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ETHICS
THROUGH
HISTORY

An Introduction

T E R E N C E I R W I N

Ethics Through History

Terence Irwin provides an extended historical and philosophical discussion of the major questions and key philosophers in the history of ethics, from Socrates onwards. He covers some of the main ancient, medieval, and modern moral philosophers, whose engaging arguments have formed the agenda for contemporary ethical theory. What is the human good? What are the primary virtues that make a good person? What makes an action right? Must we try maximize good consequences? How can we know what is right and good? Can morality be rationally justified? Irwin makes the debates surrounding such fundamental questions intelligible to readers with no extensive background in philosophy. Concentrating on the authors who are most often read by students of philosophy in particular, he examines them in sufficient detail to convey both the strengths and weaknesses of their positions.

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An Introduction

Terence Irwin

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
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First Edition published in 2020

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019953588

ISBN 978-0-19-960370-1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

In Memoriam
Muriel Martha Kathleen Irwin
1916–2018

Preface

This book aims to provide a selective introduction to some themes in the history of ethics. It is meant to be useful to readers who have some philosophical curiosity about ethics, but have no extensive background in philosophy or in ethics. I hope, therefore, that it might be useful to students who are studying one or more of the philosophers discussed here, and to anyone who has read something on ethics and has seen these names mentioned there. It may be useful to those who are primarily interested in some area other than philosophy, but would like to know something about how moral philosophy has reached its present position.

I formed the idea of writing the present book partly as a result of writing *The Development of Ethics* (OUP, 2007–9). But I soon saw that a mere summary or condensation of the longer book would not make a good shorter book. The present book lays a greater emphasis on texts that are more accessible to less specialized readers, and especially on those that students are likely to encounter. The relative prominence of Aristotle, Hobbes, Hume, Kant, and Mill reflects this emphasis.

Many of the following chapters have developed, directly or indirectly, from lectures, classes, and discussion at Cornell, Oxford, and Stanford. Questions and comments from many students and colleagues over a number of years have improved the book on many points that I could not begin to acknowledge in detail.

Gail Fine, Roger Crisp, and David Brink read the penultimate draft. Their comments and criticisms made the task of revision much more interesting, and have often (though probably less often than they hoped) improved the final version. Many other improvements have resulted from the comments of anonymous readers for the Press.

Anyone who writes or reads books on philosophy has reason to be grateful to the Delegates and officers of Oxford University Press. In particular, the helpful advice and encouragement of Peter Momtchiloff have made a considerable and beneficial difference to this book.

T.H.I.

Oxford, 2019

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Abbreviations and Conventions

Cross-references are given as follows:

‘§165’ §165 of this book
‘Hume §165’ Hume, as discussed in §165 of this book.

In the footnotes, books and papers are cited by author and abbreviated title. Some frequently used abbreviations (for further details see Bibliography):

CUP	Cambridge University Press
EN	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
HUP	Harvard University Press
L	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>
LOEB	Loeb Classical Library (in entries for Greek and Roman authors)
LS	Long and Sedley, eds. <i>Hellenistic Philosophers</i>
NCMH	<i>New Cambridge Modern History</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
R	Raphael, ed., <i>British Moralists</i>
S	Schneewind, ed., <i>Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant</i>
ST	Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
T	Hume, <i>Treatise</i>

1

Introduction

1. Ethics and Its History

This book is about the history of ethics, in the sense in which ‘ethics’ is equivalent to moral philosophy,¹ the philosophical study of morality. It is not a comprehensive history of ethics, but a selective discussion of some philosophers and some questions that belong to the tradition in moral philosophy that begins with Socrates in Athens in the fifth century BC and has developed up to the present.²

The title of the book should be understood in two senses. The book is about ethics in different historical periods and circumstances. But it also tries to show how one can think usefully about ethics by means of its history.

Let us suppose it is worth our while to study morality, and to study it philosophically. Why is it worth our while to study the history of moral philosophy? Five reasons should become clearer in the course of this book.

1. The simplest reason is that many of the main texts in the history of ethics are important and influential works in the history of thought. They are absorbing and enjoyable to read. This book will fulfil its main function if it provokes readers to pick up some of the primary texts. The notes suggest where one might go next.
2. Philosophical reflexion on morality has influenced the development of moral ideas, and thereby has influenced moral behaviour itself. For instance:
 - (a) The belief that human beings as such, have rights that entitle them to certain kinds of respect and protection for their interests becomes prominent in eighteenth-century philosophers. This belief is one source of movements for greater social and political equality that begin with the French Revolution. It is also one reason for the gradual rejection of slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³
 - (b) The moral principle that people ought to live in societies that promote their common good, rather than benefiting some members of a society at the expense of others, encourages the search for laws, rules, and institutions

¹ A brief and clear introductory book on ethics: Frankena, *E*. A fuller introduction: Shafer-Landau, *FE*. Some collections of essays help to give an impression of the scope of contemporary ethics: Singer, ed., *CE*; Skorupski, ed., *RCE*; Copp, ed., *OHET*. Two books introduce ethics partly through historical texts: Norman, *MP*; Darwall, *PE*.

² Introductions to the history of ethics: Sidgwick, *OHE*; Macintyre, *SHE*. A longer general history is Golob and Timmermann, eds., *CHMP*. Crisp, ed., *OHHE* includes many useful essays.

³ Persuasive evidence of the influence of these views comes from Nietzsche, who deplores them. See §233.

that are mutually beneficial, so that we do not treat one another simply as competitors for scarce resources. The same moral principle encourages the search for moral rules that can guide even the conduct of wars.⁴

- (c) The moral principle that prescribes the promotion of the greatest possible good implies that laws and other social institutions should be examined to see whether they could be better means to the greatest good. This question has strongly influenced legislation and social policy.⁵

In these instances, and many others, moral reflexion is not the only explanation of social and political reform. But it would be foolish to ignore its role.

3. Moral philosophy is the source of the modern disciplines of psychology, economics, and sociology. Anyone who wants to understand these disciplines and their development needs to know about their philosophical sources.⁶ Those who believe, for instance, that governments should interfere very little in economic activity and those who believe that governments should intervene extensively rely on rival philosophical premisses, derived from Adam Smith, Mill, and Hegel (through Marx).
4. To understand contemporary moral philosophy, and contemporary philosophy in general, we need to understand its history. Many current debates in moral theory continue the debates between eighteenth-century rationalists and empiricists, and between nineteenth-century utilitarians and their critics. But the eighteenth-century debates do not begin from nothing. They also need to be understood in the light of previous theories. Historical inquiries may be useful in different ways:
 - (a) Sometimes we can see why, in the light of what has preceded, some specific questions seem to need answers.
 - (b) Sometimes we can see why questions that should not have been ignored were ignored, and why some answers were unjustly dismissed. Under this head, we may notice the widespread—not universal—failure of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century moral philosophers to confront the Aristotelian outlook that is developed both by Aristotle himself and by his Scholastic successors.
5. Reflexion on the treatment of questions in moral philosophy by different philosophers of the past is one way to discover the truth in moral philosophy.

The first four of these five claims are difficult to dispute. The fifth might be disputed. But I will not try to defend it here. I will leave it for readers of this book to consider.

2. The Possibility of Philosophical Conversation

Philosophy is similar to chemistry, geology, and history, to the extent that it tries to discover the truth. It is similar to argument in courts of law, to the extent that its

⁴ War: see §124 on Grotius.

⁵ Legislation and the greatest good: §§236–7 on Bentham and Mill.

⁶ Moral philosophy and social science: §168 (Smith); §238 (Mill).

method is not experimental, but adversarial. Philosophical argument consists of a reasoned case that is subject to cross-examination and possible refutation, leading to the abandonment or the reformulation of the original case. One task of philosophers is destructive, since they try to find objections to their own views and to other people's. Another task is constructive, since they try to learn from objections and to formulate better arguments.

Philosophical conversation and argument benefit if they include more interlocutors rather than fewer, especially if not all the interlocutors ask the same questions or tend to favour the same answers. If we can answer the objections of many interlocutors, we may reasonably be more confident in our eventual views. Interlocutors from other historical periods are useful for this purpose, since their different situation and experience raises different questions for them. They offer different arguments, and reach different conclusions, from those that initially appeal to us.

