): "The only possible reason that can justify any action is that by it the greatest

[18]In fact, he writes as if "horse" always stands for *a particular horse*. But this may be inadvertent.

possible amount of what is good absolutely should be realised." But if good "does denote a simple and undefinable notion," why should the mere possession of this quality provide a reason for any action? In fact, if we turn to Moore's Preface (p. viii), we find the phrase "is good in itself" treated as synonymous with "ought to exist for its own sake." Thus, though Moore pretends not to define good, he is actually assuming that it can be defined as "that which ought to exist for its own sake" or in some such terms; and, since good things cannot be said to have a *duty* to exist, this must be taken as equivalent to "that which ought to be produced for its own sake," which seems simply to be a narrower and less plausible version of the Socratics' "proper object of desire." Moore's real contention is then not that good cannot be defined, but that it cannot be *further* defined. If Moore had actually stated the above as a definition of good, it is very doubtful whether it would have been accepted, since one can see no *a priori* reason to suppose that there is any object which "ought to exist for its own sake"; by refraining from stating it, he is able to rule out the use of such expressions as "my own good" on what purport to be logical grounds without actually having produced any explicit justification for so doing (§59). Moore is thus sunk in a most complicated confusion, and one is at a loss to explain the great reputation of his book, if not by ascribing it to its timely iconoclasm, its hectoring tone and the appearance of logical inevitability which its manner seems designed to suggest.

It may be objected that to say that a thing ought to exist for its own sake is not to ascribe a quality to it; but if that is so, either good is not a quality either (and Moore's attempt to base a theory on the impossibility of defining that quality becomes absurd) or the connection between being good and being what ought to exist is synthetic—in which case the existence of the connection ought not to be assumed and (since good is supposed to be undefinable) cannot be supported by argument. But, since we have not stated what we mean by "a quality" we cannot yet say whether goodness (with its suggested *definiens*) is a quality or not. To this question Section **5** is devoted.

6 THE ANALYSIS OF "GOOD"

AS WAS SAID in Section 3.32, there will be no attempt here to represent my formula as the only one left possible by a process of elimination. The formula will be immediately presented, and its implications set out word by word.

6.1. The Formula

To say that x is good is to say that it is such as to satisfy the wants of the person or persons concerned.

This very uninspiring formula is ambiguous at several points; these ambiguities seem to coincide with the points about which ethical disputes and misunderstandings arise.

There are uses of "good" to which this formula does not apply. These will be considered in Section **6.3**, where reason will be given for regarding them as derivative from the uses to which the formula does apply.

6.11. "To say that . . ."

For this phrase, "One who says that" might be substituted, and followed by "is saying that" or "means that." Or the formula might have started " 'Good' means 'such as to. . . .' " There are slight, but perhaps sufficient, reasons for not using these alternatives. The second might appear to make the "meaning" a property of a symbol (namely, the word "good"). But I am not talking about the symbol "good," as is shown by the fact that many of my remarks, though not all (see Sections 6.151, **9.12**), could be translated into other languages. They apply to any word or symbol which can be used as "good" is used in English. Again, if we spoke of what the word meant rather than of what people meant by it, we should not have in our formula any means of reminding ourselves of the personal interpretation that so often lies behind "*the* wants" and "the people concerned" (Sections 6.151, **6.16**). It is, in fact, despite Sections 3.331 and 3.3331, rather less my intention to provide a form of words which can be substituted for "good"[1] than to

[1]It is true that, as was explained in Section 3.51, this was my original intention; but as the following sections will show, that intention could not quite be carried out. In understanding what people are saying it is never sufficient to make the substitution. This only gives, at best, the *formal* meaning; the *effective* meaning is more specific.

provide a means of interpreting particular statements in which that word is used. If, however, we employ the first alternative, and speak of "one who says that . . . ," we might seem to be transferring our attention entirely from the symbol (the mark or noise) to the symbol-user; and, as we have said, we are not trying to give a blow-by-blow account of what goes on inside people's heads, or even in the private theatre of their minds.[2] We wish rather to be taken as referring to behaviour. It is enough for our purposes if a person who calls something good is *acting as if* our analysis were correct, and if one who reacted on the assumption that it were would be reacting appropriately. We therefore prefer the version using "to say that . . . ," which puts the emphasis where we want it, on the saying rather than on the sayer.

The foregoing paragraph applies only to the spoken word, not to the written. Analysis in terms of action and reaction, or stimulus and response, cannot be strictly applied to the written word. When the writer acts, there is no immediate reaction; and, whereas there are indefinitely many responses to what is written, the written word which is the stimulus is not itself behaviour, though it may be called "behaviour-like." Moreover, the possibility of cross-reference and the consequent possibility of multiplying distinctions make the use of language characteristic of expository writing something very different from that characteristic of debate, which in turn differs from the use of language in conversation. And in consequence of these possibilities, a language (such as English) in which writing has been carried on for some time will probably be quite unlike an unwritten language (such as Hopi).

The immediate relevance of these differences is as follows. In conversation, or even in debate, one's interlocutor is able to ensure that the right construction is put on his words and necessarily reveals much of the context in which his thoughts occur to him. Interpretations of meaning can thus be much more elastic in such a context than in a written work where there is no immediate contact between author and audience, and where the author must do his poor best to guess in advance what misunderstandings are likely to arise, and guard against them. Also, a writer usually ponders over what he writes and is likely to produce a few complete and considered statements in place of the speaker's many incomplete and unpremeditated ones. It is thus unlikely that a discussion of the use of language which bases itself primarily on the written word will be applicable, without any change, to the spoken word. The present discussion, as the phrase "to say that" might show, is

[2]This would be true even if the harsh censorship of Professor G. Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949) had not temporarily forced the theatre to close.

based chiefly upon the informal uses of conversation and disputation; in more formal writing there will be a tendency to use terms either in carefully defined senses or (since the discussion will seldom be concerned with particulars known to writer and reader alike) in one of the senses here treated as subsidiary (Section **6.3**).

6.12. *"To say that x is good . . ."*

The indeterminate "*x*" is used because it is my contention, to be supported in Section 6.4, that in this sense which we have taken as primary the word "good" is applied univocally to people, things and actions.

6.13. *"To say that x is good is to say that . . ."*

The implication of this would be that the one piece of behaviour could be substituted for the other without the substitution making any difference. Any difference to what? To whom? To the meaning, one must suppose, and to the person addressed; for one simply does not see who or what else could be in question. To interpret difference in terms of *making* a difference thus inevitably involves a pragmatic criterion of synonymy, which fits in well with the emphasis which is herein laid on the spoken as opposed to the written word.

But it is, of course, not strictly true that any such substitution for the word "good," or for phrases in which it occurs, makes no difference at all. The word "good," like every other word, leads an independent life of its own. But this independent life (for various aspects of which see Sections 3.331, 6.31, 6.331) is beyond the reach of any analysis. "Sameness" of meaning depends upon superficiality of interpretation (see Section 3.33312).

6.14. *". . . that it is such as to . . ."*

We have already stressed, in Section **5.2**, the characteristic which assertions of goodness share with other attributions of qualities to things: that what is specific is invariably reducible to statements about the effects of the thing on other things or people, or its interactions with them; while the very fact that a quality is attributed implies that such effects or interactions are assigned to some feature of the thing itself, although nothing is implied about what this feature may be.

In calling something good we are talking about the thing itself—not about ourselves, and not about society. No doubt people who hear us talk will want to know all about us, our attitudes and our backgrounds, and there is no reason why they should not take this interest; but *our* attention is focussed on the thing itself. If we speak of its effects, we speak of the effects it has as being what it is, and if our feelings are relevant they are the feelings aroused by the thing's being what it is. Hence we quarrel: "A thing can't be both good and not good." As a matter of fact it can, as we shall presently see, but we do not ordinarily *think it can, for if* we did we should not *argue about its merits.*

6.141. *The Pessimism of "Ordinary Language"*

It might seem a matter of indifference whether we say "such as to satisfy . . ." or "such that it satisfies . . . ," but in fact it is not. The latter formulation implies a certainty in attribution which we do not normally claim.[3] We saw in Section 5.232 that when we call something yellow, for example, we do not mean to imply that it always looks yellow to everyone, but rather that it looks yellow "other things being equal"; and the confidence of our predications is not affected in the least by the fact that sometimes something goes wrong. We are resigned to things going wrong, and make allowances for their doing so: it is the excess of this resignation that enables one to hold beliefs that are constantly being falsified by experience. To say that aspirin is an analgesic is not to say that it will cure one's headache every time; and the fact that a child brings up its cod-liver oil does not prove to its mother that cod-liver oil is bad, or is bad for the child. She tries again.

Of course, if the word "yellow" is applied to a patch which momentarily forms part of a visual field, then either the patch looks yellow or it doesn't; but we do not usually talk about such sense-data, and if one is to base one's interpretation of attributive adjectives on such contexts one should realize that to do so is to speak of an artificially purified language which is useless for everyday purposes.[4] Since everyday purposes are those which most concern us in this discussion of the conceptual components of ethical disagreement, we must try to preserve

[3]The implication may be obviated, as it was in Section **5**, by the addition of the phrase "other things being equal." The substitution in Sections *5.5* and *6* of "such as to . . ." for "such that . . . other things being equal" is made for reasons of conciseness and grammatical convenience only.

[4]In certain significant contexts the word "yellow" does have something of this invariance: in spectroscopic analysis, for example, the coloured bands are always viewed in certain invariant conditions, and are not subject to the effects of distance, haze, shadow and the like.

these characteristic vaguenesses. We find, then, that to attribute goodness to something is to refer to certain quite unspecified features[5] of the thing and to certain specified effects which it may be *expected* to have in virtue of those features—but does not necessarily always have. In all of this, what is true of "good" is true of every "quality word"; and this gives us some reason (which the next section will examine) for saying that goodness is a quality.

In saying "is such as to satisfy" rather than "is such that it satisfies" or simply "satisfies," then, we have preserved the resigned pessimism which must be enshrined in any language that can be serviceable to changeable and fallible beings in a hectic world. It might seem that the phrase "tends to satisfy" would have done the job as well. But "tends to" cannot be used without strain to interpret utterances about individuals (e.g., "Good shot, sir!") and is reserved for another use (cf. Section 6.32).

6.142. *Goodness as a Quality*

Although, as we have seen, our account of goodness does not differ in form from the account we should give of any other quality, many philosophers deny that goodness is a property or quality at all. This denial often rests, as was suggested in Section 5.1, upon mistaken or inadequate notions of what is usually involved in speaking of qualities:[6] notions which may be held to combine with a misplaced rigidity a certain naïvety in the acceptance of an empiricism which simplifies to the point of caricature. At the same time there is a great deal to be said for not treating goodness as strictly comparable with, for example, yellowness; and it is not difficult to give (as both Toulmin and Hare do) definite criteria for "being a quality" which disqualify goodness from being one. These criteria differ from each other, and neither set is compatible with my own account of what is involved in speaking of qualities. It is not necessary to make any irrevocable choice among the three, and there is no reason why there should be any one universally acceptable set of criteria. The question of whether goodness is a quality therefore depends

[5]The use of the word "features" avoids the appearance of an endless regress: we might have said, "unspecified properties." Whatever word is used must be used in a "special sense."

[6]It is possible that one might be led to deny that goodness is a quality as a result of adhering to some metaphysical theory about substances, properties and accidents, according to which qualities could be ascribed to substances alone. Goodness is attributed to *situations* and events as well as to substances; but the form of analysis of quality words herein offered does not require that qualities should be ascribed to substances only.

upon an act of selection which, though doubtless not arbitrary, is none the less free; so that the question cannot be answered, except within the limited context of the particular discussion for whose purposes a set of criteria may have been adopted.

The point is this: that the use of "good" is in some respects like, in others unlike, the use of "yellow" (which is herein used as a "standard" quality); and whether a writer affirms or denies that goodness is a quality depends on whether he wishes, for his present purposes, to stress the resemblances or the differences.

Wherein, then, from the point of view of the present analysis, does the difference between goodness and a quality such as yellowness lie? In the fact that one does not argue about whether anything is yellow or not, but one does argue about whether it is good or not? Nearly, but not quite. For the reason why we do not argue about yellowness is not that it is never in doubt (for quite often, if the light is bad or we have only a fleeting glimpse, it is), but that it does not usually matter enough to be worth arguing about; whereas disagreements about goodness, when they occur, are likely to attract attention and arouse heat. If yellowness were important, we should argue about it; for instance, if a lawsuit were to hinge upon whether a red warning light had been shown, and the point at issue were whether the lamp shown (lamp produced in court) had been red or yellow. But it should be noticed that in such a case the importance of yellowness would be adventitious: the classification, yellow, is itself arbitrary, and a conventional importance later attached to it.[7]

So disputability itself does not make the required difference. Is it, then, the frequency of debatable cases? This can hardly be right, for in most cases the goodness of a good *thing*—a good car, a good apple pie—is indisputable. Personal differences of taste are not usually treated as grounds for disputing about goodness: "Are you sure you won't have a glass? *This is a magnificent sherry.*"—"*Thanks, I'm sure it is,* but it just happens that I don't like sherry at all." One does not dispute the right of sherry-fanciers to set up standards, or deny their universality, just because one is oneself a total abstainer. It is, admittedly, very hard to

[7]It would be different if yellowness were invariably a sign of disease, so that the appearance of a yellow object necessitated a complicated and tiresome prophylactic or cathartic procedure. There would then be heated debate as to whether, in marginal or doubtful cases, the procedure was necessary (the debate would, doubtless, consist largely of the citation of precedents). But the concept of *yellow* would then be grounded in nature in quite a different way from our present colour concepts, which have no such necessary and invariable link with any difference-making characteristic; its logical grammar would be more like that of "dangerous," still more like that of "stinking."

settle whether Mr. Souwester is or is not a good man; but this difficulty is likely to arise only in a community which is so large that Mr. Souwester is not continually under surveillance by the same group of people and which lays stress on characteristics, such as excellence of motive, which are not accessible to most observers.[8] It is a difficulty of observation rather than a difficulty of judgement.

This last point has brought us reasonably close to the true explanation, but it will be well to approach it from another angle. Debatable cases of yellowness are very often marginal ones (though, as in the case of trick lighting or shot fabrics, they need not be). But arguments about goodness seldom are; one argues rather about whether a given thing or person or action is good *or the opposite*: Was King John a good thing or a bad thing? Is euthanasia a good practice or an evil one? The reason for this is that questions of goodness are not, like questions of yellowness, mere questions of classification, but are grounds for decision. In cases where no practical decision is called for, as with King John and most character judgements, one is most likely to say "He was not, of course, all bad or all good, but, like most of us. . . ." But one cannot so glibly speak thus of euthanasia, because one may at any time find oneself irresistibly called upon to practise it or to refrain from doing so, to condemn or to condone its use. Whether or not one has strong views for or against the encouragement of mendicancy, when a tramp accosts one there is no middle course between giving and withholding. This is not to say that there are only two possibilities, that a thing must be either simply good or simply bad. A thing may be rather good, very good, extremely good, more-or-less good, the best imaginable. . . . There are also occasions, of course, when there seems to be just as much to be said for a thing or a policy as against it. Then one may say either, "I simply cannot decide whether it's a good thing or a bad thing on the whole," or, "The arguments seem to be evenly balanced, but, since I have to say something, with great reluctance I cast my vote in favour." I did not intend to deny these cases or their importance, but to stress that one of the chief purposes of the discussion of a thing's merits is to find out whether, or when, to decide in its favour or against it; and that such arguments tend to present themselves in the form: good or bad?

[8] One must not ignore, in this connection, the religious convention which forbids such judgements on principle ("Who can tell how oft he offendeth?" "Judge not, that ye be not judged") even when it seems quite easy to make them; or denies them validity on the ground that in the sight of God all men are alike sinners. This convention may make judgements of human goodness seem harder to make than they are.

One might suppose that the difference between goodness and such qualities as yellowness lay in the fact that one can ask, if anything is called good, "Why do you say that? What makes you say that?" But assertions of yellowness may be questioned in this way, and supported ("Well, look at it from this angle"; "Have you seen it by daylight?") no less than assertions of goodness. It is nearer the mark to say that one can give reasons for calling a thing good, but that assertions of yellowness are never supported in this way. One can show a person that a thing is yellow, not that it is good; and can persuade a person by reasoning that a thing is good, not that it is yellow. Differences as to yellowness arise from linguistic differences (in classification of marginal cases), or from physical peculiarities in the persons or the lighting. The thing which is or is not yellow is what it is (and this leaves no room for argument) and may be classified in various ways (which is a matter for arbitration rather than controversy).

What chiefly differentiates goodness from other qualities, however, is the appropriateness of asking, of anything said to be good, "What's good about it?" There is a sense in which "what's yellow about" a thing is constant, and hence yellowness is "always the same" in a sense in which goodness is not. A thing does not look yellow unless it refracts or reflects or otherwise emits light in certain specifiable ways.[9] The same is true of intelligence, tackiness and all other "standard" qualities; the things about people in virtue of which we call them intelligent, though not to be readily enumerated, have a sort of family resemblance. But there is nothing whatever in common between what makes a good car good and what makes a good apple pie good. It would be possible for anyone who knew the meaning of "sticky" or "malleable" to find out, either by looking at an object or by carrying out certain simple processes, whether or not it was sticky or malleable; but one cannot by this means discover anything about a thing's goodness.

A further point must be made here. There are other qualities of which one can ask "What is . . . about . . . ?" and from which goodness can and must be distinguished. One can, for example, when shown a Norman church, ask "What makes it Norman?" or "What's Norman about it?" The answer would be to name some feature of the church which one either had not noticed or did not know to be characteristic of Norman architecture. But the possession of such features would form part of a

[9] This, of course, is not true of things which are yellow in dreams or in eidetic imagery. It may be held that all words used in accounts of such imagery or dreams are used in Pickwickian senses. If the propriety of this is not admitted (and it seems less justifiable of qualities than of things), this difference between goodness and yellowness cannot be maintained.

definition of the complex property "Norman in style"; whereas the good-making features which might be cited in a reply to "What's good about it?" could form no part of a definition of goodness.

Whether these considerations are trivial or crucial is entirely a matter of the point of view. If our interest lies in what we *mean* by attributing qualities to something, they are irrelevant; if we are interested in what qualities "really are," in "what it is for a thing to be something," they are all-important. But is it really ever legitimate to adopt the latter point of view? The fact that so many alternative views may be obtained from it suggests that it is not, that in stating criteria we are inventing rather than discovering or describing. But this is over-hasty. It might be true that we say there are things and qualities only because we know there are nouns and adjectives, and that if our language were otherwise organized we should conceive reality differently. But our task would still be twofold: to explore the workings of the conceptual scheme which we employed, and to discuss the facts about the world which justified its employment. The former task may be logically primary, but this does not mean that the latter task is illegitimate.

If there is one factor more than any other which has made me decide in favour of calling goodness a quality, it is this: to call something good is to say something about that thing—to state a fact about *it*, and not about the speaker, or about society, or about any other person or thing; and the proper denial of "That is good" is "It is not," and not "I won't," or "You wouldn't." None the less, although the formula for the analysis of goodness is identical in form with that for other qualities ("To say that x is y is to say that it is such as to . . ."), it is distinguished from "standard" qualities by two facts: that the features of x referred to by "is *such* as to . . ." are *not* the same in all cases, and that the accuracy of the account following those words is not discernible from the direct scrutiny or testing of x alone.

6.15. ". . . to satisfy the wants . . ."

My formula clearly implies that it is meaningless to speak of the goodness of anything unless some person or persons take some interest in that thing, or would be better off if they did take such an interest. No argument can do much to support such a denial of meaning; one can, at best, challenge all comers to produce a convincing explanation of what "good" could be taken as meaning in any other context or to produce a convincing example of "good" so used. It may, however, be suggested in support that "good" is freely applied to men and to human actions, which are obviously matters of interest to men, and to artefacts, which are not made without reference to human purposes. But it is not applied to natural objects except in reference to some use to which they may be put. One does not speak of "good deserts": for, in the terms of this analysis, there are no "persons concerned."

6.151. *Wants*

It seems to be a mere accident of the English language that makes this analysis possible, and prevents the word "good" from being equivocal. "Ma! Ma! I want a choc-ice!"—"What you want is a good hiding!" In this exchange, the child wishes to have a choc-ice, *desires* a choc-ice; it does not desire a beating, but *needs* it in order to attain a state (mannerliness) which its mother wishes it to attain. The apparent reference to the mother's wish here (which might lead one to suppose that needs can always be reduced to desires) is irrelevant: the mother may indeed simply wish that the child would stop annoying her, but she may equally well be considering the state of the child as dispassionately as the mechanic who says "it wants a new clutch sleeve."[10]

Does the fact that "good" can be translated by means of a simple formula make it unequivocal? Or do the hidden complexities of the formula make it equivocal? The question has an ominous ring to it which will be familiar to philosophers, who will suspect that what is needed is not a heated argument pro and con, but a statement of the relevant factors followed by an *ad hoc* decision. One who knows the nature and quality of the goods will not much mind what is written on the label. To call "good" equivocal is misleading in some ways, to call it unequivocal is misleading in other ways.

6.1511. The *Wants*

"Does he need a coat more than he needs shoes? Does he need them so badly that I should get him them and not the railway engine he has set his heart on? And does he want the railway engine as much as he

[10]Some further examples of the double use of "want" may be given. "I *want* . . ." always *means* "I would like . . . ," and this is recognized in "You wanted . . ." ("Let me see, sir, you wanted a pound of coffee") and often in "You want . . ." ("What do you want *now*?" "I'll give you anything you want, darling"). The future seems rather to refer to needs, but is not unambiguous: "If I'm going to Spitzbergen I'll want an overcoat."—"Yes, and you'll want sandwiches." When *telling* someone what he wants, "you want" refers to needs: "A beginner, sir? Then you want one with a long handle and no teeth." Then there is the mythical advertisement: "Two ladies want washing." A mentally defective person is said to be "wanting," and a poor person to be "in want," though they may have no desire to be clever or rich.

wants the Meccano set? He can't think of anything but the railway engine now, but he'd soon get tired of it, and the Meccano set would keep him happy all winter. . . ." Mothers know what is good for their children.

To call a thing "good" is to make a claim for it which it is not always easy to substantiate: that it is "such as to satisfy *the* wants. . . ." Here, as often, the definite article implies a simplicity which may not be present: it implies that one thing will satisfy all the wants of the persons concerned, whereas it is more likely to frustrate some in satisfying others. But in calling something good we do imply that the wants which it satisfies are more important, or more pronounced, than those which it fails to satisfy or frustrates. I may call my car a good car although the sun-roof leaks.

Any statement about "goodness" or about "*the* wants" thus presupposes, but does not embody, a judgement that certain wants are unique or paramount in importance. Yet, to speak thus of presupposition is misleading; for it implies that one group of wants has been weighed against others. But the important fact is that this is not usually done. One should say rather that the "the" here is vague and general in its (public) meaning, but particular and definite in its (private) reference. To speak of "the" wants is indeed to imply that certain (unspecified) wants are the only ones, or the most important; but a person who speaks of "the" wants usually has at the back of his mind a special set, and simply ignores the possibility that there might be others. Similarly, the person he is speaking to will usually take "*the* wants" as some special set of wants which seem to him to be of outstanding and obvious importance; and this set may or may not be the same as the speaker's set. This distinction, between what a person's words say, what he uses them to refer to, and what he is taken as referring to by them, is hard to state in a logically precise form and seems to belong to the realms of psychology and biography rather than that of philosophical analysis; hence, it tends to be ignored. But it is of the utmost importance, since to ignore the vagueness and looseness which this and similar habits impart to ordinary speech and argument is to make the latter appear paradoxical and strange, and to make the analysis of "good" seem an impossible task.

When one is dealing with this gulf between public meaning and private reference one is tempted to introduce one's explanation with "People speak as if. . . ." But this is quite wrong. The expression implies that, although what "people" say would be appropriate if something were the case which is not now the case, it is in fact inappropriate. But what I wish to draw attention to is the discrepancy, not between

what is asserted and what is the case, but between what is asserted and what an assertion implies. *Of course* people generally speak "as if" what is so is so; otherwise they would speak differently.

It is obvious that no one thing can satisfy all desires and needs; to speak of "the" wants must then in every instance exclude some wants as irrelevant or comparatively unimportant. Since one cannot be sure that such exclusion could be a matter of universal consent, to speak of "the" wants or to call something "good" is to conceal or to adjudicate in possible conflict. Such conflict may be between "the" wants (taken as wholes) of different persons (Section **6.16**), or between "the" needs and "the" desires of the same person (Section 6.1512), or between different needs of the same person (Section 6.1513) or between different desires of the same person (Section 6.1514).

6.1512. *Desires and Needs Considered as Deficiencies*

A desire or a need is always a desire or a need of something. To speak of desires and needs implies a reference to some object which would fulfil the desire or need. In other words, desires and needs are alike deficiencies, and carry a reference to a perfected or completed somewhat. But the deficiencies are of different kinds. Let us deal first with desires.

What is the object of a desire? We usually speak of desiring an object, a thing or person; but it seems equally possible to speak of desire as always being for a state of affairs—a situation. In every choice, one might say, an imagined situation is compared with another imagined situation or situations, and preferred over it or them. In desiring, an imagined situation is compared with a present situation, and preferred over it. But desire, as the word is generally used, is a feeling (or at least involves feeling), whereas choice is not. The feeling may take one of two forms (which often are combined as two components of the one feeling): it may be a sense of deficiency or dissatisfaction or lack, with which is combined the judgement (which is quite separate from it, and not necessarily correct) that a certain thing or situation would remedy this lack and relieve the feeling; or it may be a sense of anticipation, with which is combined the judgement (right or wrong) that a certain object or situation would yield the anticipated delight. In either case, desire is characteristically a sense of deficiency rather than a sensed deficiency. The deficiency is real, in so far as the desirer really is without some element in the situation which he regards as a completion or satisfaction, and hence desires; but it would not be a deficiency unless

he both imagined the desired completion and regarded it as a perfected state in terms of which his own present situation could be judged.[11]

In this section and throughout the book, the term "desire" will be used in an extended sense. In current usage, "desire" is a synonym for sexual lust; but in the foregoing paragraph we followed most philosophers and psychologists in giving the word a wider application, to cover everything that "I want . . ." usually covers (cf. Section 6.151, n. 10). We might need, however, to make a further extension, for which there is less warrant. It might seem advisable to include not only such unemotional states as a wish to know the time, and the fleeting and vestigial impulse implied by "Come over here if you want to see something funny," but also all purposes, aims and intentions. This extension would demand no alteration in the matter of the preceding paragraph except that we should have to amend "a feeling of deficiency" to read "a feeling or *judgement* of deficiency." This would not distress us greatly, for the strength (and hence we might argue, even the complete absence) of the "emotional" element in the sense of deficiency is really quite irrelevant. The further extension is, however, probably unnecessary, since in cases where no element of "feeling" entered in it would probably always be more appropriate to speak of "needs" than of "desires."

In the case of "desires" as thus understood, then, what matters is not that a deficiency should exist but that it should be thought or felt to exist by the person in whose life it lies.[12] With needs, the situation is the opposite. One may be quite unaware of what one needs, as the cretin is unaware that he needs thyroid extract; thus one can say without metaphor that the crops need rain, but not that they are thirsty. But to speak of deficiency, or defect, or lack, or wanting at all, is inevitably to imply reference to some notion of completeness. This fact does not mean that goodness is ultimately defined in terms of goodness, since goodness and completeness are different standards and cannot be reduced

[11]Note that the three elements of feeling, imagining and judging do not form an invariant temporal sequence. The feeling may come first, as in boredom, thirst or lust; or the imagining may come first, as in the formation of ideals. This difference between the two situations is so slight that any temptation to say that in the former case there is a real deficiency but in the latter case the deficiency is only imaginary must be strongly resisted.

[12]It is true that some writers do speak of "unconscious desires," especially when expounding the doctrines of Freud to the lay public; but to do so is wilfully paradoxical. Yet, although the advocates of these doctrines seem not to be free of the desire to shock and scandalize, it is hard to see what means there are of stating them in unemotional terms. Perhaps in this instance it would be better to speak of unconscious "drives," since this word is not already popularly appropriated to any particular psychological phenomenon.

to terms of each other (cf. Section 4.212); but it does require further explanation. Although a need can exist unrecognized by that which needs or by any other person or thing, to speak of something as needing something implies a judgement of failure. Such a judgement can be made only with reference to a standard. And a standard cannot be used to judge a thing by unless it is commonly accepted, or at least set up without special reference to the particular deficient thing. The very notion of a standard implies applicability to all things of a certain class indifferently. Completeness or perfection does in fact usually constitute such a standard;[13] and indeed the standard of completeness or perfection often has an objective ground. This is not always the case, even when it seems to be so. The "normal" state of functioning of the thyroid glands, for example, seems to be given by nature. But, in so far as it rests simply on frequency of occurrence, it does not function as a standard; and, in so far as it rests on a preference for intelligence, it cannot be said to be given in nature. Yet agreement on such standards is in fact so easy to reach as to be taken for granted, and the appeal to them as "natural norms" comes easily.

To speak of a need, in fact, is to speak of a deficiency which is "really" there for everyone to recognize; and to imply that everyone "ought" to recognize it. The standard for a desire, on the other hand, is not something that either is or is implied to be commonly accepted. It is not the case that the object of desire is judged complete by reference to some previously existing standard; the fact that it is regarded as a consummation *makes* it in itself for the time being a standard by which deficiencies are judged. This contrast comes out, I think, in our response to announcements of wants. If I say "I need a new shirt," anyone who knows my way of life and the state of my shirting can say "Whatever for? You already have three aertex and ten broadcloth with fused collars and those twenty . . ." and there is no knowing who will win the argument. If I say (using the current formulation for speaking of what I have called "desires" in the first person) "I would like a new shirt," it is still open to anyone to ridicule me and enumerate my wardrobe, but if I say "Yes, I know, but I'd like some more," my word must be taken for it. If, however, I simply say "I want a new shirt," the argument will not get anywhere until I have made it plain whether I really think I need it or have just taken a fancy to it.

[13]Not always: the standards by which paintings are judged by their painters to be complete or incomplete, for example, frequently defy formulation and cannot be generalized.

It would seem, then, that an omniscient God is a better judge of my needs than I, but not of my desires.[14] A good teacher knows what his classes need, and has a fair notion of what they would like ("desire"). There is a difference. The best lesson is one that both meets their needs and fulfils their desires. But where this is not possible, as in some cases it may not be, a sharp difference may arise between the teacher and his classes as to whether his lessons are good or bad. There is in this case no question as to who are the persons concerned; the wants or "interests" of the classes are agreed to be paramount. The disagreement arises out of the difference in relative importance inevitably attached to needs and desires by the teacher (who knows his subject well, and has no direct experience of his classes' feelings) and his classes (who know whether they are bored or not, but have to take the teacher's word for it that he is presenting the subject properly). Here, too, the needs are judged by an objective standard, fixed by the assigned subject-matter of the lessons, the acceptance of which is attested by the attendance at the institution and the lessons in question by the members of the classes.

