VIRTUE AND REASON

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1. Callicles observes that Socrates is always talking about cobblers and fullers and cooks and doctors, as if this had something to do with disputes in ethics (*Gorgias* 491a). In most of Plato's early dialogues Socrates is represented as trying to find analogies between various arts, crafts and skills, and moral virtues such as courage and justice. An art, in the wide archaic sense, is a rational power or capacity, acquired by education, training and practice, for the achievement of certain goods and the avoidance of certain evils. Proficiency in music, poetry and painting, knowledge of medicine, the ability to understand and speak a language, are all arts. In some Platonic dialogues, though not all, Socrates denies that poetry and music are arts, on the ground that their source is divine inspiration, not reason. In the *Protagoras* and *Meno* he argues against as well as for the thesis that the virtues are arts: why are there no recognized experts on virtue, if it is a teachable skill or set of skills? But on the whole he seems to favour the opinion that virtue is, like art, a branch of knowledge. The *Republic*, and even Aristotle's ethical writings, suggest modification rather than abandonment of this idea. St. Augustine says the ancients agreed in defining virtue as *ars bene recteque vivendi* (*De Civ. Dei* IV, xxi).

I shall reject most of Aristotle's ways of distinguishing virtue from art. The right account of the matter seems to me to have been adumbrated in Plato's *Republic*.

2. Aristotle says in one place (1105b 2) that knowledge has little or no weight as a condition of virtue, whereas the arts just are kinds of knowledge. Presumably he means there are honest fools in the world, and brave ignoramuses; in this way

virtue can exist without knowledge. Socrates would reply that an honest man may indeed be foolish or unaccomplished in some respects: he may be unable to ride a horse or maladroit in the composition of epigrams. But if the so-called honest fool is ignorant about the reasons for not appropriating what is another's, or if he is a conformist, unreflectively following convention because that appears least uncomfortable or disadvantageous to himself, then he has only a simulacrum of honesty. As for the brave ignoramus: the disputants in the *Gorgias* agree (491bc) that skill in cobbling or cookery, though a kind of knowledge, has no connexion with courage. Courage is a specialized knowledge. The idea of the brave ignoramus is self-contradictory if this person is deemed to be ignorant specifically of the hazards in the face of which his allegedly brave deeds are enacted, and of the reasons why the hazards should be dared. In the *Phaedo* (69b) Socrates repeats that only in company with wisdom do we attain real courage or temperance or justice. Mere respectability, the decent conformism of law-abiding citizens, is a façade that will collapse under pressure of temptation; because its possessor will not have the knowledge and judgment to do what is right no matter what the circumstances.

Aristotle concedes eventually that "it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral virtue" (1144b 30); and he tries to distinguish art from virtue in terms of a distinction between two kinds of knowledge, productive and practical. The distinction rests on the difference between making and acting or doing (1140a 16). Art is knowledge of how to make or manufacture something. The proper realization of the artist's knowledge is the useful or pleasing article he produces, rather than what he does as a means to production. The carpenter in making a table must exercise his skill with tools on pieces of wood, but what makes carpentry an art is that its end is some product distinct from the carpenter's labours. Acting or behaving on the other hand is self-contained. It has no proper results, consequences or product distinct from itself. The realization of the knowledge possessed by the good man is not a manufactured article, but simply good deeds. Virtue is practical knowledge, knowledge of how to behave well.

The distinction is clear, but it does not correspond exactly with the distinction between art and virtue. Some arts are practical, not productive; and some virtues are productive. There are many arts that result in no product or manufactured goods apart from the agent's artistic feats themselves. Dancing, for example: the dancer makes nothing, he simply moves in a certain way. It is the act of dancing itself that pleases and is worthwhile. Similarly, what is produced by someone exercising musical or linguistic ability is simply a musical or linguistic performance. As the author of the *Magna Moralia* says (1197a 10), "Beyond playing the harp there is no other end, but just this is the end, the activity and the doing". Here the distinction between producing and acting disappears. On the other hand, the exercise of virtue is in certain ways productive, though not of manufactured articles. A normal product of virtuous behaviour is reinforcement of the state of character manifested in the behaviour. By repeatedly acting justly the just agent perfects his virtue. If action springing from virtuous dispositions had no tendency to confirm them, the phenomenon of moral education and growth would be a mystery. Perhaps the claim that virtue is not productive should be interpreted as saying that virtuous acts produce nothing external to the good of their author. Increment of virtue is an improvement of the soul, and in that way not an external good. But it is not the only good intended by virtuous behaviour. Most acts of virtue are essentially productive of benefits to persons other than their virtuous author. Honesty, veractiy, generosity, all the so-called "other regarding" virtues, have as their immediate end the production of advantages to society generally rather than to their possessor alone. It seems, therefore, that the difference between art and virtue cannot be explained in terms of the distinction between productive and non-productive knowledge.

3. Knowing how to achieve certain goods and avoid certain evils may be part or a precondition of virtue; but is it the whole? In the *Protagoras* Socrates argues that the virtues are knowledge of goods to be sought and evils to be shunned, and that this knowledge excludes the possibility of doing evil. If I know that a course of action will lead to good rather than evil and the alternatives to evil rather than good, it is impossible that I

should choose any course of action other than that which leads preponderantly to good. Socrates' claim is not refuted simply by noting cases of conflict between duty and pleasure; where someone knows he should stop drinking, for example, but the pleasure makes him go on. Socrates does not acknowledge a contrast between moral good and hedonic good, or the possibility of conflict between what a man ought to do and what is in his interest. If a man ought to stop drinking it is because this is in his interest. Continued drinking will cloud his mind and upset his digestion, work and temper. If he does go on drinking for the sake of the pleasure, this can only be because he has miscalculated what his real interest is. The pleasure is not seen in correct perspective. It presents itself to the fancy here and now, and looms large. At the moment of choice the man is persuaded that present pleasure is worth more overall than escape from future distress. If he saw things clearly and realized he would do better to stop drinking, then according to Socrates he certainly would stop. The claim would be less plausible in the case of virtues like honesty, where there often does seem to be a conflict between the agent's duty and his interest. The hedonism of the *Protagoras* might entail deleting "other-regarding" dispositions from the catalogue of virtues, if it cannot be shown that one's interests overlap or coincide with those of others. Socrates does not discuss this question; but he does think that every virtuous act is an exercise of reason, and that reason's command of the passions is absolute.

He admits however that virtuous action is not determined by reason alone. He thinks men act in ways that reason judges better only because by nature they desire good for themselves and hate evil.

> No man voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil. To prefer evil to good is not in human nature; and when a man is compelled to choose one of two evils no one will choose the greater when he may have the less. (358cd).

If anyone fails to avoid the greater evil, the only possible explanation is that he lacks the ability; that is to say, the necessary knowledge. In the *Gorgias* Socrates argues (466d–468e) that the wicked do what seems good to them, but not

what they really desire. Like all men, they really desire true good; but they are ignorant of what it consists in and of how it is got. They form mistaken ideas of it and fritter away their lives chasing things that cannot bring satisfaction. The assumption that all men desire good explains why Socrates thinks it contradictory to suppose that someone might reach a complete understanding of what is best, yet not strive to attain it. For it is clearly impossible that someone should want not to have something that is within his grasp *and for which he has an unqualified desire*. The Socratic doctrine is therefore less rationalistic than it appears. This is particularly evident in the *Meno* (77–78), where we are told that the desire to achieve good and avoid evil is the same in all men, so that no man exceeds another in this, but only in the power of attainment. So virtue may be defined without reference to desire, which is presupposed. Virtue is simply the power of achieving good and avoiding evil, the knowledge how to satisfy that desire. But since virtue never exists except in combination with desire, it is not a mere potentiality that one might exercise or not arbitrarily. Here is an analogy. Suppose two men want more than anything to become musicians. One has proper training and is able to satisfy his ambition; he acquires the knowledge needed to do what he wants. But the other has no proper training and remains ignorant. Perhaps his desire to make music leads him to bang away hopefully on a piano, but he has no idea of the right techniques and the sounds he makes are ugly and inharmonious. He does not taste the happiness experienced by the good musician, and is forever experimenting with different noises in a vain attempt to reach his goal. What distinguishes the good musician from the bad is simply knowledge, that is, the power of making good music. Both men desire to be music-makers, but only one of them knows exactly what is involved and how to do it.