This is one reason why the history of ethics helps us to understand ethics. To carry on a conversation with other people, we need to understand what they are saying, and why they are saying it. To understand philosophers of the past, therefore, we need a historical account.

We may, however, doubt whether a constructive philosophical conversation of this sort is possible. If people at different times ask different questions and presuppose different things at different times, can they have any constructive conversation?⁷ Perhaps we could not have a useful conversation with Homer about subatomic physics. The terms we might use to explain it would themselves depend on assumptions and theories that would be unintelligible to him, and probably we could not convince him of any theory in modern physics. Might this also be true of the history of ethics? Do different periods introduce new conversations that may not be intelligible to participants in previous conversations?

We therefore need to examine the degree of continuity and discontinuity in the history of ethics. Is it as one continuing conversation, or is it a series of conversations with relatively sharp divisions? We can explore this question through a sketch of some of the major questions that moral philosophers discuss in different periods.

3. What Is Ethics About? Socrates' Question

Neither the history of ethics as a whole nor the part of it that is discussed in this book is a series of efforts to answer an agreed list of questions; it does not contain the answers of different candidates for the same examination. The questions as well as the answers are different for different philosophers. But it would be misleading to assert that because Plato and Sidgwick (e.g.) live at different times and belong to different cultures and societies, they are not really pursuing the same subject. Part of the interest of this book should be the emergence of different questions from reflexion on previous discussions, within some shared assumptions about the subject matter of these questions.

⁷ Presuppositions: Collingwood, *EM* chs. 4–5.

To explain why ethics matters, Socrates says that he is discussing no trivial question, but ‘how one ought to live’. Another way to put his question is: what sort of person should I be? Socrates’ question is not ‘How do I feel like living?’ or ‘What would it amuse me to do?’ If we ask how we ought to live, we assume that there are better and worse ways to live, and that it is worth our while to try to find the better way, or one of the better ways.

Asking Socrates’ question is not like asking ‘What sort of instrument should I learn to play?’ when no one has urged me to learn any particular instrument. We have all been told how to live through upbringing, education, law, and informal social sanctions. This social environment forms our patterns of action, our beliefs, our emotions, and our characters. We learn our different social roles and the actions appropriate for them, and in doing so we learn to modify our own desires by reference to the legitimate expectations and needs of others.⁸ In these ways society tells us how we ought to live.

We might ask Socrates’ question because we want to understand what is good about our habitual way of life. Alternatively, we might be looking for a different way to live. Even if society affects many areas of our lives, it leaves us with some options. We can be more or less enthusiastic in our social roles. We can try to evade the responsibilities that come with them. We can do the bare minimum to make people think we are following the expectations of society, but still try to live in some way that we prefer.

4. How to Answer Socrates’ Question

Reflexion on how we ought to live leads us to different questions, which roughly define the scope of ethics.

1. *The theory of the right.* We may ask about what it is right to do, what we ought to do, what we owe to people. The laws and other norms of our society tell us not only that this is what is usually done, or that we will suffer if we do not do it, but that the relevant actions can reasonably be expected of us. This difference between what is usually done and what we can reasonably be expected to do is the difference between morality and simple convention. If we ask whether the expectations of our society are reasonable, we are asking whether we really ought to do what society tells us we ought to do. What we ought to do is what the different virtues—praiseworthy states of character—tell us to do. If we try to acquire the states of character that are genuine virtues, we form the characters that express themselves in doing what we really ought to do.
2. *The theory of the good.* If we think about how we ought to live, we think about what we ought to aim at, what we should try to achieve in our lives. This leads us into questions about the ultimate end or ends of our lives, and hence into questions about what is good. In goal-directed action we try to find suitable means to an end, and we presuppose that the end is worth pursuing. If this process of pursuing means to ends is worthwhile, something must be

⁸ The social environment: see, e.g., §265 (Bradley).

worthwhile in itself and for its own sake, not simply as a means to something else. Our convictions about the good influence our views about the right; for a plausible defence of the rightness of a particular action or practice is likely to argue that it achieves some worthwhile end.

3. *Moral psychology*. If we ask how we ought to live, we try to find some good reason to live one way rather than another, and to act on our conclusion. We assume that we can guide our lives by practical reason that looks at a person's life as a whole. We care about what happens to us not only today, but also tomorrow, and in the more distant future. We care about our lives, and not simply about momentary experiences. To think about our lives we have to think about our longer-term preferences. To live in accordance with these preferences, we need to think about how to achieve them, and we need to act on our conclusions about how to achieve them. This is not always easy, however. Sometimes we do not know how to get the results we would prefer. Sometimes we know, but find it difficult to do what we know it would be better to do. We have non-rational desires and preferences as well as rational desires. These features of reason and desire raise questions about the possibility of acting on our answers to questions about how we ought to live.
4. *Meta-ethics*. If we reflect on our judgments about right action, virtuous character, and the ends of life, we may ask what sorts of judgments these are, and whether we can reasonably believe that they are true or false. We assume that we make some factual judgments about an objective world; in other words, we take our judgments to be true of some reality that is distinct from our judgments, so that our believing the moon is made of green cheese does not make it true that the moon is made of green cheese. We also take ourselves to know about the world on the basis of observation, experience, and theory; this basis gives us true and justified beliefs that are not mere prejudice or superstition. Can we say the same about our moral judgments about the right and the good? Is anything objectively right or good (apart from our thinking so), and can we have justified belief and knowledge (as distinct from prejudice or convention) about morality? These are meta-ethical questions, since they are not questions within ethics, but questions that arise when we look at ethics from outside it, and compare our supposed ethical knowledge with our other knowledge of the world.

5. The Right and the Good

These four different areas roughly mark out the subject matter of ethics, within which different philosophers formulate different questions and present different answers. But different areas are more and less prominent in different philosophers, and different views are held about the relations between them, and about which is prior to which.

One dispute is about the relation between the good and the right. (1) Some theories of morality take the good to be prior to the right. According to such theories, we define the good without reference to the right, and then define the right as what promotes the good. Utilitarianism is one theory that has this structure. Such theories

are often called teleological. (2) In contrast to teleological theories, some have argued that the right is to be defined independently of the good. Since the theory of the right gives the content of duties, such theories are sometimes called deontological.⁹ (3) These two theories of the right leave open a third possibility, that neither the good nor the right is prior, and that each has to be understood by reference to the other.

In ancient and mediaeval ethics some defend a teleological theory of the right (e.g., Epicurus). Most regard neither the right nor the good as prior (Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Aquinas). Scotus comes closest to a deontological theory. Among later moralists, Price, Kant, and Ross are the clearest exponents of a deontological theory. The utilitarians elaborate a teleological account of the right.

6. Conceptions of the Good

Whatever we think about the relation of the right to the good, we have to formulate some account of the good, in order to decide what goals it is rational to pursue. Some conceptions of the good are subjective, in so far as they suppose that a person's good consists in some subjective state of the person, such as pleasure, tranquillity, or the satisfaction of one's desires. Some ancient moralists defend subjective views (e.g., Cyrenaics and Epicureans). Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics defend an objective conception, since they hold that one's subjective states do not wholly determine whether or not one is well off. In addition to one's subjective states one has to meet some further standard; we have to acquire genuine virtues (Stoics), or we have to put these virtues into practice in successful and worthwhile actions and achievements (Aristotle, Aquinas). Among later moralists, most hedonist utilitarians defend a subjective conception of well-being, but Mill sometimes modifies it in an objective direction.¹⁰ The fullest criticism of a subjective conception is presented by Green and Bradley.

7. My Good and the Good of Others: Duty and Interest

One sort of good that it is rational to aim at is one's own good. If one proposed course of action is harmful to me on the whole, and another benefits me on the whole, and there is no other relevant difference between them, it would be foolish of me to choose the harmful action. In this respect my own good is my ultimate end. The choice is less obvious, however, if we consider the relation of other people's good to my own good, or whether my doing the right action always promotes my own good. It may seem obvious that if I do the right thing I often benefit other people and harm myself. We might indeed suppose that the whole point of moral principles and practices is to ensure that I consider the interests of others, even when their interests conflict with mine; that is why morality is supposed to require self-sacrifice on a small or a large scale.

Ancient moralists are familiar with this belief in the conflict between morality and self-interest, but they reject it. In their view, those who suppose that morality requires

⁹ Teleological v. deontological theories: Frankena, *E* 14–17.