It is no accident that this example of disagreement over goodness uses the relation of teacher and student. It is most frequently in this relation and in that of parent to child that questions of the relative importance of need and desire arise, for it is in these relations that the desires of one side are most easily discounted by the other as irritating products of immaturity, and that a person may most easily be held to be ignorant of his own needs. It may well be held that in dealings between equals one does not presume to know more of a man's needs than he knows himself, and leaves him to decide when and if their fulfilment is to take precedence over the satisfaction of his desires. The propriety or otherwise of this attitude becomes crucial when such questions as the fluoridation of a town's water-supply are at issue.

6.1513. *Needs*

A fragmentary pattern may be completed in different ways, and a given situation may show different deficiencies by different standards; conflicts may arise between needs just as between desires. These raise no new issues and do not merit separate discussion. But the concept of a need itself requires more attention than we have given it or are going

[14] Perhaps one might say that what one needs is what one ought to desire; but this will not *define* needs, since inanimate objects may be said to need things; and it might be taken to imply that one ought not to desire what one does not need, which is a harsh doctrine.

to give it. We have said that a need may exist unrecognized. Can we say that a sailor suffering from scurvy before the discovery of vitamins needed vitamin C? Clearly we can: his deficiency lay in falling short of a commonly held ideal of health, and he needed that the lack of which caused him to fall short. He knew that this was what he needed; what he did not know was that this was vitamin C. Thus one may be ignorant of one's needs in two ways: ignorant that one is deficient, or ignorant of what would supply one's deficiency.

Just as needs may give rise to desires (as when a sweating man craves brine), desires may become needs. By this I mean that in certain circumstances the failure to satisfy a desire may give rise to consequences which not only are displeasing to the desirer but constitute recognizable deficiencies by some standard which can be seen by anyone to be applicable. This is obviously the case in starvation, but is of wider application. The physiological needs of the human organism are few, and their satisfaction occupies only part of a man's time. To them are added further needs, which are variable. Not only is it a commonplace in these days of a rising "standard of living" that "the luxuries of yesterday are the necessities of today";[15] but, more importantly, a customary pattern of behaviour which grows up in a society is likely to become a necessity to the members of that society. The frustration of such needs may well make a man sick, neurotic or dispirited. The neglect of this fact, and of the considerations mentioned at the end of Section 6.1512, has bedevilled (among other things) colonial policies. The administrators of a colonizing power do not treat the natives as equals but (often explicitly) as children who are therefore considered not to know what they need. In one sense this is true—the sense in which the sixteenth-century mariner did not know that he needed vitamin C. But it cannot be assumed that it is true in the other sense mentioned: they may be well aware of their deficiencies. At the same time, the administrators fail to recognize (as the natives do) that the performance of certain social activities is no longer merely desirable, but necessary; thus the prohibition of these activities (as of head-hunting) may lead to social disintegration.[16]

[15] "In Middletown during the depression years of 1929 and 1935 purchases of food declined markedly while gasoline sales remained at a near-normal level." Quoted from L. E. Cole, *Human Behavior*, by J. A. C. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Industry* (Penguin Books, 1954), p. 47.

[16] One can imagine a society so stable and so tightly organized that the distinction between the needs and the desires of its inhabitants could never be made. Mr. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is in large measure such a society. In extant societies needs and desires can often be clearly differentiated, but not always.

If a man is starving, it is so obvious that he needs food that we do not stop to consider that in judging him to be in need we do so in virtue of some standard whose applicability might be denied. But it is so: "Mais, monsieur, il faut vivre."—"Je n'en vois pas la nécessité." The recognition of a given type of need by someone is necessary for a particular need of that type to exist: one cannot speak of a need except where a standard is recognized, and where it is also recognized that there is a need for whatever would achieve the reaching of that standard. But this "recognition" may not be shared by all interested parties, nor is there any foolproof method whereby agreement could be reached on what standards are to be applied. It is moreover true that, except when the standard is explicitly mentioned ("£100,000 are needed to complete this magnificent edifice"), to speak of a need implies that tacit agreement has in fact been reached. This is of course by no means always the case; and it may not always be possible to state what standard is being applied: the ever-pertinent question "What for?" with which statements of needs may be greeted, may not have any answer. A colonial administration may be so shocked by the absence of a familiar institution ("What! No . . . ?") that it assumes a need for it: "The French need Coca-Cola," or "The Yoruba need parliamentary democracy." Whatever for?

It follows that, although desires are in a sense much more private than needs, the problem of what a person desires can be settled once and for all, whereas the problem of what he needs cannot. You can ask a man what he wants, or psychoanalyse him to find out what he *really* wants, but you cannot settle what he needs otherwise than by reaching an agreed decision on the standards to be applied in his case. We have said, but have not defended our saying so, that if a man is mature and in good health he is the best authority on what standards should be applied. Can reasons be given for saying so? The principle here appealed to is clearly that of respect for individuals. This principle, which seems to be quite different from the principle of benevolence, is the foundation of many of the most cherished institutions of our civilization; whether anything more can or need be said for it this is not the place to discuss.

6.1514. *Desires*

Decisions between different desires of the same person include some of the gravest and most difficult we are called upon to make. Were this book a practical guide to conduct, it would be necessary to devote a great deal of it to the means of resolving these conflicts. Such problems may be dismissed by some moralists as "merely prudential," but they are

often of great practical interest in themselves—such problems as, for example, whether one should lay more stress on the immediate satisfaction of impulse or on the framing and execution of policies. It must suffice here to point out that in terms of the present analysis one may speak meaningfully of good, bad and indifferent desires. They may be assessed in terms of the interests of the person desiring, or in terms of those of the persons upon whom his behaviour impinges, or in terms of other groups variously defined. They may be judged in terms of desire ("I love the love wherewith I love the good, I hate the love wherewith I love the bad") or of need; for desires may run counter to needs (as for cocaine) or be allied with needs (as for food), or be indifferent (as for music).

6.15141. *The Objectivity of Desire*

The statement that A needs a new shirt may be almost as factual and objective as the statement that he is wearing an old one. But it always appeals to a standard whose applicability might be denied. The statement that he desires or would like a new shirt, on the other hand, is a pure statement or misstatement of fact and not an evaluation, criticism or estimation at all. But it would be commonly said, as I said in Section 6.1512, that the desirer is the sole and irrefutable judge both of whether or not he desires and of what it is that he desires. This is a great deal too strong. The statement that A desires x is more private than the statement that he sees x, but not so much more private as it is sometimes made out to be. Avowals of desire are no more and no less incorrigible than other statements which purport to be factual. They can, of course, be used in a restricted, incorrigible sense—but then, so can "A sees x," as in the sense-datum "language." "I see a cow" (idiomatically, "I can see a cow") can be corrected, normally, by "No, that's not a cow, it's someone's washing hanging on a line"; but it is *possible* to use "I see a cow" to mean "I have a cowlike sense-datum," and there's no arguing about that. Similarly, "I want a woman" may be countered by "What you want is a sedative," substituting need for desire. But it might also be corrected by "What you want is a hot bath"; and the suggestion may be correct for, when the woman is provided, she may afford no satisfaction, and when the hot bath is provided it may turn out to be just the thing. But it is also possible to use "I want a woman" to mean "I have a feeling of 'desire-for-a-woman.'" This eliminates argument.

It is not, however, clear to me whether "desire for a woman" describes what may unmisleadingly be called a "feeling" or not. It seems to me

that desiring is a mixed kind of business, and that this can be brought out by a consideration of the account of desire given in Section 6.1512. Sometimes (as when one is studying a menu) a symbol or word will arouse one of the feelings of "wanting," let us say a pleasantly alerted anticipation. Sometimes a feeling of "wanting," often as a sense of lack or a vague discomfort, will come in association with an image of a thing, place or person. In either case the connection between the feeling and the image or symbol seems not to be a necessary one; at least, I find it possible to make the distinction between the two in my own experience, even in those cases where neither image nor feeling can be dispelled. Suppose that, having ordered a dish, one is told that it is off, and substitutes for it another dish that one likes about as much: are we then to say that the feeling of desire-for-roast-beef disappears and is replaced by the quite different feeling of desire-for-fried-turbot, or are we to say that the same feeling of pleasantly alerted anticipation is transferred from one image or word or symbol to the other? There may be no good grounds for preferring the latter way of putting it; but if it seems at all a tolerable alternative, as in my opinion it does, then the propriety of calling a desire-for-something a "feeling" *and nothing more* may be questioned. In this respect, the idiomatic use of "I would like x" for "I want x" is suggestive.

We cannot, of course, go so far as to deny that "I want x" is more private, even much more private, than "I see x": anyone near me when I say "I see x" can check on whether x is there to be seen, but hardly anyone can ever tell me whether x is really what I want or not. Sometimes wives can and do perform this service for their husbands: "No, Henry, don't be silly, you *know* you never have three lumps in coffee."—"I think I'm the best judge of that, dear. . . ." "Henry, *dear*, you aren't drinking your coffee. . . ." But the qualifications one needs to make the correction are not the same in the two cases—physical proximity is achieved by very different means from mental "proximity," and in ways much easier to specify. The notion that I alone can tell what I desire, together with the general fuzziness of both popular and philosophical thought on the nature of desires[17] in general, is no doubt bound up with the fact that "Western Civilization" pays little attention to "inward" states: descriptions of thought and feeling in the languages of this civilization (and one gathers that this is by no means true of all languages) have to rely almost exclusively on metaphors taken from bodily activities

[17]By "nature of desires" here I mean both the use of the term "desire" and the phenomena to which the term refers.

or visible phenomena;[18] and our statements about our own and each other's feelings and emotions usually follow a convention rather than state a fact. But if my denial that statements about one's own desires are necessarily incorrigible seems paradoxical, this is not simply Western inadvertence. It must also be borne in mind that, since there is little point in mentioning a desire (or indeed any other fact) unless someone present can do, and is expected to do, something about it, "I want x" is normally used as an equivalent for "please give me x," as a request rather than as a statement of fact. The appropriate denial, therefore, is usually not "No you don't" but "You can't have it."[19]

"I want x" is thus corrigible in theory, and may be corrected in practice; although the correction is usually not by another person but by the personal disappointment of the individual. This kind of self-correction is also that most commonly applicable to statements about what one sees or can see. Thus "I want x" and "I can see x" are much more alike than one might suppose, both in the fact of their corrigibility and in the kind of correction that is appropriate.

6.152. *Satisfaction*

One might think that the concept of satisfaction held no difficulties; but the example of Professor Perry (Section 4.221) shows that it does. When, then, is a want said to be satisfied? The obvious answer is: when that of or for which it is the want is provided. But this answer conceals certain ambiguities, the unfolding of which will provide a summary of the ambiguities discussed throughout this Section **6.15**.

The answer to "When is a want said to be satisfied?" must depend upon whether needs or desires are in question; and this difference seems to be due to the different place held by assessment or judgement (as distinguished from statement of fact) in asserting the existence of needs and desires respectively.

The element of estimation or judgement in speaking of needs lies in the assertion that the need exists. To say that there is a need is, as we

[18]This fact has led some of the more absurd contemporary pundits to suppose that the *nature* of mental or "inward" states and phenomena is such that literal statements about them must be made in terms of "outer" states and phenomena.

[19]"I can see Helvellyn" is, similarly, a veiled invitation to see if you too can see Helvellyn; so here too the denial is usually not "No you can't," but "That's not Helvellyn." It may also (if shouted from a distance, or telephoned) be used to register triumph or achievement; and in such circumstances it is not usually denied, although a person with good local knowledge may be able to reject the claim.

saw in Section 6.1513, not to assert any simply observable fact, whether physiological, psychological or other, although the assertion may be based upon such observation; it is to assess a certain deficiency by a certain standard. And since to assess a need must *ipso facto* be to assess it as a need *of* something, there is no room for further doubt as to what would be said to satisfy the need. In admitting that a need exists, we already commit ourselves to a judgement of what sort of thing would satisfy the need. There is, indeed, a place for further judgement, since one may think one knows what sort of thing is needed without necessarily being able to identify that thing: one's "knowledge" may be only "Buzzby needs something for his cold" or "I need something to fix this with." But despite this one cannot talk intelligently about needs without knowing at least in a rough way what it would be like for the need to be satisfied.

The place of judgement in statements about desires is rather different. To say that someone desires something is, as we have seen (Section 6.15141), in part to report on his feelings. *What* the desire is a desire *of* may be a matter of judgement. To say that Schakow wants to go to Derby may be to say that Schakow has a feeling of lack which he happens to associate with Derby. This is a statement of observable fact; and in this case the acquisition of the object of desire (i.e., going to Derby) might not assuage the feeling of want, but presumably something else would. Or, to say that Schakow wants to go to Derby may be to say that he has a feeling which (whether he knows it or not) would in fact be assuaged by going there; and *this* is not a statement of observable fact, but a judgement. Or, thirdly, it may be to say that Schakow has an idea of Derby which makes him want to go there. In that case the visit might not satisfy him, in that the town might fail to come up to his expectations and thus might disappoint him; but if it did come up to his expectations it would satisfy him, and if it did not his feeling of lack would presumably disappear (so that if, after he had been there, we asked him "Now are you satisfied?" he might assent, even though in one sense he had not been satisfied). Most commonly, to say that someone desires something is to say both that he has a feeling which he associates with it and that it would assuage *this* feeling if he obtained it; and also, of course, that he has a notion of what the thing would be like and that this notion is associated with his feeling.

For a desire to be satisfied, then, it is not enough that the feeling should cease to be felt (for it might just die away), or that the feeling should be assuaged (for it might be assuaged by something unexpected), or that that which the desirer desired should be attained (for it might

not come up to his expectations; or his desire might have been misdirected so that he was disappointed with what he had thought he wanted). It might be best to say that one's desire is satisfied when one feels that it is satisfied; but this (though true) is a manœuvre of which the reader may quickly tire, and we shall need it more urgently in Section 8.22. Let us then say simply that a desire is satisfied when the feeling of lack or anticipation is agreeably terminated by the acquisition of that which the feeling person associated with it.

6.16. ". . . the wants of the persons concerned"

6.161. The Justification of the Formula

It would, doubtless, have been better and less scandalous just to say that "good means satisfactory"—or, at most, "such as to be satisfactory."[20] It would then still have been sufficiently obvious that there must be someone to be satisfied, and that this someone must have some wants to be satisfied. We could then have gone on to say who this someone would be likely to be and what kinds of wants there are. This stratagem would have alleviated the reader's shock, and avoided the question: "Goodness! have I really been meaning all that without knowing it?" Anyone who felt like asking this last question might be pacified by an account of what he does whenever he steers a bicycle round a corner, or by Sections 3.3331 and 6.13. But it is more appropriate to point out that to introduce the term "satisfactory" without unpacking it is to present a *quite* misleading appearance of simplicity: it might take quite a while to explain what a physician means when he says that a patient's condition is "satisfactory." Alternatively, had it made sense we might have stopped at "such as to satisfy the wants." It is obvious enough that there cannot be wants without people who want; and all our subsequent questions may be adequately interpreted as questions about wants. Moreover, as we have explained (Section 6.1511), "*the* wants" must be understood as more or less equivalent to "all and only *the* relevant wants," which sufficiently implies a judgement as to who are the persons concerned. But to stop short there would have left us with a grotesquely odd-looking expression. And to have gone further than our formula goes would be impossible, for after this point statements about goodness have no common analysis. They contain nothing more; so there is no further unpacking to be done. Statements about what "the" wants are, or who

[20] Cf. William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Longmans, 1897), p. 201: "The essence of good is to satisfy demand."

"the persons concerned" are, are (as we said in Section 6.1511) not implicit in what is said, but presupposed thereby. At this stage we are no longer concerned with what people say, or with the meaning of what they say, but with what people have in mind when they say things.

6.162. *Relevance and Importance*

Ambiguities in arguments about goodness tend to arise from lack of clarity as to which need or desire or group of needs and/or desires is solely relevant or most important. When these are different wants of the same person the case is not essentially different from what it is when they are wants of different persons. As we have said, the function performed by the phrase "the . . . concerned" does not differ from that performed by the definite article in "the wants"; the former phrase is added only because it is disconcerting to use the definite article without further specification, unless its precise reference is familiar: "the cat" is *our* cat; other cats are "the cat next door" or "the Jones's cat." To speak of "*the* people concerned" seems to imply that they are the only people concerned, and implies at least that they are the people most concerned; a judgement of relevance is simply the limiting case of a judgement of relative importance. Of course, the fact that a thing is pronounced good does not entail that these judgements have actually been consciously made, even though the pronouncement logically presupposes such judgements. The pronouncement of a thing's goodness is something like a judicial summing-up; but such a summing-up may be made prematurely.

The notion of relevance, and still more that of importance, may well seem so familiar or straightforward as to need no explanation or discussion. But the notion of satisfaction seemed so too; and we have seen that that notion may give rise to difficulties.

A thing or person or event is said to be important if it *makes a considerable difference* to everyone, or to a great many people, or to whatever particular type or group of people one has in mind on the particular occasion of calling it important. To make a difference to someone is to affect the course of his life either directly or by the effect one has on his feelings. Thus an important person is not one who attracts a great deal of attention (e.g., by figuring in a sensational murder) but one who by his decisions or actions affects the lives of many.

This may be obscured by an idiom. If a *thing, person,* event or matter is said not simply to be important but to be important *to* a particular person (or group of persons), this usually means more than that it affects the course of his life. It means rather that it *seems* important

to him, or that he knows it affects him. The person who is most important to me is not the one whose decisions or actions most govern what happens to me, but the person who most occupies my thoughts: to whom, as we say, I *attach* most importance. We must add that of course what seems important to someone is important to him also in the sense that it affects his life; for what occupies one's attention naturally affects what one does.[21]

That the foregoing is a fair account of what we mean by importance seems evident to me, and I hope also to the reader; but it was worth stating explicitly because it rules out (or is ruled out by) something that even well-educated people often say. This is, that discovery of the great size of the universe has revealed the insignificance and unimportance of human affairs. But I do not see why this should be thought true unless "important" were a synonym of "big"—in which case Napoleon would have been less important than any random rhinoceros. Human affairs will still be of paramount importance to men, no matter how large the interstellar spaces may turn out to be. The opinion in question ceases to be a piece of sentimentality only in so far as it suggests the existence of sentient beings somewhere for human affairs to be unimportant to; but this point, though it might be made, seldom if ever is. So we may fairly ask, to whom are human affairs thus shown to be unimportant? To men? Obviously not. To the inhabitants of other planets? Yes, but there can be no reason for bothering with what they may think unless or until there is some way of establishing their existence and making contact with them. To God, then? But no astronomical data would increase the disparity already agreed by theologians to exist between an "infinite" God and His creatures.

From importance we turn to relevance and "being concerned." We have said that relevance is the limiting case of importance; and the same is true of "being concerned." A thing is important to someone, or with regard to some matter, if it makes a considerable difference to him or it; a thing is relevant to any affair to which it makes *any* difference, or which makes any difference to it, and those concerned in any affair are those to whom it makes some difference. But in saying this we have over-simplified. Although a thing can be relevant without being im-

[21] It might seem that "important" is used in a different sense in the phrase "important *for*. . . ." If we say "For the student of economics, the most important event of 1955 was . . ." we might take "important" here as meaning "worthy of attention." But this would be, if not wrong, at least an unnecessary complication. The phrase may best be taken as meaning that, of those events which interest the student of economics, the most important in 1955 (i.e., the one that had the greatest effect on the most people) was. . . .

portant, it is also possible for a thing to be important without being relevant. The "to" in "relevant to" does not have the same function as that in "important to," and "relevance to" is not the limiting case of "importance to." Things or facts are said to be important to people; but relevant to problems or matters for consideration only. What is relevant to a problem is what (makes a difference to it and thus) may and should make a difference to one considering the problem.

That a thing is important, or important to someone or relevant to someone, or that someone is concerned with something, is thus largely but not entirely a matter of plain fact. It is to be settled by observation rather than by persuasion who are the parties to a transaction and are concerned in it in this way, or whose lives will be affected by it and are concerned in it in that way. But difficulty and argument may arise because anyone may concern *himself* in any affair and decide to allow it to affect him (as the Jews of New York a few years ago concerned themselves with the local government of Haifa, in which, but for their own decision, they would have been in no way concerned; it might have been argued that it was no concern of theirs). Similarly, while it usually seems fairly easy to distinguish between what is relevant to a given decision or discussion and what cannot affect it one way or another, a person may actually be affected by irrelevant considerations: what is relevant is only what would sway "the reasonable man." Again, while it may seem beyond dispute that a certain person or event is important, or is more important than some other person or event, judgement of what constitutes a great difference, or what makes more difference than what, involves the weighing up or estimation of factors which cannot be measured.

These elements of doubt in the judgements of importance, relevance or concern which necessarily underlie judgements of goodness suggest that judgers of goodness appeal to some principle of justice in the Platonic form of "Mind your own business"; or rather, that where some such principle is not followed judgements of goodness could never be agreed upon, and hence presumably would never be made. This conclusion seems to me both certainly true and probably important.

The upshot of this and the preceding sections would appear to be as follows. However hard it may be to say exactly how goodness differs from yellowness as a quality, this difficulty must not blind us to the crude but inescapable fact that judgements of goodness involve estimation and weighing up as judgements of yellowness do not; and wherever there is estimation there is a possibility of dispute. We have found that several

kinds of estimation are involved, and hence arguments about goodness may take several forms and centre on several points. There is the judgement that a need exists; there is the judgement that satisfaction is or would be achieved; there is the judgement that some wants are important or more important than others (and hence *the* wants); and combined with this there are the judgement that certain wants are relevant and others are not, and the judgement that certain persons are properly concerned and others are not.

6.163. *The Persons Concerned*

Of "the persons concerned" it must be remembered that, though who they are taken as being will largely determine what is called good by a particular person at a particular time, it would be quite useless and absurd to ask the speaker "Who are the persons concerned?" Such a question would of course seem quite pointless and indeed meaningless to him; and if its meaning and point were explained, and he were then to admit the propriety of the question, it cannot be taken for granted that he would be able, even on reflection, to say with certainty who they were. And yet, unless the question can be answered, no statement containing the word "good" has any precise meaning.

Who the "persons concerned" actually are is seldom or never a complete mystery, and most often there is no doubt about it at all—which, presumably, is why their peculiar relevance to disagreements about goodness has not been seen. In questions of connoisseurship and of goods for consumption or use there is no problem: those concerned are the connoisseurs, consumers or users. Good food is that which satisfies the wants shared by those who eat food, in so far as their concern is with food. But it is not so easy to say who is concerned with a good action or a good person. An action concerns a person if it affects him directly, or if he comes to know of it and this knowledge affects his conduct or feelings. But we cannot leave the matter here. Some people are indisputably thus "concerned" because they have to be, because the action unavoidably impinges on the course of their lives. Other people (as we have said) are concerned only because they deliberately make it their business to be. People may declare themselves offended or "shocked" by an action; and other people then try (and are expected[22]) to avoid shocking them. On the other hand, some people are conventionally supposed to be concerned in actions of a certain kind, whether the

[22]Cf. Romans xiv.

action actually makes any difference to them or not. Thus a man's adultery is assumed to affect his wife, whether or not it affects his actions and feeling towards her or hers towards him.

Who the "persons concerned" in good or bad conduct are, and who they are to be, is therefore one of the chief topics of argument on morals. Some general considerations on this subject will be brought forward in Sections 6.16311, 6.227, **6.34** and elsewhere. Here we will commit ourselves only to the assertion that people who are "shocked" at an action are concerned in it only because some other people are already more directly concerned; from which it may appear that their interests merit consideration only in a secondary degree, if at all.

6.1631. *"In-Groups"*

Usually, but by *no means* always,[23] the "persons concerned" form one of the speaker's "in-groups," one of the groups towards whom he has the "we-feeling":[24] that is to say, one of the groups of whom it comes naturally to him in certain contexts to use the word "we" without further specification. Each person belongs to many such groups: the hierarchy of general-interest groups (family, clan, nation, humanity), and the special-interest groups cutting across these (school, filmgoers, cricket-lovers, balletomanes, smokers); also perhaps such groups as "white men," which seem to belong in neither category. Each person quite naturally and without reflection judges some things as a member of one group, others as a member of another group: a man may, for half an hour after reading the leading articles in his newspaper, see *everything* from the point of view of the national interest; in his office, see everything in terms of his shareholders' dividends; during a concert in the evening, enjoy the performance as a seeker of entertainment; and on his way home, analyse the same performance as a critic of music.[25]

To constitute such an "in-group," mutual respect suffices: indeed, the connoisseurs of a special kind of thing or activity have in common nothing but a shared set of standards, together with an amount of knowledge and experience in the relevant field which commands respect for those standards. The limiting case of connoisseurship is the pioneer in the arts who works "to please himself"—but himself, not as an

[23]For remarks on the exceptions, see Sections 4.225 and 6.332.

[24]According to the *O.E.D.* the root of "good" is the same as that of "gather" and "together."

[25]Compare the illustrated joke which has appeared in *Punch* and other funny papers: a cartoonist hands a sheaf of drawings to an editor; the editor laughs uproariously at each one, and then hands back the whole sheaf with a frown.

individual with whims, but as a maintainer of standards which others would, given knowledge and experience, hold; and who may thus think of himself as the forerunner of a "posterity" among whom familiarity will have developed the taste which his work is designed to fulfil.[26]

6.16311. *"Society"*

Some anthropologists in moments of missionary zeal introduce a quite unnecessary confusion into questions of evaluation by speaking always, where this analysis speaks of "the persons concerned," of "culture" or "society": "There is no human nature; there is culture." Perhaps this is because they are used to dealing professionally with small groups whose evaluations do show a certain homogeneity;[27] certainly, social psychologists in general have realized the variety and complexity of the groupings in which men may live and pass judgement.

The missionary anthropologists have this much in their favour: that the "society" or "culture" (the unit in which they are professionally most interested and which accordingly is the only one they recognize when they are thinking generally and loosely) does always present a sort of overriding unity, within which evaluations do have a sort of family resemblance in that the judgements of sub-groups tend to overlap and shade into one another; in fact, one is tempted to say that "society" can only be defined in terms of the sharing of values. But the complete homogeneity which this way of speaking postulates is not to be found everywhere.

It may yet be thought that, though evaluations may be made (as suggested in Section 6.1631) in terms of many different groups, specifically moral judgements are always passed in terms of the judge's "society" (cf. Section 4.222). Is not the specification of a good man or a good action always given in terms of society? It may sometimes be. In the language of the Hopi Indians, we are assured, the nearest word to "good" in meaning is "Hopi";[28] and this would seem to be the implication for our analysis of Aristotle's remark, that all communities and associations of men exist for some special purpose except the political

[26]Acquiring a taste is either learning a desire whose fulfilment is for some reason exceptionally agreeable, or else learning a new way to satisfy an existing desire or need.

[27]Cf. M. Fortes, *Social Anthropology at Cambridge since 1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 38: "The theoretically significant features of primitive societies are their homogeneity of culture, their relative stability, and their lack of institutional differentiation."

[28]Cf. the use of the word "un-American" as a term of abuse.

but will not do; for what possible reason can be given why it should be easier to classify in one way rather than another, if not that one classification fits the facts better—is, in fact, more natural?

6.32. Generalization

There is a kind of modification of the meaning of "good" which is possible only where the criteria of goodness are more or less fixed. Within the field of morality, the condition holds for good men (one can say "Muggletonians are good men" without raising eyebrows); but it is not easy to fill in the blank in ". . . are good deeds." Let us rather consider the simpler and less controversial field of cows. I may point to a cow with which I am personally familiar and say, "Now, there's a good cow for you," meaning that it is such a cow as to satisfy. . . . But I may say, "Holsteins are good cows." And by this I do not mean that, whatever x may be, "x is a Holstein" implies "x is a good cow," for doubtless many Holsteins are execrable cattle. I mean rather that Holsteins tend to be such as to satisfy . . . : that if you knew of a cow only that it was a Holstein, you would have good reason to suppose that it was a good cow, although you might be wrong. In being thus used, "good" does not differ from other "quality words." If you point to a swan and say "Lookit, poppa! A white bird!" either you are mistaken or the bird is white. But if you say that the swan is a white bird, or swans are white birds, you do not deny that there are numerous exceptions: it is just that you are not thinking of them at the time. And this does not depend upon the discovery of black swans in Australia, or upon the possibility that some swans are so dirty as to be grey or have been sprayed with creosote: cygnets are swans and are not white. This is all platitudinous, but it is not trivial and should be borne in mind; for, except in history, written uses of the word "good" are more likely than not to be about classes of things rather than individuals. My formula cannot, therefore, be applied to them without the modification just stated; and any account of the meaning of goodness which does not differentiate firmly between the two kinds of contexts is likely to mislead.

I may, then, point to a cow of which I know nothing except that it is a Holstein and say, as before, "There's a good cow for you." My statement, we should say, means the same as before; only now my reasons for making it are not so good. It is, however, possible that I should actually mean "This belongs to a class the members of which tend to be such as to. . . ." And that would be half way to the purely conventional use mentioned in the last section: "Things like this are usually said to be good." If then I point to a mixed herd and say "The Holstein is a good cow," I may mean either that the particular cow at which I point, a Holstein well known to me, is a good cow; or that Holsteins (of which yonder is an example) are good cows; or that that unfamiliar cow at which I point, being a Holstein, is of such a kind that it is likely to be a good cow; or that, being a Holstein, it is properly called a "good" cow (a point of linguistic propriety acquired by association with cattlemen); or that Holsteins (of which yon is an example) are properly called "good" cows.

These last examples are akin to these conventional uses of words whereby they become merely ceremonious ("The Good Ship *Venus*," "The honourable and gallant gentleman opposite") or parts of proper names ("Good King Charles," "The New College") or of titles ("best man"). When the convention of calling things of a certain kind good is one from which the speaker wishes to dissociate himself, "good" becomes a mere abbreviation for the list of accepted criteria; and a bitter or contemptuous tone of voice may convey clearly enough that he not merely repudiates but despises or loathes the conventional standards by which such judgements are made (cf. Section 4.225).

6.33. "Hardening"

At the end of Section 6.32 we considered some cases where "good" has come to be used in a merely conventional way. These are cases of what I call "hardening." One of the features of the use of "good" in what I have treated as its primary sense is its flexibility: that it is applied to things not solely because they have certain observable characteristics, but because these characteristics make them such as to satisfy the wants of the persons concerned. If these wants were to change, the things would no longer be called good; nor would they if the "persons concerned" lost their privileged position. But there are various ways, of which Section 6.32 considered some, in which "good" may lose this flexibility. It may, for instance, where the criteria for the goodness of things of a certain class have remained for some while unchanged, come simply to be used as an abbreviation for the list of criteria, just as "Norman" may cease to refer to buildings erected in a certain period when a certain style was in vogue, and come to be used of the style irrespective of period. This process of "hardening" may be complicated by the kind of process discussed in the last section; for although the defining characteristic of Holstein cattle is their pedigree (which also holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for Frazer-Martin cars and Brighton Cheese sherry), the name comes readily to be regarded as a sort of summary of the observable characteristics which they are generally found to have.

This whole matter has been dealt with so well by Mr. R. M. Hare in chapters Four and Seven of *The Language of Morals* that it seems best to confine the present discussion to a few more or less isolated points, and to refer the dissatisfied reader to Mr. Hare.