Yet surely things are more complex than Socrates pretends. Maybe we are determined by nature to seek ultimate and unqualified goods and avoid ultimate and unqualified evils. But it is doubtful whether we are determined by nature to prefer acknowledged greater goods to lessser, or acknowledged lesser evils to greater, when the goods and evils in question are not ultimate and unqualified. As reason judges, well or badly, so we

tend to act. In most cases of acratic behaviour there is some deficiency in the agent's understanding of the nature or consequences of what he does. Complete understanding of the ends of virtue comes only with long experience of virtuous living. But there are cases where an agent does realize clearly that his chosen course of action is not the best possible. The man who drinks more than is good for him may know quite well that he will regret his intemperance next day. The indolent pedestrian who does not bother to secure a loose bootlace needs no telling that his negligence exposes him to the risk of a fall. In such cases it is not the agent's understanding but his desire that is deficient. The incontinent drinker wants, half-heartedly, to do what he knows would be better, namely to stop after consuming a seemly portion; but he wants also what he knows is worse, to continue indulging his craving for bibulous delights. Neither of these desires is unqualified, since satisfaction of either involves frustration of the other. The man's truly unqualified desire is for something which, in the circumstances, is impossible: that to continue drinking should be the better thing to do.

If a course of action were good without qualification, attractive from every point of view, and pursuit of it did not involve renunciation of desirable alternatives, then indeed it would be inconceivable that anyone aware of the facts should fail to take that course of action. But a course that is better in particular circumstances is not thereby good or desirable without qualification. If a course of action were known to lead to disaster, and had no aspect that might commend it, then indeed it would be inconceivable that anyone should be moved to favour it. The toper would cease drinking at once if he learnt the rest of the wine were poisoned; and the procrastinating ambler, if his life depended on it, would not neglect to fasten his boots. But common crapulence, and the danger of tripping on Balmer Huff, are not the most fearful things in the world. A course of action that is worse, in particular circumstances, is not thereby bad without qualification. If someone desires, albeit not wholeheartedly, to do something less than the best, it is possible he should allow that desire to move him rather than his competing inclination to follow the judgment of reason. Incontinent behaviour is unreasonable but not unintelligible. As Aristotle says (*Pol.* 1254b 4), reason governs the passions

with a rule not despotic but constitutional and royal, like that of a prince over free subjects.

I think it is possible even that a man should be convinced of the superior value of the virtuous life, yet fail to pursue it because he thinks it too hard. He might say: let me settle for a second-rate life, in which decent behaviour predominates but debauchery is interspersed. This is reprehensible (though less wicked than setting one's heart on debauchery without limit), for all hope of becoming virtuous has been given up. Probably the man's understanding of virtue's worth, and his estimate of its feasibility, are inaccurate. But he does think the virtuous life more precious, while he despairs of practising it.

4. In the *Republic* Socrates admits that reason is not omnipotent over the passions, and that virtue cannot be inculcated through philosophical training alone. Each part of the soul has its own function, and virtue is the condition where each part exercises its function as it should. Reason's function and inclination is twofold: to seek knowledge, and to govern the other faculties. The former function is purely intellectual when knowledge is sought for its own sake, but the latter function is not. Virtue and vice are acquired by good and evil practices (444e), but not intellectual activities alone. Moral virtue is the disposition of reason to use knowledge in ruling and directing the passions and powers for the good of the whole human person, in the way that the wise navigator directs the crew of his ship and the wise prince his subjects. Now effective government necessarily implies docility in the subjects governed. If reason fails to govern effectively the passions will become vigorous and unmanageable, absorbing more than their share of the soul's limited endowment of energy, and reason will be weakened and subjugated. If one seeks only to gratify the flesh or achieve fame and prestige, reason is deprived of the strength to function as it should. It is reduced to a power of calculating how to serve the passions.

In most men reason is not, as it should be, the dominant part of the soul. Socrates says that in every society, young people with the natural gifts necessary to achieve virtue are reared in habits of vice. The philosophic nature

> is like a plant which, having proper nurture, must

> necessarily grow and mature into all virtue, but, if sown and planted in an alien soil, becomes the most noxious of all weeds, unless he be preserved by some divine power. (492a).

And actual societies are "alien soil", "the greatest of all sophists", educating their members to value false things. Their leaders are panders and flatterers who cater to the worse desires of the people and know nothing of the true art of politics. Hardly any young man, whatever private training he may have received, is able forever to stand firm against a multitude. In the end, he will

> assent to the notions of good and evil which the public in general have, will practise what they practise, and be such as they are. (492e).

Virtue flourishes only when external conditions facilitate it. To live well in a corrupt society is impossible, unless one "be preserved by some divine power".

Here we see the extent of Plato's departure from his earlier intellectualism. The Socrates of the *Gorgias* claimed to be the only Athenian who knew the art of politics. Yet he had no theory of the state, he propounded no social policies, he took no account of social and economic forces as determinants of character. He believed that dialectic was sufficient to lead men to goodness. But Plato's mature moral philosophy is linked with his social and educational theories. He acknowledges that elenctic disputation will cut no ice with the wicked. Philosophy is powerless when character has been "warped and alienated" under the influence of a warped society. Indeed, in such conditions philosophy itself degenerates into "controversy, of which the end is opinion and strife" (499a). Dialectical training is likely to harm those who are not morally prepared for it (537e–539d). In the *Laws* Plato repeats that "fair reasonings" may be present in the soul and yet lead to evil rather than good (689b), and that fatal consequences ensue when advanced education is given to people who have been brought up badly (819a). There is little prospect of reformation for individuals without the reformation of society. Morals is inseparable from politics. But the converse is also true. Society could be reformed only by wise and virtuous men, who knew how to achieve felicity for the whole community.

5. It is interesting to compare Plato's account of the relation between reason, passion and virtue with Hume's. There is more agreement between the two than most commentators allege. Like Plato, Hume thinks reason has a dual function: to seek truth for its own sake, and to direct the passions "by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery" (*Enquiry* 246). Reason is the power of thinking (reflecting, pondering, calculating, judging). It is essentially cogitative and contemplative, not orectic or appetitive; it has no "original influence" and cannot give rise to or prevent volition, or dispute the preference with any passion (*Treatise* 415). A man will not do what reason judges necessary to some end unless he desires that end; and he might not desire it. He might, as an intellectual exercise, conceive a strategy for conquering a fortress or seducing the Queen, without having any intention of trying to execute these wild plans. Hume says action cannot be contrary or conformable to reason. It is not contrary to reason to prefer an acknowledged lesser good to a greater (*T.* 416); for preference involves favour, and to judge that one thing is more conducive to an end than another is not thereby to favour it. One will favour it only if one has that end at heart. It is not contrary to reason, though it may be contrary to interest and inclination, to prefer the destruction of the world to the scratching of one's finger. Hume admits, however, that there is a vulgar sense in which it is contrary to reason to do what frustrates one's own ultimate purposes.

He supplements his austere conception of reason with a liberal conception of passion. Besides violent, sudden, disturbing passions, which may move us to folly, there are calm passions, settled principles of action, concerned with long-term interests and purposes (*T.* 417–8). These include benevolence and love of life (*T.* 417), love of truth (*T.* 448–54), and the sentiment "which distinguishes moral good and evil, and which embraces the one and rejects the other" (*E.* 245). We speak "not strictly" of the combat between reason and passion, which is really a combat between passions, calm and violent. Hume suggests that the tranquillity of calm passions misleads us to take them for operations of reason (*T.* 417). This is surely wrong: we never use the term "reason" to designate passion, however tranquil, without understanding. Hume's more plausible

suggestion (*T.* 583) is that "reason" in vulgar parlance means "a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflexion". Reason, in this vulgar sense, is calm passion directed by reason in the strict sense. Though Hume insists on the distinction between the calm passions and reason he implies a close association between them. Perhaps he would admit the *Republic*'s claim (580d) that there is a passion appertaining specially to reason, namely love of truth; a calm passion to which Hume devotes a whole chapter in the *Treatise* (II, iii, x). He speaks as though reason operates independently of any passion when it seeks truth for its own sake: "Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel" (*T.* 183). But reason would not function at all if we did not will that it should. Thinking, like any other intentional activity, requires a motive, a desire to possess the end to which the activity is ordered. There would be no such thing as even idle speculation if there were no such thing as even idle curiosity. When reason is exercised in pursuit of truth for its own sake the motivating passion must be curiosity. When reasoning is practical—when truth is sought for its utility in guiding action—the ultimate moving passion must be "the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, considered merely as such" (*T.* 417). The proper object of reason is to find ways of satisfying the desires for truth and good. When Hume says reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions, it is these passions he has in mind. For the objects of physical desires like hunger, thirst and sexual appetite, which non-rational animals are equipped to satisfy, coincide with the objects of reason only contingently. Reason, moved by the calm passions, recommends indulging physical desire only so far as is necessary for the good of the total person. Virtue and happiness require domination of the violent by the calm passions. Strength of mind is "the prevalence of the calm passions over the violent" (*T.* 418). People who lack this quality are unable to resist the temptation of present ease or pleasure, and fail to achieve happiness. The virtuous man "keeps still in view those distant pursuits, by which he, at once, ensures his happiness and his honour" (*E.* 196).

Of course there might be calm *malicious* passions, that would subdue any spontaneous altruistic tendencies and use reason to

bring about great evils. But Hume would agree with Plato that then reason would not be working as it should. Every immorality is derived from some defect or unsoundness of the passions (*T.* 488): the wicked are deficient in benevolent sentiments. But immorality must also involve defective understanding since, Hume believes, virtue serves the agent's own interest, pleasure and happiness, vice the opposites, and the wicked do not know this. Virtue depends as much on sound thought as on sound passions.