¹⁰ Mill on well-being: §§250–2.

the sacrifice of one's own interest have the wrong idea about self-interest and the nature of a person's good. Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans offer different defences of the harmony of morality and self-interest. Augustine and Aquinas agree with them. Scotus rejects this harmonizing view, and defends the initially plausible view that morality conflicts with self-interest. Among later moralists, Butler argues for harmony, and Sidgwick argues most elaborately for the conflict of morality and self-interest, which he calls the 'dualism' of practical reason.

8. Reason and Desire

Reflexion on how we ought to live presupposes that practical reason has some role in guiding our lives, but it is not easy to describe this role clearly. One question about the powers of practical reason arises from the prominent place of non-rational desires in determining our choices and our actions. Some of our irrational tendencies can be explained by ignorance, or carelessness, or inattention. Sometimes we act on passing whims, or prejudices, or emotions, because we do not know any better, or because we do not stop to think about what we know. But sometimes we seem to act irrationally even though we know perfectly well what we are doing. In such cases we display weakness of will (sometimes called 'akrasia' or 'incontinence'). Ancient moralists reject the possibility of acting incontinently if we are fully aware of what we know to be the better course of action. Aquinas agrees with them. Scotus disagrees.

Even if we set aside the questions about incontinence, further questions arise about the powers of practical reason. Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas believe that we have distinctively rational desires that are formed by practical reason and direct us towards ends that are rational in their own right. One might ask, however, whether this belief in distinctively rational desires and ends is justified. According to Ockham and Scotus, the ends that guide our action come from our will, to which practical reason is subordinate. Hume states a more extreme version of this thesis about subordination. In his view, the only role of practical reason is to find means to ends that are objects of non-rational desire. As Hume puts it, reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions. Butler, Reid, and Kant oppose this anti-rationalist position.

9. Meta-Ethical Questions

In ancient philosophy the main meta-ethical dispute is about the role of relativity and convention in morality. Protagoras argues that since different societies differ in their views about right and wrong, just as they differ in manners, customs, and laws, morality is also a matter of convention. According to this view, right and wrong are relative to the conventions of different societies. It is neither objectively right nor objectively wrong to wear black at a wedding, or white at a funeral, but it all depends on the conventions of a given society. Similarly, it is neither objectively right nor objectively wrong to lie, cheat, steal, or murder, but it all depends on social norms. This conventionalist attitude of Protagoras is developed by the ancient Sceptics, who

not only attack the belief in objective morality, but also argue more generally from variation in belief to the denial of objectivity.¹¹

Plato and Aristotle oppose this argument from variation to scepticism. In their view, facts about human nature and the needs of human societies underlie objective facts about the good and the right. Once we grasp the objective basis of moral facts, we can see that variations sometimes reflect people's errors (e.g., some people attach too much importance to revenge), but sometimes reflect real differences in circumstances (e.g., some dangerous situations may require aggressive behaviour that would be out of place in less dangerous situations). The Stoics and Epicureans agree in finding the basis of moral facts in facts about human nature, and this is also Aquinas' view about the factual basis of morality. If moral facts are natural facts, we can acquire moral knowledge just as we can acquire knowledge about other natural facts.

The voluntarist tradition in mediaeval philosophy presents a different answer to the meta-ethical questions about morality. If we believe, as the Abrahamic traditions do, in God as a moral legislator who expresses the divine will in commands and laws (such as the Ten Commandments), we might infer that morality is simply divine law, and that we have a reason to observe it because it expresses the divine will. Plato questions this view in the *Euthyphro*, but it gains some support from the belief in divine omnipotence. If moral right and wrong are independent of the will of God, do they not (we might ask) limit the power and freedom of God? If we recognize divine freedom and omnipotence, we must (according to this line of argument) treat morality as essentially a series of divine commands, not as a series of facts about human nature.

Mediaeval voluntarists do not intend to deny the objectivity of morality; if moral facts are facts about divine commands, they are independent of the beliefs and desires of individual moral agents. Still, the belief that morality depends on some sort of legislative will may lead us to ask whether morality might be the product of any legislative will, human or divine. Hobbes asks this further question, and answers it by arguing that morality is the product of socially sanctioned commands that result from a collective response to individual human desires.¹² Hobbes's sentimentalist successors, Hutcheson and Hume, reject Hobbes's account of morality, but they agree with his view that morality essentially guides actions. Hobbes believes that commands carry out this action-guiding function. Hutcheson and Hume attribute this function to our emotions and sentiments. In their view, the connexion between moral judgments, sentiments, and action requires us to reject any belief in objective moral facts. Judgments about objective facts, in their view, cannot have the action-guiding role that is essential to moral judgments.

By this route, the belief that morality consists in divine commands leads to the belief that it consists in human sentiments and emotions. The mediaeval theological voluntarists certainly do not intend to support a subjectivist conception of morality, but the gradual transformation of their view by Hobbes and the sentimentalists reaches a subjectivist conclusion. This conclusion is rejected by the rationalists and by Kant.

¹¹ Sceptics on objectivity: §§55–6.

¹² This is an over-simple view of Hobbes. See §131.

These disputes introduce the main topics of recent and contemporary meta-ethics. Those who are impressed by Hume's arguments emphasize the practical and action-guiding character of morality, and argue that these features of it exclude belief in the objectivity of moral facts. On the other side, those who are impressed by the case for objectivity try to explain how this feature of morality is consistent with its role in guiding action.

10. Periods in the History of Ethics

We have sometimes spoken of 'ancient', 'mediaeval', and 'modern' philosophers. These divisions correspond to divisions that are frequently used in marking different historical 'periods' or 'ages'. The 'ancient world' conventionally extends to the so-called fall of the Roman Empire in the West (fifth century AD). The 'modern world' is often said to begin with the Renaissance, sometime in the sixteenth century, or with the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century.

These divisions into 'ages' or 'worlds' cast their shadow on the history of philosophy as well. 'Ancient' or 'Classical' philosophy extends at least to the lifetime of Augustine, who is also sometimes counted as the first mediaeval philosophy. 'Modern' philosophy is often taken to begin with Hobbes and Descartes in the seventeenth century.

We need not discuss how well founded or (more probably) ill founded these large divisions may be.¹³ But we should treat them with some scepticism when we study the history of ethics. It would be a mistake to assume, for instance, that if the division between mediaeval and modern marks historically significant changes, it must therefore mark a significant division in ethical thought. To see whether there is some fundamental difference between ancient and mediaeval, or mediaeval and modern, we need to examine the relevant texts without too many presuppositions.

The previous sketch of different areas of moral philosophy tends to undermine the view that sharp divisions in the history of ethics correspond to larger historical periods. We have seen that two types of questions that are often supposed to be especially characteristic of modern moral philosophy—normative questions about the relation of the right to the good, and meta-ethical questions about the objectivity of ethics—arise from the questions that mediaeval philosophers raise about an Aristotelian conception of ethics. Some further reasons for emphasizing continuity rather than separation in the history of ethics will be clearer when we discuss particular philosophers.¹⁴

11. Aims of This Book

This book tries to introduce some of the main questions that arise in the tradition of moral reflexion that begins with Socrates. I try to show how later philosophers sometimes answer the questions raised by their predecessors, and sometimes raise

¹³ On these divisions see, e.g., Ryan, *OP* 187–91, 403–8.

¹⁴ Continuity: §117.

new questions, out of dissatisfaction with their predecessors' views about which questions need to be answered.

I have not set out from a contemporary view about which questions in ethics are most important, or about how to answer them. I have tried to trace the questions as they arise in historical debates. But I have tried to make the questions intelligible and accessible to readers who are not already familiar with the history of philosophy or with moral philosophy. For this reason, I have added a few remarks here and there to sketch some of the historical and philosophical background. The notes suggest a little further reading on these topics.

The index contains two sorts of aids: (1) names and dates, with brief biographical information, on the people mentioned in the book; (2) brief explanations of a few philosophical terms.¹⁵ Readers will also learn more if they follow the cross-references that they will find in the notes to each chapter. If they use these together with the index, they will find it easier to trace the main themes that I discuss.

Some chapters are about individual philosophers, others consider larger debates or themes. In these latter cases I thought it would be easiest to see what different philosophers are saying by presenting the different sides of a particular conversation within one chapter. This is particularly true of Chapters 14 and 15, which discuss the sentimentalists and rationalists in eighteenth-century British moral philosophy.