6.331. Goodness as Simple

When we say "God is good" . . . the meaning is, *Whatever good we attribute to creatures pre-exists in God*, and in a higher way. (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I. 13. 2)

Some of the implications of this quotation—that badness is a form of incompleteness, that badness and goodness are correlative, and that since in God there is no kind of badness there is in Him every kind of goodness—are cursorily dealt with in Section 4.212. But it suggests also the following considerations. We discover what "good" means by talking and hearing about creatures, and discover what goodness is by observing the limited goodness of creatures. The goodness of creatures is thus, so far as we are concerned (or psychologically), prior to that of God. But that of God is logically and ontologically prior to that of creatures, since He alone can be called "good" without restrictions, and the goodness of creatures depends, causally as it were, upon His. But is it not conceivable that, upon being confronted by God at the Last Judgement or whenever, we should perceive in Him a simple unanalysable quality—His goodness—about which we should feel "So this is goodness after all!" and realize that all previous opinions about what constituted goodness would have to be rejected in favour of an explanation in terms of this simple quality? If it is conceivable, whether or not we think it is likely to happen, and even if we can say nothing more than this about what the experience would be like, it is not meaningless to say that goodness is a simple quality. More specifically it may be held that one can say that a thing is "good in itself" and mean the following: that it is such that anyone aware of it must necessarily (at least, unless he is uncommonly stupid and insensitive) wish passionately that it continue to exist, although he himself might never again come across it or even be assured of its continued existence. Nothing, it might be said, is *really* good except that which possesses this quality that compels such wish for its continued being; other things are to be called good only in so far as they resemble this. And I see no cogent reason for excluding this possibility, or for objecting to any who should wish to say that there is such a quality and that God alone has it.

To recognize the possibility just mentioned is by no means to renounce what has been said elsewhere. For, why should this supposed quality be called "goodness"? Only, surely, by some analogy with what is called goodness in more familiar contexts; were there no such analogy, one would rather coin a new term than adopt one already familiar. Nor is the analogy hard to detect. What the supposed object and other things called "good" have in common is that (whether by possession of this supposed quality or no) they are such as to satisfy wants; the supposed object differs from most others in giving satisfaction, not by being experienced or possessed, but merely by existing. In this, that its existence alone is desired and would satisfy desire, it resembles many states of affairs which disinterested workers for causes may seek to bring about: such persons may well sacrifice themselves in order to bring about some result which they will not live to see.

It is thus possible without any fuss to bring this rather extravagant notion within the terms of our formula: we have only to bear in mind the caution already given (Section 6.1512) against undue restriction of the scope of the term "desire."

There is also a quite different way in which it may come to seem that goodness is a simple quality. If one restricts one's attention to a single class of objects, men or wines or sewing-machines, "good" may be used descriptively to summarize the criteria of goodness in that class. It is only a matter of time before one ceases to notice the presence of the particular criteria, and simply sees the thing as "good." This may also happen if "good" is not used merely as a summary of criteria; we then have the curious situation that the thing in question is seen, not as possessing the relevant criteria, but as being simply "good"—as having the simple quality of goodness—and as being satisfactory in virtue of its having this simple quality. The goodness of a good man may come to be the most immediately obvious thing about him. The mind has a habit of taking short cuts like this. If and only if we recognize the short cuts for what they are, we shall not be misled into thinking that goodness is something ineffable and mysterious.

Nothing is more common in philosophy, and nothing more futile, than the attempt to set limits *a priori* to what can be conveyed in words. It may well be felt that our analysis is not adequate to all the conjectures and aspirations of which human thought is capable. But it is hoped that the present section will have shown that, if not adequate to them, it is at least not false to them.

6.332. "Good" as Descriptive

In particular cases where "good" or some word for a virtue is used in a derogatory sense, it is not always easy to see whether this involves

using the word descriptively or not. If A says of B "He's too good for this world," this particular kind of "hardening" does not seem to be at work. It is rather implied that B's behaviour is such as to satisfy the wants of God or the Church Triumphant, but not such as to satisfy the wants of the likes of us, and that in A's opinion only one of these groups constitutes "the persons concerned." Which group this is must be gathered from the tone of voice in which the remark is made. Suppose, however, that A says to B, "Oh, don't be so damned heroic." Is he not here using "heroic" as a simple description of a form of conduct which he feels to be inappropriate and absurd in the circumstances? I think not. One would normally speak thus if the person addressed were, in one's own opinion, acting as he did because he thought such conduct heroic: if he seemed to be trying to live up to an ideal of heroism, and this ideal seemed either absurd in itself or inappropriate to the occasion. Since, even when one does not accept or reject a set of standards, one usually either respects it or despises it, it is not easy to find a case where an evaluative word is used merely for description. In some circles, I believe, the term "good music" is used with no hint of admiration or irony to describe a certain kind of noise—defined usually (though without precision) in terms of the kind of instruments used to produce the sound. Mr. R. M. Hare cites the cricketing expression "a good wicket."[51] One might also say that it was a brave act for someone to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel, without wishing to commend the act. It might be objected to this that although the act was not a particularly commendable one, its being brave was, so far as it went, something in its favour; so that "brave" itself was used in commendation, though the commendation was as it were cancelled by other considerations. To call the action brave without adding any further comment would, in fact, be taken as a commendation. One might object that there is nothing good about bravery where bravery is not called for, but this is to confuse a disposition with its manifestation. Courage is a good quality in a man even if not every action which manifests it is a good action. And you have to admit that it takes a lot of nerve to go over the Falls, barrel or no barrel.

If such words are ever used in a merely descriptive way, these cases are far less common than those in which the elements of the judgement of goodness are, as it were, reshuffled. In these, what should be the criteria in virtue of its possession of which a thing is judged good become *defining* criteria of its goodness, while the judgement that the thing, being what it is, is such as to satisfy . . . is replaced by an emotional attitude towards it. This is what is likely to happen when a person has

[51] *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 118.

learned at his mother's knee to call things of this kind good and to adopt a "pro-attitude" (a vile phrase, but I have no other) towards them, and then, instead of going on from there to develop and refine his evaluations, goes no further but simply reacts towards or against what he has been taught. This failure to learn how to evaluate is sometimes taken by psychoanalysts who write on ethics to be the typical case of evaluation.

Even when the descriptive element of "good" does not take up this important position, it cannot be ignored in any discussion of the word's meaning. Although they do not appear in the definition, the kind of context in which the word is in fact applied, its associations however derived, and the ways in which its use was learned and mislearned, all affect the peculiar timbre of the word whenever it is used; and, since they are unlikely to vary much within a community, all may be said to form part of its meaning.

6.34. *Moral Goodness*

To call a man a good man, and to call a car a good car, are plainly different. We must consider whether the difference is such that we should do well to speak of a special ethical sense of "good," and make moral goodness a thing apart, or whether moral goodness finds easy and natural interpretation in terms of this analysis. For, though we have written as if what we said applied with little or no modification to moral goodness, we have not justified this assumption or indeed given any special attention to moral goodness as such. And if we are forced to give an account of a good man's goodness which differs in substance from that of the good car's goodness our analysis has no value at all for ethics, whatever its interest may be for philosophy at large.

6.341. *"Moral"*

If we say of a man that he is morally good, do we say more of him than that he is a good man? Let us follow our rule and take ourselves to that learned and supposedly dispassionate witness, the *Oxford English Dictionary*. We learn there that the word "moral" was coined by Cicero to render the Greek, and should by its derivation from *mores* mean "pertaining to behaviour." But the English word in its primary signification means "of or pertaining to character or disposition, considered as good or bad, virtuous or vicious" and so forth. Moral goodness, then, is goodness of behaviour, or character, or disposition. We note that the dictionary makes no separate mention of behaviour, except where it deals

with the word's origin. For this there is a good reason. Although we say of a soldier that his conduct is exemplary, meaning only that he has not been convicted of any offence against military discipline, and of a child that he behaved well or was on his best behaviour, by which we mean only that he observed the rules of etiquette and gave no trouble to his elders, we do not say that a man is good or morally good unless we believe that his good actions are the manifestation of a good character. For this too there are good reasons, which will be stated in Section 6.342. What then is "character"? A character reference is simply a statement of a person's virtues and vices; and it is generally true that to speak of a man's character is to speak of his virtues and vices: that about him, in fact, on the basis of which we should call him a good man or a bad, in general or in particular respects. From all this it seems to follow that to call a man morally good is simply to say that he is a good man, if "a good man" means what we should expect it to mean, namely, "good as a man" and not as a carpenter. And, since nothing except a person or his deeds is ever said to be morally good, there is nothing absurd in this conclusion. There would then seem to be only this difference between the moral goodness of a good man and the goodness at carpentry of a good carpenter: that, whereas the addition of the word "carpenter" indicates that the goodness is of a specialized sort, a sort in which only carpenters and those who like or need woodwork are to be expected to concern themselves, the addition to "good" of "man" after it or "morally" before it delimits its application without specializing it. We do not demand of a good man that he be a good carpenter, for he may be no carpenter at all: but we do demand of a good carpenter that he be a good man; for a man, good or bad, he must be, and a good carpenter who is a bad man will cheat you if he can. Nor does anyone care whether a carpenter be a sound workman or a bungler, unless he has work for him to do; but one cannot be indifferent to the moral worth of any man, for willy-nilly one may suffer from his badness or profit from his goodness.

In speaking of moral goodness one can do little more than say badly what Plato and Aristotle have said well, and perhaps unsay what others have said wrongly. But if we say that the excellence of a carpenter appears only when he is at his trade, while the moral goodness of a man appears in all his transactions with his fellow men, we are reminded that there is a sense of "moral" in which this is not so. For a man is called "immoral" often because of his sexual behaviour alone, so that "immorality" and "vice" have become the names of a particular vice. This usage seems worthy of nothing but the contempt which it has so often

received, since it seems both to derive from and to encourage an estimate of the importance of behaviour of that kind which has never, to the author's knowledge, been defended. It is mentioned only lest the reader be misled by association with this sense of "moral" to suppose that there must be a special "ethical sense" of the word "good" on no better grounds than that in these contexts it has a certain peculiar aura.

But the dictionary has yet another suggestion to make: that moral goodness perhaps, and moral obligation certainly, lie in obedience to the moral law. We need not follow the dictionary here without question, for its compiler may well have written more of his own philosophy into our language than was in fact there. But it seems reasonable to hold that we do speak of moral obligations, that there can be no obligation without a law, and that therefore we speak as if there were a moral law. Two things thus seem to be meant by "moral goodness": first, "being such as to satisfy . . ."; and second, "obedient to the moral law" or something like that. We have, then, to answer three questions. Is there a moral law to which a man's goodness is related, and if so what is it and what kind of law is it? What is the precise relationship between moral goodness and the moral law? Does the sense of "moral goodness" which involves reference to a moral law really differ from the other suggested sense—in which case it must be a "special ethical sense"—or is it merely the other's inevitable corollary? The following sections will endeavour to resolve these questions.

6.342. *The Good Man*

In saying what "a good man" means we shall first simply unfold the consequences for its meaning of what we have already said in the course of our analysis and then ask the reader: What is wrong with this? Any other course would betray a lack of confidence in the correctness of what has been said. To begin with an affectation of ignorance, and by the demolition of false views to make it appear that the view with which we concluded was the only one possible, would be to follow the deceitful Platonic method already stigmatized in Section 3.322; and whether we managed to deceive ourselves or the reader only would be of no great importance.

A good man, then, is one who is such as to satisfy the wants of the person(s) concerned. Not that he does, in fact, satisfy them; he is "such as to" do so, which is in some respects more and in others less. It does not alter our estimate of his goodness that he is prevented by facts which he cannot alter from satisfying certain of such wants—he may be pre-

vented by poverty from feeding the hungry or by arthritis from visiting the sick or by amnesia from keeping a promise—or that he is prevented by the meeting of one claim upon him from meeting some other. Nor yet do we blame him, or think him any the less good, if he fails to fulfil some want through his ignorance of some matter he had no means of knowing.[52] On the other hand, we do not call a man good simply for acting on some occasion as a good man would act, or even for always so acting, for a man may act so without being such as to act so. We call him good only if his actions proceed from some settled disposition to act well. For to say that a person is such as to do something is to say that he can be relied upon to do so, as far as in him lies. He can be relied upon to do so only if he has a fixed disposition to do so. But what could such a disposition be? It could not be a mere habit of reacting in a certain way to a certain stimulus, for this might not on all occasions be the right way to act. The disposition required can, it seems to me, be nothing but a fixed intention to act well; and such an intention must be either vacuous or else indistinguishable from the habit of reaction just dismissed unless it is an intention, first, to estimate as closely as possible the relevant factors in the situation (whatever these may be) and, second, to act upon some principle in relation to the estimate thus formed. Such a principle should presumably be capable of statement, and may then be termed a law; this, no doubt, is that moral law which we found involved in the notion of moral goodness in Section 6.341. And if our analysis is still to be trusted, to "estimate the relevant factors in the situation" must be, having decided what the situation in fact is, to decide who the persons concerned are, the extent of their

[52]Although we blame a person whose good intentions (the road to Hell is paved with them) go awry because he is not careful enough in his estimates of what the situation demands, we do not blame one who means well but, owing to mental deficiencies, does more harm than good. We may ascribe this to our habit of treating a person as if he were indeed a ghost imprisoned in a machine, so that only his efforts are truly "his," his mental and physical equipment being thought of as if they were external circumstances. This habit is no doubt connected with the fact that it is inappropriate to praise or blame a man for mental and physical endowments though one may esteem him for them or congratulate him on them, since such praise or blame cannot influence him to alter them. The close connection between our notions of responsibility and moral worth and our knowledge of what can be expected of praise and blame as instruments of education was pointed out by Aristotle (*Ethics, passim*). There is a sense in which a man who tries to be good is a good man, and a sense in which he is not. This is because certain defects of a man's character (e.g., a hasty temper) are in some contexts thought of as an aspect of his "self," in others as impediments against which his "self" struggles. Since it does not seem possible to give a precisely delimited meaning to "self" and its equivalents, most people vacillate between these two views, both of which seem to me to be perfectly reasonable.

concern and the nature of their wants in that particular situation;[53] and the principle must ultimately be, to satisfy those wants as far as possible.

The good man is, then, one whose conduct is guided by a principle. Differences in the estimate of a man's moral worth, in so far as they do not correspond to different degrees of knowledge, will depend on disagreement or agreement with his estimate of who is concerned, or on how far his behaviour is believed to be based in fact upon the principle. For if a man, to further his own interests, acts as if he were acting upon the intention to satisfy the wants of those concerned, one does not (if one knows this to be the case) call him good. This is not because moral goodness is something mysteriously inward, but because such a man cannot be trusted: he is not truly "such as to satisfy . . . " because if he were no longer to find the appearance of moral goodness useful to him he would jettison it.

The foregoing would seem to imply that the "suchness," the disposition to act, is valued for the sake of the acts likely to issue from it. But in fact we often prize good actions simply as signs of moral goodness, affecting at least to value the "suchness" more highly not only than any individual manifestation of it (which might be reasonable) but than all manifestations of it together (see Section 6.331). This valuation is justifiable in the context of religious belief, to which it properly belongs. God who "knows the secrets of all hearts" is supposed to care more for what people are than for what they do; and of course one attaches unique importance to God's method of evaluation, and abides His judgement. Men, the argument runs, pass moral judgement with reference to deeds rather than qualities because of the inaccessibility of the latter to human observation.[54] In reply to all this one is tempted to suggest that a divine standpoint is necessarily inappropriate to mortals, who are quite right to "think mortal thoughts." But surely when a religious person speaks of goodness, God is to him quite properly the "persons concerned"; though it is irresponsible to use this fact (as many do) to invalidate secular judgements which take those people upon whom an action impinges as being concerned in it. Religious and secular thinking about morality, even when identical in content, thus differ notably in attitude. To eliminate this difference would be to deny either the divinity of God or the humanity of men.

We have seen that the notion of a moral law, discussion of which is

[53]These two decisions are only theoretically distinguishable, for to establish the "facts" in a human affair is to establish who is involved and the nature of the involvement.

[54]Perhaps the most striking statement of this point of view is Abelard's *Ethica seu Nosce Teipsum.*

deferred to Sections 6.343 and 8.24, does enter into an account of moral goodness, but not in such a way as to render our account of the meaning of "good" inadequate. That account, indeed, demands the notion of action in obedience to a law as the condition of the reliability it implies. But this notion of law is that of a principle by which judgement is made, rather than that of a rule which one is obliged to keep. One does indeed have obligations, but they are not necessarily imposed by laws (see Section **8.2**).

If it is characteristic of the morally good man that he acts in accordance with the moral law, it is no less characteristic of him that he is careful in fulfilling all his obligations and all claims upon him. But this also is a necessary corollary of our original formula, since it is obvious that in any transaction to which he is a party the "persons concerned" will primarily be those, if any, to whom he stands in some definable relationship: and such relationships are very largely resoluble into terms of obligations. With this in mind we may ask what the addition of "man" in "a good man" tells us about the persons concerned. We have seen that the effect of the addition is "delimitation without specialization": the persons concerned are those who are concerned with him, not as a carpenter but as a man. Although the triteness of this makes it seem clear, it is really not at all easy to state the force of "as a man," except in so far as it means simply "not in virtue of any special skill or competence." We should be tempted to say that "as a man" meant "in virtue of those qualities which are required in *any* transaction with his fellow men," were it not that an adulterer is not a good man, though his adultery does not affect his relations with bachelors. Perhaps we should take "as a man" as being equivalent to "as a person" and define a person as "one having a place in a community," except that one feels inclined to say that his place in a community may be that of a carpenter. To say "as a member of society" takes us no further, unless the reader thinks that the notion of "society" is clearer than that of "a man as such." We might, remembering that one cannot contract out of morality, gloss "as a man" with "in those relationships which do not depend upon his free will"; but the carpenter may be so perforce, as member of a hereditary caste of carpenters, while a promise, which is freely given, is none the less binding. But perhaps, since it is our aim to find an account that delimits without specializing, the negative account suggested not only is but ought to be the best one: "as a man" then may be taken as equivalent to "not in virtue of any particular skill." Who then, to return to the question, are the persons concerned? We can hardly say "everyone" or "anyone," even if that should turn out in the end to be

the answer we could wish to give: a term so general gives the mind nothing to work on. What we can say is, "everyone with whom the man is concerned, or may be concerned": that is, everyone to whom he stands in some definite relationship. This excludes those men, if such there be, and those animals, whom either he does not consider to be persons, or one judging him does not consider as persons—for one may judge a man good "according to his *lights*" although he be not good by one's own standards. While excluding those, it includes those to whom, though he does not know them and they do not know him, he has certain duties because of some acknowledged relationship between him and them—his fellow citizens, for example. It also includes those to whom, if he knew of them, he would have certain duties in virtue of some less explicit relationship: one who acknowledges "basic human rights" of all men, for example, cannot be said to have fixed obligations to each and every man in all the world; but he has a conditional obligation to any man with whom he may have any dealings. The kind and the extent of the obligations for the fulfilment of which the good man is called good vary with the nature and closeness of his relationships: his obligations to his family are not only more exacting but different in kind from those to his fellow citizens, and these in turn from those which he owes to any man in virtue of his humanity. Again, he may be expected to do more for the poor in his own street than for those in the next town, and for these more than for those in distant lands: he is bound to his poor neighbours by his knowledge of their needs and his imagination of their desires, but of the distant poor he knows nothing unless some "charitable appeal" supplies knowledge and feeds his imagination—and no one who believes that all men are in some way united by their humanity would call a man good if he refused such an appeal without good reason.

From all this it would appear that, with the good man as with the good car, no further means of specifying "those concerned" can be found which is not another way of saying that they *are* (or are thought to be) concerned; for the foregoing paragraph is far from providing a sufficient and necessary means of identifying the groups with tacit reference to whom a man is said to be good. The point must be taken up again when obligation is discussed in Section **8.2**, but little more can be added. When we turn from the "persons concerned" to their needs and desires, we find a similar difficulty in stating more precisely what they are. We are tempted at first to say that not all needs and desires can be "the" ones, since demands may be frivolous, unreasonable, illegitimate, immoral, someone else's concern and so on. Hence we may again attempt to give an account in terms of obligation, as follows: where a relationship is an

institution existing solely in order to satisfy certain wants, "the" needs and desires are those wants; in all other relationships, they are whatever wants there may be for the satisfaction of which the relationship constitutes a claim. The first half of this statement may stand, but applies only to those formal relationships (e.g., being a godfather[55] or a bodyguard) which would not cause any difficulty anyway. The second half seems to be nugatory and neither reduces any problem there may have been nor alters its location; for it would seem that the definition of a given relationship either gives no hint as to what these claims may be or consists of a statement of them. But so far as it goes our statement seems correct enough.

Is it enough, though, to say that the good man is one who is such as to fulfil certain definable obligations to certain definable persons? At certain times and places it may suffice; but in other contexts the restriction it imposes on our formula is unwelcome. Here and now it might accord better with our opinions on human goodness to say that the account in terms of more or less specific obligations will serve to define the just man, or the "upright" man, but that it is characteristic of the *good* man that he is kind and considerate. To be kind and considerate is certainly to be such as to fulfil the needs and desires of others, but it involves more than a willingness to fulfil obligations. As we said before, a man's goodness is judged by his behaviour not only towards those to whom he has some specific and definable duty or some definite obligation, but towards all those "persons" with whom he has any kind of dealing. Every "person," we may say, is regarded as having a sort of limitless residuary claim upon his superfluous benevolence. This may arouse misgivings: a general disposition to "do anything for anybody" is not invariably thought to be a part of moral goodness. Such a man may be said to be "too easy going" or "too good-natured"—a significant phrase. But the objection is, I think, less to an excess of benevolence than to an inability to say "no": that is, to an unordered and undiscriminating tendency to respond to the most immediate appeal. The good man has sometimes to disoblige people: he will weigh one of two incompatible claims against the other; he will weigh a child's long-term interests against its immediate satisfaction; he will resist claims which he sees to be immoral.

If any general conclusion can be said to emerge from the foregoing discussion, it is this. By our formula, a good man is one who has a fixed disposition to fulfil the wants of the persons concerned, and he can have

[55]That is to say, a godfather in the Anglican church. Things are different in Mexico.

this disposition only if he acts on the principle of fulfilling them. No further specification of what and who are concerned seems adequate; to different specifications, it may be suggested, will correspond different notions of what it is to be a good man. Today's common notions of what constitutes moral goodness are, I think, complex, as is to be expected in view of the direct and indirect influence of Roman, Greek and Hebraic notions upon our own ideas and customs. A man's goodness is judged partly by his possession of certain virtues, that is by his conformity to certain patterns of behaviour which are (by the processes of "hardening" previously mentioned) treated as if they were good "in themselves"; partly by his fulfilment of specific obligations to specific persons and groups; partly by his benevolence, kindness, considerateness, and so on, to all those alike who are recognized as persons.

By calling someone a good man, however, we may mean something quite different from what we have hitherto considered in this section: we may take the "persons concerned" as being lawgivers or standard-setters and say that a good person is one who obeys the "moral law" in the sense that he fulfils all the demands made of him by convention. But among the things demanded may be beauty, strength, intelligence, etc.: nothing but confusion can result from calling the fulfilment of such demands *moral* goodness. Yet the equation is often made, especially by anthropologists; it is made plausible by the contingent fact that in some societies (including our own) the conventional criteria of goodness in men are behavioural. Among the Dobuans[56] and the fifth-century Athenians this is not so. To speak of conventionally virtuous behaviour as the fulfilment of an obligation to "society" seems to be a symptom of this confusion between those concerned as standard-setters and those concerned as participants. This manner of speaking seems to be justified only in so far as the satisfaction of a conventional demand, when its specific reason has disappeared and been forgotten, is necessary to maintain social solidarity or to preserve a unified way of life for some similar end.

6.3421. *Conscientiousness*

We may claim on the basis of the last section that the most natural and straightforward interpretation of our formula yields a meaning of "good" perfectly adequate to our use of the phrases "morally good" and

[56]See R. Fortune, *Sorcerers of Dobu*, p. 177 (cf. *ibid.*, p. 136). Note that Dr. Fortune was, by his own account, taken aback to find that the Dobuan concept of goodness (*bobo'ana*) was not that of moral goodness but had reference to health and social success.

"a good man" and that the formula entails the appropriateness of the two notes that are actually thought characteristic of the good man, namely his obedience to (or willingness to obey) the "moral law" and his determination to do what is right. By a process of "generalization" (see Section 6.32), either of these two characteristics may be considered in isolation and thought in themselves to constitute goodness. If "obedience to the moral law" is isolated and equated with goodness, there is a tendency for the strict implications of the term "moral" to be neglected and for the "moral law" to be equated with the totality of the demands made of the agent by the group to which he or his judge belongs. The results of this slipshod thinking are much the same as those of equating the "persons concerned" with the setters of standards, as considered in the last section. The implications of isolating the determination to do what is right (which we shall from now on term "conscientiousness") and reducing moral goodness to it alone may be more complex.

Some philosophers define moral goodness as "an agent's practical loyalty to his own conviction of right."[57] On this showing, to be morally good one need not think correctly about what is right and wrong; one need not even try to think correctly about them; one need only behave in determined accordance with whatever one happens to find oneself believing. This definition is also made to serve for "goodness of the will," "goodness" here plainly being equated with "strength." I cannot believe that this usage, not current in the circles in which I move, is common except possibly amongst Scots philosophers; one is indeed at something of a loss to tell why this quality should be thought to be desirable at all: no wonder the article from which the definition was taken is called "How Important is Moral Goodness?" We may perhaps call such a person "moral" or "a man of principle," but it does not seem at all natural to call him "good," since he may well be not only a great nuisance to everyone else but also extremely self-centred in his exclusive concern with his own prejudices and other convictions.

The reduction of moral goodness to stubbornness of will may be symptomatic of the tendency, to which we have already referred, which makes goodness a matter of the inner man only. This tendency, common as it is, tends to make judgements of goodness impossibly difficult—not unnaturally if, as suggested, it represents the attempt to adopt a "God's-eye view." For one thing, in removing all reference to behaviour it leaves nothing from which the presence or absence of goodness may be inferred; for another, it introduces psychological considerations of indeterminable scope.

[57]W. G. Maclagan, *Mind*, LXIV (1955), 213, citing in support Dr. A. C. Ewing and others.

Conscientiousness may be considered in two ways: as an aspect of goodness or as a psychological phenomenon. The two need not be identical, or even related. Whereas some psychoanalysts equate the conscience with the "superego" as a matter of course, some moralists equate it with a knowledge of right and wrong; the two are utterly different, although many writers behave as if they were identical.

In terms of our analysis, it is clear that a person may be conscientious either in being such as to satisfy . . . (which includes attempting to find out what is really wanted of one as well as doing what one knows to be wanted), or in merely conforming to whatever serves him as a moral law or to whatever the requirements of his society happen to be, or in merely doing whatever he thinks right, whether or not this can be reduced to terms of law. But in the young, and in unthinking persons generally, both the tendency to conform and the notion of right and wrong are formed by psychological processes to which no moral significance attaches. It would seem that everyone starts with an unspecialized will to conform and that how this becomes specialized depends largely upon how and with whom one is brought up: the delinquent is less often one who fails to conform than one who conforms to a group whose standards are at variance with those of its society as a whole. Similarly the formation of a personal ideal may be to a great extent an automatic process whose course is determined by whoever meets and impresses one.[58] If "conscientious" is used to refer to people in virtue of their conformity to standards thus formed and ideals thus acquired, it seems clear that "conscientious" has been reduced to a psychologically descriptive term.

Insistence on the inwardness of goodness may make "conscientious" ambiguous in another way. "The deepest of all moral requirements," writes J. Oman, "is not to act conscientiously, but to seek an ever more penetrating conscientiousness."[59] If this means that one should seek always to be more considerate, more careful in ascertaining what people want, and wider in one's sympathies, we agree; but in the mouths of many it would mean rather that one should be ever more critical and doubtful of one's own ultimate motives. Oman himself writes "Never except in the atmosphere of living religion has morality maintained its absolute demand, penetrated from outward conformity to inward motive. . . ." But in the present state of psychological speculation (and possibly since Oman wrote) "motives" have come to mean, not inten-

[58]What determines the selection of the persons whose ideals and characteristics go to make up one's own ideals seems not to have been much studied.

[59]*Grace and Personality* (1917), pp. 46–7; quoted by H. H. Farmer, *Revelation and Religion* (London: Nisbet, 1954), pp. 152–3.

tions in acting nor principles of action, but the inward forces impelling one to act. Since these need not be accessible to consciousness, to worry about one's own motives is a sign of mental imbalance rather than merit, and to make the goodness of a man or an action depend upon the goodness of his or its motivation is to abandon all attempt to distinguish between good and bad.

6.343. *Moral Law*

The difficulty with which the preceding sections have been wrestling is not that of applying our formula to a clear notion of what moral goodness is, but rather that of finding some acceptable notion of moral goodness by which the appropriateness of our formula might be assessed. This is not surprising, since different kinds of men have at different times and places been thought good. Therefore, since it is not the concern of this book to answer the question "Whom or what am I to think good?" the difficulty mentioned cannot be cleared up. At best it can only be bewitched by the challenge: if this account fails to meet your notion of moral goodness, make plain what that notion is and show wherein the failure lies. I have dealt with what seemed to me to be current views, but there may be others. Meanwhile the same difficulty must bedevil the argument of the present section, which is concerned with the moral law.

It was stated in Section 6.341 that moral action must be law-abiding in the sense that it must proceed from conformity to a principle. It was suggested that our "formula of analysis" itself provides such a principle; and others, such as the "golden rule," have been put forward and won widespread assent.[60] Does this justify the statement that moral action is action "in accordance with the moral law"? The analogy between such a principle as that just spoken of and the laws by which nations are governed seems in several respects little stronger than that between the same principle and the "laws of nature" which help us to decide what inferences we may make about the physical world. Before dealing with the former analogy, however, let us consider some other kinds of law that might be involved in the law-abidingness of the good man.

First, his law-abidingness might be held to be merely abiding by the laws, written and unwritten, of his own country or "society." The notion of an unwritten law is not itself free from difficulty, but clearly some

[60]However, G. B. Shaw's famous objection to the "golden rule," that other people may not share one's own tastes, seems to me unanswerable except by so modifying the rule's content as to make it indistinguishable from the principle deduced from our formula.

reference to customs which are not sanctioned by an explicit legal code must be included to make the position plausible, for there is morality even where there are no legal codes. Now, it is true that if a man breaks the law of the land we are inclined to doubt whether he is a good man; but this is in part because the actions which the laws proscribe are held to be wrong independently of this proscription—for laws are not made with no reason—and in part because, even when the law broken has no moral sanction, we feel that the existence of the community, which is greatly to be desired, depends upon the law-abidingness of its members. That morality does not consist of, or necessarily involve, abiding by such laws, however, is sufficiently shown by our readiness to admit that there may be bad laws and that a man's goodness may be shown in his refusing on principle to abide by these. Thus, as Aristotle pointed out, if the good man is ever the same as the good citizen this can only be so in a good society; and his obedience to the laws of the land only incidentally forms part of a good man's goodness.