> Human nature being compos'd of two principal parts, which are requisite in all its actions, the affections and understanding; 'tis certain, that the blind motions of the former, without the direction of the latter, incapacitate men for society . . . . Both these causes are intermixed in our judgment of morals . . . (but) reflexions on the tendencies of actions have by far the greatest influence, and determine all the great lines of our duty. (*Treatise* 493 590).

Sometimes like the Socrates of the *Protagoras*, Hume says that when reflection is done and judgment made, the passions will not fail to wax or wane accordingly (*T.* 416); and means only this, it seems, by the claim that there cannot be conflict between reason and passion. More often, like the Socrates of the *Republic*, he admits that "our passions do not readily follow the determination of our judgment" (*e.g.*, *T.* 583): and then he must explain the non-contrariety of reason and passion in terms of the "inert" nature of the former. Nothing Hume says, properly interpreted, is incompatible with Plato's doctrine that virtue is a disposition of reason.

But then the question arises once more, how virtue differs from art.

6. Maritain (*Art and Scholasticism*), von Wright (*The Varieties of Goodness*) and others think that virtue, in contrast with art, is not governed by fixed rules or principles, and has no determinate form of exercise. In the case of a skill like chess or playing the violin there is a specific activity which is the exercise of the skill. But "there is no art of 'couraging', in which the brave man excels" (von Wright, p. 139). Courage may be shown in leaping from a trench and charging the enemy, and

in telling an irascible person that there are fallacies in his reasoning. Leaving the trench and running to the enemy is not as such a brave act: one might have been moved by fear to surrender on dishonourable terms. The moral quality of behaviour is conditioned by the circumstances in which it takes place and the state of mind of the agent. The requirements of virtue cannot be specified, except generally, without reference to these factors. So there is no finite set of verbally formulable precepts by memorizing and following which one could be sure of acting rightly, no matter what the circumstances. This helps explain why, in Plato's early dialogues, the neat formulae offered as definitions of the virtues do not survive the tests of dialectic. Maxims of conventional morality like "Tell the truth and pay your debts" give sound guidance only within a limited range of circumstances.

The arts have more specific ends, and therefore more specific forms of exercise, than the virtues. But the requirements of art too often cannot be laid down except in general terms. The manner of using a plane or tuning a violin may be circumscribed by clear norms, but the carpenter or musician must know also what to do in unfavourable conditions, when intractable materials do not respond to ordinary techniques with the plane, or when heat and humidity interfere with the tuning of the violin. In art as in morals particular cases "do not fall under any art or precept but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion" (Aristotle, 1104a 7). No handbook or training manual can give foolproof instructions on how to become a successful musician, actor or dancer. The composition of poetry or sculpture is not achieved by blind obedience to rules or recipes. The artist, like the just man, is a sort of creator.

7. Virtue is a rational disposition the existence of which involves complementary dispositions of docility in the orectic faculties. Art, however, seems not without qualification to be a disposition, since it can exist without being exercised. Of course art must be exercised at some time. Every artist has abilities he does not use, but most of them are specific abilities involved in some art, not arts properly speaking. Anyone who knows a language has the capacity to ridicule his friends by recounting

their mishaps or misdeeds. *This* ability may never be used. But linguistic competence could not be ascribed to someone who lived and died without understanding an uttered or written word. One can have an art without exercising it continuously, but not without exercising it at all. Since art is not acquired unintentionally, every master of an art must once have willed to practise it. Nevertheless, when circumstances change he may do so no longer, and his grasp of the art be unimpaired.

Is it then the case that the artist, unlike the good man, need not be disposed to act well when the circumstances call for it? Aristotle says (1140b 25) "In art he who errs willingly is preferable, but . . . in the virtues he is the reverse". In the *Hippias Minor* Socrates collects examples (373c *ff.*) to show that someone who acts badly on purpose is better than one who acts badly without meaning or wanting to. A man who purposely runs slowly is a better runner than one who runs slowly because he cannot run fast; it is better to sing out of tune voluntarily than to do so despite oneself; and so on. Hippias accepts these examples, but not the conclusion that in moral matters too it is better to do evil willingly. Does this bear out Aristotle's claim?

Certainly the artist whose work is flawed only because he chooses that it shall be is, *ceteris paribus*, one whose art is more perfect than that of him whose work is flawed despite his efforts to avoid it. But strictly there is no such thing as willing error. The expert cyclist who wobbles on purpose, the dancer whose movements are studiedly droll or grotesque, are contriving the appearance of clumsiness by means of great skill. Their artistry is like the virtue of a man who relinquishes to another the opportunity for brave or generous action. He may seem to have done nothing worthy of credit, or even to have acted dishonourably; yet maybe in choosing the less agreeable course he has exercised a higher virtue. At least it is clear that there is no virtue exercise of which is called for in all circumstances. A generous man may on occasion forbear to show generosity, without fault and without ceasing to have the virtue. Deliberate action *contrary* to virtue does weaken or destroy it; but in the same way, the artist who repeatedly flaws his product—the dancer who does nothing but stagger and stumble, the pianist who botches every performance—risks losing the ability to get good results when he wants to. Possession

of art (as distinct from particular abilities comprised therein) involves repugnance for slack ways of doing things. The artist is as disinclined to do sloppy work when good work is called for as the virtuous man is to act viciously. Art, like virtue, involves complementary dispositions of the faculties subject to reason. The artist must practise self-discipline, patience, industry, even in a way truthfulness, humility and simplicity, in order to achieve the end of his art. Like the good man, he not only can act well: he does act well, when the circumstances call for it.

8. But there is an ambiguity here. The artist acts well, in that he conforms to the principles of his art and achieves the good that is its end. What is artistically good may, however, be bad from other points of view.

In the first book of the *Republic* Socrates argues that every art exists for the sake of, and may be defined in terms of, its own proper good or end, something distinguishable from whatever motive individual artists may have for practising the art. Medicine is the art of healing the sick. If a physician heals the sick in order to earn a living, this does not show that medicine is the art of taking care of oneself. Thrasymachus tries to specify the art of ruling in terms of the interest of the ruler. If this were so, there would be no way of distinguishing ruling from other arts that are practised with the motive of furthering the interest of the agent who possesses them. Whether or not Thrasymachus is right about the motives of those in positions of power, he is wrong about the characterization of their art. The object of any artist, as such, is simply to exercise his skill. He must of course intend the result he achieves. If someone heals the sick by accident or mistake, that is not an application of medical science; and if an army of baboons playing randomly with typewriters happen to turn out all the works of Shakespeare, that is not a display of poetic creativity. But there is no ulterior motive proper to art. In order to classify something as a work of art, we need not know what extrinsic advantage its author may or may not have hoped to obtain by making it so.

Unfortunately Socrates spoils his argument by claiming that the end of art is the perfecting or improvement or benefiting of the subject to which it is applied. The proper good of medicine is health; and because normally people regard health as a

good and its restoration as a benefit, Socrates assumes that the end of medicine is the benefiting of the sick. But the physician as such is no more concerned with benefiting his patients than with benefiting himself. His job is healing the sick, and remains that whether or not in the particular circumstances restoration of health is a blessing. It may not be. The healthy soldier is the one who must fight. The healthy pig is the one that gets eaten. When the deaf are provided with hearing aids and can listen to the nonsense that is talked, they are not always grateful. Further, doctors have, by virtue of their training, the power to injure and kill. Cunning methods of homicide are known to and usable by skilled physicians exclusively. Certainly we do not say of the physician who poisons his patient that he is *doctoring* him; the doctor as such is a healer. But medical knowledge can be misused, and a misuse of knowledge is a use of knowledge. Other examples make it obvious that Socrates is marching up a blind alley. Some arts intend directly the exploitation of their subject-matter. The wood-cutter does not labour for the advantage of the trees. The angler's skill is not good for the fish he is good at catching. The carpenter aims at producing useful or beautiful pieces of furniture, not at pleasing the wood; nothing is good or bad for inanimate material. In general, the end of an art, though somehow good, may be bad from the point of view, if any, of the subject, if any, to which the art is applied; and may benefit only the artist, or a third party. The art of ruling cannot be defined in Thrasymachus's way, as the art of feathering one's own nest. But neither can it be defined in Socrates' way, as the art of feathering other people's nests. Ruling consists in ordering, governing and controlling a community, but for all Socrates has yet shown, achievement of this may *as it happens* serve only the interest of the ruler. The weakness of Thrasymachus' position is his assumption that the interest of the ruler cannot be satisfied unless the interests of the ruled are frustrated; but Socrates ignores this, and none of his ploys in the first book of the *Republic* bears upon it. Only later, when he introduces the analogy between city and soul, do we begin to be persuaded that the proper end of ruling is the good of the community ruled.