The main purpose of the notes to each chapter is to provide readers with a reasonable selection of the sources that I rely on. I hope that this book might persuade some readers that it is worth their while to read some of the main texts in the history of ethics, and so I have tried to suggest where they might go next after reading this book. It is certainly better to read Aristotle, Hume, Kant, and so on, than to read what I have to say about them.

For the sake of brevity, I have given relatively few references to secondary literature. The references provide very little indication of my debts to other writers. They try to give readers an idea of what to read next, or of where they might learn more about some questions that I have merely sketched.

To make these texts intelligible and interesting, sympathetic exposition is needed, so that readers can see what might be said in favour of a given position and against its rivals. Similarly, consideration of some objections shows why other views might be attractive. When I have engaged in exposition and criticism, I have avoided the tedious repetition of 'Aristotle thinks', 'in Hume's view', and so on. Readers should suppose I am trying to expound a particular view, or objections to it, and not that I am setting out my views. But my views about the best way to defend someone else, and about which objections are most cogent, inevitably reflect my philosophical outlook.

¹⁵ Audi, ed., *CDP* is useful for fuller explanations of philosophical terms.

2

Socrates

The Choice of Lives

12. Morality in Peace and War

Socrates lived from 469 to 399. Plato lived from 428 to 347.¹ The last part of Socrates' life, and the first part of Plato's, coincided with the long war between Athens and Sparta. Our main historical source for this war is the history of Thucydides, who calls it the Peloponnesian War. It lasted for twenty-seven years (with interruptions), from 431 to 404. The war was a struggle that extended throughout the Greek world, between two alliances, led by Athens and Sparta. It was also a conflict between two political systems—democracy (favoured by Athens and its allies) and oligarchy (favoured by Sparta and its allies). Athens was eventually defeated, partly as a result of internal revolution. Opponents of democracy, with Spartan help, set up an oligarchic regime and abolished the democratic assembly and jury-courts. The oligarchic regime of the Thirty was expelled in 403, and democracy was restored.²

The history of Thucydides both discusses and displays the effect of prolonged war, including civil war, on morality. He suggests that a relatively stable state is the product of some force strong enough to keep the peace and to assure some protection for the different groups; but when one or another group sees a chance to take the dominant place, it takes the chance (iii 82.2; v 89, 105.2). Since war involves an external power willing to support a revolution, it tends to increase political instability within a state. Thucydides describes the civil conflicts that resulted from Athenian support for the democrats and Spartan support for the oligarchs.³ He intends this to indicate the pattern followed by civil wars all over the Greek world, and eventually in Athens itself. In these circumstances, according to Thucydides, the basic tendencies of human nature—the desire for security for oneself and domination over others—inevitably come to the surface.

As Thucydides puts it, war is a 'violent teacher',⁴ because it forces us to recognize that morality is irrelevant in conflicts between states or within a state. If we can be assured that violations of the moral rules that forbid fraud and violence will be

¹ An account of ancient ethics (from Socrates to the Stoics): Meyer, *AE*. A brief, clear introduction to Socrates: Taylor, S. A fuller study of Socratic ethics: Vlastos, *SIMP*. Evidence for the views of the historical Socrates: Vlastos, *SIMP*. The main evidence for his views on ethics is found in some of Plato's works, all translated in Plato, *CW*. Other sources on Socrates: Boys-Stones and Rowe, eds., *CS*.

² The Peloponnesian War and its effects: Hornblower, *GW* chs. 13–14.

³ Civil conflict in Corcyra: Thucydides iii 82–5. Melos: v 84–116.

⁴ War is a violent (or 'forceful') teacher: Thucydides iii 82.2.

punished, we have a good reason to keep the rules, because each of us benefits from them. But when we cannot be assured that a stable state will support these rules, we have good reason to use fraud and violence to get the better of our opponents and to advance our own interest. This sharp difference between the status of morality in peace and in war reveals the fact that morality is only a means for preserving our security; once we see that it often pays to violate moral rules, we violate them.

Thucydides believes that war teaches us that moral rules have no place outside a peaceful state. But might we not go further? Sometimes, even within a peaceful state, we can see that we might gain by lying or cheating; why should we not take advantage of these means of getting ahead? Thucydides' implicit analysis of morality reappears in the explicit views of those who agree that morality has a limited role, as a means of maintaining security. These views reappear in the arguments of Glaucon and Adeimantus in Plato's *Republic*, in the doubts about justice that are presented by Carneades the Sceptic, and in the arguments of Grotius and Pufendorf (who reject them) and of Hobbes (who largely accepts them).

Socrates and Plato had first-hand experience of war, civil conflicts, and the moral questions that they raised. Socrates had first-hand experience of the war, during his military service in the Athenian army.⁵ He also experienced the effects of the war on democracy and the rule of law in Athens. He mentions two episodes:⁶ (1) In 406 the Athenians won a naval battle at Arginusae, but the generals did not follow the recognized practice of waiting to retrieve the bodies of their dead. The Athenian Assembly demanded a collective trial of the generals. Socrates resisted the demand because he believed a collective trial would be unjust. (2) In 403, at the end of the war with Sparta, the Thirty took power, and the democratic leaders left the city. Some of the oligarchic and the democratic leaders were friends of Socrates and relatives of Plato.⁷ The Thirty consolidated their regime by intimidation. They rounded up innocent citizens, and coerced other innocent citizens into collusion in the illegal arrests. Socrates refused to collude, because it was unjust.

After the fall of the Thirty and the restoration of democracy, Socrates was brought to trial for impiety and corrupting the young men. In his speech to the jury at his trial, he undertakes to disobey any order by the state that would require him to give up his philosophical activity. To give it up would be unjust, because it would violate a divine command. The Athenian jury convicted Socrates, by a narrow majority, and sentenced him to death. He had an opportunity to escape, but refused.⁸

Socrates and Plato might reasonably believe that these incidents resulted partly from the attitude to morality in peace and war that Thucydides describes. They argue that this is not a reasonable attitude to morality.

⁵ Socrates' military service: *Symposium* 219e; *Laches* 181ab.

⁶ Attention to ourselves: *Apology* 29d–30b.

⁷ Charmides and Critias were relatives of Plato on the oligarchic side. Both appear in the *Charmides*. On the democratic side, Chaerephon was a disciple of Socrates, and Pyrilampes was a relative of Plato.

⁸ Socrates's trial: *Apology* 35e–38b. His refusal to escape is discussed in the *Crito*.

13. How Ought We to Live?

In Socrates' view, the most important question we can ask is 'How ought we to live?' If we attend to this question, we will see that we pay more attention to less important things—wealth and status—than to more important things—ourselves and the condition of our souls.⁹ By 'souls' Socrates means our mental states, dispositions, attitudes, and states of character. The states of our soul that matter most are those that determine our choice of a way of life.

Many people do not bother with Socrates' question. In some cases, it has not occurred to them to ask the question. They simply take for granted the way their life is arranged, and the goals it promotes. Many people think they have no choice about these things—if, e.g., they are slaves, or they live under oppressive conditions.¹⁰ Others may recognize that they have a choice, but they suppose it is a matter of mere preference; some people prefer one kind of life, others prefer another kind, and no one makes a better or worse choice. Others think Socrates' question is unnecessary, because they already know the right answer. They think that the best life is the one that gains wealth, social status, and enjoyment.

In Socrates' view, all these people are mistaken. We have a choice about how to live. Our choice is not merely a matter of preference; it may be right or wrong, and it is important for us to make the right choice. Those who think they already know how to live, and care more about wealth and power than about their souls, have their priorities wrong. If they cared about their souls as they should, they would care about acquiring the virtues, because the life we ought to live is the life of virtue (*aretè*). What does Socrates mean by this, and why does he believe it?

14. Happiness and Virtue: Some Preliminaries

When Socrates asks 'How ought we to live?', he means 'What life is the happiest life and how can we get it?' Our answers to Socrates' question reveal our conception of 'living well' or 'well-being' or 'happiness' (*eudaimonia*), or, in other words, our conception of the ultimate good. The different moral philosophers and schools of moral philosophy in Greek and Roman Antiquity argue for different conceptions of the ultimate good.¹¹ Socrates, the Cynics, and the Stoics identify the best life with the life of virtue; Epicureans and Cyrenaics identify it with the life of pleasure; Plato and Aristotle identify it with the life of virtue combined with external success.¹²

To see why this question 'What is the ultimate good?' is worth discussing, and why different people give different answers, we need to understand the question better. *Eudaimonia* is the ultimate good, and the most common English rendering of '*eudaimonia*' is 'happiness'. Hence we might say that Greek moralists argue about how to achieve happiness.