Next there is the possibility that the "moral law" is an unique code similar to the legal codes by which nations are governed. The existence of such a code has in fact been postulated. Such was the "Noachic law" supposedly given by God to Noah, which all mankind are bound to obey; and it is sometimes held that there is a "natural law," obedience to which is moral goodness, of which all men are aware unless blinded by some perversity. If for such a law there is supposed a lawgiver (and this can only be God or a god) upon whose will alone its authority rests, then this can scarcely be the moral law we are seeking, for we have said that there is no moral obligation to obey a bad law, and if it be replied that God wills only what is right, then still the rightness of obedience rests upon the goodness of the law and not upon its status as law. If no lawgiver is supposed, but instead the prescriptions of the "natural law" are derived from a study of "human nature," being considered either inborn behaviour patterns which cannot be violated without distress or necessary conditions of human happiness, then the authority of the "law" derives not from its legal status but from the manifest unreasonableness and unnaturalness (hence disadvantageousness) of acting otherwise. It is then no true law, but merely lawlike: a general counsel of prudence. However, if we follow A. L. Goodhart in regarding as a law any rule recognized (whether by those who enforce it or by those who obey it) as obligatory,[61] we may describe as a "natural law" any rule which all

[61]A. L. Goodhart, *English Law and the Moral Law* (London: Stevens, 1953). He points out that we cannot look to any authority as the source of law since that authority is likely to owe its position to law.

men recognize as obligatory, no matter what authority or reason, if any, for obedience may be suggested. Its legal status would then depend upon the fact of its recognition, its naturalness upon its connection with "human nature" in the way already suggested. It seems doubtful whether the necessary consensus exists or is obtainable.

Finally, we may suppose that moral goodness lies in obeying specific injunctions, no matter how derived, such as "Do not steal" or "Do not kill." The discussion of these is postponed to Section 8.24, where they are judged not to play a decisive part in moral action, but to function as rules of thumb, rather as "Holsteins are good cows" functioned in evaluation. It must here suffice to say that though its contravening such a principle may be good reason for supposing an action immoral, this is never by itself a decisive reason; whereas, if an action contravenes one of the provisions of a legal code, it is illegal, and that's that.

We may return to treat explicitly the analogy between legality and morality. One has legal rights and moral rights, legal and moral obligations, and one's actions may be morally or legally right. It seems natural, if one has a moral right to something to which one has no legal right, to say that it is guaranteed to one, not by law, but by the moral law. But does not the very fact that what is opposed to "the moral law" is "Law" without qualification lead us to suspect that "the moral law" is called into being for just such contexts? Might we not just as well say that no law guarantees our right to whatever it is, but we have a right to it just the same? Perhaps the fact that we can give a reason by citing some general principle, *just as if we were quoting a law*, seems in the context more important than that the principles appealed to are in other respects very unlike laws.[62]

If the "moral law" is not like a legal code, this is not because it is trying to be one but fails. If anything, it would be nearer the mark to say that the Law is a continuing but unsuccessful attempt to embody "the moral law": that is, to correspond to the convictions about rightness and wrongness of those to whom it applies. But in fact modern legal codes are artefacts in a way in which the "unwritten laws" of other cultures are not. The legal status of a law, as opposed to the respect in which it is held, does not depend upon its morality. Thus one may regard the Law not as condemning certain actions but as saying what one may expect to happen to one if one is found doing them, and hence as merely stating the cost of the actions. If one has enough money, one supposes,

[62]It may be significant that, though a claim or a document may be "legally good," i.e. valid, an action is not said to be "legally good" as it may be said to be "morally good." Laws decide not goodness, but rightness, for which see Section 8.3.

one can spit in a bus with an easy conscience till one's mouth runs dry—so far as the Law goes.[63] But where the Law and the moral law coincide the legal sanction is reinforced by the pangs of conscience or the disapproval of one's fellows. It may well be that where law is not written and codified and where no separate body draws up or administers the laws, the distinction between legality and morality can be drawn, if it can be drawn at all, only in terms of the kind of sanction invoked. Where there is a definite penalty, there is a law.[64]

Law and morality are most of all alike in this, that they are experienced as forces constraining one (a custom so taken for granted that its existence passes unnoticed is neither a law nor a moral principle, but something else for which I know no name). It is indeed likely that the chief reason why today we still speak of a moral law even if we no longer think of God or Nature as lawgivers is simply this feeling that right conduct and moral goodness are somehow duties imposed upon us, though there is no one to impose them. But this sense of morality as making an "absolute demand" is a sense which some have and others do not. Its importance is probably merely psychological and may well be due to some such factors as earliness or intensity of toilet-training. One cannot say that all those, and only those, who have this feeling are good or "moral," nor can one infer from its occurrence anything about the Ontological Status of Value in the Universe.

6.344. *Recapitulation: A "Special Ethical Sense"*

We are now in a position to consider whether, in speaking of a good man, we use the word "good" in a special sense. The fact that we were able to discuss moral goodness without introducing into our analysis any new principles of interpretation might well lead us to expect that this supposed special sense is simply one of those discussed under the head of "hardening" and may be accounted for by saying that, since certain specific characteristics are thought in a particular society to be necessary

[63]I understand that professional criminals, whose very professionalism is a sign that they do not regard their actions as moral delinquencies, actually do regard the Law in this way. The same attitude may also be adopted to other formal arrangements supposed to govern behaviour, for example, to commercial contracts. Cf. G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 162: "Instead of taking profits directly, the King's officers would often extort them by means of a bond which fell due later, though from the first it was understood that the obligation entered into would be broken and the bond forfeit. It was one of the normal overheads of sixteenth-century business."

[64]A. L. Goodhart, *English Law and the Moral Law*, throws doubt on the possibility of this distinction; so perhaps in the absence of codification and a legal profession legality and morality coincide. See, however, E. A. Hoebel, *The Law of Primitive Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), *passim*.

for goodness, the word "good" comes to be used as if it were simply an abbreviation for a list of these characteristics. This would then be no more and no less a special ethical sense than the sense of "good" in "a good wine" is a special vinous sense—if indeed it is not less of a special sense in that the wants to which it refers are less specialized than those satisfied by good wine.

So abrupt a dismissal of the "special ethical sense" is not, however, justified, for at least three good reasons.

First, the very lack of specialization makes it a special sense. With the exception of such idioms as "a good thing," where the noun qualified implies no restriction, I can think of no other use of "good" which does not refer to a restricted set of needs and desires. This may be true even of "good weather," which is evaluated by its effect on the activities of people who are out in it, as the expression "lovely weather —for ducks" may serve to show. The lack of specialization is connected with the important fact that no special knowledge or qualifications other than maturity and disinterestedness are needed for the recognition of moral goodness. This is not to say that moral goodness is a simple quality (like yellowness) which can be detected by any rational person, whether he be a Malay or a Mancunian, but that within any culturally homogeneous group this use of "good" is not consciously learned by identifying definable or demonstrable criteria until it becomes automatic and "second nature" to think of whatever possesses those criteria as good of its kind, but is learned one cannot say how. Although a sophisticated person can say what is good about a particular good man, such goodness need not be susceptible of such a precise analysis as can be given of the goodness of a good car: indeed, Aristotle in his *Ethics* takes as the ultimate criterion of a good action that it is one determined by the principle that the good man would employ. It is only the discovery that different groups of people have different notions of what moral goodness consists of that forces us to the conclusion that the differences among these notions should be capable of statement and that therefore the notions themselves should in principle be capable of analysis, though that analysis may be in practice too difficult for people like me to carry out.

The other two reasons for speaking of a "special ethical sense" are connected, not with the apparent simplicity of moral goodness, but with the fact that persons and not things are involved. First, the qualities of performance, endurance, etc. in virtue of which a car may be said to be such as to satisfy the wants . . . are to be referred to the physical disposition of its parts; but we have seen that the qualities of performance

in virtue of which a man is called good are to be referred to his will so to perform.[66] A car does not earnestly endeavour to keep its fuel consumption down to 30 miles per gallon, nor does it suffer from pangs of conscience when it stalls. This fact, together with the lack of restriction on the wants and persons concerned, may make us sympathetic with statements that "nothing is unconditionally good except a good will."

Perhaps the chief justification of speaking of a special ethical sense of "good," however, is the ambiguity of the very expression, "a good man." It may mean either that he is a morally good man, which is what it would be taken to mean if the context were not further indicated, or that he is a good man for some purpose which both speaker and hearer have in mind. There are two points to be noted here. The first is that this ambiguity shows that the word "man" in a "a good man" does not after all function in quite the same way as "car" in "a good car," for it does not, by itself and apart from context, suffice to specify the respect in which he is called good. This is further indicated by the fact that the stress in "a good man" falls on the adjective and not on the noun, except where some such antithesis is made as "a good man, but a bad embalmer." The second point is that in the "non-moral" uses of "a good man" it is appropriate to speak, as we did, of purposes which the man is to serve. But it is not appropriate to speak thus of moral goodness. In the special contexts referred to, a man is considered as a tool or instrument for the achievement of some end, and not as a man, an "end in himself and member of a kingdom of ends."

Let us take an imaginary example. Messrs. Dandrough and Swetband are selecting an underling to represent them in some disreputable enterprise. Mr. Dandrough says: "Why not send Homburger? He's a good man." Mr. Swetband digs his partner in the ribs and says "Oh, we don't want to send a *good* man, do we?" Whereupon they both snigger gently.

[66] It is conceivable that at some future time it will be possible to state precisely the conditions of "possessing a good will," "having a policy," "being determined" and so on in terms of the disposition of a man's physical parts—presumably his brain. But this would not obliterate what is essential in the distinction made by this paragraph, which is the distinction between always in fact behaving in a certain way and being resolved to act in a certain way.

The notions of the will, determination, resolution, policy and the like would repay analysis, but this is not the place for it. I trust that no reader will object that, in speaking of the will, determination, resolution and the like, I adhere to an outmoded faculty psychology and that these concepts have been replaced in the laboratory by those of task or motive or something. The concepts which experimental psychologists employ and define are those they require for the explanation of the particular phenomena which they investigate. Meanwhile, outside as well as inside the laboratory, one meets many people able to frame a policy and stick to it.

What is the point of this feeble joke? Clearly it hinges upon some ambiguity in the word "good" which they both perceive. But wherein does this ambiguity lie? Certainly there is no trace of the ambiguity between needs and desires. There is, however, an ambiguity as to the persons concerned. Mr. Dandrough means that Homburger will be a good man *for the job*, that he has the right qualities to fulfil the needs and desires of the firm in the transaction they are talking about. These needs and desires may appropriately be called "the present purposes of the firm." Mr. Swetband knows that he means this, but pretends that Mr. Dandrough is referring to Homburger's (non-existent) moral goodness: his determination to fulfil the needs and desires of all those with whom he has to do.

There is, however, much more to be said. To be good in D.'s sense, H. need not have any particular determination or quality of will, unless it should chance that "loyalty to the firm" is necessary for the task in hand: technical ability, and pride therein, may suffice. But we have seen that he cannot be good in S.'s sense unless he has "a good will." Again, when D. called H. a "good man," he was thinking of H.'s peculiar personality and ability, and how well they were suited to the firm's requirements; when S. used the same expression he was thinking of a particular kind of man: he was using "good" as a descriptive term. It might be correct to say that in this case to call a man good means that he has certain specifiable qualities, such as honesty; it might be better simply to say that one can recognize a good man when one sees him. We have already observed that to call a knife "a good knife" means that it is such as to fulfil the wants of people who have to do with knives; and it has been supposed (by Plato, among others) that the expression "a good man" is used in the same way to refer to a man who satisfies man-connoisseurs. But in fact, in S.'s remark, it is fairly clear that "good" is as objectively and specifically descriptive as "tall" would have been. We have here, in fact, a case of "hardening" as defined in Section 6.33. The question is, what has hardened? How? And why?

It is only at this point that our preliminary account becomes truly applicable. Because the meaning has become thus fixed, we cannot continue to refer to "all those with whom he has to do." We must refer rather to specifiable wants of "people *in general*" which have become standardized and thus institutionalized. In our own thinking about another's judgements we may substitute a reference to "his own culture" or "his own society" for "people in general," but we must be careful to remember that this restriction is an outsider's view, remote from everyday thought such as that of Messrs. D. & S.: remote, that is, in the sense

that they would not accept it even if it were to occur to them. If the distinction were clear to them, they would no doubt prefer to this interpretation the one analogous to that of "a good knife," since we claim universal validity for our own judgements of goodness even if we do not allow it to those of others.

Why this sense of "a good man" has hardened in the way it has rather than in terms of some other personality traits is not our present concern, but rather that of the historian aided by the sociologist. The mechanics of the process of hardening are also the province of the social scientist: the functions of press, pulpit, school and so forth require empirical enquiry which the philosopher is not specially fitted to undertake. But it is likely that what one learns at (or over) one's mother's knee is of special significance.

Whatever may be thought of the Freudian concepts of introjection and the formation of the "superego," it is not questioned that attitudes, habits and beliefs acquired in childhood do have a privileged position. It is of course not true that they always remain unchallenged, nor is it true that one always rebels against them; and it is not enough to say that one's attitude towards them is always "ambivalent." It is rather that, whether accepted or rejected or (as in the morally mature) modified and outgrown, they continue to be recognized as norms: they tend to form a standard in terms of which one defines one's own position, *whatever that may be.*[66] They are thus, in a sense, uncritically accepted despite later learning; and this is quite different from the uncritical acceptance of what, owing to ignorance of anything different, one never comes to question.[67]

An example of the kind of process I have in mind may be found in the curious custom, prevalent in the circles in which I was brought up, of

[66]One hopes that such speculation as this will one day be superseded by an objective study of the role actually played by such youthful norms in normal adult experience.

[67]It would be interesting to investigate the success of ethnographers in transcending in their researches their own "culturally parochial" outlook. One might expect to find (1) that, since their reports are written in their own tongue (just as the ordinary man uses in later life the evaluative terminology he learned in childhood) their descriptions are to some extent evaluations; (2) that their attempts to avoid being "ethnocentric" in judgements will be as self-frustrating as an *attempt* to ignore a person whom one knows to be present. It is precisely the ethnographer's acute concern with these problems that would lend interest to the enquiry. It may well be, however, that the sympathetic ethnographer is able to discard his own accustomed standards more readily than the ordinary man can discard those acquired in childhood, because of the sharp break between the two realms of experience. "Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt" is less than half true.

making children "say their prayers" before going to bed. The adults who inculcated this practice did not themselves follow it; but there is certainly nothing in the activity of prayer which makes it especially suited to children if it is not suited to adults. One can only suppose that the adults had themselves learned to "say their prayers" when young and had accepted that this was the right and proper thing to do, although it would never occur to them to do it. But of course they would teach this accepted practice to their children, on the old principle, "Do as I say, not as I do." This teaching may well, however, have an effect which is the opposite of that intended: the children, who know that their parents do not pray, may come to regard such a practice as essentially childish, and hence shameful in an adult. Similarly, the behaviour demanded of children who are told to "be good"[68] (not interrupting, being generous and considerate, being patient, keeping promises, telling the truth and so on) is not only often markedly different from the behaviour manifested by the child's teachers, but is often, if not usually, quite obviously designed to serve the teachers' personal convenience (cf. Section 6.227). Thus one cannot be surprised that Mr. Swetband thinks and speaks of "a good man" without meaning anything complimentary by that term: for in so far as it is not merely descriptive, it is likely on his lips to refer to conduct demanded of one by one's parents when one was a child.[69] It is this frame of reference, rather than "people in general," which is potent both in fixing the affective tone and in determining the descriptive content of the "hardened" word, and for this reason one cannot attack Mr. S. (as one might wish) by pointing out that the firm of Dandrough & Swetband is simply a sub-group of these "people in general," and that for this reason Mr. S.'s sense of "good" has even more relevance in this context than Mr. D.'s.[70]

We thus have not one but several "special" senses of good which may be called distinctively "ethical." There is the "inverted-commas" sense in which Mr. Swetband uses it: quasi-descriptive but somehow awe-inspiring even when it is used (as here) ironically. There is the restricted

[68]Cf. Section 9.123 for further discussion of this expression.

[69]The use of "good" as an instrument of child-management (which is not the same as moral education) may help to account, not only for the feeling of the bindingness of moral law mentioned in Section 6.343, but for the familiar fact that while some people act unscrupulously while paying lip-service to morality, many others pay lip-service to "business ethics" (i.e., infantile selfishness) while actually behaving quite honourably.

[70]The difference of affective tone between Mr. S.'s and Mr. D.'s uses shows clearly that favourable and unfavourable associations attach, not to the word itself, but to something else.

sense in which "good" refers to sexual "purity"[71]—a sense connected with the supposition, so abhorrent to philosophers, that ethics applies to a particular, delimited field of human conduct known as "morality." There are senses which have been precisely, though variously, defined by writers on ethics. Finally, as we have seen, there is the sense in which a man is called good by someone who wishes to praise him by saying that he is such as to satisfy the wants of the person(s) concerned. This is a "special sense" in that it is a special case for the application of our formula, the working out of the implications of which seems to me to show both why we feel that the goodness of a good man is very different from that of a good toothpick, and also why it is not inappropriate to use the same word for both.

6.35. *The Antonyms*

If the reader is not by now convinced that the formula here proposed can accommodate as many of the uses and shades of meaning of "good" as can reasonably be expected, he will remain unconvinced. But it may be worth while to mention briefly the various antonyms of "good." Study of them suggests that we could have distinguished as "special senses" of "good" not only the ethical sense but also the sense in which "good" was said to be tantamount to "real" (see Section 6.163221).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* would have us believe that "bad," which is now of course used as the general opposite of "good" in all its senses, began life as equivalent to "feeble" or "defective," implying failure to conform to a standard. In this sense it has now been replaced, at least in some contexts, by "poor": in schools, exercises are often graded as excellent, good, fair, poor or very poor. Similarly, a bad reason for doing something is not a reason at all, but a poor reason is a reason which is not good enough. We find the same use of "good," in the quantitative sense of "adequate," negated by "poor" when we speak of seeing things in a good light or a poor light.

"Poor" is less clearly the antonym of a special sense of "good" than is "wicked"; for to be wicked is to be morally bad, and deliberately so: people are not called wicked just for failing to be morally good. Indeed, the notion of wickedness has almost disappeared, for it is unfashionable

[71]Cf. an advertisement in the *Bournemouth Echo*, quoted in *Picture Post*, August 22, 1953: "Wanted, red-faced lovebird hen; must be good." The author had in mind the wants of bird-fanciers, but (since it is a lovebird) the reader is likely to think of "moral" goodness in matters of sex.

to suppose that anyone deliberately goes out of his way to injure other people; the wicked man has been relegated to fairy tales. People who act as if they were wicked are thought either to be selfish or to be neurotic. The neurotic is sick rather than wicked, and the selfish man is not wicked, for he does not deliberately set out to frustrate the wants of others: he simply neglects the interests of others when they conflict with his own. Even such a man as Hitler, though abhorred, is often not said to have been wicked; his actions are ascribed either to some form of mental ill health or to the irrational preference of the supposed needs of the *Herrenvolk* over all others.

Not all bad men, even when they are properly said to be morally bad, are called wicked. We have seen that our present notion of moral goodness is complex, and failure to conform to any aspect of this may be held to constitute badness. A man whose sexual behaviour deviates from accepted norms may be called bad, though he is not necessarily either selfish or wicked.

Unreflective people whose conduct is frequently antisocial are not necessarily selfish; they are likely to turn fiercely on a selfish person and say "All right for *you*! 'Damn you, Jake, I'm all right,' eh?" But they are careless and emotional in their recognition of claims. A soldier who is generous and loyal to his comrades will steal their equipment, though not their money, in their absence; a patriotic businessman will devote much ingenuity to evading his country's laws if the evasion does not involve obvious and immediate injury to anyone. Such persons, though their conduct cannot be approved, are not called "bad," but "thoughtless": their conduct is guided by the right principles, though the guidance is fitful. They would behave better if only they were more continuously and fully aware of the effects of their actions upon other people.

"Evil" was the general negation of goodness, until it was displaced by "bad." "Evil," except in so far as its use is purely literary and artificial, is now complementary to "poor" in that it implies some positive badness. An evil thing is not merely "such as not to satisfy the wants of those concerned" but such as to frustrate or go against them. Thus one can speak of a "struggle of opposed forces of good and evil." But in most contexts the word nowadays has some suggestion of the diabolical: a wicked man is just wicked, but there is some suggestion that an evil man is in league with the Evil One. No car or corkscrew, how refractory soever, would be dubbed "evil," unless perhaps it had magical properties. This use is rare probably because few people in their everyday thinking (Sundays may be different) reckon seriously with forces of evil. The only contexts in which, at the present time, "evil" is commonly used, are certain stereotyped phrases in which the sinister implications do not arise: an evil-smelling concoction, for instance, is one which not merely fails to satisfy the nostrils but revolts them; but not necessarily because of the intervention of the Devil.

It seems appropriate in most cases to say that an evil thing may be defined as a fit object for avoidance. This may give us pause, since it suggests that a good thing might be defined conversely as a fit object for desire, a form of definition which we have rejected (see Sections 4.2112, 4.224). But I do not think we have cause to worry. If a thing is in fact such as to satisfy the needs and desires of the persons concerned, surely it is a fit object for desire. But this is not to say that one has any obligation or duty to desire it. Nor has one any kind of obligation or duty to avoid evil smells, though doubtless one has a kind of obligation not to make them; nevertheless, they are indubitably fit objects of avoidance.

6.4. *The Univocalness of "Good"*

What have actions, things, persons, processes, states of affairs and so on if necessary in common, that we should say that "good" can be applied to all of them equally without change of meaning? They have this in common: they can be thought of as in isolation, and true statements may be made about them. Something may be predicated of any of them; thus each can be said to be "such that . . ." something or other. It is not that they possess these somewhats (let us call them predicates), but that the predicates may truly be ascribed to them. Nature does not put words into our mouths: although the truth of a statement is no doubt determined by its relationship to a "fact," "facts" do not exist independently of the statement thereof. For example, it is obvious that, although international frontiers do exist, they would not do so if they were not agreed to exist. It is only slightly less obvious that though Mt. Everest is indubitably a mountain, it would not be *a* mountain if explorers, geographers and others had not distinguished it from the contiguous parts of the Himalayan massif. Equally, though it is true that July 1955 was a dry month, it is clearly a matter of human decision that a certain stretch of time should be treated as a unit and called July. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, is true of the Battle of Waterloo and the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company. Again, a rose bloom (set off by human decision as an isolable part of a bush) is such as to appear of a

certain shade which we classify as red in certain conditions, whether the conditions are ever fulfilled or no; but its redness does not become a "fact" until it is isolated by recognition. According to Aristotle, a statement is true if it connects things that are connected in nature. But the "things" and this "connection" are isolated by human conceptual activity, though nature is such that things may be connected in some ways more easily than in others, and cannot be connected in some ways at all.

Actions, persons and things are treated as being alike by European grammar, and this shows that for some purposes it is convenient so to treat them: this is one possible way of looking at things. The world is such that we are encouraged, but not forced, to distinguish between these kinds of things; and we are encouraged, but not forced, to think of them as different kinds of *things*. We can and do isolate them, describe them and adopt attitudes towards them. Any of them may be such as to satisfy our needs or our desires, for our needs and our desires partly determine, and partly are determined by the kinds of objects we distinguish and recognize. Presumably a "thing" would not be isolated and said to exist, if it did not make some difference to those who say that it exists; and if it makes some difference, it must presumably exist, and may be good or bad. If later we decide that the people who believed it to exist were wrong, we say that witchcraft (or whatever) does not exist and never existed, there was never any such thing; but the belief in it existed and made a difference. They were simply mistaken about what was making the difference; they were not mistaken in thinking that something was making a difference. There may be no witchcraft, in the sense that none would have such powers if they were not thought to have them; but if witches are thought to exist, in a sense they do exist and have powers, though these may not be in every respect the powers they are thought to have.

Distinctions among different kinds of "entities" may be convenient, but they are not absolute or inevitably "given" in nature. The notion of an entity itself, and the key position held by nouns and noun-verb combinations in our language, show that we for many purposes treat people and events as things. There may well be languages which reduce both people and things to happenings:[72] a man may be treated as a biography[72] and an object as its history.[72] A river is no doubt a thing rather than an event,[72] if we are to preserve the distinction; but what of a rainbow? A flame? A sunset? A forest fire? A disease? And Martin

[72]Note that these also are nouns.

Buber has shown impressively in his *I and Thou* how people may be treated as things and things as people.[73]

As we have seen, the distinctions between these kinds of entities are not such that we are forced to deny that "good" has the same meaning in its application to all of them; the distinction, in so far as it is relevant to our discussion, lies in the kinds of truths about them in virtue of which they are said to be good. Thus persons are called good in virtue of their "wills" and things in virtue of the disposition of their physical parts and the permanent qualities resulting therefrom. But events are said to be good things in virtue of their results, and situations in virtue of the opportunities which they afford.

The goodness of good action is as complex as that of good people, on which it depends: a good action is usually both the kind of thing a good person would do and an action which is in fact done with good intentions—if not from a good motive. This complexity expresses and strengthens the assumption, which we all have to make and all know to be false, that a person's actions are a safe guide to his character, to what he is "really like inside."[74] Thus when we look back on those phases of our own lives in which we did the worst possible things from what then seemed the best possible motives, we are in doubt which expedient to take. Are we to say that "we were misunderstood," or that we were deceiving ourselves about our motives? That is, were the judgements which we suppose were made on our characters as the result of our actions right or wrong? But this is the wrong question to ask, unless we are concerned only to maintain our self-conceit. It is not enough, as we have seen, to mean well.

6.5. *A Possible Misunderstanding*

Our use of the phrase "to say that a thing is good," though convenient in view of our conviction that "facts" as such do not pre-exist

[73]A. A. Ward, Jr. (quoted by J. S. Wilkie, *The Science of Mind and Brain* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p. 124) reports that a monkey with area 24 removed from its brain will treat other monkeys "as inanimate objects, and will walk on them, bump into them if they happen to be in the way, and will even sit on them."

[74]The assumption is not false if, stressing the distinction between an action and a bodily movement, we include in the description of an action a statement of the motives from which it proceeds. In that case, a man's goodness could be legitimately inferred from a description of his actions. But in fact the description of an action, though not a description of bodily motions, does not usually include an assignment of motives or intentions but rather concentrates upon the social aspects of the deed.

the means of recognizing them, is misleading in one respect. For, given the existence of a set of needs and desires, a thing is good with reference to those needs and desires, whether or not it is known to be good, if it is such in fact as to satisfy them. The accounts of some thinkers, such as Professor Stevenson and Mr. Hare, suggest that to the question "Is this any good?" the answer "I don't know" is simply inappropriate: that this is not a case in which one can speak of knowing or not knowing, and that the correct reply would therefore be, "I can't decide." But surely this suggestion is not only false to usage but a fundamental misrepresentation of what goodness means. It is, I believe, of the utmost importance to bear in mind that, when there is no doubt as to who are the people concerned or what they want, questions about goodness are questions of fact: it is as appropriate as it is natural to say that one *knows* something to be good. If this were not so, questions of goodness would be a great deal less important than they are.

6.6. *Conclusion*

The general upshot of Section **6** is as follows. "Good" is used in many different ways, some of which are so distinct from the rest that they may be called "special senses" of the word. For this reason, any unexpanded statement of the form " 'good' means . . ." or "goodness is . . ." must be downright misleading. But these many uses are related to each other in intelligible and quite simple ways, all of which are either reducible to, or explicable in, terms of the "formula" with which Section **6** began. For this reason, it is incorrect to say that "good" is equivocal and that the attempt at analysis must fail.

7 *THE PROPOSED ANALYSIS COMPARED WITH OTHER OPINIONS*

7.1. *In General*

IT IS NOW APPROPRIATE to see how far our analysis avoids the defects which were attributed to those opinions examined in Section 4. Since he who performs the analysis is also he who decides what is a defect in others, success may be prophesied. What is expected to appear is that the views criticized, while taking account of certain striking phenomena, have either failed to account for other phenomena equally striking or explained those phenomena in so misleading a way as to lead to unacceptable or paradoxical consequences. The proposed analysis does no more than state fully and correctly what has often been stated partially or incorrectly. It will be said that the statements criticized have been selected and distorted in such a way that this conclusion was bound to emerge. This objection has force only if it can be shown that a different selection and a less biassed presentation would have led to a different result, and not merely to the same result by a more devious path.

7.2. *In Particular*

7.21. *The Ancients*

7.211. *The Socratics*

7.2111. *Goodness and Function*

We have seen that the interpretation of goodness in terms of function fails to apply to the goodness of men or even of horses, since the goodness attributed to them can be formulated neither in terms of what they alone can do, nor in terms of purpose, since it is not clear whose purposes are to be considered.

An interpretation in terms of aptness to satisfy the wants of the person or persons concerned includes the interpretation in terms of function as a special case: it is clear that if anything has a function that function is to satisfy the wants of those concerned, whether or not any further specification can be made. The function of the carpenter as such

is to satisfy the wants of those who need or would like carpentry done; the function of a hammer is to meet the wants of those who want hammers. In these cases it is a matter of indifference which interpretation is given: there can be no question of calling the one correct and the other incorrect, since they differ only in form.

To apply the interpretation here proposed to the goodness ascribed to horses or men is to see at once why it is that the concept of function cannot be applied to them. A horse as such has no single function, but may be used successfully for a variety of purposes. Since there is no one group of persons concerned with horses as such and as distinct from race-horses, dray horses and the like, the respect in which goodness is ascribed to a horse cannot be determined out of context. The same considerations apply to the goodness of men in the "non-moral" senses considered in Section 6.344. And we have seen (in Section 6.342) that the goodness of the good man does not lie in any definite use that may be made of him or in any purpose of his own or anyone else's that he may fulfil, but rather in his determination to do what is expected of him, by himself and by others, as a member of society and as a human being. This is obscured by the interpretation in terms of function, but follows naturally from that in terms of satisfaction of wants. A good deed is one calculated to satisfy the wants of those concerned in the situation in which it is performed; hut one cannot speak of the function of a deed as such, or of the purpose which it as such fulfils, since different deeds serve different purposes. One can specify the uses of a hammer and predict (if one understands medicine) the actions of a good doctor, but one cannot tell in this specific way what a good man will do.

The suspected ambiguity in the term "function," which is applied indifferently to things which are good *for* something and to persons who are good *at* something, has no analogue in the interpretation in terms of satisfaction here offered.

7.2112. *Goodness and Desirability*

The Socratics saw that goodness and desirability must be somehow related. They also saw that not all that is desired is good. But they did not succeed in reconciling these truths.

In terms of our analysis we are able to give meaning to the expression "correctly desired." A thing is correctly desired, in one sense, if it is such as to satisfy the desire in question; for certainly a desired object which fails to yield the satisfaction expected from it was erroneously or inappropriately, and hence "incorrectly," desired. In another sense a thing may be said to be correctly desired or pursued if it is such as to satisfy the *wants* of the pursuer; for it is part of the meaning of the distinction made by the Socratics that a desired object may yield a certain satisfaction and yet run counter to the desirer's needs, or to some other of his desires. An object then seems good to one who desires it if for the time being he takes into account no need or desire which the obtaining of it would thwart; the object is good only if there is no such need or desire, or if such needs and desires are outweighed by those which are to be satisfied.