Can virtue too, like art, be put to evil purposes? It might seem not, for by comparison with art, virtue is concerned with

relatively unqualified and universal objects of desire and aversion. The arts make life easier and more pleasant: they are necessary means to achieving certain goods and avoiding certain evils. But these are not ultimate goods and evils, and not all men are concerned with them. One can live well and reach the felicity proper to human nature without achieving all those goods and avoiding all those evils. There are however some goods that every man needs and wants to achieve, and evils he needs and wants to escape; for which virtue is necessary. The whole problem what the ultimate ends of life are, and whether every disposition conventionally designated virtuous really is a necessary means to those ends, is infinitely perplexing. But it does seem that virtue is more necessary than art for attaining happiness. The art of language is for communication between persons; but communication as such is not specially valuable, rather communication *of truth*, which requires veracity. Since virtue is concerned with more ultimate ends, it makes relatively unqualified demands on us. Aristotle says

> The products of the arts have their goodness in themselves, so that it is enough that they should have a certain character, but if the acts that are in accordance with the virtues have themselves a certain character it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent also . . . must choose the acts . . . for their own sakes. (1105a 27–33).

By this criterion, a man does not act virtuously if he has an ulterior motive. The virtuous agent must intend by his act simply to achieve the end of the relevant virtue. Drinking moderately is an exercise of temperance only if the motive is simply to retain a clear head and an untroubled stomach. If one did it to impress one's associates, and would not have done it otherwise, virtue would not have been exercised even though, on that occasion, one enjoyed its proper reward.

But frequently virtue *is* practised for an ulterior motive. A virtuous act may be motivated by the wish to practise a virtue to which the virtue manifested in the act is subordinate. If, in certain company, one drinks moderately so as to avoid being tempted into fornication, two virtues are being exercised; so long, of course, as one's attachment to the ends of temperance

and chastity is habitual. Temperate behaviour motivated only by the desire to appear temperate is not virtuous, not because it is blameworthy to wish to seem a gentleman, but because the disposition to act temperately would tend to weaken when the agent knew his behaviour was not being observed. Some of the lower virtues may actually be acquired and practised for evil motives. One may accustom oneself to rising early, the better to plunder and exploit one's fellow-citizens. One may show diligence in the persecution of innocent non-conformity. Industry and fortitude perfect a man in ways that may make him just a more effective villain.

Even though virtue be practised for the sake of its proper ends alone, those ends are not absolutely unqualified and universal goods. An act of almsgiving may be meant only to help the recipient financially, and yet lead to his moral downfall. The administration of justice may have unfortunate consequences, as Hume points out.

> Judges take from a poor man to give to a rich; they bestow on the dissolute the labour of the industrious; and put into the hands of the vicious the means of harming both themselves and others. (*Treatise* 579).

The virtues, like the arts, are not ordered essentially to human happiness, and by themselves are not sufficient to produce it.

We might be inclined to say that an act should not be described as an exercise of any virtue if that act is incompatible with fidelity to some other virtue, or with achievement of the highest goods. But since ordinary usage permits speaking of patient forgers and brave cat-burglars, it is simpler to conclude that virtue is not a seamless unity. Each virtue is concerned with particular goods and evils; and a man may be equipped to deal as he should with one such set of goods and evils without being equipped to deal as he should with others, the subject of different virtues.

Sometimes, however, when we speak of virtue, we have in mind not particular virtues but simply the disposition to act rightly, which is prudence or practical wisdom, and which includes all the particular virtues. Wisdom involves knowing the relative values of all human goods and evils and being ready to cope with them. Thus its end is an absolutely unqualified and universal good. It may in certain circumstances be

reasonable not to practise an art. It may in certain circumstances be reasonable not to practise a virtue. We are not bound to practise nominated virtues indiscriminately. Reason prescribes assisting those in need, not necessarily everyone who requests assistance. But though the arts and virtues may reasonably be laid aside on occasion, wisdom cannot be, because it is the perfection of reason. Every art and every virtue is subordinate to it. The wise man uses art and virtue for the best. He need not be master of every art. He need not know how to swim, win battles or make a lot of money. But he knows the part recreation should play in a balanced life. He knows in what circumstances battles are worth fighting. He knows how money should and should not be used. He may lack dexterity or virtuosity, but he has knowledge of a more excellent sort than these. Wisdom is admittedly, like the arts and virtues, only an instrument, which in unpropitious circumstances may fail of its end. But among instruments it is supreme.

9. Similarly with the wise prince. As reason governs the life of the just man, Plato's statesman governs the life of the city. He is not an agent of the popular will, not a hired expert in the business of organizing the state for good or evil purposes chosen at the whim of others. He is one who knows what the best society would be like and how to achieve it and maintain it in existence. His art is on a different level from all others. They are subordinate to the art of ruling, in that the ruler prescribes and regulates their exercise. The philosopher-king decides where navigators shall guide their ships. He decides how many farms there shall be and what they shall produce, when and where the soldiers shall go to war, and so on. His is the art of planning for the whole state.

It has been claimed that no art can be subordinate to another in this way. Speaking of Plato's analogy between the ruler and the navigator of a ship, Renford Bambrough says:

> Although navigators may have their own preferences for particular destinations, these preferences have no special status, and are neither better nor worse than those of their masters. (Laslett, *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, 1956, p. 105).

If the navigators' preferences are no *worse* than those of their masters, it follows that the masters' preferences have no special status either. Bambrough's implication is that *no one* is qualified to decide where ships should be sent. But this is absurd. Merchants know where ships should be sent for trading purposes. Generals know where ships should be sent for military purposes. In this way the work of navigators is subsordinated to the commercial and military arts. Why should not these be subordinated in turn, as Plato says, to a higher art? The statesman's function is to decide, *inter alia*, with whom the state will trade and with whom it will go to war. These decisions cannot be left to traders and generals, who know about making money and winning battles but not about what is best for the state as as a whole. Politics is thus the supreme art in a hierarchy.

Bambrough's reason for saying that no art can prescribe how other arts are to be used is what he calls

> the inescapable logical reason that anything which can properly be called a *techne* will be by its very nature instrumental, and the decision about the purpose for which it is to be used will lie outside its own scope. (*P.* 112).

But this is ambiguous. Art is instrumental in that it is essentially a means to some end. Art is knowledge of how to act so as to achieve good. Even the Platonic art of politics is instrumental in this way: it is knowledge of how to ensure the happiness of society. It is no business of the statesman to consider whether a happy society would serve any further purpose. He applies his wisdom to pursuing this end, and he has no further function. But though all art is instrumental, it is not the case that the *ends* of art are always instrumental, that is, means to further ends. Certainly the end of an art like navigation is only an instrumental good. We want ships to be guided efficiently in order that we may achieve other things. But the end of the art of ruling is, Plato would say, an ultimate end. The happy society is sought for its own sake. The art of ruling, like every art, is only a means to a given end; but that end, unlike the ends of other arts, is not an instrument but the supreme and architectonic good.

VIRTUE AND REASON

Benjamin Gibbs and David Pole

II—David Pole

Virtue is love of the good, which may sound a large sentiment to start with. Granted it stands in need of refinement. Yet a philosophical account doing justice to the notion as I understand it would need to embrace a sizeable slice of moral philosophy. In the present circumstances, then, I hardly know how to proceed. It seems impossible to avoid saying either too little or too much.

Plato and Aristotle drawing on the stock of available concepts as they were bound to, found it natural to relate virtue to *technē*, some sort of craft or expertise. The point would appear to be one on which moral philosophers can still differ; they likewise differ on their reading of the ancients. The opening of *Republic*, according to Collingwood, represents an heroic refusal to conceive justice as a craft.[1] Mr. Gibbs seems to see almost the opposite; it represents for him a substantial endorsement of the analogy, which, if I read him rightly, he broadly endorses in terms. True, he enters reservations from time to time. But his argument ends at least by recommending for favourable notice the Platonic notion of a supreme art, the 'royal art', of ruling; which, too, he seems to see as the supreme virtue.

I must regretfully waive questions of exegesis, about which anyway I can make no great claim to scholarly authority. Even as to the substantial issue, since a certain analogy undoubtedly exists—I mean, between virtue and *technē*—any ruling may be ultimately verbal. But the analogy to me seems much less striking than it apparently does to Mr. Gibbs. I shall begin by attempting, though briefly, to assess its merits.

I

First let me stress one distinction. We must distinguish between a craft and its exercise; and so too with virtue. An expert who

has never practised his expertise, Mr. Gibbs argues, may be reckoned a dubious instance of the breed. At least he must at some time have learned it; which seems to be true. Yet, as he implicitly acknowledges, it makes sense to speak, say, of a good pianist who has not played for years; and so, too, *mutatis mutandis* of a doctor, mechanic and so on. Of course he may prove to be a bit rusty at first; that is another thing, not a question of the nature of the concept. Or a good linguist—another of Mr. Gibbs's examples—may not have spoken Danish, say, for a decade yet falling into conversation with a Dane get it back in a few moments. There would be an obvious absurdity in the notion of a good man, a virtuous man, who had never practised virtue since he left college.