This description of their arguments may be misleading, however, because some of the common associations of 'happiness' may differ from those of '*eudaimonia*': The

⁹ Importance of the soul: *Apology* 30de.

¹⁰ Epictetus on slavery: §75.

¹¹ Even the Sceptics have a conception of the good: §57.

¹² Different conceptions of the good: Cicero, *Fin.* v 16.

English term may suggest a feeling of pleasure or contentment. ‘*Eudaimonia*’ has a less definite sense. Some Greek moralists identify *eudaimonia* with pleasure, but they recognize that their claim needs some defence, because it is at least not obviously true. Moreover, ‘happiness’ is sometimes used to refer a momentary feeling that may be followed by a feeling of unhappiness. *Eudaimonia* is a longer-term condition. Just as we would not say that someone has a good life for only five minutes, Greeks would not say that someone is *eudaimôn* for only five minutes.¹³ We may guard against these misleading associations of ‘happiness’ if we also think of ‘welfare’ or ‘well-being’ as alternative renderings of ‘*eudaimonia*’ that avoid these associations. With these cautions, it is safe to treat *eudaimonia* as happiness.

Socrates and other Greek moral philosophers discuss the relation between *eudaimonia* and *aretê*. This Greek term may have the general sense of ‘goodness’ or ‘excellence’ (the English ‘virtue’ sometimes has this sense, as in ‘this book has many virtues’). ‘*Aretê*’ corresponds to ‘virtue’ in so far as it refers to the qualities that make someone a good and admirable person. Many of Socrates’ interlocutors agree that the virtues include bravery, temperance, justice, and wisdom.¹⁴ They agree that these virtues are valuable. They believe some people are better than others because (for instance) they are disposed to control their appetites and fears and to consider the interests of others as well as themselves. Someone who is disposed in these ways has some elements of a good character; these elements include the virtues of temperance (control of appetites), bravery (control of fears), and justice (consideration for the interests of others). Most people want to possess these virtues, and want other people to possess them.

But some people do not believe that these virtues matter most. They think the virtues are simply means to other goods—to one’s own wealth, social status, enjoyment, and the other things that make up happiness. If a virtue ever interferes with pursuit of these recognized goods, it takes second place. Even if honesty is usually the best policy, most people want the benefits that sometimes result from dishonesty. The virtues, therefore, are often useful, but they do not guarantee happiness.

Socrates replies that the virtues are both necessary and sufficient for happiness.¹⁵ We should take the virtues more seriously than most people do, because they are more closely connected to happiness than most people realize.

15. Socrates’ Inquiries: The Examined Life

To find the life that is worth living, Socrates examines himself and others. The greatest good is to discuss virtue every day, because that is how we find out how much virtue matters. Discussions with Socrates draw us into an examination of our own lives.¹⁶

¹³ *Eudaimonia* and happiness: Sidgwick, *ME* 92–3; Ackrill, ‘*Eudaimonia*’; Kraut, ‘Conceptions’.

¹⁴ Lists of virtues: *Meno* 71e; *Euthydemus* 279b; *Protagoras* 329c.

¹⁵ Virtue and happiness: *Euthydemus* 281de; *Crito* 48b; *Gorgias* 470e, 507bc.

¹⁶ Daily discussion about virtue: *Apology* 38a. Socrates leads interlocutors into self-examination: *Laches* 187e–188c.

These discussions made him both notorious and unpopular in Athens. He was accused of corrupting the young men with his arguments, by making the worse cause defeat the better. His discussions appeared to undermine conventional and respectable moral beliefs. Eventually he was brought to trial on the charges of not believing in the gods of the city, and of corrupting the young men. He was convicted by a narrow majority of the jurors, and put to death.¹⁷

According to Socrates, his inquiries into virtue show that he is better off if he is just than he would be if he pursued physical safety, a good reputation, and the other things that most people care about.¹⁸ How, then, could he be accused of undermining morality?

The discussion of bravery in the *Laches* illustrates the structure of Socratic examinations. Socrates asks 'What is bravery?' Laches is a successful general who has a reputation for bravery. He answers Socrates' question confidently with an attempt at a general definition. But when Socrates asks further questions, Laches sees that the consequences of his attempted definition conflict with his other initial beliefs about bravery. After several attempts, in which his fellow-general Nicias joins the discussion, the interlocutors are puzzled and at a loss. They agree that they do not know what bravery really is. The same pattern of examination is repeated in other dialogues.¹⁹

Socrates' interlocutors in these dialogues include Nicias and Laches (who might be expected to know about bravery), the young aristocrats Charmides and Critias (who might be expected to know about temperance),²⁰ Euthyphro (a self-styled expert on piety), and Protagoras the sophist (a reputed expert on the virtue that he professes to teach). They cannot answer Socrates' questions about something that they might reasonably be expected to know. Their inability to answer Socrates' questions reveals their ignorance about the virtues.

Socrates' inquiries are embarrassing and disconcerting for people who are satisfied with their way of life and their ethical outlook. But Socrates does not simply expose other people's inability to answer his questions. He points out his own inability as well. He claims that he is wiser than other people because he recognizes his lack of knowledge, whereas they suppose falsely that they know about virtue.²¹

If Socrates and others are at a loss to answer questions about the virtues, should we suspend judgment about whether we ought to be just or unjust, brave or cowardly, and so on? This suspension of judgment is the attitude of the later Sceptics. They take their attitude to be the inevitable result of Socrates' critical inquiries into morality.²²

If this is all that Socrates has to offer, we can see why his inquiries got him into trouble, and why he was accused of corrupting the young men. If he convinced them that they did not know what they were talking about when they made moral

¹⁷ The charges against Socrates: *Apology* 23c–24c. The jury's vote: 36a.

¹⁸ The value of justice: *Crito* 48b–d.

¹⁹ The structure of Socratic inquiries: *Laches* 190bc, *Charmides* 159a, *Euthyphro* 5cd, *Apology* 29d–30a. Socrates' question: §27. Puzzles: §37.

²⁰ 'Temperance' (*sôphrosunê*), i.e., 'moderation', was a political slogan of the oligarchic side in Athens. Cf. *Charmides* 171d–172a.

²¹ Socrates' awareness of lacking knowledge: *Apology* 21d.

²² Suspension of judgment: §55.

judgments, and that he knew nothing about morality either, he might well appear to have undermined conventional moral beliefs and put nothing in their place.

16. Socrates' Convictions

Socrates rejects this sceptical conclusion. His moral beliefs lead him to take unpopular stands on specific moral questions. He resolves to act justly, and affirms that he ought to face death rather than commit injustice.²³

Socrates affirms his convictions about justice on occasions when he faces difficult choices. In the *Crito* he argues that justice requires citizens to obey a law, whatever sufferings it imposes on them, as long as it does not require them to act unjustly. Obedience to the law requires him to refuse the opportunity to escape from prison, and to accept the sentence of death even if it was unjust. But justice also requires disobedience, if obedience would require acting unjustly. Both in the trial of the generals after Arginusae and during the rule of the Thirty, Socrates refuses to take part in unjust actions. For the same reason he tells the jury at his trial that if they order him to give up his philosophical activities, he will disobey, because he pursues philosophy at the command of a god, and it would be unjust to disobey a divine command.

Many of Socrates' contemporaries probably found his attitudes puzzling. Why, one might ask, should he care so much about justice if it harmed him (by exposing him to danger) and harmed others (by making it harder, for instance, to make a salutary example of negligent generals)?

Socrates replies that when he acts justly, he acts in his own interest. He does not harm himself by doing what the virtues require, because the good person cannot be harmed. Socrates professes to rely on the conclusions of repeated arguments and discussions.²⁴

17. Assumptions About the Virtues

Socrates believes his inquiries make progress because they correct our initial views about the virtues in the light of assumptions that we take to be more reliable. Laches, for instance, first defines bravery as standing firm, but then admits that sometimes a tactical retreat is the brave course of action. Hence he rejects his initial attempt at a definition. Later he identifies fearlessness and resolution with bravery. But he also agrees that bravery is a virtue, that a virtue is always fine and beneficial, and that fearless resolution is sometimes disgraceful and harmful. He infers that fearless resolution is not the same as bravery.²⁵ Socrates and his interlocutors eventually agree that a brave person's fearlessness results from wisdom—i.e., knowledge of good and evil as a whole. If bravery were separable from wisdom, it would not always be

²³ Avoiding injustice: *Apology* 28.