Two further distinctions between correct and incorrect desires appear if we go on to complete our formula by stipulating the aptness to satisfy the wants *of the persons concerned.* A person whose taste in wines is defective may desire inferior wine "correctly" in the sense that he will obtain from it the satisfaction he expects: to him, it will seem good wine. But that does not make it good wine, if those who understand and appreciate wines would reject it. There is therefore a sense in which his desire is misdirected and hence "incorrect," and in choosing it he chooses wrongly. Finally, a person may desire to bring about a situation which will indeed satisfy his own needs and desires, but will thwart those of others not less concerned in the situation than he himself. Such a person desires correctly in that his opinion as to what will satisfy his own wants is correct, but incorrectly and irrationally in that what seems good to him does not seem good from a more objective viewpoint: one, that is, which uses more objective standards of relevance in judging who are "the persons concerned."

It would thus seem that the formula of analysis proposed in this book preserves and clarifies all that is valuable in the formulae of the Socratics, resolves the perplexities which those formulae raise, and shows that the goodness of "function" and that of "desirability" are one and the same.

7.212. *St. Thomas Aquinas*

We have seen that Aquinas gives two accounts of goodness, an account in terms of desirability and a "connoisseur's account" in terms of perfection. In our analysis the two are reconciled: the "connoisseur's account" appears as a special case, as was seen in Section **6.163.** The restriction to substances of the notion of goodness as perfection also disappears: the requirements which that restriction meets are metaphysical and have no bearing on the concept of goodness as employed

either in "ordinary language" or in the discussions of moral philosophy; it should therefore be introduced by explicit metaphysical statements and not as a by-product of conceptual analysis. The difficulties which one finds in Aquinas are caused by his using arguments about the meaning of terms in support of metaphysical and theological positions. In our analysis, the introduction of the words "is such as to . . ." enables us to avoid subjectivism without introducing superfluous metaphysical commitments: "goodness" is neither a mere matter of taste on the one hand nor a by-product of ontological status on the other.

The distinction between goodness as desirability and goodness as perfection, which Aquinas unsuccessfully tries to obliterate, should not appear in a statement of what "good" means, but has its proper place in the discussion of God's goodness, where it must be strictly maintained. In the consideration of the Divine Providence, to affirm that God is good is to maintain that it is God's nature to satisfy the wants of His creatures, and that in His creation wants tend to be satisfied (Section 6.1632). But the assertion of God's perfection belongs to another line of thought altogether, one in which words are used not in their ordinary senses but to indicate realities to which no words in their usual senses can be strictly applied. Such, in Professor Farmer's phrase, is the recognition of the "axiological otherness" of God.[1] God in experience is met as a being demanding unqualified admiration as well as unconditional allegiance: as an object of admiration in a way quite other than that in which any other being is an object of admiration (cf. Section 6.331). In speaking of God as the "most perfect being" one properly refers to this aspect of man's knowledge of God. It is (as we have said in Section 4.212) a misguided piety to rationalize this sense of the authority of the Divine presence by saying that "the perfections of all creatures are in God," since this statement, if taken literally, is absurd. What Aquinas apparently intends by the statement—that since God created all things, their being and hence their goodness must in some sense be grounded in Him—is something that the words he uses do not convey. One may no doubt assert that God's goodness in the providential sense as well as His activity as Creator are grounded in that aspect of His nature which demands admiration and allegiance; but this should not lead us to suppose that in speaking of these three aspects one is saying the same thing in three different ways.

In thinking of the Divine Providence one may reasonably assert that "God wills the good because it is good." In thinking of God as the

[1]H. H. Farmer, *Revelation and Religion* (London: Nisbet, 1954), p. 54.

"axiologically other" one may reasonably assert that "What God wills is good because God wills it." The former is a statement about God's operation in the world; the latter is an expression of surrender and allegiance. Since within the frame of reference to which the latter belongs it necessarily appears that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," considerations of morality and hence ethics are obliterated. But this does not (as some religious persons believe) invalidate morality (see also Sections 2.31, 6.342): a room seems black when the light has just been switched off, but if one wishes to move about in a dark room one must adjust one's eyes to discriminate between degrees of darkness. On the other hand, the statement that "God wills the good because it is good" is framed within the limits of the conceptual framework of our ethics; but it adds nothing to that framework. It would thus seem that considerations of God's goodness, on either interpretation, have no direct bearing on ethics.

There is a third interpretation of God's goodness which does have a direct bearing on ethics. One may say that God is good in that He is such as to satisfy the needs and desires of men, not by giving happiness in this life but by giving happiness after death. If one considers a desire as primarily a sense of deficiency which may be associated with the idea of a particular object or situation but need not be necessarily connected therewith, one may regard a man's desires for particular things as mere symptoms of a state of general deficiency. This state, it is argued, nothing earthly can remedy;[2] but it can be remedied by the Vision of God. If all this is true, it follows that one would be foolish not to pursue this end at the expense of all others; for on this way of thinking God would be infinitely better than anything else, in the sense indicated in Section 6.16321.

7.22. *The Moderns*

7.221. *R. B. Perry*

Since Professor Perry is concerned with value whereas we are concerned with goodness, and since we have already shown that the two concepts are not equivalent and vindicated our concentration upon goodness rather than value, we shall ignore the main body of his account and concentrate upon his criticisms of the concept of satisfaction to which our account may be thought obnoxious. We shall also ignore those

[2]Cf. the striking exposition in Augustine, *Civitas Dei* XIX. 1–11.

points which arise from Perry's misinterpretation of the concept of satisfaction itself, since these have been dealt with in Sections 4.221 and 6.152. This leaves us with two points of substance.

Perry rightly says that the good cannot be identified with that which actually satisfies desire, since a thing may be none the less good for being unobtained or even unattainable. But this argument does not tell against us, since a thing may be "such as to" satisfy wants without having satisfied them. It may be objected to this that the phrase "such as to" is ambiguous: to use Perry's example, if a girl is "such as to" satisfy a young man's wants, this may mean either that she is such that if he got her she would be satisfactory or that she is disposed and willing to satisfy them. That is true. But we have already seen (Section 6.4) that the facts about a thing in virtue of which it is called good may be of very different kinds; and we may say here, in terms of that discussion, that which of the two interpretations is correct will depend on whether she seems good (to the young man) as a thing or is being good (to him) as a person. Once more an ambiguity which might have seemed a defect in our account is found to correspond to an actual ambiguity in the concept of goodness.

The second substantial objection which might be raised against our account on the strength of Perry's is that "my satisfactions" may be no less false than my desires and likings. "False" here is glossed as "contrary to my real interests"; and "satisfactions" looks as if it were used as tantamount to "enjoyments," though as we have seen Perry elsewhere tends to exclude enjoyment from satisfaction. This statement of Perry's is plainly true, but it does not tell against our analysis. Certainly if a thing satisfies it must in some sense be such as to satisfy; but not everything that gives satisfaction is such as to satisfy *the* wants of the person satisfied or of the persons concerned at large. Perry's formulation is in terms of "desires and likings" and ignores needs; and the equation of "false" with "contrary to my real interests" can only mean that that which gives false satisfaction frustrates more, or more important, wants than it satisfies. But such a thing cannot be said to satisfy *the* wants in terms of our analysis; so that we cannot be accused of attributing goodness to something which gives false satisfaction.

7.222. *H. J. Paton*

In so far as Professor Paton identifies the good with the object of will, we need not repeat what was said in Section 4.221 on the necessity of the concept of satisfaction to an account of goodness. Professor Paton

is able to equate that which is willed with that which satisfies the will because he stipulates that the will shall be coherent; and it may well be maintained that only that which satisfies can be coherently willed as part of a policy of life, and *vice versa*. But the two notions are certainly not equivalent, and we gave reasons in Section 4.222 for supposing that of coherence of will to be inadequate in some cases. Is it not possible for a coherent policy to be a bad policy, if its aims are in fact incapable of fulfilment? Paton gives us no ground for saying that a policy which involves frustration for all who follow it, and which it is therefore surely reasonable to call a bad policy, necessarily involves incoherence of will.

The coherence of which Paton speaks is twofold: the internal coherence of a will, and the coherence of a will with other wills. Goodness may lie in being either the object or the possessor of such a will. Both types of coherence are accommodated by the analysis herein offered. The use of the word "the" indicates, with its implicit claims of inclusiveness and relevance, how the criterion of coherence in fact functions both as to the internal coherence of the will ("*the* wants") and as to the coherence of one will with others ("*the* persons concerned") (Section 6.1511).

In speaking of "the wants" we are able to reconcile needs and desires and to indicate that both are relevant to goodness, whereas to speak of a need in Paton's phrase as "a sort of potential will" must involve the subordination of needs to desires. But this subordination seems highly paradoxical; indeed, it seems at first sight to place a premium on frivolity, which is far from Paton's intention. Thus our analysis preserves and broadens the basis of Paton's internal coherence of the will.

In speaking of "the persons concerned" our account avoids the necessity of defining (as Paton does) the society with reference to which moral goodness is ascribed, which enables us to preserve a greater flexibility than he in taking account of the many communities to which each man belongs.

For Paton, moral goodness lies in the manifestation of a coherent will rather than in being the object of other wills. This enables him to distinguish more sharply than we between moral goodness and goodness in other respects. But the will manifested must be coherent with other wills; and in this context such coherence must imply the satisfaction of other wills. Indeed, the notion of "service" which Paton introduces[8] goes far beyond that of coherence; Paton's central concept thus falls short of his requirements at the crucial point. Like that of Paton, the

[8] *The Good Will: A Study in the Coherence Theory of Goodness* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1927), p. 362.

analysis herein put forward also refers moral goodness to the will. As pointed out in Section 6.342, to say that a man is "such as to" satisfy the wants of others is necessarily to refer to the quality of his will, and also implicitly to attribute coherence to his will since only a man of stable will can be "such as to" do anything. We might thus reasonably claim that the facts which Paton's theory of coherence are designed to cover are covered equally adequately (indeed, especially with regard to moral goodness, often more adequately) by our proposed analysis, which both avoids the pitfalls of Paton's theory and succeeds in preserving the distinction between moral and other goodness without making the word "good" equivocal. For Paton, whatever is called "good" is so called in virtue of some relation to a will; but to different relations correspond what are in fact different meanings of "good," which are distantly connected but do not, as it were, overlap. It is of course possible that this high degree of ambiguity must be attributed to "good"; but it is more convincing, if it can be done, to attribute to the term at least so much unity of meaning that any one use can be understood as developing out of, and continuous with, some other. Otherwise we are faced with the question "Why is the same word used?" even if we are prepared to admit that the question has no answer or a trivial one.

7.223. C. L. Stevenson

The analysis herein offered fufils Professor Stevenson's programme better than his own, in that it deals more directly with the concept of goodness and more fully with his "central problem" of the relation between beliefs and attitudes. It covers the same variety of phenomena without the "fragmentation" which his own account incurs, making plain their relationships and avoiding the paradoxes by which he is embarrassed.

On our account, "This is good" is tantamount to "I approve of this" only when "I" is equivalent to "the persons concerned." But to admit this equation is to confess that one is self-centred (cf. Section 6.229). It is for this reason that, as Stevenson concedes, " 'Whatever I approve of is good' is emotionally objectionable."[4]

Of the additional meanings which Stevenson mentions but fails to integrate, our analysis plainly accommodates those which refer to the "approval" of persons or groups other than the speaker; the equation of "good" with "effective"; and the reference in the "second pattern"

[4] *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 104.

to specific qualities (Section 6.33). It also shows in what ways these various forms of judgement are implied by an ascription of goodness. And it justifies Stevenson's feeling that "This is worthy of approval" is a closer approximation to "This is good" than "I approve of this."

Our account claims to maintain the objective reference of ascriptions of goodness without making goodness irrelevant to action; but vindication of this is postponed to Section 7.225. Depending on the context, a statement that something is such as to satisfy the wants of those concerned may be used to provide the grounds for the speaker's favourable attitude; or to serve as ground for advice; or simply to impart information. But neither of the former two uses is necessary for a judgement to be a judgement of goodness, or is contained in the meaning of the statement itself. Stevenson has to admit this but does not take it seriously, with the strange result that the "working model" upon which his whole account rests is made up of two elements, an expressive one and an emotive one, neither of which is necessary. Stevenson has in fact confused meaning and use (cf. Section 3.333).

Our account makes easy what is impossible for Stevenson, an effective discrimination between good and bad reasons, between the relevant and the irrelevant. It also maintains the objective reference of judgements of goodness without slurring over the fact that interpretation depends upon who the speaker is. But it further shows that such interpretation depends, not simply upon one's estimate of what the speaker likes, but upon one's estimate of his knowledge (and hence his ability to tell what kind of thing will be satisfactory, and whether the thing referred to is that kind of thing) and his broadmindedness, impartiality and experience (and hence the reliability of his judgements of relevance). This account subsumes and integrates the types of disagreement which Stevenson names: disagreement on fact and disagreement in attitude.[5]

7.224. A. C. Ewing

Nothing needs to be said on the relationship between the present analysis and that of Dr. Ewing that has not been said already in connection with Aristotle and Stevenson, or will not be said in connection with Hare. But in the course of his discussion he dismisses a view which has certain affinities with the present one. "It might be suggested," he writes, "that 'good' or 'right' always meant 'approved by some group which the speaker had in mind'; but that the group might vary with the context and speaker. But this would make the meaning of ethical state-

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 2, p. 3 n. 2.

ments shift in an impossible fashion."[6] It would entail that "*X* is good" would not contradict "*X* is bad" if the speakers had different groups in mind.

Our analysis in fact avoids this difficulty. Even if two speakers do refer to two different groups, their opinions formally contradict each other if they appear to do so, since both formally allude not to the composition of the favoured group but to its status as "the persons concerned" (see Sections 6.1511, 6.161).

7.225. *R. M. Hare*

The analysis here offered, like that of Mr. Hare, treats the epithetical use of "good" as more informative than the predicative use, but does not follow him in regarding the latter as in any way elliptical.

Hare's remarks on the use of "good" summed up in the last paragraph of Section 4.225 might perhaps be represented as tantamount to the following: "To call a thing good is to commend it by claiming that it satisfies the standards for the class of objects to which one is referring it." This has much in common with the formula here proposed. Standards, says Hare, exist to guide choices. We may say equally well that the standards for a set of objects are determined by the needs and desires of the persons concerned; and that the class of reference within which the standards are applied is determined by the existence of a person or group of persons who have in common certain wants and are the "persons concerned." To comply with standards is therefore to be such as to satisfy wants. The stability of standards to which Hare refers is explained by the continuity of types of need and desire. Thus far, then, Hare's account and our own may be made to coincide without too great violence.

Our analysis departs from that of Hare in that we do not make the function of commendation essential to the word "good." To say that something is good—is such as to satisfy the wants of the persons concerned—is no doubt almost always to commend it; but in form such a statement does not differ essentially from other factual statements. Commendation, as was pointed out in Section 3.333, needs no special vocabulary, but may be carried out hy grunts or cries, implied by the tone of voice, or conveyed by such exclamations as "What a swimmer!" or such idiomatic expressions as "That's something like a car!" On our view, then, as opposed to that of Hare, a serious attribution of goodness does

[6]*The Definition of Good* (Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 59.

not necessarily entail any imperative or give any definite answer to any question of the form "What shall I do?" Can we then justify and explain our remark that an attribution of goodness is usually commendatory? Or is Hare correct in his apparent assumption that unless such an attribution entails an imperative it can be related only tenuously to action?[7]

Behind the reluctance to allow attributions of goodness to be factual statements seems to lie the curious and unavowed belief that if a fact is important it cannot be a fact: that a fact can never be a reason for doing anything.[8] But if one asks anyone his reasons for something he has done or a preference he has avowed, the answer almost always takes the form of a factual statement; never of an imperative, and seldom of a statement containing the word "ought." "Why did you kill Glengarry?"—"He had lived too long." It may be said (and often is) that such an alleged fact does not constitute a "reason" without an additional unexpressed premise affirming a general principle (and thus completing what Aristotle called a "practical syllogism").[9] But what would be the general principle here? That one should always kill people who have lived too long? Surely not. Perhaps, that one should always kill people like Glengarry when they have lived too long. But the sole criterion here of an adequate resemblance would be that a person's having lived too long would be a sufficient reason for killing him. In fact, the "general principle" whose necessity is postulated seems to be a fictitious entity conjured up to meet the *a priori* requirement that a reason for an action must stand in some relation to the action which can be defined in terms of a familiar formal logic, or at least in terms that recall such a logic.

The foregoing paragraph does not seem at first to support our analysis of "good," since attributions of goodness are seldom put forward as reasons. But this is only because in most cases they are insufficiently specific. "Why do you use tomato ketchup on your floors?"—"Because it is good" is no answer; but one might well say "Because it makes a very good floor polish." This is a reason as far as it goes, and at least it tells us that the ketchup is not being used as a stain or in connection with some religious rite, and that it is used because it makes a *good*

[7]The notion that a fact cannot be a reason for a moral judgement because it cannot entail such a judgement has also been attacked by Mr. S. Hampshire, "Fallacies in Moral Philosophy," *Mind*, LVIII (1949), 466.

[8]R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 28, 31; quoted in Section 4.225.

[9]Cf., however, K. E. M. Baier, "Good Reasons," *Philosophical Studies*, IV (January, 1953): "Certain facts are good reasons for, and certain others good reasons against, doing certain things. . . ."

polish and not just a cheap one. It would seem, then, that affirmations of goodness may serve to provide reasons, and thus parallel other statements of fact, such as "My husband likes to chew the carpet, and the flavour gets monotonous."

The theory that attributions of goodness somehow are or entail imperatives is sometimes thought to follow from the fact that a person who calls a thing good but shows no tendency to favour it in his choices may be said to be acting "inconsistently." But consistency is not necessarily a logical relationship. Two beliefs are consistent if neither entails the falsity of the other. But as applied to actions the word "consistent" has a different meaning. A golf player's game is consistent if he may be depended upon not to vary much from a certain standard of performance. A person's actions are consistent if in general they "hang together." Certainly a possible explanation of their hanging together may be that they are carried out in accordance with logically consistent beliefs; but other explanations are possible, and it certainly does not follow that to speak of consistent behaviour is to refer to any beliefs whatever.

Suppose that Mr. Galeros knows that A's are better *x*'s than B's, but he has just bought himself a B. Isn't he silly?—hopeless?—stupid? No doubt he is; but who would ever say that he is inconsistent? He might, of course, not even be silly or ill-advised, since it may well be that A's are far more expensive than B's, and he is unable to afford them; or perhaps he does not need a very good *x* and can make do with a cheaper variety. The goodness of A's is only one reason for buying them, and there may be other stronger reasons for not buying them. Or, to take a more complicated example: Calpack knows very well what is good manners and what is not, but he regularly behaves like a boor. His conduct is perfectly consistent. No one would ever say "Calpack is the most inconsistent person! Here he is acting like a great ape as usual, but he knows very well how to behave." He would be called inconsistent only if he were always telling people (correctly) how they should comport themselves. A person is called inconsistent if his behaviour (of which his sayings, including his avowals of principles, form a part but his knowledge does not) does not "hang together." A piece of behaviour may be consistent or inconsistent, not only with another piece of behaviour, but also with a belief or an item of knowledge. We can say that Klosch's going to the Feltmakers' Arms on Saturday night was inconsistent with his knowing that his grandmother would be there; but this means, not that Klosch has been inconsistent, but that his going proves his ignorance. Here we do indeed have a logical relationship; but not

one of the kind that Hare desiderates. In short, then: if it were true that a person whose assertions of goodness bore no discernible relation to his choices would properly be called inconsistent, this description need not be taken as referring to any logical relationship of entailment; for such logical consistency is just one type of consistency among others.

The terms of the formula we have proposed do not in themselves have enough evaluative force to permit the drawing of an imperative conclusion. The facts that certain persons have certain desires, and that certain objects are apt to satisfy these desires, are simple facts. The status of needs is less clear (see Section 6.1513). The process of assessing needs is always one of estimation if not of evaluation, and not merely one of recognition; yet there are statements of needs that are factual in the sense that they may be known to be true or false. If we grant the objective status of needs and desires, the notion of satisfaction does not add any evaluative element, since a need or a desire is always (to speak roughly) a need or desire of or for something which will satisfy it: the notion of satisfaction is thus virtually contained in that of a need or a desire. Finally, the notion of relevance, like that of need, though it involves estimation and is never a straightforward matter of ascertainable fact, is one on which agreement can often be reached by ordered discussion (Section **6.163**) in which the wishes of the discutients have no part.

Any imperative conclusion to be drawn from ascriptions of goodness would then have to be carried by the estimative or evaluative elements in the ascription of needs and judgements of satisfactoriness or relevance; but they are plainly incapable of bearing this weight. If estimation differs from recognition, it differs far more widely from prescription. Moreover, to call an A a good *x* is not to commend it unless one aligns oneself with "the persons concerned." In fact, of course, one usually does align oneself with them because one does not usually have occasion to consider a thing's goodness unless there is some practical point in so doing. But one need not so align oneself. A convinced pacifist may know very well the difference between a good shot and a bad shot, while wholeheartedly condemning the activities in which the marksman is engaged. Note that he may *know* the difference: for Hare and those who think like him it is scarcely legitimate to speak of knowledge in this connection, although it is perfectly natural to do so (cf. Section 6.5).

We have said that an attribution of goodness may be a reason for doing something or choosing something, and that this is not merely compatible with such attributions being factual but even lends support to the supposition that such is their status. But we might also say that

one's reasons for calling a thing good would also be reasons for choosing it. This confronts us once again with the intimate connection of goodness with choice, the recognition of which is Hare's great strength. But while the goodness of a thing or action must always be *a* reason for choosing or doing it, there may (as we have said) be other reasons for choosing or doing something else. A judgement of goodness then cannot in any sense entail an imperative, or any rule to the effect that one ought to do or choose things of a certain kind: one cannot say that one ought to do something unless one is sure that the reasons for doing it are stronger than the reasons against, and the judgement of goodness does not ensure this. At the same time, not to allow goodness to be a reason at all is either foolish or inconsiderate. A person must be very foolish heedlessly to reject what would meet his needs and satisfy his desires, and very inconsiderate heedlessly to reject what would satisfy the wants of others. To be a fool is not necessarily to be logically inconsistent or to contradict oneself; it may simply be to lack insight or imagination. Nor does inconsiderateness necessarily involve inconsistency rather than a failure of sympathy. If then it is foolish or inconsiderate not to allow goodness to be a reason, this is not because "good" has in itself any logically imperative force which is necessary to any explanation of its meaning and use, but because needs and desires are what they are.[10]

7.226. G. E. Moore

Since our analysis is not a simple description of how the word "good" is used but offers a form of words which is supposed to be suitable for use in paraphrases of statements containing the word "good," we must consider whether it does not in fact commit the "naturalistic fallacy" of maintaining that the same expression is at one and the same time analytic and synthetic.

Is "That which is such as to satisfy the wants of the person(s) concerned is good" then a significant proposition? The answer, surely, is "No." The material in Sections **6** and 7.225 should have demonstrated that no such proposition is needed to explain why the fact that a thing is "such as to . . ." is often, if not usually, a reason for choosing or preferring or recommending it; and such use of such propositions is the

[10]There is here the appearance of a regress: since foolishness and inconsiderateness are presented here as reasons against acting in a certain way, they *must* be thought bad; and if goodness is not accepted as a reason *for*, why should badness be a reason *against*? But the implication of "needs and desires are what they are" is rather: if you want to frustrate your own needs and desires, or think you can get away with frustrating those of others, go right ahead and see where it gets you.

main object of Moore's attack. Formally, as the use of the words "to say that . . . is to say that . . ." (Sections 6.11, 6.13) shows, the proposition under consideration is not a significant one because one cannot speak of "*the* wants of *the* person(s) concerned" *in abstracto*. In certain contexts, however, this proposition or one like it might be used to make a significant statement, if "the persons concerned" were used to refer to a specific group or if "good" were used in one of the various "secondary" senses spoken of in Section **6.3**; but no specific meaning can be assigned to the proposition in its own right, just because it takes on significance only if the word "good" is used in some one of its subsidiary senses.

Even within the context of a particular situation, it is never appropriate to answer "Why do you call this a good so-and-so?" by "Because it is such as to satisfy. . . ." To reply thus would be rather to refuse to state a reason than to state one. Our analysis does not, then, seriously conflict with Moore's statement that "Good is Good and nothing else whatever," but robs that statement of its air of mystery and hence of its more startling consequences. By the same token, unless one is to reject Broad's contention that "If Naturalism be true, Ethics is not an autonomous science; it is a department or application of one or more of the natural or the historical sciences,"[11] I am not a naturalist.

[11]"Some of the Main Problems of Ethics," *Philosophy* XXI (1946).

8 GOODNESS, RIGHTNESS AND OBLIGATION

OUR ANALYSIS of the concept of goodness will not be complete until we have considered what part it plays in ethical discourse as a whole, and how it is related to the other key concepts of such discourse.

Section 2.1 suggested that questions of goodness and questions of duty tend to arise in different contexts, and that therefore a basic dichotomy between the two kinds of problem might be expected in all ethical discourse. Ethics would then not be a completely unified subject. But, without denying the truth of what was said, one must admit that there are strong reasons for wishing to annul this dichotomy and for maintaining that it cannot be observed.

There is, first, the hard fact that problems of both kinds do after all occur within the framework of a single life, and may in practice be inseparable. One may have to reconcile the pursuit of some ideal with the possession of a wife and sixteen children. It is idle to tell a man thus placed that his obligation to provide for his progeny and his desire to construct a model of the Eiffel Tower in cork must be considered in isolation from each other, or that the said desire has simply no business to arise until the hungry mouths have been fed. The fact is that the obligation is there and the yearning has arisen, and the fulfilment of one must be postponed to the fulfilment of the other. There must be some means of deciding which. Even to settle the matter by the flip of a coin is an admission that the two possible solutions are of equal merit, and not to deny that they are comparable.

The neat distinction between questions of duty and questions of aim is threatened, secondly, by the tendency of the concept of duty to spread. One may say that, in strictness, a man's duties comprise those specific acts which he is committed to perform in virtue of specific roles which he has undertaken or which he finds thrust on him. But it is very hard to say just what does and what does not constitute a role; and, since the acts which make up duties are "specific" only in the sense that they are acts of a stated kind in situations of a stated kind, it is equally hard to say how inclusive the stated kind of action may be. Thus it may be a boilerman's duty to push in a certain damper whenever a certain dial shows a temperature of 750° F., or a lecturer's duty to speak about constitutional law for fifty minutes at 11 A.M. every Thursday in term. But not all roles or duties are so specific. Thus it is the duty of the

citizen (and maybe of the resident alien too) to assist in the apprehension of a suspected criminal whenever called upon to do so by a properly authorized agent of the state. This requirement is still reasonably specific, but what are we to say of the suggestion that it is the duty of every man, qua rational being, to develop his potentialities to the full? This seems to be only one inch short of saying that it is every man's duty, qua man, to do as much good as possible. And here we must protest that we cannot see how this can possibly be every man's duty in quite the same sense as it was the boilerman's duty to push in that damper. The notion of duty is clearly a plant which unless ruthlessly pruned will run riot over the whole field of ethics and choke out all possible competitors. Many thinkers do indeed wish to reduce goodness of aim or action or character to terms of duty or obligation, or *vice versa*. There is more than one way of attempting this.

One may attempt, as just suggested, to explain duty and obligation in terms of goodness and the good. Granted, we may say, that the proposition that one ought to do one's duty is analytic and needs no defence, because duty may be defined as that which one ought to do,[1] none the less we have to explain why it is that there are any actions which we ought to do. The answer is, we may be told, that it is recognized that actions of certain types tend to be good or to produce good results.[2] All particular duties are special cases of a general, overriding duty to do good at all times; that this is so may be seen from the fact that if the performance of a particular duty would do harm instead of doing good that action ceases to be our duty: we had after all only a *prima facie* duty to do it. This position takes into account the fact that the commitments into which a man enters have less than coercive force, and also the fact that each man has many roles and cannot decide what he ought to do on any given occasion by considering only one of them. But to maintain this position consistently is to destroy everything that is characteristic in the notions of duty, obligation and commitment. A man may indeed encourage himself in the performance of an unpleasant duty by reflecting that these things must be, and that it is good that laws should be obeyed even if the income-tax really ought not to be quite so exorbitant. But even if he does not so reflect it remains true that the tax falls due on April 1st, that he has an engagement to meet Ernestine

[1] Cf. S. E. Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 162.

[2] Cf. H. J. Laski, *The State in Theory and Practice* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), p. 104: "The claim of the state to obedience, I have argued, rests upon its will and ability to secure to its citizens the maximum satisfaction of their wants."

at lunch, that the contents of his "in" tray must be in his "out" tray by five, and that he has to sell fifty $2 tickets on a 1956 Pontiac. The man is committed to doing these things, right or wrong, good or bad; and such commitments unquestioningly accepted play a major part in determining his actions and the pattern of his whole life.[3]

One may then take the alternative of reducing goodness of character, aim or conduct to terms of duty or obligation. A good man would then be one who, as far as possible, meets all claims upon him, carries out all his duties and fulfils all his obligations, and who consistently acts with the intention of being such a person; and a good deed might reasonably be said to be one which forms part of a man's duty to God or to his neighbour as laid down in the Catechism. This is indeed very close to what we have seen in Section 6.342 to be meant by moral goodness; but it seems to commit us prematurely to a "closed" morality, defining goodness in terms of the satisfaction of fixed criteria and making no allowance for the spontaneity of action and moral initiative which some societies at least recognize and value. We must also take into consideration that the man who does good from a sense of duty and not because he likes doing good is neither (as C. S. Lewis observes) an agreeable person nor (as Aristotle insists) really a good man—if he doesn't like doing good, it must be that he would really rather be doing evil.

To seek unity in ethics by reducing one half of its concepts to terms of the other half seems likely, then, to do violence to our usual notions of what our moral situation is. One might therefore prefer to select as the basis for unification some intermediate or neutral term. Such a term lies ready to hand in the word "right." One might say that it is always one's duty to do what is right, and that a good man is one who always does the right thing. In any situation, one action and one alone is the right one: and this the one which the good man does. What action in a given situation is right is determined partly by considerations of what would be a good state of affairs to achieve, partly by considerations of specific obligations and commitments. To the objection that the two kinds of consideration are so disparate that no principles can ever be laid down for deciding in disputed cases what is in fact the right alternative, it might be replied that such is indeed the case, as is well known,

[3]Cf. E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1949), I. 7. iv: "Because we fill some certain domestic or social function, we are involved in a complex of obligations from which we have no right to free ourselves."

and that it is beyond the power of any ethical theory to provide principles with magical properties or to obviate the need for a decision in such cases. The function of the conceptual scheme is not to explain real difficulties away but to accommodate unavoidable difficulties without adding new and gratuitous ones.

The proposal to adopt rightness as the basic ethical concept seems promising, but this promise may be due to the ambiguity of the word "right," which is even more outrageous than that of the word "good." A full unravelling of this ambiguity is far beyond the proposed scope of this enquiry, but Section **8.3** will discuss some aspects of it.