Our distinction, however, requires careful handling; the point is more than a simple antithesis. It is possible, to repeat, to possess skill without practising it. As to virtue, its possession and exercise are related more inwardly and essentially. Roughly one may say this, that with *technē* its exercise takes precedence; with virtue, its possession. But let me try to set out the differences more adequately.

Skill is external, virtue inward; it is something belonging pre-eminently to the soul; which, incidentally, makes me doubtful whether Mr. Gibbs is in spirit quite as true a Platonist as he seems to think himself. A craftsman who loves his craft, he says—and surely rightly—is likely to be a better craftsman on that account. Yet the reverse remains possible; he may practise it and practice it well, yet simply for gain. To the evaluation of his work, of his craftsmanship *qua* craftsmanship good or bad, consideration of his motives are logically irrelevant. Mr. Gibbs notices but ought he not to make more of the key distinction drawn in the *Nicomachean Ethics*? Aristotle distinguishes the products of *technē*, things that are valued on their own account, for their intrinsic merits, and requiring only to satisfy certain descriptions; which differ, therefore, both from virtue and its practice.

> 'Where acts are [merely] in accordance with the requirements of virtue it will not follow that they are done justly or done with self-control. The agents while acting must also be in a given condition; first he requires

> knowledge, next must choose to act as he does; and these actions must be chosen for their own sakes.' (1105a 25-30).

But, says Mr. Gibbs, the practice of virtue, the mere act as one might call it, may be done for ulterior motives; we still act for the sake of something else. True, Kant's honest shopkeeper who adheres scrupulously to the practice of honesty but only because 'honesty is the best policy' is not therefore to be called an honest man. We may grant that true charity and again temperance—Mr. Gibbs's example—are practised on account of further ends, of benefits to others or to oneself. Now how Aristotle would have answered of course we can only guess. But, it seems to me, where charity is a virtue it is indeed practised not for the act's sake but for its consequences. But the relevant point only shifts. Those themselves must be judged to be good (and at least reasonably if not necessarily rightly)—not here morally but naturally good. And *the good* is still valued for its own sake. The consequences which charity aims at are broadly the relief of need or suffering: and that must be sought for itself. Next *actions* thus motivated are distinguished as morally good. To the evaluation of craftsmanship *qua* craftsmanship, as we have already seen, the motive of a craftsman is irrelevant.

Mr. Gibbs, very early, notices the possibility of honest fools and brave ignoramuses. But he seems to me to dismiss them too briefly. At least I am led to reflect on that procession of good, noble simpletons who troop with the blessing of heaven through the pages of eighteenth century English literature; of Parson Adams's and Uncle Toby's, simple honest men, the noblest work of God; whose goodness is all goodness of heart. Are all these mere flowers—not certainly flowers of evil, but something like it in reverse, something all too, too good, namely sentimentality? What Jane Austen by contrast celebrates pre-eminently —leaving aside the one slightly uncertain shot in the portrayal of her namesake, Jane Bennett—is always thoughtful or intelligent love. But surely Samuel Johnson at least was no sentimentalist. And it is Johnson who tells us of Swift:

> 'He was frugal by inclination, but liberal by principle . . . his benefactions were never graced by tenderness or civility; he relieved without pity and assisted without

> kindness; so that those who were fed by him could hardly love him.'[2]

But if so, one might answer that all that follows is this: Swift proves, searchingly examined, to be an imperfect practitioner of the *technē* of virtue. Indeed, one might equally invoke Aristotle on the other side; Aristotle's concern with performance at least fits well enough with the present line of thought. For, of course, he puts great stress on the need not only to do the right thing but also on the manner of doing it. Yet the point must still stand, I think. It concerns these essential values, good will and goodness of heart; which appear not only in a range of overt acts but generally and everywhere. They appear pre-eminently, we should note, in involuntary responses; and further in responses to remote and even fictional events, or again in ordinary talk, no less than in where some practical immediate thing is to be done. One may anticipate the rhetorical question, 'What is virtue apart from its exercise?' If it is a question expecting the answer 'Nothing' we need not give the answer expected. These two things, virtue and *technē*, are closely linked, not identical. Our feelings, our attitudes, our whole outlook, as well as our actual conduct, define both our virtues and vices. We love people as people, and sometimes hate them, not only for what they do but what they are. I can conceive of no life that I would call human which such attitudes, such relationships, make no significant part of.

One may contrast a practice of a *technē*, an expertise, which is precisely voluntary. True, a man may be, and in the depths of his being, an engineer, say, or a horseman, loving fine skill and genuine craftsmanship; which he, too, like the virtuous man, shows in involuntary responses. But there, as I have already argued, our main concern is different. If he botches the job, well, that's that—certainly if he repeatedly botches it. Much involuntary distress over the product will not even tend to mitigate our judgement as to his lack of skill.

Uncle Toby might be called sentimental and not wholly without plausibility; though Parson Adams less plausibly, I think. Yet the issue is not to be settled out of hand. Sterne and Fielding both know exactly what they are about. They are deliberately exalting unworldliness, even simplicity, precisely the lack of such skill as belongs for Mr. Gibbs, I think, to the

essence of virtue. Now this sort of outlook, or something like it, is certainly not confined to the English Augustans or Pre-Romantics. It has been widely embraced and deeply felt. Rousseau preceded and Tolstoy followed. Can one write it off as a mere aberration? But if not, how to explain it? Perhaps the right place to look for an answer is in our customary ambiguous regard for what would be called worldly wisdom; even, taking it more broadly, for practical wisdom. We rightly and necessarily value it—and yet, it seems, mock ourselves for doing so. We could hardly manage our affairs without expert practitioners; good businessmen or lawyers, politicians and diplomats, skilful chairmen of committees and the like. The point, after all, is a simple one; those are indeed virtues, but bought all too often at a cost. Behind the species of Augustan sentiment I have cited there lies some such creed as the following; the bedrock of goodness, the goodness that can always be relied on, proves only to be goodness without guile. The exact measure of truth contained in that doctrine is something which I shall not seek to assess; it would be hard to dismiss as containing none.

To repeat, one's title to a skill is in no way impugned—though, if I read him rightly, Mr. Gibbs thinks differently—by making it subservient to other things. In craft, *pace* Mr. Gibbs, there strictly is such a thing as willing error. If Hardouin-Mansart at Versailles sacrificed his superb craftsmanship (witness the dome of the Invalides), to his high patron's love of show and splendour—which, they say, his great-uncle whose name he assumed would never have done—where are we to allocate the fault? Rather to the man than to the craftsman. Virtue is a disposition governing preferences, craftsmanship a matter of capacity. The latter concerns what one can do, the former what one will. The young Michelangelo carved a masterpiece out of a huge but awkwardly shaped block of marble which had defeated two sculptors already. Virtue, to repeat, is typically tested by temptation, craftsmanship by the magnitude of the task.

One might, I think, give further reasons for doubting whether the concepts of 'a royal virtue', the would-be single encompassing wisdom that sums all virtue, is in practice a useful one—even though we admit the possibility (if the phrase is allowable) of its formal formulation. Other people, for one thing, are

not clay. In handling them one must also relate to them, and not merely technically but also humanly; humanly and morally as well. 'Do not treat your neighbour as yourself,' Shaw tells us, 'he may not like it.' Anyway it is he who must decide, or at least has a right to a voice. But I must turn to other issues which concern me more centrally.

II

I have said so far nothing of the notion of reason which figures so prominently in Mr. Gibbs's picture. Let me try to make good the lack, for here I have no wish to take issue. Yet perhaps I ought not to have written that I have said nothing of it, only that I have said nothing explicitly. Parson Adams, to return to my example, might not seem a paradigm of pure rationality; his motives have already appeared, he acts out of kindness of heart. To this false dichotomy one might answer shortly; here you already have a reason and a good reason too. The question is, generalizing, why a man acted as he did. We answer by referring, in the present example, to evident distress and the need to relieve it; and that, I suppose, is to give a reason. Indeed one may be moved to act from 'principle' like Swift (at least according to Johnson); or from 'inclination' like Parson Adams; either way it is still a reason. So, too, the proverbial shepherd has a reason for his expectations as to tomorrow's weather: namely, p, that is, that tonight's sky is red; and secondly that p implies q (whose value in the present instance I omit.) True, neither of the shepherd nor of Parson Adams need it hold that he could fit this particular reason into some wider articulate system; far less engage in philosophical assessments of such systems or dispute as to what such assessment would involve. But, to repeat, they still have reasons and good reasons; to say otherwise would be blatantly false.