²⁴ The good person cannot be harmed: *Apology* 41cd. Repeated arguments: *Crito* 48b, 49ab.

²⁵ Fine and beneficial: *Laches* 191a–c, 192d, 193d. Bravery: *Laches* 194c–197e.

beneficial. But since bravery is essentially a virtue, it is always beneficial, and therefore it cannot be distinguished from wisdom.²⁶

Since the participants in the discussion share some assumptions about the virtues, and since they reject initial beliefs that conflict with these assumptions, the discussion makes progress. But should we accept these assumptions? We might agree, for instance, that virtues benefit someone; but does my virtue always benefit me, or does it sometimes benefit other people at my expense? Does each virtue require knowledge of good as a whole? Even if it does, should we identify it with knowledge of the good? We might suppose, as Laches initially supposes, that bravery requires some affective state (confidence, fearlessness), and that knowledge alone is not sufficient. Why does Socrates ignore everything except knowledge?

In other dialogues Socrates answers these questions.

18. Virtue Is Necessary and Sufficient for Happiness

Socrates argues that each virtue benefits not only other people, but also the virtuous agent. He begins from the accepted assumption that we all want to 'do well' (or to 'be happy'). He assumes, more controversially, that if anything besides happiness is choiceworthy for us, it is a means to our happiness. The means to happiness are the various goods. But the virtues have a special place among the means to happiness. Mere possession of a good such as wealth or strength does not ensure our happiness, since we may misuse it. Hence we need knowledge of how to use these other goods. Virtue promotes our happiness because it is this knowledge.²⁷

Virtues, however, do not always appear to benefit the agent. Sometimes bravery exposes us to more danger and greater harm. Socrates acts justly by refusing to break the law, by refusing to give up his philosophical activities, and by refusing to escape from prison. These virtuous actions seem to harm him.

Socrates replies that if we think his virtuous actions harm him, we do not grasp the importance of virtue. A good person cannot be harmed; the virtuous person is happy; living justly and living well (i.e., living happily) are the same.²⁸ If then, we aim at happiness, we ought to aim at being virtuous, and hence we ought to do the virtuous actions that the virtuous person does. The only actions that would harm Socrates are those that would make him a worse person.

These claims are difficult to believe because they seem to ignore the role of external circumstances in happiness. Even if we know the best thing to do and we do it, we cannot be sure that it will achieve our end. Our calculation of consequences is fallible, and external circumstances do not always turn out as we intend. To achieve happiness, we seem to need both virtue and favourable circumstances.²⁹

²⁶ Knowledge of good and evil: *Laches* 196d, 198d; *Pr.* 329cd, 349a–c, 359a–360e. Benefit requires wisdom: *M.* 88b1–c4; *Euthd.* 281b4–e5.

²⁷ Virtue benefits the virtuous agent: *Charmides* 175d5–176a5. Doing well (*eu prattein*) and being happy (*eudaimonein*): *Euthd.* 278e3–6; 280b6. Cf. Aristotle, *EN* 1095a17–20; *Rhet.* 1360b4–7. Knowledge of how to use goods: *Euthd.* 280d–281e.

²⁸ Living justly and living well: *Crito* 48b.

²⁹ Good fortune: *Euthd.* 279c4–d9. See §41.

In Socrates' view, however, external goods (circumstances and resources) cannot deprive us of happiness, because they are neither good nor bad for us. What is really good or bad for us is our use of external goods. No matter how many or how few we have, our happiness consists in good use of them. No matter whether we are rich or poor, strong or weak, healthy or sick, honoured or dishonoured, we are happy as long as we make the best possible use of these goods.

This argument from the irrelevance of externals shows why a virtuous person cannot be harmed. Virtue is all that we need for happiness, and harm consists in being deprived of happiness. The virtues are all we need to live well, and we have no reason to sacrifice them for the results that preoccupy other people.

But does happiness consist entirely in the use we make of external goods? It may be no more admirable to be just, healthy, comfortably off, and well thought of than to be just without these other advantages. But would we not rather be just and have these other advantages than be just and lack them? Socrates seems to rely on a strange notion of happiness or welfare.

19. Happiness is Maximum Pleasure

In the *Protagoras* Socrates presents a fuller account of happiness and explains why it is the ultimate end of rational action.

If we answer the Socratic question 'How ought we to live?', and we try to put our answer into action, we show that we are to some degree rational agents. We look beyond the present, and ask what we will be like tomorrow or next year or further in the future. Perhaps one course of action involves more risk, but promises a better future than we could expect if we followed the safer course. One course of action will give us wealth, but at the cost of being stuck in work that we find tedious and frustrating; another course of action will give us a more satisfying occupation, with less money. When we think about the pros and cons of different courses of action, and try to make up our minds about which course is best on the whole, we engage in practical reasoning. If we do it well, we are sensible and prudent about our own interest.

In the *Protagoras* Socrates analyses practical reasoning through a hedonist account of happiness.³⁰ According to the hedonist, good things are good in so far as they result in pleasure rather than pain; therefore happiness, the ultimate good, consists in a life in which pleasure predominates. Short-term pain sometimes leads to longer-term pleasure. We deny ourselves the short-term pleasure of having another drink, so that we can avoid greater pain in the future (a hangover, a road accident).

Some people, having noticed that bravery, temperance, and justice often require them to give up pleasures, infer that a life of maximum pleasure is a life of self-indulgence. This facile contrast between virtue and pleasure results from neglect of time and security. If we act on our current desires for short-term pleasure, we form more demanding appetites. The more insistent and extravagant our appetites

³⁰ Readers of the *Protagoras* disagree about whether Socrates presents hedonism as his own view.

become, the more painful it becomes to frustrate them, and the more difficult it becomes to satisfy them.

If we are wise, then, we form desires that do not result in future deprivation, frustration, and anxiety. Socrates says we need the ‘measuring craft’, which accurately estimates pleasure and pain. If we estimate accurately, we are not misled into thinking that the lesser pains we suffer now are greater than the greater pains we will suffer tomorrow. This measuring craft corrects a short-sighted outlook.³¹

The virtues are aspects³² of this measuring craft of pleasure. The brave person sees that short-term pain in facing danger is less than the pleasure that results from (say) winning the battle. The temperate person sees that the pleasure that results from finishing the bottle of wine now is outweighed by the pain of tomorrow’s hangover. The just person sees that the immediate pleasure gained by keeping the money he has promised to repay is outweighed by the pain that will result from other people’s distrust.³³

20. Why Is Knowledge Sufficient for Virtue?

If practical reflexion finds the best plan for our lives, and we can see how to put our plans into practice, we still may not put them into practice; for we do not always respond whole-heartedly to the conclusions of practical reflexion. Though we are rational agents and deliberators, we are also moved by prejudices, beliefs, desires, and emotions that do not respond immediately to the conclusions of rational deliberation.

Socrates believes that our reluctance to follow the conclusions of practical reason results from our tendency to think about the short term. In his view, we simply need to think clearly on the basis of knowledge about what will be pleasantest in our lives as a whole. This knowledge frees us from the short-term thinking that ruins our lives.

It is difficult to believe Socrates’ claim that knowledge ensures our acting on our considered views about how to live. Our experience of weak will (‘incontinence’)³⁴ seems to refute him. For often (we suppose) we believe *x* is better than *y*, but still choose to do *y*, because we give in to our misguided desire to do *y*. Though we know it would be better for us not to take another drink, we feel like another drink, and we take it.

Socrates answers that this analysis of choice is self-contradictory. If we display weakness of will, we choose the option we believe to be worse, and therefore the option that we believe will yield less pleasure. But since we always act for the sake of maximum pleasure, we choose one option because we take it to yield more pleasure than the other option. Hence allegedly weak-willed people would have to choose what they believe will yield less pleasure, but choose it because they believe it will yield more pleasure. But since no one is ever in this grossly incoherent condition, there is no weak will.³⁵

³¹ Measuring craft: *Pr.* 356c4–357b4.