8.1. *An Apparently Circular Argument*

Neither the reduction of goodness to terms of obligation nor that of obligation to terms of goodness can justly be termed illegitimate, though we have found each deficient on one side. It might thus seem that either could be used to invalidate the other by completing an apparently circular argument. If we were to say that the goodness of a good man is defined in terms of the rightness of his conduct, equating this with his fulfilment of his obligations and performance of his duties, and that the notion of goodness is thus a secondary one in ethics, it might be replied that rightness and obligatoriness of conduct are in turn decided by its achieving or tending to achieve good results. On this showing, goodness is after all explained in terms of goodness, and we have made no progress. However, there is in fact no circle, for the goodness of the good results mentioned can by no means be explained in terms of rightness and obligations. If the argument shows anything, it shows only that the notion of moral goodness, though not wholly to be distinguished from that of goodness in general, can only be shown to be a special case of the latter with the aid of some subtlety of argumentation. But the argument is not correct, and does not show even this; for the phrases "explain in terms of" and "reduce to terms of" employed therein have no single and simple meaning but may be used to denote various forms of logical and rhetorical relationship. In the present instance, it may be true that what is thought good and desirable as an end determines what shall be thought right and obligatory in conduct, and that this in turn determines what shall be held to constitute the goodness of the good man. But it is more precise to say that the goodness of the good man is *described in terms of* the institutions which determine what his duties and so on shall be, and that these institutions are *justified by reference to*

notions of what is desirable. The fact that a good man may be thus described enables one to say how to recognize a good man, but the definition of "good" need not differ from that outlined in Section 6. On the other hand, the justification of institutions mentioned is a theoretical project, and the reality of obligations is not affected one way or the other by the existence, or even the possibility, of such a justification. For not all obligations are moral obligations; there are, besides, legal obligations, political obligations, personal obligations and, no doubt, others. Only with moral obligations is such justification as we have mentioned possible; indeed, we may suggest that this possibility is the criterion of an obligation's being a moral one. It is true that many moralists have assumed that all the obligations by which they find themselves or their fellows bound are moral obligations and have often in consequence assumed the possibility of this justification, asking only what form it would take. Thus, some old-fashioned books on political philosophy ask themselves the question "What is the ground of political obligation?"; the course of their discussion shows that they mean by this "Why is the citizen morally bound to do everything his government tells him to?" but we are not given the authors' reasons for thinking the citizen to be so bound. We have seen in Section 2.2 that morality cannot be equated with the sum of the laws and conventions actually governing the behaviour of any person or group.

8.2. *Obligation and Related Concepts*

Extended treatment of the concepts of duty and obligation, and of other concepts related to these, would here be out of place. They are fully treated in a promised work by Dr. K. E. M. Baier and in published works of other scholars, to which the interested reader is referred. This is not to say that I agree on all points with Dr. Baier or Mr. Nowell-Smith or Sir David Ross, but that the careful consideration which they give to these matters is the necessary basis for any opinion, and that the inevitable result of such consideration is an area of mutual agreement so wide that any one of these works may be used to supplement the present enquiry. It is true that in any summary of the opinions of a writer on ethics the remaining disagreements will seem more prominent than the consensus; but this is due rather to the aims of the summarizer than to the nature of the case. The more one studies the original writings the more one is impressed by the range of agreement: a library of such works is like a housing-estate built to varying designs from standardized components.

8.21. *Duty and Obligation*

The uses of the words "duty" and "obligation" do not seem to present the same opportunities, or the same difficulties, to analysis as do the words "good," "right" and "ought." They are not so much rubbed by various use; they are scarcely used except in serious discussion of human conduct. Because they apply only to human behaviour, they do not have the apparent wide-ranging ambiguity of "good." None the less, they do not have the precision of technical terms, and a careless and inattentive use of them may give rise to perplexities of which some might be avoidable.

Moralists commonly treat "duty" and "obligation" as synonyms, and speak indifferently of moral duties and moral obligations. Even so careful a speaker as Samuel Johnson is reported as using the words as equivalent in the same paragraph,[4] although he held the opinion that no two words are *strictly* synonymous.[5] One is scarcely entitled to quarrel with a usage so firmly established—indeed, we have ourselves used the words as synonyms in Section 6.342. But it seems possible to distinguish at least between the more typical uses of these words, and once the distinction has been made one can see how the lack of it has elsewhere impeded clear thinking.

We stated in Section 8 that an action said to be a man's duty is usually one he is committed to perform, or has committed himself to perform, in virtue of some role which he has undertaken or in which he finds himself. We also said that the concept of a role as here employed is a highly elastic one; but the more clearly defined the role is, the more confidently one speaks of duties. On the other hand, the concept of a role does not enter at all into any explanation of the meaning of obligation, though of course a role may impose obligations on one. The fundamental notion of obligation seems to be that of irksome restraint or constraint. In matters of behaviour, this restraint or constraint is usually imposed by some precise relationship into which the person obliged has entered, and this relationship may or may not be such as to constitute a role.[6] The concept of obligation is thus wider than that

[4] Boswell, 7 May 1773.
[5] *Ibid.*, 17 April 1783.
[6] When it is, an obligation may be vague where a duty is specific; when it is not, the obligation will more probably be to perform a specific action. Thus, one might say that in addition to his particular duties a department-store Santa Claus has a general obligation to comport himself in a fashion consonant with the dignity of his employing institution. On the other hand, an individual might enter into an obligation to pay the expenses of a football team—which would not be the same as the duty of supporting them.

of duty; but in cases where the word "duty" is especially appropriate it does not seem natural to speak of obligation at all. Thus if it is a sentry's duty to shoot after challenging three times, it does not come naturally to say that the sentry is obliged to shoot after challenging thrice, although one would be understood if one did say so. Similarly, one might say that the sentry is under an obligation to shoot in this situation (on the ground that his orders do impose this obligation on him); but if this form of words were used it might be taken to mean that the sentry's shooting was imposed on him by some private commitment into which he had entered. Certainly this latter form of words would be puzzling. Again, on the morning after some such incident the sentry might say "I had challenged him three times, so it was my duty to fire"; but he might equally well say this if he had not fired. But if he were to say "I had challenged him three times, so I was obliged to fire" we should know that in fact he had fired, and that he had done so in virtue of some arrangement which he was powerless to alter; there is also some suggestion that he fired unwillingly, and certainly that he would not have fired if the arrangement had not existed. To speak of a duty is thus to speak of a role, even if the person does not perfectly fulfil his role; to speak of obligation is to stress the efficacy of the constraint which the role (if any) imposes.

What we have said about obligation may be illustrated by a few plausible phrases. Shops in England sometimes bear a sign: "Walk round. You are under no obligation to buy." The meaning of this seems to be that a person does not, merely by entering the shop, place himself in a position vis-à-vis the sales staff which commits him to buy something. Again, a person confronted with evidence of some event may say that he is "obliged to conclude" that the event took place. Here one could not possibly say that it was his duty to draw the conclusion, and it seems unnecessary and far-fetched to say that the drawing of the conclusion is forced upon him by some role which he plays. The sense of constraint is here paramount: it is implied that the person does not willingly believe that what has happened has happened, but the evidence is such that he has no choice. Again, it is possible to say that one is obliged to obey a person because he is one's superior officer, and one might suppose that this was the same as saying that it is one's duty to obey; but it is also possible to say that one is obliged to obey him because he is aiming a revolver at one's midriff, where no question of duty can arise. One does not, however, usually say that a thrown stone is obliged to fall, for there can here be no irksome restraint or constraint: an obligation limits choice, and where it makes no sense to speak of choice it makes no sense to speak of obligation—or for that matter, of duty.

We have said that an obligation need not be specific; but it may be argued that we have here to do with a "different sense" of the word. Even if this were so, the two senses would be seen to have a certain likeness. If one renders some important assistance to a neighbour in need, one may be said to lay him under an obligation; the neighbour may say, that he is much obliged to his benefactor. In so far as the latter phrase has not degenerated into a mere form of words, both these phrases refer to the same institution. The person obliged may discharge his obligation by performing in turn some service for his benefactor, no matter what, so that he may no longer be beholden to him. Old-fashioned persons regard such vague general obligations, such beholding, very seriously; they are uneasy and embarrassed if there is nothing they can do for those to whom they are thus connected.[7] Unless we are to take these as separate senses of "oblige" and "obligation," then, there can be indefinite obligations; but there can hardly be duties which are indefinite in the same sense. It seems at first sight that a man who claims to have fulfilled his obligations as a parent is referring to a similarly indefinite obligation, but this is scarcely so: although one cannot list precisely what a man's obligations as a parent are, one would probably be able to tell if one were omitted, and thus could confidently rebut or cautiously admit such a claim. The man might indeed in this case have said equally well that he had done his duty as a parent: there are certain things which a father is expected in virtue of his parental role to do for his children, and is blamed for not doing. The man is claiming to have done these; he would usually, by the way, be taken as admitting that he has not done more: that he has not been a *good* father.

One is thus able to distinguish between the concepts of duty and obligation, though they are similar and not mutually exclusive. We have now to consider what is meant by a specifically moral duty or obligation, and why in the sphere of morals the concepts should seem more nearly related than elsewhere. In each case the answer seems to be that an action is one's moral duty, or morally obligatory, if one is expected or obliged to do it because it is prescribed by some injunction or principle which can itself be described as moral; and if one can be justly censured for not doing it. The problem of moral obligation (like that of moral goodness) thus resolves itself largely into the problem of moral law. Leaving for a later section the matter of the criteria and status of moral laws and principles, one can see how roles and rules may combine in the notion of duty. For the duties of a particular job or role or station are normally prescribed in a set of rules; and it is natural to speak as if, in

[7] In the mouths of others, of course, "much obliged" means no more than "thank you," and an obliging person is just a helpful one.

those vaguer roles where no such prescription is possible, there were unwritten and unformulated laws specifying those duties. As a citizen it is one's duty to obey the civil law; by analogy, it is said to be one's duty as a "moral being" to obey the "moral law." So moral obligations are the duties imposed on one by one's role of moral being, if there be any such; and moral duty and moral obligation turn out to be the same.

One is not under any moral obligation to do an action merely because that action would be a good one, or would lead to good consequences.[8] To say that there is an obligation is to say that one may be held at fault or negligent for not fulfilling it, and one would certainly not be so held if there were no more specific and cogent reason than the goodness of a suggested action, or its expected consequences, why one (and no one else) should do it (and nothing else). Moreover, it is obvious that one cannot achieve every good end, life being short and men weak: one has to choose among good ends, and among good actions. Nor can one be held obliged to do what one is quite incapable of doing. It would be good if war between Egypt and Israel could be averted; but I am not personally obliged to avert it, because no way of doing so is open to me. If any good actions are obligatory for me, they are those alone which by my special talents and possessions and position and opportunities I am uniquely able and fitted to perform. One might, with this restriction, say that every man has a kind of general obligation to do all the good he can; but this, so far as it is not merely loose uplifting talk, would seem to imply an obligation to do one cannot say just what. The constraint necessary to the notion of an obligation is here imposed by the existence and acceptance of a rule or principle of conduct: "Do all the good you can." Attempts to derive obligation from goodness inevitably end thus, in tracing the obligation to a law or something like a law. An action is morally obligatory only if there is some recognized law or principle of conduct which prescribes just this action and no other to one situated as the person obligated is situated, and if this principle is not overruled by some other.[9]

[8]Duty may seem definable in terms of goodness in a somewhat different way, in terms of our proposed analysis: to do one's duty is surely to satisfy the wants of those concerned. But the apparent reduction is illusory; to do one's duty is to satisfy only certain specific requirements of a person or institution, no matter what other wants the person or institution may have. And the particular requirements are those made of the persons having the duty in question in virtue of their duty. Nor are needing and desiring directly in question at all, since for there to be a duty it is necessary that there should be a more or less explicit demand, and that this demand should be for some reason binding.

[9]Samuel Johnson remarks: "If a murderer should ask you which way a man is gone, you may tell him what is not true, because you are under a previous obligation not to betray a man to a murderer" (Boswell, 13 June 1784). He goes on to remark (as we have done) that only such "obligation" can override a supposed duty and excuse a man from it: considerations of the goodness of the consequences are not sufficient. But we should observe that there is no question here of any specific provision of the moral law that forbids betrayal to murderers: the existence of the "previous obligation" is deduced from the evident wrongness of the act according to our usual notions.

8.211. Commitment

It is only to specifically moral duty and obligation that the notion of a law or of something lawlike is indispensable for the reasons outlined in the last section. The notions of duty and obligation as such carry no reference at all to any law or standard (much less to any ideal), although it is true that a duty or an obligation may in fact be imposed by, or with the aid of, laws or rules or principles, whether openly avowed or tacitly adopted. What is essential to both these concepts is the notion of *commitment*. It is the essence of a duty or of an obligation, not that it provides an ideal or an incentive to action, but that it limits one's freedom to act: it binds. Duties and obligations form a part, often the most important part, of the conditions within which a man's choice is exercised. A man's duty is, in the common phrase, something he *has* to do—the expression might well be taken as if "has" had here its literal sense. How this troublesome possession came to be his, or why he should not disown it, are problems which do not immediately present themselves.[10] Nor indeed should they. As Dr. Baier points out, the question why a person who has made a promise should keep it is rather like the question why a chessplayer should not move his rook diagonally.[11] The game of chess is one in which a man may or may not take part—it is an amenity which is available to him. But once he avails himself of it he keeps the rules: for if the rules are not kept the game ceases to be an amenity and there is no point to it. Similarly, the institution of promise-making and promise-keeping as it exists in our society is one of which a man may or may not make use: many people in fact never make promises because they doubt their ability to keep them. But once the promise is made the

[10]Mr. E. F. Carritt writes (*Ethical and Political Thinking*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1947, p. 14): "The general question is whether our obligations, and consequently our duties, depend upon our actual situation, including our capacities for affecting it and the consequences of what we immediately bring about, or upon our beliefs about that situation, or upon our moral estimate of what that situation demands." But this question is obviously not one about duty or obligation at all, but about the right thing to do, which is very different (see Section 8.3). Mr. Carritt uses in illustration at least one sentence containing the word "ought" which could not possibly be paraphrased by any sentence containing the words "duty," "obligation" or their cognates.

[11]K. E. Baier, "Proving a Moral Judgement," *Philosophical Studies* (April, 1953).

man has bound himself to keep it, and is recognized by himself and others to be so bound. This recognition of bindingness is of the essence of the institution of promising. One may wonder why the institution should exist, or why one should make promises; but one can scarcely wonder why promises once made should be kept.[12]

The problems of political and moral obligations, into which a man does not voluntarily enter, must be very different and much harder. To the question why a man should obey his country's laws, the only true and adequate answer is that if he does not he will be jailed or fined or hanged. To the question why he should obey them gladly, the answer may be in terms of the benefit to all which results from law-abidingness. But the obligation is an obligation because it is a constraint, and regardless of its beneficence.[13] The case of moral obligation is more difficult still. Why should a man obey the "moral law"? We may repeat the answer made in the former case: for fear of sanctions—divine retribution, or the pangs of conscience.[14] But these, whatever their efficacy, may be held irrelevant to the question of principle. We feel that a moral obligation would not be a moral one unless it were justifiable by reason. Whether we should respect this feeling, and what form the justification would take if we did respect it, are debatable. But here, as before, the obligation is an obligation not because it is justifiable but because it is binding; and it is binding because it is laid on us by God, or by the society from which we cannot or dare not dissociate ourselves, or by the nature or conscience which that God or that society has implanted or bred in us—in fact, because the moral law is accepted as law. No question of obligation, not even of moral obligation, is a question of goodness; all are questions of bindingness, of commitment.

[12]All this is, of course, too simple. Some promises are more solemn than others: there is an unbroken line from mere predictions of one's future movements to the most solemn contracts; and misunderstandings may arise because the promisor meant his word to have less weight than the promisee attached to it. These considerations are of great practical importance, but do not affect the argument in the text.

[13]The traditional argument from tacit consent, that if a man does not fly his country he is, as it were, tacitly entering into an undertaking to obey his country's laws, has lost whatever force it had. For a man cannot nowadays leave his country without the consent of its government, and without the consent of another country's government to admit him. By demanding passports and visas which are not automatically granted, the governments of the nations renounce any claim to the loyalty of their subjects beyond what may be exacted by force.

[14]Cf. Amber Blanco White, *Ethics for Unbelievers* (London: Routledge, 1949), p. 53: "And when you ask . . . 'Why should I do right?' . . . the answer is 'Because you cannot help yourself. You are a moral being in virtue of your membership of the human race.'" By "doing right" Miss Blanco White here means obeying the promptings of the superego—a group of impulses of whose moral status others may feel less confident than she.

8.22. *Obligation and the Feeling of Obligation*

Professor Broad warns us that if the recollection of something we have done gives rise to a disagreeable feeling, we should not be too hasty in calling this a "guilt-feeling," since guilt cannot properly be defined except in moral terms.[15] A similar objection might be raised against our practice in the last section, where we listed the "conscience" (by which we there meant a tendency to be ill at ease when doing, planning or remembering what one believes wrong) among the agencies responsible for making moral obligations obligatory. But it is not at once evident that we have more than merely grammatical grounds for supposing that guilt is actually or logically prior to guilt-feeling, or obligation to a sense of obligation. It seems true that the occurrence of a disagreeable feeling could never by itself give rise to the concept of guilt (although a "feeling" generated by early training may be of some complexity, amounting perhaps to unrecognized apprehension of parental disapproval combined with a fear of retribution); but it is equally true that the fact of an action's wrongness (by any standard) does not account for the disagreeable feeling. There is no reason to doubt that such feelings may come to be attached to any actions whatever; the connection is to be explained in terms of the patient's personal history, not of morality. It is true that the two will often coincide, perhaps more often than not, since this peculiar emotional sanction will presumably come to be applied in accordance with the moral standards of the patient's associates, which will probably not differ too widely from those of the patient's society as a whole. It is also true that a large part of the conduct thus controlled will come to be controlled in accordance with avowed ethical principles: children learn at least as much from the admonishment as from the example of their families, and the former is more likely than the latter to set up the emotional connections in question. But we cannot rule out the possibility that the concepts of moral obligation and guilt take their rise from the feelings of constraint and discomfort which early conditioning attaches to the thought of certain actions, and originally refer to actions which arouse such feelings.

We can then only concede to Professor Broad that "guilt-feelings" refer not to rightness or wrongness, but to what the patient has been taught to believe to be right or wrong, and that we cannot expect a

[15]C. D. Broad, "Some of the Main Problems of Ethics," *Philosophy*, XXI (1946).

complete correspondence between such feelings and moral codes—although what he has been taught will presumably bear some relationship to some code or codes. But in so far as there are any feelings of guilt, these are they; and in so far as conscience is a matter of feeling, this is it. We certainly cannot, and I don't suppose Professor Broad or anyone else holds that we can, call one feeling a guilt-feeling and withhold the name from another which feels just like it, on the ground that the one is connected with an action which is "really" wrong and the other not.

Feelings of guilt, remorse, obligation and so forth will then be no more and no less worthy of consideration in deciding what to do than feelings of hunger or thirst or anything else. One does not ignore a feeling of hunger but one does not follow it blindly. Similarly one ought[16] not to disregard one's feelings of compunction, but equally one ought not to give them sole authority over one's actions.

Perhaps that last paragraph went too far. For, as we have said, feelings of guilt will on the whole be good guides to conduct, if one has been well brought up; whereas hunger and the like, though factors which must be taken into account in reaching decisions, do not have this, as it were, privileged position. But the fact remains that the feeling is only a feeling, and however good a guide is not one ever to be followed blindly. "The unexamined life is one not fit for a man to live." Such feelings may be regarded as a sort of pram or scaffolding for the moral life, to be discarded when one has put the keystone in place and learned to live rationally. Yet, if a man has not leisure to think out what is right for him to do, it is no doubt better that he should do what he feels to be right than that he should do what he neither feels nor thinks to be right.[17]

8.23. *Obligation and Pattern*

We suggested in the last section that the reasons for keeping a promise were not altogether unlike those for making lawful moves at chess.[18] Reflection on this analogy may lead us to recognize the formal, patterned character of much of our behaviour. Many of our actions

[16]This word, which has nothing whatever to do with obligation as such, will be briefly discussed in Section 8.4.

[17]If the position adopted in this section is sound, religions which lay stress on the "conviction of sin" should not only distinguish in theory between this and the feeling of guilt, but make sure in practice that their followers can make this distinction. Careless preachers often give what amount to exhortations to live by one's feelings.

[18]In drawing this analogy I may seem to be following too blindly the lead of those many recent philosophers who have learned from Wittgenstein to discover

and interactions are laid down for us as precisely as their steps for a troop of dancers. No doubt it was for this reason that Plato in his *Laws* prescribed as a chief part of moral education participation in complex choral dances. This view of life has not in general been much noticed by moralists, although it is popular with poets—it has played, for example, a notable part in the work of Mr. T. S. Eliot. Dr. Baier regards the fulfilling of an obligation as the completion of a pattern,[19] and something of the same attitude may be discerned in the eighth and ninth books of Aristotle's *Ethics*. But the most striking interpretations of behaviour in terms of pattern may be found in anthropological works, notably in D. D. Lee's interpretations of Malinowski's studies of the Trobriand Islanders. It is Mrs. Lee's contention that in a series of what might seem returned favours or fulfilled obligations, the later steps are not thought by the islanders to be any more dependent upon the earlier than the earlier upon the later, but that both form equivalent parts of an unvarying pattern of behaviour whose parts are all of equal status. It is perhaps worthy of note that Professor Macbeath, in the fourth chapter of his *Experiments in Living*, interprets Lee's interpretations of Malinowski's interpretations of the Trobrianders' interpretations of their own moral experience in terms of obligations. We may say that even if no obligation is felt as imposed by the initiation of such a series of interactions, the anticipated form of the series as a whole imposes in fact a certain constraint.[20] Here once more the behaviour in question is not purposive and requires no justification, but is, as it were, preordained.

8.231. *Community and Co-operation*

In any complex society, each person is member of many different groups: family, church, club, business, union, school, city, nation.[21] The

unsuspected likenesses to chess in practically all other forms of human activity. But to be in the fashion is not necessarily to be in the wrong. The purpose would have been served as effectively, if less elegantly, by snooker or tiddleywinks, except that I am not sure of the rules of tiddleywinks.

[19]"Proving a Moral Judgement," *Philosophical Studies* (April 1953).

[20]To me Mrs. Lee's conclusions do not seem to arise naturally from the material she cites; and her remarks on "our society," which she uses as a foil, do not inspire confidence.

[21]This ignores the distinction often made between "associations" which exist for a limited purpose, and whose members are thus bound by explicit rights and obligations, and "communities" which do not exist for any limited purpose and whose members are bound not by any explicit arrangements but by a general feeling of solidarity (cf. Morris Ginsberg, *Reason and Unreason in Society* (London: Longmans Green, 1947), pp. 8 ff.). But in fact associations tend to turn themselves into quasi-communities.

closeness of the bond which links him to the members of these various bodies may be regarded as a function of the number and importance of the rights he has against them, and the obligations and duties he has to them. This will also, for the most part, be a measure of the degree of sympathy and affection or comradeship he feels towards them. The scope of these various ties will define the "moral universe" within which he lives; and the limits of this "moral universe" will determine who shall be for him a "person."[22] It appears from this that there may be three types of rule by which a person's conduct is guided: one which lays down what particular duties and rights are owed in respect of a given relationship or group-membership; a second which lays down the minimum that is owed to (and by) all who are considered "persons"; and a third which lays down who shall be a person—for it is characteristic of "advanced" peoples that they recognize potential relationships between their members and persons with whom they will in fact never have anything to do. Rules of the first of these three kinds are thought of as "moral," for the most part, only in so far as they refer to relationships into which a man cannot help entering: those, that is, in which certain actions are thought of as sufficing by themselves to set up a relationship of a certain kind. For the rest, "morality" requires only that one should play the parts one has taken up, without specifying what those parts shall be. And this is only to require the conditions in which men can co-operate with each other—in which, that is to say, society is possible. Rules, then, which prescribe obligations say: let there be society of such and such a kind. Those which prescribe who shall be thought a person say: let there be society of such and such a scope. But those which demand that obligations shall be fulfilled say only: let there be society.

8.2311. *Conformity and Co-operation*

In Section 8.231 we spoke as if the rules to which men conform in their relationships to one another were simply the means to, and as it were the structure of, their co-operation. But in Section 8.211 we emphasized that in obligation the essential feature is not the purpose or justification

[22]See Sections 6.227 and 6.4. Cf. further Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* (UNESCO, 1952), p. 12: "Humanity is confined to the borders of the tribe, the linguistic group, or even, in some instances, of the village, so that many so-called primitive peoples describe themselves as 'the men' (or sometimes—though hardly more discreetly—as 'the good', 'the excellent', 'the well-achieved'), thus implying that the other tribes, groups or villages have no part in the human virtues or even in human nature. . . . They often go further and rob the outsider of even this modicum of actuality, by referring to him as a 'ghost' or an 'apparition'."

of which the obligation might be susceptible but the constraint which it is felt to impose. It may well be that in a simple and stable economy co-operation may be reduced almost entirely to the performance of certain functions and the fulfilment of certain clear-cut obligations whose purpose is never thought of at all. It is only in a complex economy that close and systematic co-operation which cannot be reduced to rules becomes necessary. We may even distinguish on this basis between two types of community: those in which the members conform in detail to a complex code of behaviour but do not systematically co-operate with one another, and those in which the members show a considerable degree of nonconformity in their individual behaviour but are accustomed to co-operate with one another in enterprises of unpredictable variety. Some such distinction as this may underlie the observation by Mr. Raymond Firth, that primitive peoples usually wish to obtain the "material benefits" of Western techniques but cannot do so without social disintegration, since both their acquirement and their use presuppose a certain type of institution and mental attitude.[23]

8.24. *Moral Laws*

In Section 2.2 we enumerated several grounds on which actions might be condemned. Some but not all of these grounds involved reference to some law or rule or principle, several types of which were distinguished. Presumably moral laws are to be found among these. In Section 6.343 we gave reasons for saying that "the moral law" consisted of those principles which may be appealed to in praising or blaming and which may be felt as imposing constraint although not imposed by any sanction, whether or not such principles are derived from divine edict or a study of human nature, and whether or not they are embodied in a legal code. But this formulation provides no way of making the necessary and familiar distinction between wickedness and bad manners. It is therefore plainly necessary to classify the principles, generalizations, laws and lawlike statements used in moral discourse, and to make their relationships plain. What is the status of moral laws? How are they established? What are the limitations on their validity? Where they are valid, how far are they binding? What kind of influence should they exert on conduct? I know of no adequate treatment of these problems, to the solution of which the following remarks are merely a fragmentary and tentative contribution.

In the foregoing paragraph we spoke both of "the moral law" and of "moral laws." In using the latter phrase we seem to be referring to

[23]"Problems of Social Development," *The Listener*, LII (August 5, 1954), 200.

principles which can be understood and acted on in their own right; but in speaking of "the moral law" in the singular we seem to imply that those principles form or should form some sort of coherent whole. We accept both these implications: we shall argue that moral laws are *quasi-independent principles*.

We may follow Professor Broad[24] in distinguishing between "behaviour-mentioning" principles, which prescribe or prohibit certain specified kinds of action, as "Thou shalt not steal," and "formal" principles, such as "Do as you would be done by," which do not name any particular kind of deed. Sometimes, but not always, it is possible to justify a principle of the former kind by appealing to one of the latter kind. When such an appeal is made, it becomes clear (if the one really does depend on the other for its justification) that the behaviour-mentioning principle is valid only in so far as the individual actions which are done or avoided in accordance with it can themselves be justified or condemned by reference to the formal principle. If this is so the status of these mediating principles can be only that of generalizations: stealing is said to be wrong only because the individual thefts are wrong, the wrongness being in each case to be inferred from some formal principle ("How would you like it if someone took *your* pet lizard?"). Like all generalizations, then, these mediating principles do not always hold: that an action is a theft is a good reason for supposing it wrong and likewise for not doing it, but there may in a particular case be other and overriding reasons for supposing it right and doing it.[25] We might suggest that if one complies with a formal principle there will at least be something good about one's action, whereas if one complies with a mediating principle of the behaviour-mentioning kind there may be nothing good about one's action, but there is a high probability that one will have acted rightly: the one action will be partly right, the other will probably be right. But this suggestion presupposes not only that the principles concerned are themselves valid, but also that formal principles are always ultimate and not mediating principles requiring further justification; and neither of these presuppositions can be taken for granted.

There are other ways in which one can justify, or avoid the need for justifying, behaviour-mentioning principles. One can say that God has decreed thus; or that such and such "is not done"; or that one just *knows* that such and such is wrong, by an indubitable deliverance of the in-

[24]C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930), pp. 120–1.

[25]The same point may be made by saying that words are never applied in quite the same sense to individuals as to classes (see Section 6.32).

fallible ethical consciousness; or that it is against the law; or that the neighbours wouldn't like it.

Behaviour-mentioning principles which one just *knows* to hold good may, but need not, be generalizations from what seems to be the directly experienced wrongness of particular actions. If so, it is likely that the particular actions are judged wrong by some implicit standard which could be formulated and expressed as a formal principle.[26] If they are not generalizations it is likely that they are maxims taken over from one's nurturers, in which case they are principles whose original justification was that "the neighbours wouldn't like it"[27] but which have acquired an independent status of their own. Whether or not they are generalizations, such principles are usually allowed to admit of exceptions: they provide only *prima facie* reasons for supposing an action wrong. It seems likely that this admission of exceptions, since it shows that a principle is somehow both related to other principles and itself based upon reason, is one of the signs that distinguish moral laws from other behaviour-mentioning principles.

Neither the precepts of divine law nor those of etiquette have the status of generalizations. "Don't eat peas off your knife" does not derive its validity from the badness of particular cases of such pea-eating or the evil consequences observed to follow therefrom; on the contrary, such acts are condemned only because the rule of etiquette happens to exist among the condemning class. The same applies to sabbath-breaking, which would never be wrong if it were not generally forbidden. Of such precepts alone is it true that "I had not known sin, but by the law."[28]

[26]Cf. Morris R. Cohen, *Law and the Social Order* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933), p. 263: "How are we to settle disagreements as to ethical matters? By appeal to principle! But if the principles are questioned, we appeal to particular instances." But to appeal to an instance as an instance is not to appeal away from the principle at all; and to appeal to a particular thing or event in all its individuality is no help, because one could not be sure that the aspects of the thing or event which aroused approval or disapproval had any connection with the principle whose worth was in question. Thus to appeal from a principle to its instances can only be to appeal from a principle to a further principle. Cf. also F. M. Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica* (3rd ed.; Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1933), p. 8: "A principle is a rule of inaction, which states a valid general reason for not doing in any particular case what, to unprincipled instinct, would appear right." But surely the features of the particular case which activate the "instinct" must also be those which activate it in other cases. Cornford is just appealing from principles enunciated to principles unconsciously held.

[27]In the neighbours' mouths, of course, they may have some quite different status. One usually appeals to what so-and-so would say only if one is not sure of the precise ground of the disapproval—if, that is to say, one is out of one's moral or social depth.

[28]Romans vii. 7.

Just because they are not generalizations, they admit of no exceptions and fail of being absolute within their field only in so far as obedience to them would be disobedience to other precepts of like status: that an action contravenes such a principle means, if the principle be accepted, not that the action is probably wrong but that there is definitely something (however little) wrong about it.