Conscience as well as kindness can prompt conduct. One may desire to do benefits from mere sympathy; just as simply one may desire to do right. Now suppose morality to be ultimately rational; then, Mr. Gibbs argues, there must also be a further desire, precisely the desire to be rational—a view he ascribes to Plato, too. As to Plato, I find his position unclear and perhaps

not wholly consistent; but I shall not pursue the question.[3] The substantial issue would seem to be the following; whether or not, if we are to think or act rationally, we require this separate factor, specifically the desire to comply with reason. At least for the purposes of explanation it seems dispensable; a point which, I think, has a certain importance. We explain rational conduct, as we do rational thought, precisely by exhibiting its rationality. And such explanation must remain central in some sense, whatever else may need saying in special cases. Say I believe first that p and secondly that p implies q. Sufficient conditions in general, strictly sufficient, are hard things to specify. But that, for normal purposes, will be taken as sufficiently explaining my belief that q. The premises may or may not be true, or the principle valid. I need only believe them. Then, whatever holds those prior beliefs, my belief in the conclusion is so far rational; which adequately accounts for my accepting it. It is tempting to go further and add that unless rational beliefs were first explicable no belief would be explicable at all. Bad arguments can of course pass for good; likewise bad observation or description. Hence we embrace error as truth. But if so it would seem that to explain error, or more broadly unreason, is ultimately this, to show how it was taken for reason. In a sense then, on the present doctrine at least, no sheer irrationality can be possible. And the concept of reason throughout retains a necessary explanatory primacy.

Or suppose that we psychologize the story in a style currently popular; one belief, we say, causes another, my belief that p causes my belief that q. So far the recasting is unexceptionable. Yet imagine the two beliefs to be utterly unrelated or, worse, conflicting: say I believe in fairies because I believe in Euclid's axioms; or in the universal virtue and applicability of the propositional calculus because I believe, like our predecessors, and equally fervently, in the universal applicability of the syllogism—a comparison not wholly fanciful—then, surely, the postulated causal connexion rather calls for explanation than supplies it. For such explanation presupposes the soundness of the relevant inference, or at least its apparent soundness, the intelligibility of accepting it in the circumstances. (Belief ultimately, we may hold, is intelligible as being rational, not merely as being caused.) Or weakening the doctrine

still further, we may sometimes say this: given certain conditions, not in fact realized, I would have accepted it. For clearly we often accept conclusions which rest, as we say in some paradoxical sense, on principles not consciously formulated. Formulated, indeed, we might positively reject them. But that difficulty stirs waters altogether too murky. Yet it is noteworthy that belief is made at least initially intelligible by processes, these being rational, that did not cause it in fact but only might have.

But my main interest is in what now is liable to follow, which is something like the experience of *déjà vu* (nor, indeed, does this aspect of the issue escape Mr. Gibbs). Suppose I wrongly prefer one thing to another: it may be a worse act or a worse argument—nothing turns on the example. The explanation must apparently be this or roughly of this sort, that I misperceived it; to me placed as I was it looked better. Then, it would seem, there is no such thing as sheer irrationality. Now this doctrine, pretty much though not exactly the doctrine of the *Protagoras*, may be true or at least contain some crucial truth. Yet irrationality—whether or not sheer and utter irrationality—exists all too plainly and commonly. Besides we can surely point to actions done consciously and voluntarily which are yet, so to speak, opaque to the agent himself. Genuine *akrasia*, I suspect, must be defined at least in part by such subjective opacity. I still of course have reasons for what I do. I may, as in Plato's example, be overcome by the near prospect of pleasure. But they are *ex hypothesi* bad reasons, or bad in the context, and hence my preferring them remains opaque. As to my rational preferences, simply *qua* agent I can explain them; of my irrational weakness I can say no more.

To return to the statement of logical relations: these, as Professor Edgley has shown, are primarily normative.[4] Suppose that I believe both that p and that p implies q. In fact I may or may not infer that q. What necessarily holds is only this: that if believing that p I deny that q then so far my belief is irrational.

Now the inference itself, the mental process, is a temporal or historical thing, an item in an individual's biography. The principle in some sense is timeless. Thought in general, the very possibility of thought, presupposes principles—and principles,

we must further add, both formal and informal. To think is to think well or badly; thought would no longer be thought, suppose *per impossibile* it admitted no such appraisal. Conversely suppose those principles had no application, played no rôle in assessing or guiding actual belief or inference, how should we think of them? They would be idle or vacuous. 'Logicians', as we could no longer call them, would be left to manipulate marks with no meaning.

But all this, of course, is to speak only of norms, not of what we do but what we ought to do. Clearly one may believe both that p and that p implies q and yet not believe that q. Further, I suggest, one may explicitly deny it. The former point will doubtless be easily granted; I may accept both the premise and the principle yet the conclusion merely not occur to me. But suppose I explicitly deny that q. Then, it will be argued perhaps, that alone must cast doubt on the rest. I believe that p, which presupposes that I understand it; but what of the principle governing the implication? At some point my understanding is cast in doubt, and if not of the premise then of the principle. For such understanding must be manifest precisely here, in my acceptance of the appropriate conclusions.

To this strong and plausible argument I shall offer two possible answers. First, the phrase I used, and surely the sole natural phrase to use, was no more than 'cast in doubt'. Understanding is a matter of degree. Of any proposition then, or of any principle, it will be manifest in a multiplicity of ways. Hence strong grounds may still exist for allowing both points—that is, my understanding of both the premise that p and the principle of p implies q—despite my denial of the conclusion. In general I may show well enough that I appreciate the principle, for example, that rational animals are able to learn grammar. In general—but then you name Socrates. I pause, purse my lips and shake my head. 'Yet Socrates was a man and a rational animal?' 'Yes, certainly, but unable to learn grammar.' You find that strange? So it may be. But you never knew Socrates. What of the principle that we were taught in school that $2 + 2 = 4$? There surely exists plenty of ways in which to exhibit an understanding of these various notions, that of addition and quality and again of the numbers two and four,

though inexplicably one remains blind to this sole truth—or even perhaps positively denies it.

My second argument involves something like what has been called the will to believe; in which, let me say, I myself most powerfully and potently believe—though in the present context 'the will to disbelieve' may be the apter expression. I go further. Even those who acknowledge this phenomenon, at least nowadays, who allow its existence seem loath to allow its rationality, or (not to make too large a claim) its occasional rationality. They see it as a sort of aberration, as wishful thinking that is necessarily irrational. My own view is precisely the opposite. The will to believe, I myself believe—though in this case by no act of will—is intrinsic to full rationality. Such rationality, if we are to understand it adequately, is not simply a matter of accepting the inference of some q from some p or rejecting *non sequiturs* and the like. It involves a real readiness to explore, to range over new points of view, to envisage unfamiliar intellectual possibilities. What is at issue may be no less than a whole different outlook, and one not only strange to me but deeply repugnant. It would be grossly inadequate here to speak simply in familiar terms of entertaining suppositions. Or if we do, we must recognize that to suppose anything—which already of course involves belief, that is, one must believe it to be possible—may be no slight or easy matter. I must seek genuinely to entertain beliefs, say, beliefs profoundly alien to me, that perhaps involve the restructuring of my whole conceptual map. That, among philosophers, is no common ability, at least so my own experience suggests; in fact, I think, rarer than even impressive logical acumen. To repeat, I must be ready, like Descartes, to doubt even where doubt seems absurd —or seems so to me. Grant that p does indeed imply q. In certain circumstances I may still wholly properly—though indeed experimentally, and it is an experiment, certainly, that is likelier to fail—deliberately will to disbelieve it.

Professor Hare, rightly in my view, connects words like 'good' with the relevant conduct—but wrongly, it has widely been felt, makes the connexion between them a rigid one. We can never, on his principles, act against a genuine belief (indeed 'belief' is a term a noncognitivist is strictly unentitled to; though advocates of the doctrine regularly use it so as to help drape its

true nakedness, which might otherwise show too startlingly.) Now, weakness of will, so Hare argues—again I think rightly—is something to be seen as problematic. Hence, as he says, the descriptivist borrows rope enough to hang himself. For suppose 'good' to be merely, as that doctrine tells us, a word for some describable state of affairs: then certainly you might see it without seeking it, without even feeling called on to seek it. The difficulty of *akrasia* is solved indeed but, so to speak, rather too perfectly. For the situation on this account becomes, not only psychologically possible, but in no way anomalous or strange. The truth is, a point made by Professor Davidson, that such processes are possible enough; they are only—not a rare phenomenon—irrational.[5] And openly irrational belief, let us note is similarly, not strictly impossible, only strange. 'Evidence!' exclaimed Lawrence to Aldous Huxley (they were arguing about Darwinism). 'I don't give a scrap for evidence. I feel it' (striking his solar plexus) 'here!' So likewise, to borrow Professor Ryle's example, one may acknowledge the folly of smoking, perhaps genuinely, too, while lifting one's pipe to one's lips.