³³ Pleasure and pain in justice: §66.

³⁵ No weakness of will: *Pr.* 353c–355e.

³² Aristotle on relations between the virtues: §47.

³⁴ The Greek term *akrasia* means ‘lack of control’.

If, then, we think we are weak-willed, it is because we are temporarily deceived into thinking that (e.g.) another drink now will be so pleasant that it will outweigh the resultant pain. If we act on this belief, we still act on our desire for what we take to be best. The appearance of weak will is simply vacillation about what is best. The cure for this vacillation is Socrates' measuring craft.

21. An Argument against Hedonism

Socrates does not seem to be satisfied with this hedonist defence of his views about virtue and happiness. In the *Gorgias* he argues that hedonism fails to vindicate the virtues because it ignores some central features of rational agency.

The main argument in this dialogue discusses Callicles' attack on Socrates' claim that the just person is happy. Callicles relies on a hedonist conception of happiness.³⁶ In his view, we achieve happiness by maximizing our pleasure, and we increase our pleasure by forming stronger and more urgent appetites; hence we achieve happiness by cultivating the strongest possible appetites and securing the resources to satisfy them. Justice impedes happiness, because we often need to act unjustly in order to supply our ever-expanding appetites. Justice is a cowardly attitude that makes us shrink from what fearless and brave people would do to satisfy their appetites.

These objections to justice assume that bravery is a virtue. Socrates argues that this assumption conflicts with Callicles' hedonism. In Callicles' view, pleasure results from satisfied desire, and we increase our pleasure if we make our desires stronger and we satisfy them. The coward is more afraid of danger than the brave person is, so that he forms a stronger desire to avoid danger. Since he has this stronger desire, he gains greater pleasure, according to Callicles' criterion, once he satisfies his desire to avoid the danger. By Callicles' criterion, therefore, the coward is better off than the brave person.³⁷ If, then, the good consists in maximum pleasure, Callicles has no reason to choose bravery over cowardice. The less we think about future compensations, and the more strongly we feel present dangers, the greater are the pleasures that come from short-term relief. Maximum pleasure does not result from concentration on longer-term pleasure.

Socrates infers that hedonists have to reject rational planning for their lives. If we had the coward's outlook, we would see no point in making plans for the future, and we would make no effort to carry them out in the face of obstacles. But what sort of life would this be, if we did not care about ourselves as persisting selves who have a future that we need to think about? Hedonists try to say what is worthwhile in life by starting from what we find obviously attractive, but the life they recommend is so unattractive that we have reason to question hedonism.

22. An Adaptive Conception of Happiness

In the *Protagoras* Socrates defends the virtues, including justice, as means to pleasure. But in the *Gorgias* he argues that happiness does not consist in maximum pleasure,

³⁶ Hedonism: *Gorg.* 494b–495e.

³⁷ Bravery and pleasure: *Gorg.* 497d–499b.

but in satisfaction, so that what I get fits what I want. According to Callicles, the stronger my desire, the greater my happiness in satisfying it. According to Socrates, however, I am equally happy in satisfying a strong or a mild desire. If happiness consists in satisfaction, I have reason to cultivate desires that are easy to satisfy rather than ones that are demanding and difficult to satisfy. According to this 'adaptive' conception of happiness, we achieve happiness by adapting our desires to the means available for fulfilling them. Our desires are plastic, since we can modify them through reflexion on whether they are easy or difficult to satisfy them. Since want our desires satisfied, we have good reason to adapt them to the available means of satisfaction.³⁸

On this basis Socrates argues that the virtuous person is happy. Virtuous people form the desires that they can satisfy, and hence they can achieve happiness. The different virtues are aspects of rational order in someone's soul. This rational order teaches us not to make foolish demands of the external world, and shows us that we lose nothing by being just, temperate, and so on. We are tempted to act unjustly because we think we can gain something for ourselves. We would gain something only if we needed to maximize our desires and the pleasure we can get from satisfying them. Since we are better off with desires that can be more easily satisfied, lying, cheating, and stealing make us no better off. The virtuous person loses nothing by being virtuous. The adaptive conception of happiness, therefore, supports Socrates' conviction that the virtuous person is happy.

We may object that this reply to Callicles has gone too far in the other direction. Even if Socrates has shown that Callicles' sequence of desires, satisfactions, and more demanding desires does not produce a happy life, we may doubt whether mere adaptation of desires to circumstances is all that we might reasonably expect in the best life. Aristotle expresses such doubts when he maintains that happiness consists in being active rather than inactive.³⁹

23. The One-Sided Successors of Socrates

A reader of the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* might be puzzled by Socrates' claims about happiness. While the *Protagoras* defends a hedonistic account of happiness over one's whole life, the *Gorgias* argues that hedonism is inconsistent with concern for one's whole life. Some of Socrates' followers, the 'one-sided' Socratics, develop these two tendencies in Socrates. The hedonism of the *Protagoras* underlies the hedonism of Aristippus the Cyrenaic. The anti-hedonism of the *Gorgias* underlies the austere doctrine of Antisthenes and Diogenes the Cynic, who defend Socrates' view that virtue is sufficient for happiness.⁴⁰

Plato (in the *Republic*) and Aristotle argue against the Cyrenaic and Cynic interpretations of Socrates. Epicureans and Stoics reject the Platonic and Aristotelian position, and return to the one-sided Socratic positions. Epicurus'

³⁸ Desire and satisfaction: *Gorg.* 492d3.

³⁹ Aristotle on activity: §40.

⁴⁰ Sources for the Cyrenaics and Cynics: Giannantoni, ed., *SSR* (Greek and Latin only); Boys-Stones and Rowe, eds., *CS*. Discussion: Long, 'Legacy'. Aristippus was from Cyrene (a Greek colony in Libya), and his followers were called Cyrenaics.

hedonism is a modified version of Cyrenaic hedonism, and the Stoic doctrine of the sufficiency of virtue for happiness is a modified version of the Cynic doctrine.

24. The Cyrenaic Version of Hedonism

Aristippus endorses hedonism, but he rejects Socrates' preference for long-term over short-term pleasure. He believes that we should care only about the pleasure that we can enjoy here and now. The ultimate end is not happiness (i.e., the good in one's life as a whole), but the pleasure of here and now. If we are only concerned with what will give us most pleasure here and now, attention to future effects and future preferences is pointless. Aristippus expresses indifference to long-term satisfaction, by asserting that happiness is worthwhile only because of the particular pleasures that compose it. He denies any value to memory and anticipation of pleasures.⁴¹

This version of hedonism challenges some of Socrates' assumptions in the *Protagoras*. Socrates affirms: (1) Good and evil consist in pleasure and pain. (2) Particular pleasures are to be chosen for the sake of our ultimate end, happiness. (3) Happiness consists in the predominance of pleasure over pain in our life as a whole. Aristippus replies that a hedonist who accepts (1) has no reason to accept (2).

To refute (2), Aristippus asserts we know that pleasure is good, not through argument or learning or any rational process, but because we grasp it through our feelings (or 'affections' or 'passions', *pathê*). Our initial feelings are the basis of beliefs about good and evil, because we experience these feelings before we acquire education or rational belief. Socrates is right, therefore, to assert that pleasure is the ultimate end. But happiness, understood as a condition of one's whole life, is not the ultimate end; our feelings move us to pursue pleasure, but not to pursue happiness.⁴²

This version of hedonism concedes Socrates' objection to Callicles in the *Gorgias*. Socrates argues that the hedonist cannot justify concern for one's longer-term good, and therefore cannot justify bravery or the other virtues. Aristippus agrees, but he still maintains hedonism. If we believe, on the basis of our feelings, that the good is pleasure, we should not try to defend the Socratic virtues, but we should be hedonists of the present.⁴³

25. The Cynic Defence of Socrates

Socrates' Cynic followers reject this hedonist response to Socrates' argument against Callicles. Since we think of ourselves as temporally extended beings who have a life, rather than simply a series of experiences, we have good reason to reject an account

⁴¹ Aristippus' hedonism: Diogenes Laertius (cited as DL) ii 88. Cf. Plato, *Pr.* 351b7–e7. The future: DL ii 91. Happiness: DL ii 87–8; Clement, *Stromateis*. ii 21, 130.7–8; Athenaeus, xii 544a–b.