That a certain kind of action is a breach of divine law or of etiquette is a reason for not doing it, but in neither case can any reason be given why that kind of action rather than some other should be forbidden. One can indeed justify "Observe the sabbath" or "Never eat your peas off a knife" by saying "The rest will be good for you" or "You might cut your mouth"; but these are spurious reasons, because if it were shown that the facts thus alleged as reasons were no facts the status and validity of the precepts would not be in any way affected. To make these reasons operative would be to remove the precepts from the sphere of law and manners and convert them into mere good advice.[29] Somewhat similarly, one might give as reasons the sanctions which attach to the breaking of any precept of these classes, such as "God will not help you to win the next war" or "People will laugh at you"; but this is to provide motives for obedience to the precept once established, not to justify the precept itself.

One may say with reservations that whereas a breach of a moral law arouses indignation, a breach of etiquette arouses only ridicule or contempt or, at the most, disgust. The reservations are necessary because a person who commits a breach of etiquette may arouse indignation on the ground that he lacks consideration for the feelings of others (though this shows only that there may be a moral obligation to observe etiquette, whatever it may be, wherever possible), and may evoke indignation in his companions in that he is "letting them down," that is, bringing into question their social status. A breach of divine law, like one of moral law, arouses indignation. But it does so only on the assumption that God is both good and wise;[30] for if God were not such a being no one would care whether His edicts were broken or kept. The assumption is that the divine law is what the moral law would be if only men had God's wisdom. For this reason divine law (if any) is always taken as overriding

[29]The effect of "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark ii. 27), if it is not mere rhetoric, is to change the Fourth Commandment from a precept of divine law to a counsel of prudence; hence no doubt its absence from Matthew and Luke.

[30]One may say that "God is good and wise" is true by definition. This may be so—there are many ways of defining "God." But neither "The Author of the putative divine law is good and wise" nor "The Creator of the Universe is good and wise" is true by definition.

the moral law, which is indeed not allowed to be valid if it contravenes the former.[31] And both moral law and divine law are always taken as overriding considerations of etiquette. This hierarchy depends, I think, on the possibility of the justification of the various types of principle, the assumption again being that, although we cannot justify the divine law, its divine status is a guarantee of its ultimate supreme justifiability.

In addition to these behaviour-mentioning principles we must mention what we shall loosely term taboos. A certain type of action may arouse not ridicule or indignation but horror (which may be combined with indignation if the act is thought to imperil the tribe). Here again the individual action takes its quality entirely from its being an act of the specified forbidden kind. Such taboos have the prestige of divine law in that they cannot be overridden at all, and are like the precepts of etiquette in that no justification of them is even theoretically possible. It makes no difference whether they are thought to depend upon the will of some deity, since they are thought of as immediate and automatic in their operation: that is, the deity involved, if any, operates as an automaton. Transgression against them cannot be excused, alleviated or aggravated, not even by the necessity of avoiding some other taboo. Both in its lack of justification and in its lack of coherence, a set of taboos is at the farthest extreme from a system of moral law.

Which of these behaviour-mentioning principles can be called moral laws? Not principles of etiquette, or taboos, since neither of these is thought ultimately justifiable and breach of either arouses no indignation. The divine law, if accepted as such, will no doubt be the backbone of the moral law; but it depends for its status on its Author's status as a moral being, and either this status must be deduced from the excellence of the laws He gives or the authenticity of the laws must be judged by their conformity with that status. Thus unless we already know right from wrong (that is, have some moral law) we cannot recognize the divine law for what it is. Similarly, we may accept as moral law the dictates of the moral consciousness, but we cannot accept them unless we antecedently know that the consciousness is moral. We must be able to make out at least a *prima facie* case for the accuracy of our "moral intuitions."

Those moral laws which are most readily allowed to be such, that is to say the behaviour-mentioning generalizations which are intermediate between particular judgements and formal principles, can be useful only as rules of thumb. Moreover, they are usually rather unhelpful. Either they are vacuous, like "Do no murder" which means only

[31]All this is, of course, only true of a reflective theology. To the unreflective, God's will is God's will and that's that. But we cannot allow much weight to what the unthinking may think.

"Kill no one you ought not to kill" and does not get us very far, or they are plainly invalid, like "Do not kill"—for a physician must either kill bacteria or kill his patient.[32]

It would appear from the foregoing that moral generalizations cannot be regarded as absolutely binding. But this apparent fact may be obscured, and perhaps even altered, by two considerations. First, there are enshrined in various legal codes positive enactments corresponding roughly in content to many of these generalizations. If there are enforceable laws tantamount to "Thou shalt not steal," then stealing is always illegal, and if an action is a theft it is legally wrong even if it can be morally justified. But the boundary between legality and morality is blurred, since not only do legal codes enshrine moral principles but what is illegal may come to be held immoral: laws both follow and guide moral thinking (cf. Section 6.343).[33] And in another sense one may argue that what is illegal is always for that very reason immoral, on the familiar ground that in order that security and stability may be main-

[32]One might say that the function of "Do not kill" is to remind: the fact that an action is a killing is a *prima facie* reason for not doing it—although of course it is sometimes refusal to kill that needs defence, as by those with conscientious objections to military service. We may compare the type of precept to which Aristotle gave so much weight, in which the content is trivial but the form significant: be the kind of person who does the right thing to the right person at the right time for the right reason. Such a precept reminds one of how many different things one must bear in mind when reaching a decision, but does not purport to guide one in making the decision itself.

It is instructive to consider the way in which "Stealing is wrong" is trivially true, though it designates a class of easily recognizable actions. For one can only steal what is someone else's property: if there were no property, there could be no theft, so that the crime depends for its existence upon the institution. But it is also true that it is impossible to explain what is meant by saying that something is someone's property except by saying that no one else is allowed to take it. So "Do not steal" means the same as "Do not take what you must not take." Still, the commandment is not altogether vacuous, since it enjoins the acceptance of the institution of private property, that is, the recognition that there are certain things which one must not take; and this institution may itself be defended or attacked on the basis of its contribution to or detraction from human happiness. Even if one rejects the institution one may still acquiesce in "Stealing is wrong" on the ground that where the institution exists it governs people's actions and expectations, so that to steal is bound to cause both disruption and distress.

[33]Professor A. L. Goodhart has argued strongly to this effect in his *English Law and the Moral Law* (London: Stevens, 1953), where he maintains that the law depends for its efficacy less on the sanctions formally imposed by the state than on popular sentiment—which in effect obliges the state to make its law conform closely to the moral ideas of the society within which it operates. Cf. F. M. Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica*, pp. 20–1: "The best sort of rules are those which prohibit important, but perfectly innocent, actions. . . . The merit of such regulations is that, having nothing to do with right or wrong, they help to obscure those troublesome considerations in other cases, and to relieve the mind of all sense of obligation towards society."

tained it is right to obey even bad laws. "Obey the law" may itself be regarded as a moral principle of the "formal" kind. Secondly, the reasons for calling "Obey the law" a moral principle are equally good reasons for observing whatever moral laws one's society holds by. On this way of thinking, a moral generalization acquires an independent status of its own and requires no further justification than that it is regarded as a moral law. And a principle regarded in this way obviously has an authority very different from that of a mere generalization. From this it will be seen that the status of such principles is complex and even ambiguous. No simple account can be given of the extent to which such a principle is to be held binding, or of the kind of justification of which it is susceptible. It should be observed, however, that in so far as such principles are taken as being generalizations and thus not absolutely binding they cannot be taken as imposing moral obligations: that one can regard a moral law as imposing a moral obligation only in so far as one regards it as a law, absolutely binding and dependent for its bindingness solely on its legal standing.

If the justification of those moral principles which mention types of behaviour is ultimately in terms of formal principles—and it may be held that apparent exceptions are all examples of confused thinking or failure to think—this leaves us with two hard questions. The first is: are the formal principles by which moral laws are justified themselves moral laws? To this we may say shortly that in a way they obviously are. If one hesitates at all to call them so, it is not because one questions their moral status but because one is reluctant to call them laws. For a law really to be a law, one feels, it must enjoin something more specific than "Do all the good you can." If this feeling is worthy of any respect at all, perhaps we can appease it by calling them not moral laws but parts (or, more specifically, principles) of the moral law.

The second hard question is: how are formal principles themselves justified?—for we cannot assume that a principle is self-evidently valid just because it does not mention any specific kind of behaviour. Obviously, some formal principles appeal to others: "Obey the law" must be justified by referring to some more general principle stating the end which this obedience is to serve. But there must be some principle or principles which cannot be justified in this way. If these are not to be left unjustified, their justification must be in terms of the nature or consequences of the particular actions which comply with them. Whichever is the case, we seem at first sight to be reduced to a sort of intuitionism, whereby the rightness of certain actions or of certain principles is either directly seen or else believed in without any reason. But the situation is not desperate; we do not really have to reduce morality

to ultimate dependence on arbitrary opinion or on "infallible" intuitions which someone else's intuitions might contradict. For we have already suggested that the laws in terms of which right conduct is defined are themselves to be justified in terms of goodness: that is, in terms of what is actually such as to satisfy needs and desires which people actually have. Indeed, whether a precept is to be regarded as pertaining to divine law, to the moral law, to etiquette or what have you, may conveniently be regarded as a question of who are concerned and whether they are concerned directly or as critical bystanders. But we must bear in mind that in suggesting this type of classification we are not providing a sociological description of the "facts of the moral life"—even if we allow for the fact that the more general and formal principles are, the less articulate they become; we are in fact advocating a system of behaviour in which unique importance should be attached to questions of goodness, and other principles should be adopted or retained only in so far as they do not run counter to this overriding consideration.

8.3. *Right*

Moral obligation was explained as obligation imposed by rules held to be binding on some other ground than their forming part of legal codes. The justification (if any) of such rules may be in terms of what is thought good; but the form of the rules is that of assertions that such and such actions are right or wrong, or ought or ought not to be done. It remains to consider the concepts of right and wrong, and the use of the word "ought."

The peculiarities of the word "right" are a constant danger for writers on ethics in the English language. Like "good" it is a word whose use is not confined to moral discourse; and its ambiguities are even more marked. All of its current uses, which are more or less clearly distinguishable from one another, seem to have belonged to it from the time of its earliest recorded use: that is, for about a thousand years. But it is still possible to be confused by them.

The two senses of "right" which are most often confused are those connected with righteousness and with correctness. The confusion is especially easy because an action which conforms to the moral law (or to *a* moral law) may be held to be both righteous and also correct as judged by the standard of the law to which it conforms. But an action may also be correct in the sense of being appropriate to its situation, and may be called right for that reason; such an action need not be related in any way to any moral law. A person who asks "Did I do something wrong?" may want to know whether he has done anything

for which he may be held morally blameworthy; but he may just be wondering whether he has done something inappropriate to his particular purpose at the time—whether, for example, he has pressed the wrong button on a machine. One might suggest that the easiest way of making this distinction is as follows: when "right" is used with a definite article (as in "the right wine to go with duck and green peas") it means approximately "uniquely appropriate to the occasion"; whereas when it is used with an indefinite article (as in "a right action") it means "morally right," "conforming to the moral law." But this will not do. For the use with the indefinite article is almost confined to professional writers and speakers on ethics; when speaking less formally of moral rightness we usually put the word "right" into the predicate, making our sentence ambiguous in form between rightness and appropriateness. Moreover, the expression "the right thing to do" preserves the original ambiguity entire: its meaning must be judged solely from the context. Despite this difficulty, which is partly due to the colourlessness of the word "thing" (for which see Sections 5.211 and 6.4), the use of the definite article is of great importance; for it implies that only one thing can be right in the circumstances. But there is no reason to think that only one action can in most situations conform with the requirements of moral law. Thus Sir David Ross maintains that one should never ask what the right thing to do is, because more than one thing may be right.[84] This is good advice if it means generally that some situations may be met by one action as well as by another, but not if it means (as apparently it does) only that the requirements of morality may be equally well satisfied by various actions. For this is to ignore the most usual sense of the words employed, and to suppose (as Sir David seems to do) that "right" in connection with human behaviour can mean one thing only.

The ambiguity which we are exploring is by no means a clear-cut homonymy. "Rightness" always means conformity to some standard; but this standard may be the unique demand of a situation for a particular action, or the demand of a law for a particular kind of action, or some other canon: as a student may give right answers, or a right line does not deviate from the rule. How far-reaching this ambiguity may be can be seen from the couplet which Professor C. L. Stevenson quotes:

> When there's wine and there's women and song
> Then it's wrong not to do something wrong.[85]

In analysing this somewhat revolting sentiment we may say that the first

[84] *The Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 43.
[85] *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 84.

"wrong" means "inappropriate," and the second "immoral." But we may also say that the meaning of the first "wrong" is indeterminate between these two, and the second is in implied quotation-marks and thus equivalent to "unconventional"; or we might say that the word means the same in both cases, but there is an implied shift in the ethical standards appealed to in either case. I myself find the first interpretation the easiest to take, but it is clearly not the only possible one, nor is it in fact the one Stevenson suggests.

Sir David Ross begins his *Foundations of Ethics* by opposing the notions of rightness and duty and obligation on the one hand to that of goodness on the other. This is misleading. The notion of rightness as conformity with moral principles seems to have nothing to do with that commitment and constraint which we saw to be of the essence of obligation, and nothing to do with the idea of a role which we found characteristic of duty.[36] The three notions are no doubt connected, but very loosely; and the notion of rightness as appropriateness obviously has even less to do with duty and obligation than the notion of rightness as conformity. But in addition to this, the emotive overtones of calling actions right and obligatory are very different.

It has been suggested that the notion of *Recht* prevalent in the thought of northern Europe in the Dark Ages (at the end of which period we find the cognate "right" used much as it now is) implied a law higher than and independent of the political organization, which it was the duty of that organization to administer. This would include rights, as correlative with duties, as well as right actions; and to know right from wrong would be to understand the provisions of this super-political quasi-code.

If this suggestion is correct (and its implications are so complex that it would probably be equally misleading to label it as either correct or incorrect) it would seem that some of its old connotation clings to the word. This would not be strange, since popular conservatism is such that purely historical explanations of institutions are often necessary and valid. Such questions as "Are there natural rights, or are all rights dependent upon political organization?" would then be loaded: the use of the word "rights" would guarantee the correctness of the former answer; one should rather have asked "Is the notion of 'right' a valid one?" The mere existence of the notion of "the rights of man" does not itself prove that the "historical" suggestion which we are considering is correct. But its correctness would provide a kind of explanation—

[36] As we saw in Section 8.24, moral laws do not necessarily impose moral obligations, although they may be taken as doing so.

perhaps not a very good kind—for certain associations that cluster round the words "right," "obligation" and "duty." Both "duty" and "obligation," words of French origin, have a certain legal flavour. In so far as they may be connected with particular social and political institutions they may well be thought to refer to a code and to tasks laid on people from above; whereas the older word "right" refers to the moral and legal standards accepted by the community, adhered to by general consent rather than under compulsion. Thus to say that a person always does what is right will arouse approval for him; but to say that he always does his duty and fulfils his obligations evokes nothing more than a grudging respect—except, of course, from his employers or official superiors. It may therefore he suggested that "It is always right to do one's duty" and "It is always one's duty to do the right" are not tautologies but mean different things.

The "historical" suggestion we have been considering is, though relevant, unnecessary; its falsity would not leave us perplexed. For, on the one side, to say that a person does his duty and fulfils his obligations is, as we said before, to suggest that he does no more—a suggestion unlikely to promote enthusiasm. And on the other side it remains true that obligations are in fact felt as constraining and that duties are generally tasks laid on one from above, while to do right is to act in accordance with the moral law—the code which depends for its legality on its acceptance. To say that a person does right is to say that he acts in accordance with a code which the speaker approves of and accepts as valid, even if he does not approve of the act or its agent for conforming with it on this particular occasion. It is pointless to object that no code has in fact the universal validity which this use of "right" is said to claim; for the truth of the objection would imply only that those who speak of rightness and wrongness make use of an unduly narrow frame of reference; and this might be so.[37]

When "right" is used with a definite article, one moves in an entirely different context of thought. To take a wrong turning is to take a turning which does not lead where we want to go: the right turning is the one that leads to our destination. If more turnings than one lead to our destination, which turning is the right one depends solely on what we happen to want: it might be the one with the best surface, or with the prettiest view; or it might be the shortest one; or it might be just a particular turning which we had in mind and had for no particular reason decided to take. But to call it the right turning is to imply that all others

[37] Yes, dear reader, you *have* seen this argument before: in connection with beauty, in Section 5.5.

are wrong turnings. Again, the right piece for a particular place in a jigsaw puzzle is the one—the only one—that exactly fits and continues the pattern; the right move in chess is the one that wins most quickly or comes nearest to averting defeat. It is implied in each case that only one will do; if more than one will do equally well, neither can properly be said to be *the* right one. Thus, a man may find himself in a situation where it is not possible to do anything good, since he is not in a position to fulfil the wants of those concerned, and where he cannot do right because every possible action would violate some accepted principle. But even in this situation one possible action may be the right thing to do in that it would meet the demands of the situation better than any other—even though in practice the man might be unable to determine what this right thing to do would be.

8.31. Rightness and Goodness

The separate accounts given of rightness and goodness should suffice to make clear the main points in the relationship between the two concepts. But a few words of amplification may be added. In so far as rightness is tantamount to appropriateness, it might seem to be all but equivalent to goodness. The rightness of the right thing for any occasion lay, we said, in its meeting the demands of the particular situation. But do situations really make demands? Surely it is only people who make demands: the "demands" of a situation must ultimately be equivalent to the wants of the persons concerned. By calling a thing the right thing rather than a good thing, we add only the notion of uniqueness. In a general way this may be true enough, although it does some violence to the concept of need (Section 6.1513); but it is not the whole story. For if a thing is called the right thing it is always further characterized as the right thing *for* something, or to do something *with*, except where the situation or purpose for which the thing is required is so obvious that this further characterization can be "understood." Such further characterization may indeed be added with "good" also, but it modifies the import of the word—it is one thing to be a good x, and quite another thing to be a good x for y—and without this addition the meaning of "good" in its epithetical position is usually plain enough. Thus it makes perfectly good sense to say that brandy is a good drink, although it is definitely the wrong drink for a temperance meeting. In attributing rightness (in this sense) to a thing, we are thinking primarily of its relationship to other things; in crediting a thing with goodness, we are thinking rather of the qualities of the thing itself.

Rightness regarded as conformity with moral law is of course very different from goodness as such. Since "right" in this sense is usually found in the predicative position, its sense cannot be limited, as that of "good" typically is, by the word to which it is attached. And although, as we have said, moral goodness (the goodness of a good man) might *be defined in terms of readiness to do right, this is not what* "good" means but rather that wherein goodness in this instance consists.

One further difference between goodness and rightness may be noted. To call a thing or action right is to suggest that some action has been taken, or is to be taken, in respect of it. If what is said to be right is not itself an action, it is usually something which is to be chosen or in some way affected by action. But this does not apply to goodness; though considerations of goodness do indeed affect choice, it is not uncommon to appraise or evaluate a thing without contemplating any action upon it. And this difference arises because rightness is primarily a matter of relations while goodness is not.

The essential differences between rightness and goodness may be summed up thus. First, actions may be called right in virtue of their conformity with moral law, but good only in virtue of their relationship to the agent and patients. Second, rightness is always a matter of relation or situation, whereas goodness is usually ascribed to a thing in virtue of the properties which *make* it such as to stand in a certain relation. Third, "right" is characteristically used with a definite article to designate which of several proposed alternatives is uniquely appropriate, whereas "good" is not so used ("the right thing" may be equated with "the best thing in the circumstances"). This difference arises from the relational character of the one term and the quasi-descriptive nature of the other, *from which also follows the fourth difference: the close association of* "right" with choice and action. It follows also that the right thing is not necessarily a good thing, and *vice versa*.

8.4. "Ought"

We have seen that the question "What is my duty?" and the question "What is right?" do not mean the same and need not have the same answer, and that both are different from "What is the right thing to do?" But all these questions may be asked in the form "What ought I to do?"[38] What I ought to do may be what it is my duty to do, what

[38]In the less important situations one would perhaps be more likely to say "What should I do?" But I do not think that an account of "should" in this usage would differ greatly from one of "ought."

it would be expedient to do, what it would be appropriate or efficient to do, or what I am morally or otherwise obliged to do; in all of these cases it is what it would in some sense be right to do. "Ought" seems then to reflect "right" in the nature and variety of its ambiguities. But it may be possible to say something in a more general way about the use of this grammatically very odd word.

When I say "You ought to have done such and such," what am I doing? Surely I am doing more than merely stating a fact about your behaviour, as if I said "You were talking in your sleep." By telling you what you ought to have done I am certainly trying to interfere in some way with your conduct: you might reasonably reply "Oh, leave me alone, can't you?" It might seem to follow from this that "ought" carried with it something of the force of a command. But this does not necessarily follow. One must not confuse what a statement conveys by itself with the point it derives from the context in which it is used; and it might be that the quasi-imperative force is derived from such a context. It would be quite enough to explain the apparent force of the word to say that statements of the form mentioned are simply statements of fact, either about existing obligations or about what was in fact necessary in order to fulfil some actual purpose of yours or expectation on the part of others—which would depend on the context of the remark and would be easily enough gathered therefrom. But in what circumstances would it be appropriate to make such a statement? There is no point in telling a person what step would have achieved his purpose if he has taken the step and succeeded, or what step is necessary if he seems likely to take that step on his own account; it is equally pointless to remind someone of an obligation he has or has had, unless the obligation has not been or is not likely to be fulfilled. The only likely purpose of such a reminder in the present tense is to get a person to alter his course of action; the only likely aim of one in the past tense is to make a person feel badly, to make him more careful about future obligations, opportunities and the like. These statements, we may then say, are purely factual ones, and derive their imperative or admonitory tinge from the nature of the situations in which alone they are likely to be made. Other factual statements of a more versatile character may derive such a tinge from their context: "I saw you in Max's tavern," for example. And some sentences, indicative in form, are almost always imperative in intention although they are devoid of specifically ethical or axiological vocabulary; for example, "You are standing on my foot" (cf. Section 7.225).

The position adopted in the last paragraph, though of a pleasing simplicity, can perhaps not be maintained. A statement in the form "You

were supposed to do such and such" conveys much the same information as "You ought to have done such and such," and would be used in much the same kind of context; but it does not have quite the same overtones of rebuke. Also, the last paragraph ignores statements in the third person. "Berry ought to see a doctor" cannot be meant to affect Berry's conduct if he is not in the room at the time, but it can hardly be called a mere affirmation of a truth, like "Berry has erysipelas." So perhaps we shall have to say after all that any statement with the word "ought" in it has, *ipso facto*, some of the force of an imperative. But it is not the same as an imperative: for if I tell you to do something I do not thereby imply that it is in any sense right for you to do it, and I can tell you to do something whether I think you ought to do it or not. Where the rightness in question is that of conforming to a law, the "ought" refers to a general principle; but not where the rightness is appropriateness to a situation. In either case the "ought" clearly refers the action to some standard to which it is expected to conform, with the implication that if it fails to conform blame or disappointment will be appropriate. When the statement is itself a general principle, like "One ought always to tell the truth," this affirmation seems neither to state a fact nor to embody a command, but simply to announce or proclaim the principle.

At this point, the reader is advised to refer to Mr. Hare's luminous account of "ought" in *The Language of Morals*. Mr. Hare argues persuasively to the general effect that "One ought never to steal" is almost equivalent to a sort of universal imperative: "No stealing by anyone ever, please!" The more awe-inspiring character of the sentence with "ought" he ascribes solely to the age and prestige of most of these general vetos and injunctions. He also explains, ingeniously, and I think successfully, how "You ought not to have stolen that" can be explained in these terms. I suspect that Mr. Hare is right; for "Stealing is wrong," which we may regard as the appropriate form of a moral law, is not equivalent to "One ought never to steal" but is simply one very good reason for maintaining the latter: "Stealing is foolish" would be another. And "Never steal" is not equivalent to "No stealing by anyone ever, please!" but is as it were a special case of it, so that the exchange—"Never steal."—"Why not?"—"One ought never to steal."—is made by Mr. Hare neither more pointless nor more informative than it seems actually to be.

If one rejects Mr. Hare's account of "ought," I see no alternative to regarding it as an irreducible concept and an indefinable term. Perhaps one such term would add tone to this book.

9 THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE FOREGOING DISCUSSION

9.1. Limitations on the Reference of Conceptual Schemes

9.11. The Limitations of Conceptual Schemes

NOW THAT WE HAVE DESCRIBED the structure and the main components of the conceptual scheme used for evaluation by speakers of the English language, it remains for us to ask whether this scheme is peculiar to this language or whether one like it may be expected to occur in all or some other languages; and whether its validity depends on the presence of certain social or cultural institutions which do not occur in all societies, or whether it provides a useful frame of reference for the discussion of all societies and of occurrences within those societies. Such questions cannot be adequately envisaged or definitively answered without accurate knowledge of what variations in human culture and social arrangements are actually found, and also of what limitations are imposed on these arrangements by whatever is constant in human physiology and psychology. Such knowledge I do not have; and some of these matters are still in dispute among the masters of the relevant disciplines. The following discussion is therefore limited to the principles on which the decision of the problems should rest when adequate information has come to hand.

The problems concerning the scope within which what has here been written is valid are not unlike problems of translation—this book, for example, might be translated without much loss into German, not so well into Chinese, and little if any of it might go into Eskimo. But the problems are not quite the same, for its untranslatability into Eskimo shows only that the speakers of Eskimo do not in fact think and speak in this way, not that it would be inappropriate for them to do so. It is at least partly true that the different conceptual schemes which different languages embody all refer to the same world, about which different things seem worth saying to different groups of people. The question whose insolubility confronts us is precisely, however, in what sense and to what extent the world is the same for all its inhabitants. For if different languages are different ways of talking about the same phenomena it must follow that if a conceptual scheme is valid at all it is valid for everyone.

All languages must classify and abstract, in that they must apply the same word to objects or processes which in fact differ, and are known by the speakers to differ, one from the other. Different languages may use different principles of classification, and some may carry their classification farther than others; but in so far as they refer to the physical world, the facts of which they are for the most part powerless to alter, translation from one tongue to another must be possible after a fashion. If there is a bear eating a salmon, all languages must be capable of conveying this fact, even though the grammatical structures of the languages may be utterly different, and although one language may have no word for bear as opposed to elderly-female-grizzly-bear and another may not be able to distinguish between bears and other large animals except by *ad hoc* description. Any deficiency on this level in a language, such as lack of a word for snow among dwellers in a tropical swamp, may be remedied with as little ado as our own recent lack of a word for penicillin.

When we come to consider the application of language to human institutions, however, we are met by graver problems. For in this field the facts are very largely whatever they are thought to be:[1] for example, the institution of promising exists only because people assume that it exists and act as if they were determined that it should exist (cf. Section 8.211). In such cases, we cannot say that all peoples have the same world to deal with. This is not immediately apparent, because of a superficial analogy which we may now examine. If we ask, "Is the word 'good' like the word 'snow' (which refers to a natural phenomenon which is in a sense the same for everyone) or like the word 'potlatch' (which refers to a social institution not found in many societies)?" it seems at first that the disjunction is unreal. For, as we have suggested, there are many languages with no word for snow because snow is unknown to their speakers, and there are others which have no such word because their speakers have so much snow around, and so many uses for it, that they have words only for what we should consider to be different kinds of snow. Yet the concept of "snow" is a perfectly valid one: if it began to snow in the tropical swamps their natives would soon find a word for it, and if Eskimos went in for crystallography they might well find a use for the generic term or one corresponding more or less closely to it. But the same is true of "potlatch": a potlatch is a potlatch whether the Greeks have a word for it or not. Thus in the case of "good" we may say that the concept is applicable wherever there are

[1] Cf. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, III, § 130: "The Christian resolve to find the world ugly and worthless has made the world ugly and worthless."

needs and desires which may but need not be satisfied, whether or not the fact is recognized and, if recognized, is socially respectable. It would thus seem that we are not justified in opposing terms referring to human institutions to those referring to natural phenomena. It would have been more appropriate to distinguish "snow" from "potlatch" on the ground that the latter (like "Orangemen") refers to a highly specialized type of institution and depends for its utility upon the observation by a small group of people of what seems to everyone else to be a rather odd code of behaviour, whereas the concept of snow, like that of goodness, may occur in the thought and refer to the behaviour of many groups of people of widely differing kinds.

One might thus be led to suppose that so far as the student of language is concerned institutions differ from natural phenomena only occasionally, in the frequency of their occurrence and hence in that of the need for words to describe them. But this would at best be only partly true. In the course of our discussion of "good" we ran across many idioms and nuances which are peculiar to the English language; and we should expect to have found the same in an equally detailed examination of any ethical concept in any language. But in practice one cannot isolate the (as it were) institutionally neutral core of the concept from its idiomatically derived overtones. No actual ethical discussion will be fully intelligible unless allowance is made for these overtones. In so far as ethical treatises can be translated from one language into another, it is because they are formal in their use of language and for this very reason fail to reflect the tone of any live ethical controversy or to convey the actual relevant determinants of any moral action. Whether this formality is to be regarded as a falsification of data or as a clarification and refinement of vulgar discourse, extraordinary pains are then required if the author is not to have his thought moulded by the very idiosyncracies which his formality avoids.

At this point an important distinction must be made. If it be true that the concept of goodness and its related concepts are applicable to a very wide range of phenomena, it does not follow that this conceptual scheme ought to be applied wherever it can be: that it is always the most helpful scheme that we can use. Each language, we may say, is best fitted to the needs of those who use it, and is the best in which to discuss the institutions of its users; if by using it we are unable to answer or even to ask some of the questions which interest us most, this shows only that those were not the right questions to ask. If we ask "What is the religion of these people?" or "How do they dispose of their garbage?" we are automatically imposing upon their society the

categories of our own, which do not necessarily fit it. For the institution which most nearly corresponds to what we should think of as religion may be quite different from any religion we should recognize both in its scope and in its significance—they may not even differentiate between these "religious" practices and others; while to say that they shoot their garbage out of the front door is to say that they are a people of dirty habits just as much as it is to describe their actions—by calling the stuff "garbage" we imply, whether we mean to or not, that it should not be dealt with in this way. By using our own language to describe an alien culture, also, we automatically present that culture in a light which makes it seem familiar and even homelike: "Why," we think, "these people are just like us! They have religion and laws, go to dances, perpetrate financial transactions, till their gardens and make love."[2] But what first strikes the observer may be that only the physical component in these is to some extent the same: that the people's attitude to all that they do is so radically different from anything we know that they and we might belong to different species. The things are to some extent the same; but the relationships of place and time and causality and significance in which they are conceived as standing to each other and to their users may be utterly different, and such differences can only be given full expression by using a language of a fundamentally different structure.

The relevance of the concept of goodness, then, is limited by that of the concepts of need and desire and satisfaction; and these depend upon views of the nature of man as an individual and his relation to his surroundings which, though widespread, are probably not universal. The observer armed with this conceptual scheme may always be able to find a use for it, but the use may sometimes cause confusion and misunderstanding.