In explaining aberrations of practical reason we often appeal to desire. Now desire, I have argued, may itself be reason; and fear likewise. Suppose first that I continue to smoke but that I also, doubtless rationally, fear cancer—or, as we say, the risk of cancer. Yet at the same time I desire the comfort of tobacco. its soothing fumes or whatever else a pipe stem may mean to me, This strong desire troubles my perception. The aberration, to repeat, is explicable and only explicable on these terms: I still seek what at the relevant moment appears in my eyes the greatest good. So at least it would seem. But I shall not seek to resolve Plato's problem. It suffices for the purposes of the argument that reason itself is explanatory, it serves to explain actual occurrences, thoughts or actions. It must do so—at least until the promised tide of neurological advance overruns this whole province of discourse—whether or not, like Mr. Gibbs, you feel a need also to invoke desire, specifically the desire to follow reason.

III

What I have written so far is, I fear, sketchy; what follows will

be sketchier still. For further topics, other concepts, require attention.

My initial interest, one which I expressed in somewhat Platonic language, concerned the nature of virtue, which I spoke of as love of the good. Now the good I shall roughly define as the object of rational preference; or, if you like, of preference or acceptance, of pursuit or desire—a list, clearly, that could easily be added to. I have used the word 'preference' very generally at some strain to natural idiom; so as to avoid repetition which would be tedious; or neologism which is ugly. I so dislike philosophical essays, and they seem to be increasingly in vogue, that look as if they were written by a dyspeptic computer, hiccupping in slabs of initials, half-syllables and digits, that I prefer not to add to their number. We accept arguments that seem to us good; we admire and linger to contemplate sculpture or paintings; we desire and seek practical things. For instance, we may 'seek peace and ensue it.' Whatever we prefer we prefer—that is, where our preference is explicable and in terms of reasons which are our own reasons—inasmuch as it appears to us good. Say I am drunk; my drunkenness may explain preferences and actions that would otherwise be thought strange. But such explanation, something unimpeachedly legitimate in its place, is in no conflict with the other; for alcohol troubles my judgement, being drunk, then, I may fail to distinguish and hence see the worse object as better—a worse argument, or bedfellow or work of art. I still prefer the thing—or person—*sub specie boni.*

But, I shall naturally be asked, what is this thing 'good' that I speak of? What, to put it otherwise, have all sorts of good objects in common? The answer, predictably, is nothing, not even a family resemblance. Wittgenstein's account, it seems to me, often usefully and properly applicable, becomes misleading if applied indiscriminately. It brings out one important truth that holds pretty widely: that tidy Euclidean-type definitions are unlikely to meet our needs in philosophy. Yet Wittgenstein still does, after all, seem to hanker quite generally after 'something in common' even though something attenuated almost to vanishing point. (Thus different games, it seems to me, need have nothing in common whatever. Or if they have it is only as forms of *play*, a term not to be defined on that pattern. Yet the

concept of play is still intelligible, as contradistinguished from work, by the rôle that it fills in our lives.) The good, to repeat, then, is any object of rational preference and hence in appropriate cases of action too. So far I am at one with Professor Hare. (And even a thing good of a kind *qua* thing of that kind is to be preferred. A surgeon performing a heart transplant will prefer a good heart to a bad one; though 'good' used attributively of function words forms a special case that I cannot discuss.) Yet I still differ from Hare. A reason for preference, namely the good—the good in the appropriate context, which of course will vary indefinitely—must always be something describable, a describable state of affairs. How then do we group good things together or why do we use the same word?

'Good' is first, of course, an abstract word; and secondly it is special in another way which one can characterize, not very illuminatingly, as 'evaluative'. As to abstraction, its use is familiar and obvious. By grouping things together in one way in preference to another—those cases of paralysis that reflect, say, not the real structure of the nervous system but the popular notion of the body—we can see and set up further connexions, connexions that might otherwise not only be obscure but virtually inexpressible. Again we first abstract movement from body, and then speed of movement; lastly, the speed of increase of speed. We finally arrive at the point where we can compare and measure rates of acceleration. All this is obvious and uncontroversial. What may need more underlining is that what holds in science holds in philosophy, too, where generalization is sometimes frowned on. Forensic considerations suggest an example from Wittgenstein. Let us, then, consider the notion of a language-game, itself of course an abstract term. As such, being once framed, it enables us to see new connexions; we now, for instance, see a connexion between an artificial example, the question, 'Is it five-o'-clock on the sun?' and the further question sometimes asked in good earnest by philosophers, 'How can one talk meaningfully about *nothing* since in doing so one is already talking of something?' or 'In the ultimate furniture of the universe are abstract entities, or only collections of concrete ones, really real?'

Good, then, is an abstraction; so far, I hope not a startling contention. What is evaluation? For the time being let me stay

within the region of philosophy. Arguments and theories, it will hardly be disputed, appear prominently among the things that we call good and bad. I shall also stay with Wittgenstein, who calls his philosophy descriptive; though not wholly accurately, I think. First, the term 'redescriptive' might have been happier. You redescribe familiar linguistic practices to enforce different judgements; you 'assemble reminders' or stress this analogy rather than that. Different features grow in prominence or recede. 'The accent falls differently from of old.' Thus very similarly in another sphere, you may, for instance, redescribe an industrial worker as a 'wage slave', and do so to enforce different value judgements (a sort of example sometimes invoked, and surely very strangely, to establish the non-rationality of ethics. One might have thought that the analogies and disanalogies between Roman slaves, say, and nineteenth century factory workers admit of a thoroughly non-emotional assessment). But the truth is that Wittgenstein uses not only redescription but deduction, too. He does so, to take an obvious instance, in discussing the view that to recognize colours we need to recognize images first; which leads, he shows, to an infinite regress. And Spinoza, deductionist *par excellence*, relies in reality quite as much on the redescriptions to be found in his scholia as on the official deductive arguments of his theorems. In all philosophy, perhaps in theory generally, both things are present and always present, though their prominence varies.

To influence or change rational preferences we describe and often redescribe objects: so in philosophy, so in politics and art criticism. Indeed, my examples so far have been confined to narrowly theoretical or narrowly practical issues, which leave much even of moral philosophy unaccounted for. It may be valuable, then, to glance at aesthetics; besides it is a field in which we are oftenest told that we could comfortably quite dispense with the use of value-words. The word 'good' is empty, it seems; or like 'truth' it adds nothing. All the weight will have fallen on what proceeds it; the real work is done by analysis or description. The view may seem plausible; but only because it simplistically expects 'good' to function similarly to 'red' or 'round'—or at least to critical terms like, say, 'rhetorical' (supposed, perhaps, to be strictly non-evaluative). In fact you could as easily proceed as in dynamics and dispense with the

notion of acceleration. Let us consider: might we not still accumulate all the data, point to and relate the same features of works as critics do now? I should think it unlikely in point of fact. But suppose we did: we should still be hopelessly at a loss as to what use to make of it, what intelligible body of argument it could be designed to figure in. We redescribe objects here as elsewhere, to justify and enforce rational preferences.[6] Aesthetics without evaluation makes about as much sense as logic without validity; and validity is the goodness of arguments.[7]

IV

I have outlined a notion joining two features and features that some philosophers keep apart. We have first some describable object, a possible state of affairs, and further we have reason for preferring it. The object of preference, in other words, is or contains in itself the reason or grounds for the same preference. Say I act for the sake of the good, a possible state of affairs; in a given instance, perhaps, the relief of suffering. Now you ask about my reasons for doing so. The answer is the same; it is, to repeat, the relief of suffering. Or, to vary the example, I might prefer a simpler explanation for some problem to the more complicated ones. And just that once again furnishes my reason; other things being equal simpler explanations are preferable. Here, of course, we use 'good' as a predicate which we ascribe to this or that object. But 'the good' of which I have been speaking is simply the whole class of good things.

As to the two features I have mentioned: the connexion of goodness with action or, better, with pro-attitudes generally, has been widely acknowledged. Even naturalists recognize it in their way, though the pattern of their thinking distorts matters. It forces an unnatural divorce between the goodness on the one hand of actions and people, and that of descriptions, arguments and the like on the other. Worse, it distorts the logic of the relevant concepts, and makes them seek motives for rational action and perhaps thought, too, external to reason itself. But our concern was with the connexion between goodness and appropriate preferences: prescriptivists, of course, stress it; and, rightly in my view, they make it a matter of

logic. What of course they omit, or rather repudiate, is the notion of a describable object; which precludes any intelligible account of 'good' in what is surely its main rôle, I mean as a reason or explanation. One prefers things because they are good. Prescriptions, plainly, are not in themselves reasons. Their functioning presupposes some prior reason; that is, a reason for compliance prior to the prescription itself. Certainly, I may after dinner pass you the port when you ask me for it; not, or not simply, because you do. I must independently wish to oblige or else comply with common etiquette or the like. The simple utterance, the prescription, 'Do not kill', 'Do not eat cheese'—or again 'Never have sexual contact with kindred nearer than a second cousin' or 'Never use a many-valued logic'—coming from John Doe or Richard Roe is certainly no sort of reason, nor by itself likely to influence anyone other than the pathologically suggestible.