9.12. *The Limitations of English Ethical Concepts*

9.121. *Evaluation*

Neither the word "good" nor any analogous word would be of use to any society which did not have the custom of evaluating. It is hard

[2]Of course, such descriptions make alien institutions seem eccentric just because they make them seem so familiar. By naming some of their practices "religion" we arouse the expectation that they will resemble our own religious practices. When this expectation is not fulfilled the reader concludes that their religion is queer. But the proper conclusion would be that the word "religion" is not a perfect fit.

to imagine how any people could live without performing any evaluation at all, but this function might conceivably be performed in a stable and homogeneous society by a system of classifications: instead of saying that some apples are good and others not, some come up to standard and others not, we might simply have two words, one (say, "yapple") for what we should call a good, sweet, unblemished eating apple, and another (say, "napple") for other apples. Instead, then, of asking whether a given apple is fit to eat or not, we should simply have to ask, "Is this thing a yapple or a napple?"—and similarly with good or bad eggs or cars or other objects of interest and use. But observe the restrictions of this method. First, it presupposes that the uses for apples are limited and known (presumably one would have a different word for apples suited to each different purpose). Names would, *ex hypothesi*, be applied to different kinds of apples on the basis of their primary and secondary qualities, and it would be (so far as language went) a merely contingent fact that each one of these kinds met a different kind of need or desire. The language would have no means of catering to new needs, or of classifying new kinds of object. The outside observer might note that the distinction between a yapple and a napple was the same in principle as that between a yegg and a negg, but this would (again *ex hypothesi*) not occur to the users of the language. One would, then, surely be justified in saying that the thought of these people stopped short at a low level of generality, and was thus inflexible and necessarily restricted in its applicability to unfamiliar situations. On the other hand, such a scheme of classification would make for great clarity within the limited fields of its application. But since the users of "good" can achieve this same clarity by simple means ("a good eating apple," "a good cooking apple," "a good apple for chutney," "a good keeper"), the clarity of "yapple" and "napple" might be too dearly bought. One might of course argue that the importance of the concept "good" shows that our civilization is too much given to evaluation, in that it is perpetually worrying over the merits of things, actions and people, instead of just taking them as they come. But this is not the fault of the concepts we use so much as of our excessive use of them: the possession of a tool does not necessitate its continual use, nor does its over-use cast doubt on its utility.

The concept of goodness as we have explained it would seem to be a useful and flexible tool of evaluation, doing well what we must suppose everyone needs to do in some way or other. Such a concept might find use even within a "closed" society whose standards, customs and institutions, whether or not they did in fact change, were not thought of as liable to alteration; and it might equally be used by outsiders in discussion of such a society. In such a society the bases for disagreement would not be different from those outlined in our Section **6.2** and elsewhere, but simply more limited. There would be no disagreement as to who the "persons concerned" were, and these would in most cases be equivalent to the group as a whole. We should expect to find the disjunction between the individual and society felt only dimly if at all, and desires to a very great extent determined by social conditioning, so that for the most part needs would be more or less equivalent to desires. Whether or not the concept of goodness were here applicable would depend largely upon the attitude to the "bad" or to the occasional nonconformer. If this attitude were one of resentment or repugnance, or of wishing or even considering that the "bad" might be different, one would be justified in speaking of a concept analogous to that of goodness; but one would perhaps not be so justified if the attitude were one of surprise, incomprehension, acquiescence as in a portent or complete lack of interest. In this latter case the "good" and the "bad" would not be brought together on the same scale at all, and there could be evaluation only in terms of the "good" and the "better"; and even this might be avoided.

9.122. *Moral Law*

Within the conceptual scheme we have outlined, the notions of right and wrong and the notions of "the good man" and "moral goodness" which depend thereon require the concept of a moral law. But even if one supposes that there be a moral law that holds good for all men equally, it remains true that the concept need not be current in every society. The notion of a moral law is, as we have seen, complex; one way of defining it is as a system of principles governing behaviour which are not reducible to religious commandments or to taboos or to legal enactments or to precepts of etiquette. The notion of a moral law cannot then be said to occur among people who are not given to making such distinctions among the principles by which they live or in accordance with which they evaluate behaviour, or to be strictly applicable to any society whose principles resist such classification. But it is also true that the notion of a moral law would be very different from what we are used to if this distinction were regarded as amounting to complete lack of relation. For the principles of the moral law are not, for us, merely *different from* those of positive law: they are principles of a higher order. Appeal may be made to the moral law either to override or to

justify the civil law, whereas principles of etiquette are held to be of inferior status just because no moral support is claimed for them. Often enough, indeed, there is legitimate doubt as to what is the precise status of a given principle: is it merely a matter of good manners, or is it a matter of right and wrong? Is this action wrong, or merely illegal? But, in spite of this vagueness, there is a recognizable custom of referring actions to some such principles as this "moral law"; and this custom might or might not be found in a given society. The concepts of rightness, wrongness and moral goodness which depend for their meaning upon this custom might therefore not be applicable within some societies. But if one were to say of such a society that its members didn't know right from wrong, one might mean any of three things: that they did not approve or condemn actions at all, or did so on no system; that the system which they used was in no sense comparable to our "moral law" (but, for example, combined the function of a code of etiquette with that of a religious code); or that the distinctions they observed were not the same as those observed by the reporter. Of these, the last is irrelevant unless the reporter can show that his principles have universal applicability, and the first is not likely to be true in many cases; but the second might be true, and would then refer to a conceptual scheme differing in a very important way from the one which we have outlined.

9.123. *Idioms and Nuances*

Even if "good" has synonyms in other languages, it may be held that these are not likely to be exact equivalents: the tone of a word is largely determined by the situations in which it is customarily used, and these may be very different in different languages even if no definition could capture the difference. For example, it has been suggested (perhaps not quite seriously) that the Chinese word usually translated as "good" would be better represented by "not too bad." It would probably be found that although the terms in a language outside the "Western" tradition (such as the Japanese *yoi*—"good"—and *warui*—"bad"), may share the wide range of applicability of the English concepts, they always carry implicit references to the other institutions of their users. Such differences, even if philosophers by hard thinking succeed in eliminating them from formal discussion, must at least affect greatly the starting point from which the problems are approached. Thus English and American children are trained with the aid of the command "Be good," "Be a good boy." It would therefore naturally occur to a writer of English that goodness implied satisfying the demands of some

person:[3] the whole of the present book might then be put down to the persistence of childhood memories. But the corresponding terms in other languages, even languages closely related to English, happen not to be so much used in the training of children: I am informed that in such situations the French are likely to say "Sois sage" or "Sois raisonnable" and the Germans "Sei artig," while the Hopi Indians tell their infants to act like Hopi. Similarly, the Greek *orthotēs* is almost always correctly translated by "rightness," and shares much of the varied applicability of that term; but it is free from association with moral law, and hence has a quite different flavour from its English analogue.

9.124. *Conclusion*

The foregoing sections might seem to imply that translation is impossible, that concepts cannot be separated from the words of particular languages, and that philosophers can speak only to their own countrymen. Perhaps this ought to be true, but obviously it is not, since English philosophers are reared on Kant, Plato and Descartes. Admittedly Chinese philosophy abounds in concepts whose meaning is clear and precise for their users but can scarcely be conveyed in English even by the most painstaking paraphrase;[4] but the moral terms of the European languages with which we are more nearly concerned may be successfully treated as equivalents. The intelligent reader seems to pick up the use of Greek ethical terms, for example, without difficulty, and soon comes to make allowance for the slight differences of usage he finds. This difference is, after all, not much greater than that between the uses of the term "democracy" by two contemporary Englishmen, and one of the most elementary techniques of discussion is to observe and allow for such slight differences. We have already suggested (Section 4.21) that philosophers from Lucretius on have, while using Latin or their native tongues, in fact deployed their terminology as though they were thinking in Greek, and that this has not caused anyone any great difficulty or given rise to any serious confusion of thought.

Finally, we must guard against confusing the available resources of a language with what is most commonly said in that language, and

[3]Cf. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (Modern Library ed.), p. 2: "Everybody knows that good children are those who make as little trouble as possible for their elders. . . . Generally speaking, good people have been those who did what they were told to do. . . ." The evident truth of the first part of this statement obscures the glaring untruth of the second part.

[4]Cf. Joseph Needham, "Human Laws and Laws of Nature in China and the West," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII (1951), 3 ff., 194 ff.

a fortiori against taking a selected few idioms as providing the key to the *ethos* of a language.[5] A language so complex as English is not confined to embodying a restricted handful of thought-patterns. It is not true that thought in such a language merely amplifies what was already implicit in the structure of the language itself, as can most readily be seen by simply examining the history of what different languages have in fact been used to express, and seeing how these languages have in fact been modified by thinkers in order to give more adequate expression to their thoughts. The resources of a language are not defined by its structure, but depend on what can in fact be communicated with its aid. To direct statement we must add the indefinite resources of metaphor and simile, with whatever may be achieved by rhythmical speech, tone of voice, supplementary gesture or other less readily classifiable means of suggestion. The person who first described the symptoms of influenza by saying that he felt all-overish was probably understood.

Since our account has not been a mere natural history of English terminology (though at times it seemed to be on the point of degenerating into just that), but has presented a simplified and tolerably coherent and comprehensive scheme, and since in practice people do not seem to be confined so narrowly as one might expect within the bounds of the linguistic habits in which they were brought up, there is nothing but faulty execution to keep it from being of interest to those whose native language is other than English. The Iglulik and the Alorese, no doubt, would find nothing in it, but this would apply equally to any work of philosophy as we should understand the term. Even if its potential audience is limited to the speakers of Indo-European languages, we may console ourselves with the thought that, after all, that is quite a lot of people.

9.2. *Relative and Absolute Standards*

In Section **9.1** it appeared that, while the actual contexts within which "good" and analogous words in other languages are employed may vary from society to society, just as they vary from person to person,

[5]This is the besetting sin of American "metalinguistics": e.g., Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Collected Papers in Metalinguistics*, ed. Trager and Smith (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1952); D. D. Lee, "A Primitive System of Values," *Philosophy of Science*, VII (1940), 355–78, "Being and Value in a Primitive Culture," *Journal of Philosophy*, XLVI (1949), 401–15, and especially "Linear and Non-linear Codifications of Reality," *Psychosomatic Medicine*, XII (1950), 89–97.

the concept of goodness itself as herein explained is related only to such institutions as one may suppose to be very widely diffused: it does not carry with it any reference to any specific culture or any specialized institutions. This fact suggests the last question with which this book will be concerned: what degree of agreement may be attained on the goodness of things? This question falls into two parts. First: granted that within different cultures or societies or groups different things will be thought good, is it possible to decide (or even meaningfully to ask) whether any of these cultures or societies or groups are themselves better than others? Second: are there any standards whose validity does not depend upon the cultural context within which they are employed? Or does one's certainty that some things are good depend always upon the fact that there is only one context in which judgement on these things is in fact customarily passed? We do not pretend that our discussion has enabled us to decide these questions; but it is to be hoped that it has left us in a position to see what these questions actually involve and what considerations are relevant to their solution.

9.21. *The Argument from Disagreement*

Many people are led to conclude that "All values are relative" simply by the observation that different people in fact call different things good. But, even if this conclusion should be true, the mere fact of disagreement would not help to establish it. In all other cases we accept without question that if you and I disagree upon the truth of some statement one of us is right and the other wrong, whether or not we can at the moment establish which. Even if the whole population of mediaeval Europe believed that the earth's surface was flat, that does not make the proposition true; and one cannot get round its untruth by saying "It was true for them," because either this statement means merely that they believed it to be true or it means that they had no way of discovering that it was false. The latter alternative is useless, because it is still the case that if their techniques of discovery had been better they would in time have found that this belief was false and abandoned it. If on the other hand one were to use the word "true" as if it meant "believed by the majority of people at a given place and time," one would have to find a new word to do duty for "true" as we now use it. It is equally true (though in other respects the cases are different) that "This is a good custom" differs in meaning from "This is universally believed to be a good custom."

The fact of disagreement about goodness shows only that questions

about goodness cannot always be decided without difficulty. And certainly our analysis of the different factors which go to make up a judgement of goodness has shown that often enough the decision is indeed difficult if it is possible at all. It may be added that although, when I say that a custom is good and you say it is not, our statements are contradictory if one considers their formal meaning, on consideration of their effective meaning they may be found not to be contradictory at all. One may need only to make clear the precise respect in which goodness is attributed in each case to discover this agreement. It then remains to decide whose opinions about the relevance of interested parties and the relative weight of various needs and desires are the better grounded; and there might or might not be means of reaching such a decision (cf. Section **6.22**). As premature objectivism is the result of restricted vision, premature relativism is the fruit of intellectual slovenliness.

9.22. *Comparing Cultures*

It is often said, although perhaps less often now than twenty years ago, that judgements of the excellence of any institution can be made only from the standpoint of some particular culture; and that in consequence no culture can be said to be better than any other, so that it is impossible to evaluate different cultures against each other. The premise in this argument is not, however, true in the sense required. What is true is that every person is trained and brought up in some beliefs by the society to which he belongs. *It is not true that this early training* need determine completely what he will think in later life, no matter what his later experiences may be, nor is it true that all cultures are alike in the rigidity of the standards of judgement which they inculcate. But even if this premise were true, the desired conclusion would not follow unless one were to grant a further premise which those who use this argument do not usually state: that concepts formed within a particular culture can never be validly applied outside that culture. But the extent of applicability of a given concept must be established separately in each case; and this is precisely what Section **9.1** attempted for the concept of goodness. Yet, if the argument as a whole must be rejected since neither of its premises is true, the conclusion might still be true for other reasons; for those who use the argument may have begun with these true opinions and simply failed to find the correct justification for them. This would be especially likely to happen in the case of the working ethnologist, for whom (one supposes) insight must

precede analysis if he is not to falsify his data. Is it true, then, that "This culture is better than that culture" is a mere series of sounds devoid of meaning? Or, if it has meaning, is it always false?

In terms of our analysis, to say that one culture is better than another is to say that it is more apt to satisfy the wants of the persons concerned. The statement is not meaningless, although its meaning must be indeterminate unless there is agreement on who the "persons concerned" are, and which of their wants are to be taken into consideration. But in this case only one group of people can be said to be primarily concerned: those whose culture is being judged. If one were to say that any other group were concerned, specification of the manner and ground of their concern would inevitably show that their stake in the matter was less vital than that of the group first considered. In fact, I do not know that this judgement of relevance has ever been denied, though as will be seen one may inadvertently speak as though it were false. If this be granted, it remains to consider what their wants may be; and this is a matter on which there may be more disagreement. The most secure basis of comparison, and one to which the most determined "relativist" can hardly object, is the needs and desires recognized by the group itself. Upon no other interpretation could one be sure that the needs and desires really were those of the persons concerned, and not just attributed to them without warrant by outsiders. From this standpoint a bad culture would be one which tended to generate needs which it could not satisfy, and desires which it made impossible of fulfilment. The Alorese as described by Dr. Du Bois are just such a group, for their institutions are such that the majority of the inhabitants are necessarily frustrated in their predominant desires.[6] Even if in fact Dr. Du Bois is laying it on too thick, it remains true that if the culture were as described it would be a bad one as judged from this purely internal standpoint. Some observers have alleged that American society is defective in the same way.[7]

Complaints against calling some cultures better than others are, however, in effect though not in form complaints against the selection of inappropriate needs and desires—against the theoretical imposition upon a society of standards to which its members do not subscribe. This imposition may take several forms, some of which are plainly unjustifiable though others may deserve more consideration.

The naïve person is likely to judge other cultures than his own by

[6]Cora Du Bois, *The People of Alor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944).

[7]Cf. A. K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954).

one of two standards: Would I like to live there? and Is it what I'm used to? The latter in effect takes the "persons concerned" as being the society to which the person judging belongs, the former as that person himself—although the question "Is it what I'm used to?" often appears in a disguise which equates the persons concerned with "all right-thinking people" or even "all rational beings," and the man who asks whether he would like to live in a place may well attribute his own desires to the people whom he is considering as possible companions. In neither case are the needs and desires used as criteria properly to be attributed to anyone who could fairly be said to be concerned: there is a confusion between evaluation and the mere statement of a personal preference (Section 6.229). But the naïve person, in making such judgements, is not likely to claim explicitly that his own tastes and the customs of his own people are proper criteria for assessing the institutions of others; he is far more likely simply to take it for granted that all reasonable people like what he likes and do as he does.

The most ardent proponents of "cultural relativism" usually seem to suppose that the two standards mentioned in the last paragraph are identical; that the standard of what one is used to is the only standard by which cultures are ever judged; and that in consequence comparison between cultures always decides in favour of the culture of the person judging. All these are no doubt true of the most naïve and least educated, as may be seen from the reactions of armies sent overseas. But they are all completely untrue of educated and imaginative persons in our "Western" civilization, and have been so at least since the fifth century B.C.; and it is only such people as these who can in any case be reached by our arguments or by those of the relativists themselves. Within that civilization it is a frequent practice to use realistic or fanciful descriptions of other cultures to show up by contrast the defects of one's own, and to praise exotic cultures for maintaining standards and following ideals neglected or unknown at home. One need only mention in this connection the prestige of the "Wisdom of the East" and the cult of the "noble savage,"[8] and perhaps also the liking of some primitive peoples for the "blessings of civilization." The assumption of the relativist appears to be that either there is no such thing as ethical thinking or if there is it is completely deductive in form: that it consists in the acceptance of norms of behaviour and universal imperatives for which no reason can be given, and from which rightness and wrongness in

[8]Cf. the opening words of Professor John Collier's *Indians of the Americas* (New York: Mentor Books, 1948): "They had what the world has lost. They have it now. What the world has lost, the world must have again, lest it die."

behaviour must simply be deduced. This is far from the truth, as we have seen; much of our ethical thinking is inductive and critical, and may lend more support to an exotic institution than to a domestic one.

"Cultural relativism" is no doubt a useful safeguard against the unthinking parochialism of the naïve, and it takes into account also something we have so far ignored: that whatever his theoretical sympathies may be, anyone who is actually thrust into the midst of an alien community is likely to be acutely unhappy until he gets used to it. But, like all objections to criticism, it fails to take into account the actual nature of the process to which it objects. No more than the art critic does the critic of cultures say merely "This is good and that is bad," or "I like this and don't like that." The form of critical statements is more like "This tries to do this and that, and does not aim to do that or this; it succeeds in this respect and fails in that respect, and in these respects it is more successful than these over here but less successful than those over there."

The last paragraph suggested a parallel between the criticism of works of art and the evaluation of cultures. But this introduces a type of evaluation we have not yet considered, that which operates by the application of criteria explicitly formulated, as opposed to the criteria with which we have thus far been concerned: agreeableness and familiarity on the one hand, and those drawn from the culture examined on the other. This more articulate criticism may be of two kinds. First there is a sort of aesthetic criticism in terms of some standard used more or less arbitrarily: a need (e.g., for "consistency" or "integrity," for which see Section 9.2215) attributed quite gratuitously to all societies whatever. Such criticism is certainly possible and is quite unobjectionable so long as it remains hypothetical in character: so long, that is, as one says merely "*If* this standard be applied, then this society is superior to that." But it becomes inexcusable if the critic forgets what he is doing and allows himself to suppose that this postulated need is the only one whose consideration is important, or in some cases even that it is a genuine need of the persons concerned at all.[9] One can, on this understanding, set up not one but many standards in terms of which cultures may be compared with each other; and though none of these

[9]Cf. Dr. Reo F. Fortune, *Sorcerers of Dobu* (London: Routledge, 1932), p. 290: "Such action tends to preserve native customs for scientific study, and should be encouraged from this view point." If one assumes that Dr. Fortune is wholly serious, whether one finds this offensive or not depends on whether one takes it as implying that a practice is more properly the concern of the scientist than of the people engaged in it, or simply that *if* one takes this view point it follows that the action should be encouraged.

may be of absolute or exclusive validity they are not homogeneous nor all equally invalid. It is the very fact that within "our society"—that is, the "Western" civilization in which ideas derived from many different traditions are preserved in a revered literature and have been modified but not destroyed by scientific and industrial revolutions—many different standards are accepted, or partly accepted, or approved, or lived by though unacknowledged, or paid lip-service, or at least put forward for consideration, that makes such cross-evaluation of cultures tempting, interesting and possible. It is true that such comparison must be ethnocentric to the limited extent that one cannot compare cultures in terms of standards of which one has never heard and which one has never imagined, even if they are used by some of the cultures which one attempts to evaluate. But it is by no means true that our society imposes on us an unique and inescapable set of standards which are the only ones we can apply. It is only in a society where there is no norm but tacit conformity to a way of life accepted as given that no intelligent comparison of cultures is possible; and I am not sure that such a society is more than an anthropological "ideal limit" from which all existing societies deviate to a greater or less degree.

Not all conscious application of standards need be the hypothetical use of arbitrarily selected criteria which we have just considered. There may be a more earnest attempt to determine the needs common to all men which certain societies may fail to recognize, although this failure may lead to unhappiness or even the eventual downfall of the society as a whole. For example, a society may be so organized as to require for its functioning certain practices which expose the population to internal parasites or to recurrent plagues; and it may be argued with plausibility, if not with evident truth, that this leads to weakness and misery which frustrate even the felt wants of the society. With less plausibility one may simply point to pleasures which are unknown in certain societies because the desires which they gratify are not acknowledged. This would amount to a statement that some cultures offer a less rich life or less opportunities for self-fulfilment than others. But the merits of this argument are, for reasons to be given in Sections 9.2211 and 9.22143, dubious.

Finally there is the missionary approach. It may be said that it is the will of God that certain institutions—such as monogamy—should be universally observed, and that any society which does not observe them is to that extent bad. Assuming that there is a God and that He does in fact approve of some institutions and disapprove of others, and that one can determine without risk of error what those institutions are, the

argument still does not hold unless God is taken to be the Persons concerned. This raises certain difficulties, which we encountered before in discussing God's goodness (cf. Sections 6.1632, 8.24). For it is hard to see how He could be held to be concerned unless He took an active interest in human affairs. But whether this interest were confined to imposing sanctions on infringements of divine law, or whether "God made us for Himself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Him," the true reason for obedience would be the attainment of one's own happiness or the avoidance of one's own discomfort. So here again we have ultimately as criterion the satisfaction of certain needs of the society itself, whether or not those needs are recognized.

The following sections will deal with certain of these standard needs in terms of which comparisons between cultures may be made. It will be seen that such comparison may in itself be perfectly objective, although the judgement whereby one need is taken as standard may not.

9.221. *Some Standards of Comparison*

It is not necessarily true that if cultures are to be compared they must be compared in terms of some standard. It might be possible simply to compare two cultures with each other, using each as the standard by which the other is tested rather than starting with a preconceived basis for evaluation. But the implications of such an improvised process are obscure. Does one who judges thus judge by constantly changing standards, or do new standards of judgement emerge in the process of evaluation? Or does one in fact simply use the criterion already mentioned, "Where would I like to live?" We had better content ourselves with saying that processes of evaluation have depths which we have not plumbed, and pass on to a review of certain standards which have been consciously employed to this end.

It is not the comparison itself between cultures which is difficult, but the decision which of many possible comparisons to make. If one compares two cultures with each other, one is concerned with two groups of people whose interests differ. Who then are the persons concerned, and which wants are *the* wants? To take as standard the interests of one of the two groups *en bloc* is to prejudge the issue; to judge each by its own standards and ideals is in many ways the best method, but may be thought unduly cautious. One may therefore wish to select certain standards which can be held to be applicable to all cultures alike and in terms of which objective evaluation is possible. But one must remember that there is little prospect of obtaining an exhaustive list of fundamental

human needs which might provide a secure basis for judgement; and in default of this all our comparisons must take the hypothetical form: if this be the standard of judgement, then superiority lies here.

9.2211. *Knowledge and Inclusiveness*

In so far as one culture simply ignores or fails to take into account considerations which some other culture recognizes and takes into account, the former may reasonably be said to be inferior to the latter. One cannot rule out in advance the possibility that some differences between cultures are due to simple ignorance on one side or the other. On the same basis one may find it hard to maintain an attitude of impartiality between cultures which reflect upon and criticize their ideals and standards, and those which do not; between those cultures which study other cultures in the hope of learning from them, and those which are self-satisfied; between those which embrace many systems of values, and those which are committed to one. The former in each of these pairs, one is apt to think, is more inclusive and superior to the other: it has attained a degree of intelligent behaviour which the other has not yet attained for want of mental elasticity.[10] But this conclusion is not necessary. One might equally well say that if our culture has made life capable of manipulation with the aid of variable standards, the means-end distinction, mathematical space and time, the concept of progress to an indeterminate goal, and the like, it has done this simply by draining life of value: that it has made us live in a world which we can control only because it lacks significance, and that for most of us life is shapeless and drab. Our many-sidedness might be thought of as simply lack of a point of view, our study of other cultures a desperate attempt (which no healthy society need make) to find out what we are missing. This difference of attitude corresponds to a difference as to the resources and nature of the human personality, and might theoretically be settled by psychological enquiry: can there be an unlimitedly critical society, or do all men need a secure framework of belief? At present the consensus among social psychologists and anthropologists seems to be that a stable social structure and system of standards make for mental health (see Section 9.22142) and happiness; that all cultures are and must be

[10]Cf. E. A. Hoebel, *The Law of Primitive Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 142: "The Cheyennes . . . looked upon and treated their culture and the law within it as a medium to be manipulated and not as an absolute verity before which they had to prostrate themselves. They were a genuinely socially mature people—except in a few glaringly weak spots."

exclusive, rejecting certain possibilities of development and style; and that restrictions and inhibitions as such are not necessarily evil.

9.2212. *Revealed Standards*

Certain systems of behaviour or evaluation, such as the "Noachic Law," are put forward as having supernatural authority. Since these are not supported by argument one cannot argue against them directly, although one can sometimes point out features in them which imply a particular cultural background and thus shed doubt on their claim to hold good for all cultures indifferently. Moreover, they are usually accompanied by a "revealed" anthropology, to the validity of which empirical data are more or less relevant: for example, the doctrine of original sin may be supported or challenged by an appeal to history, even though no historical basis is claimed for it. Such a standard may achieve a certain degree of cultural detachment; but, since one cannot very well accept a revealed code which is at variance with all one's other standards, there is in practice a tendency to interpret it as supporting one's own social system and afterwards in a crusading spirit to impose one's own *mores* on anyone within reach, under the delusion that they form part of the revealed code.[11] Such standards are then not only of dubious authenticity and (as we saw in Section 9.22) of doubtful relevance, but are in practice liable to be applied in a confused manner.

9.2213. *Self-Preservation*

It has been said that "Personality organizations, which at last analysis are psychologically comparable with the greatest cultures or idea systems, have as their first law of being their essential self-preservation."[12] The standard of self-preservation may be interpreted in more ways than one. Actual stability is one plausible criterion in this category, since a social system which appears only briefly as a transitional phase can scarcely be taken seriously as a possible way of life; a culture must at least prove itself workable over more than one generation if we are to allow it the name at all. On the other hand, inability to withstand external political

[11]An account has appeared in the *Reader's Digest* of an attempt by a missionary from America (where dogs are pets) to prevent the eating of a dog in a society where dogs are food, apparently in the belief that American diet has divine approval. The author of the article shared the missionary's point of view.

[12]E. Sapir, "Cultural Anthropology and Psychiatry," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XXVII (1932), 238.

or economic or cultural pressures proves inferiority in one respect only: in many respects the Wedgwood vase may be superior to the thrown brick that shatters it. Still the ability to resist such pressures might be the index of a certain vigour. A third facet of self-preservation is adaptation to a specific environment. It should be possible to say whether or not a certain group of Eskimos have solved the problems of surviving in their environment better than a certain Melanesian tribe have solved that of living in theirs. This could certainly be taken as an index of superiority in one respect. Conversely, one might emphasize adaptability in this regard: one culture might be so highly specialized as to be unable to respond to a sudden change in physical environment;[13] another might provide for a high degree of adaptability in its individual members and as a whole. But we have here an ambiguity. By "adaptability" of a culture we might mean that its institutions were flexible enough to remain basically unchanged when faced with a sudden change in environment; or we might mean that its institutions were such that in such a change the people might change their way of living and so survive, as it were, the death of their culture.[14] The "race" survives the death of its culture, but not the death of all its individuals; and it cannot be taken for granted that preservation in all circumstances of a cultural principle is in itself desirable. The only legitimate demand for adaptability in this field might then be that a culture should not unfit its members for a change of environment, not that the culture itself should survive transplantation. Even this is premature. For a people might deliberately face extinction rather than change their way of living.[15] And I do not know how we could condemn this decision, except by mistaking biological description for Nature's Law of Progress and making the Preservation of the Species a supreme moral duty. But perhaps it may be legitimate, other things

[13]Cf. A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), p. 377, for an account of the Southampton Island Eskimos who, having lost the craft of boat-building and come to rely exclusively on a herd of reindeer for food, starved when the reindeer died out.

[14]This ambiguity seems to be present in the following observation by M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems* (Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 21: "The visible test of how well a given body of rights, duties, and sentiments is being maintained and is working is to be found in the level of security and success with which the basic needs of existence are satisfied and the basic social relations sustained." This seems to me to embody two tests, not one. For an example of how flexibility makes it possible for a ritual to survive where rigidity leads to its extinction, see M. E. Opler, "Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture," *American Journal of Sociology*, LI (1945–6), 205–6.

[15]Mr. R. St. Barbe Baker reports that there is a tribe on the southern fringe of the Sahara whose lands are disappearing under the encroaching sand and who are therefore refraining from bringing up children (*The Listener*, LI, April 8, 1954, 603).

being equal, to prefer societies which are not such that their members will probably have to make this choice; although it may be harder than one would expect to tell what societies answer to this description.[16]

9.2214. *Human Nature*

One must suppose that there is *some* invariant element in human nature, since human babies usually grow up to be human adults but chimpanzees never do; but whether man as such has any inescapable needs other than those for a certain amount of food and drink and warmth is an open question. Although one may suspect, for example, that all men need some symbolic and ritual apparatus for ordering experience, and some sexual gratification or substitute therefor, such suspicions are virtually impossible to confirm: cultures already known to be viable show such diversity that it is hard to say what limits there may be to what is workable. The universal needs of mankind, then, though theoretically capable of providing a criterion whose satisfactoriness could not be doubted, are not in practice a useful basis for judgement. In any case, since all societies exist and are composed of people who are alive, it is obvious that in a sense all societies are catering for whatever universal needs there may be. But a more liberal interpretation of "needs" may provide some workable criteria.

9.22141. *Physical Health*

The need for health and for whatever is necessary to sustain strength must be supposed common to all men, and hence part of "human nature"; and failure to satisfy this need must to some extent condemn a society. But this criterion is not easy to apply, since every society depends for its very existence on the fact that each of its members will one day die, and it is always open to one to say that a given society depends on periodic decimations by disease or famine to keep its numbers within workable limits. Indeed, no less a body than the Roman Catholic Church has bestowed a tacit approval on these expedients by officially forbidding birth control. Still, preference for health over disease and for vigour over semi-starvation is presumably widespread, so that one may suggest that insanitary practices reflect on those who

[16]Cf. D. Lerner and D. Riesman, "Self and Society: Reflections on Some Turks in Transition," *Explorations 5* (Toronto, June 1955), 69: "Someone steeped in the ethnographic literature of the Zuni or the Navaho might have been startled to see the Indians as GIs in World War II—the former carrying prayer-sticks yet shooting and sometimes even drinking in the all-American way."