Now to proceed: ideally, perhaps, at this point—even staying within my topic, namely, morals—I ought to go on to attempt some account first of 'my good', a restricted concept presupposing a wider one; and then of 'good' without qualification, taken 'absolutely' or *tout court*. But I have not undertaken the production of a new treatise on the principles of ethics. And anyway in practice we never start from scratch; we find ourselves *in media res*. There exists sorts of conduct or situation, sorts of argument or evidence, whose mere description suffices to recommend them; doubtless subject at all times to modification but hardly to be rejected *in toto*. Philosophers, it is true, make it their professional business to probe matters that the rest of the world takes for granted, and especially to question first principles. But that, to repeat, would be a task for another time. Besides existing notions of good remain our starting point; and some such notions, however modified, continue to ground rational preference—preferences both theoretical and practical.

The motive for our right actions I have argued, just as for our right beliefs, need be nothing but reason itself. I believe that q because I believe that p and that also p implies q. In other words, to the particular rational principle, which can enjoy only a Platonic, timeless being, we seem to ascribe a kind of causality—hardly, I fear, a notion to recommend itself nowadays to the generality of philosophers. No doubt your or my

particular belief that p or again that p implies q is simply a mental event, hence categorially qualified to appear as a cause. But if my earlier account is to be accepted we still need more. Let me recall a famous passage from Kant:

> 'We cannot possibly conceive of a reason as being consciously directed from outside in regard to its judgements; for in that case the subject would attribute the determination of his powers of judgement, not to reason but to an impulsion.'[8]

Suppose I believe in Pythagoras's theorem or alternatively the doctrine of the Trinity. You ask me why. For a causal explanation of the event, it may be thought, we shall do best to refer to neurology. At present, it seems, neurology has no answer; but we can still optimistically look ahead. Take *S*, then, as the state of the brain or the nervous system, doubtless elaborately disjunctive; which, we shall say, with the progress of science proves to yield just the law that we need. And that law will presumably be as follows: anyone in state *S* believes the theorem. And now I may be able to answer you: my brain is at present in state *S*, I therefore believe in the theorem. The explanation is seemingly complete; but Kant, clearly, would think it heteronomous. It rests in no way upon reason; nor in explaining it do I cite any reason. Then let the belief in fact be true or false; *my* belief in it remains strictly irrational.

A striking recent instance of deliberate preference for the heteronomous, the alternatives being explicitly stated, appears in the work of Professor Rawls. He mentions the intuitionists' belief in 'the desire to do what is right solely in virtue of its being right'. He allows in fact that this desire may exist. But it precisely lacks, as he puts it, 'any apparent reason', so that to rely on it would be 'utterly capricious'.[9]

Rawls himself therefore prefers 'the sense of justice'; a sentiment, it seems, originally nursed in pleasing associations, widened by experience and sympathy, and finally reinforced by the putative felicities of what he calls 'a well-ordered society'.

Elsewhere, however—and perhaps a well-ordered society is not something to bank on—the case may be different. This sense of justice, which apparently means here, not a sort of judgement or awareness, as we speak of, say, 'a sense of the

situation' but rather a sort of motivation, is something vulnerable to all actual, casual influences, it may or may not be predictably non-capricious. My own present concern is of course solely with motivation, with grounds (or 'the desire to do right'). Now theory and practice run parallel, a point I have repeatedly insisted on. We have reasons for actions as for beliefs. I believe, say, two things both equal to a third thing are equal to each other; and believe it, as we say, because they do. Further, I see that they do, a case of non-optical seeing, which precisely is called 'intuition'. Thus, then, certain of my beliefs may be explicable. Others, I dare say, are to be explained by pleasing associations of the school-room or the influence of praise or self-respect. Are we to stigmatize the former rather than the latter as 'capricious'?

I have spoken so far of causation. And, I said, the notion I mooted, that of the causal action of reason on history, of timeless things on contingent reality, is unlikely to be kindly received. Belief in ogres or final causes, I may be told, would hardly be worse. The conviction, perhaps, is one best not argued with. But the present case is happily easier; it leaves us room for manoeuvre and conciliation. The objectionable notion can be dispensed with; we can drop it in favour of another, namely that of pre-established harmony, which will do instead. What we cannot relinquish is this: that we justify belief in terms of reason. Normally, indeed, we explain them, too, and the same holds for action; we are led only consequently, only on that account, to dig in search of a more respectable pedigree, that is of a psychological cause. But let me leave the last knotty point. Even in neurology, it will be granted, and even in materialist metaphysics we need reasons to support our beliefs; which suffices at present.

Now to speak briefly of neurology, which seems a likelier field than psychology in which to seek *bona fide* causal laws. Neurological processes, we may suppose, run parallel to mental ones or, as some philosophers hold, the two are identical. That already must set limits to the former. And so much can be said *a priori*. The detail, of course, must remain empirical. But we find that certain possibilities that broadly conceived might have seemed open to us can in fact be excluded in advance. For it is trivially true, to repeat, that we justify beliefs in terms of

reason; it follows that the brain cannot be so constituted as to make the thing physically impossible. Take all valid inferences of the form *p* implies *q*. Now classes of brain-state, we shall assume, correspond to both sorts of belief, respectively to beliefs that *p* and that *q*. What we can exclude in advance are any would-be neurological laws that might serve, wholly generally, to make such conjunctions impossible. Rationalists, so positivistically inclined empiricists often say, seek to settle factual issues *a priori*. (Professor Vlastos illustrates the point in his discussion of the famous argument in the *Protagoras* referred to above. Of the Platonic Socrates—praised, however, for his quickness in arguing on his feet—he says just this.)[10] That, as Professor Bennett has shown, is an error.[11] And as to the present case: we find that the possibility of reason must, to express it paradoxically, set limits to the empirically possible. But it need not do more; reason need not act causally on the world. And as to that, I said, in some quarters at least, the harmony of neurological processes with rational ones even knowable *a priori* may seem preferable. We may even say that reason explains belief and not only justifies it; though that, if you like, may be no more than a *phenomenon bene fundatum*. But until psychological concepts wholly give place to neurological ones—an event, let me say, that I anticipate neither in the near nor remote future—talk of explanation can stand. It has, and must keep, a central place. And so long as our account is psychological, in other words, so long as the question arises at all, this at least remains true, that we need evoke no extraneous desire.

All which brings me back to my starting point, which I may have seemed to have strayed from. But the detour was perhaps unavoidable. An account of the concept of virtue required in turn some account of that of good; and one to tie in with the rationality of preferring it. A good man will act to promote good, which includes, of course, the mitigation of evil; he acts, say, to further understanding or to relieve suffering. And these, as good ends, yield good reasons. To re-state my original formulation: virtue is a disposition to prefer the good, and preferring it to act accordingly. But as to the analogy of special skills, carpentry, navigation and so on: I, like Callicles, am inclined to doubt their further usefulness.

REFERENCES

[1] Cf. R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 18.

[2] Cf. Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Principal English Poets, Swift.*

[3] I said I would waive the question of exegesis, which I have neither space nor, I fear, competence to go deeply into. But for Mr. Gibbs's Humean Plato, I find myself unable to go along with him. Plato doubtless groped his way through various not wholly consistent formulations, moving, it seems, towards the view portrayed, rather than argued, in the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. Yet his governing picture seems to me constant: ignorant men seek power, physical pleasure and the like, which, with dim cave-vision, are all they can see of the Good. They do not seek the same good as the wise, for one cannot seek what one cannot conceive of. Plato does indeed sometimes use Humean languages of means and ends; but, proper to Hume's purposes, it is wholly inadequate to his.

The wise seek knowledge, knowledge above all of the Form of the Good; whose role is to stand to other Forms as they stand to particulars; being at once their unifying principle and their perfection. It both makes them and makes them intelligible; the Good and the One are the same.

[4] Cf. Roy Edgley, *Reason in Theory and Practice*, especially Chapter 3.

[5] Cf. D. Davidson, 'How is Weakness of Will Possible?' in *Moral Concepts*, ed. J. Feinberg, pp. 195-213. I cannot of course discuss as a whole Professor Davidson's closely argued paper. The points I would heartily endorse (cf. also above), come in what he himself seems to offer as an appendix to the main issue, the last couple of pages; where he sees himself, I think, as clearing up a few minor left-overs. But his main argument seems to me far more nearly Aristotelian in spirit than he evidently means it to be.

[6] The point is developed by John Casey; cf. *The Language of Criticism*, Chapter i.

[7] The phrase is from John Wisdom's *Other Minds*, but I have been unable to trace it.

[8] *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, transl. Paton, *The Moral Law*, p. 116.

[9] John Rawls, *The Theory of Justice*, pp. 478-9. The sense of justice first appeared (*op. cit.* pp. 46 ff.) as a cognitive faculty, hence presumably rational. Here it is a matter of non-rational motivation.

[10] Cf. Gregory Vlastos's edition of *The Protagoras*, introduction, pp. xliii-xliv.

[11] Cf. Jonathan Bennett, *Lock, Berkeley, Hume*, p. 276 ff.