⁴² Affections (*pathê*) and pleasure: DL ii 88; Aristotle, *EN* 1172b9–25; Plato, *Philebus* 11b4–6; 60a7–b1. Cf. Epicurus on pleasure v. happiness: §61.

⁴³ Sidgwick on preference for the present: §256. See Parfit, *RP* 117–20.

of our good that ignores this feature of us. The Cynics, therefore, accept the adaptive conception of happiness and the sufficiency of virtue for happiness.⁴⁴

Diogenes explains the implications (as he supposes) of this position. Socrates' claim that the good person cannot be harmed is true if and only if the virtuous person is invulnerable to external circumstances. To be invulnerable, we need to ensure that our desires can be satisfied even in the most unfavourable external circumstances. If we can achieve this condition, nothing else matters. Though other people think Socrates' choice of justice is costly to him, the Cynics argue that it costs him nothing, because it deprives him only of alleged goods that he does not need.

The Cynics believe that if we understand happiness in this way, we should reject hedonism. Antisthenes denies that pleasure is either an instrumental or an intrinsic good, and asserts that he would rather go mad than feel pleasure. Pleasure essentially involves some psychic disturbance, and inevitably attracts us to external objects that we may or may not be able to secure. Hence it impedes the adaptation of desires to circumstances. We are better off if we are free from both pain and pleasure.⁴⁵

Diogenes (according to stories about him) put these Socratic convictions into practice in an ostentatiously unconventional way of life. He lived in a tub, wore very few clothes, satisfied his sexual needs by masturbation, and rejected the ordinary duties of a citizen because he regarded himself as a citizen of the world. He did not necessarily intend people to imitate all his practices. Through exaggerated behaviour he sought to make people realize that they were putting effort into getting things that do not really matter. Physical comfort and ordinary social life do not matter, because virtue is the only thing that matters.⁴⁶

Socrates did not follow a Cynic way of life, and did not withdraw from ordinary social and political life. But the Cynic interpretation of Socrates raises a question for him. If he believes that the virtuous person is happy, how can he resist the Cynic conclusion? Plato is supposed to have described Diogenes as 'Socrates gone mad'. But Diogenes might reply that he simply pursues Socrates' arguments to their logical conclusions.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Antisthenes: Xenophon, *Mem.* iii 11.17; Diogenes: Dio Chrysostom. 8.1–2; Xenophon, *Symp.* iv 61–4.

⁴⁵ Antisthenes on pleasure: Aulus Gellius, *NA* ix 5.3; DL vi 3. Cf. Plato, *Philebus* 43a–50e.

⁴⁶ The use of exaggeration: DL vi 35.

⁴⁷ Diogenes and Socrates: DL vi 54.

3

Plato

26. Plato and Socrates

When Socrates was executed in 399, Plato was 28. His philosophical dialogues expound, defend, and modify the views of Socrates. According to Plato, the most defensible version of Socrates' outlook is neither the Cyrenaic nor the Cynic version. But he agrees with the one-sided Socratics that a defence of Socrates' central views requires us to abandon some of his other views.¹

Socrates asks how we ought to live. To answer this question, he tries to define the virtues and to understand their relation to happiness. In his view, we are better off if we practise the virtues than if we gain other goods at the expense of the virtues. Plato agrees with Socrates.

But Socrates also defends two further claims: (1) Knowledge is sufficient for virtue, as the *Protagoras* argues. (2) Virtue is sufficient for happiness, as the *Gorgias* argues. Plato rejects both claims. To defend Socrates' claim that we are better off if we live a virtuous life than if we live any other life, he examines these claims about knowledge and virtue.

27. Definitions and the Metaphysics of Morals: Moral Objectivity

Plato believes that Socrates was right to look for definitions of the virtues. But what are the objects of definition? What sort of thing is 'the F' or 'the F itself' that we try to define? Plato's examination of this question leads him into the area of ethics that is later described as 'meta-ethics', in contrast to normative ethics. Normative ethics asks, as Socrates does, about what the virtues are, what actions are right and why they are right, and, in general, about what we do; it looks for norms and standards to guide our actions. Meta-ethics asks what we mean in speaking of moral properties (the semantics of ethics), how we know moral truths (the epistemology of ethics), and what sorts of things moral properties are (the metaphysics of ethics).²

According to Plato, Socrates' question 'What is bravery?' is about the property, or 'form', that is common to all brave people and actions, as such. 'As such' indicates that not every property that they might share is the one that Socrates is looking for. He is not asking about the meaning of the word 'brave', or about the definition of a

¹ Plato's works are translated in Cooper, ed., *CW*. Plato's ethics in general: White, 'Plato's Ethics'.

² Meta-ethics and normative ethics: §§163, 268.

word or concept. He wants a 'real definition', a single account that applies to all and only brave people and actions, and shows what is brave about them. Such an account gives us a 'standard' or 'pattern' for judging whether someone's actions display bravery or not; it is not a list of brave actions. In the *Euthyphro* Socrates wants not 'the many piouses', but the single 'form' or 'character' that they share.³

Since the form is a pattern that we can refer to in deciding whether something is pious or not, we have not found it if we can only cite a property that belongs to things that are not pious, or does not belong to everything that is pious. Many answers offered by Socrates' interlocutors have one or both of these faults.

But some answers that are free of these faults still do not describe the form. They describe a property that is coextensive with the form (i.e., it belongs to all and only the same things), but that is not what Socrates wants. This is why in the *Euthyphro* he denies that the pious, as such, is what all the gods love. Even if the two predicates 'pious' and 'god-beloved' are coextensive, the pious is not the same as the god-beloved, because it is not true that the pious is pious because the gods love it. Our definition should reflect the fact that the gods love the pious because it is pious.⁴

Socrates answers (without much argument) a question in theological ethics, about the connexion between the divine will and moral rightness and wrongness. He rejects the voluntarist view, that the divine will creates moral properties, and he affirms the naturalist view, that the divine will follows the divine knowledge of what is already right and wrong. Later we will discuss elaborations of naturalism and voluntarism.

This argument illustrates one of Socrates' general principles. In his view, 'The F is the G' is an adequate definition of the F if and only if F things are F because they are G. Forms are explanatory because a correct account of them explains the relevant features of things. The beautiful is not the same as the bright coloured, because bright colour is not what makes things beautiful. The 'lovers of sights and sounds'—i.e., those who attend only to observable features of things—cannot find moral forms.⁵

Observable properties do not provide definitions. Repaying what was borrowed is sometimes just and sometimes unjust, so that this property changes from making an action just to making an action unjust. Since the presence of justice in an action always makes the action just, justice cannot change from making an action just to making it unjust. Since repaying what was borrowed changes in this way, justice cannot be repaying what was borrowed. Nor can it be any other observable property that undergoes such a change from being just to being unjust.⁶

But even if some observable property had the same extension as the relevant form, it would not provide a definition, because it would not provide an explanation (as the *Euthyphro* shows). We want to know what makes it just to repay in some circumstances and unjust in others. Plato contrasts observable properties with the just, the fine, the good, the appropriate (*prepon*), and the required (*deon*). He sometimes calls these 'disputed' properties. When he argues that these are not observable properties,

³ Socratic definitions: §15. Single account, single form, pattern: *Laches* 191c–192b; *Euthyphro* 5de, 6de; *Meno* 72a–e.

⁴ Piety and what the gods love: *Euthyphro* 10de.

⁵ Forms v. observable features: *Phaedo* 100b–103a; *Republic* 475d–480a.

⁶ Repayment: *Republic* 331c–332a.

he affirms that evaluative properties cannot be reduced to non-evaluative properties, because the latter do not explain what the former explain.⁷

If moral properties are not observable properties, it is easier to answer a sceptical argument. Sceptics notice that it is sometimes just to repay what we have borrowed, but sometimes unjust, or that it is sometimes brave to stand firm, but sometimes simply stupid.⁸ From these facts about variation they infer that nothing is objectively just or brave, and that beliefs about justice or bravery are simply social conventions with no objective basis. We notice more conflicts of this sort between different societies with different laws and conventions.

This is the route that Protagoras (e.g.) follows to his conclusion that moral properties are purely conventional, and are not objective features of reality. We might suppose that Socrates' inquiries lead to this conventionalist conclusion, because they seem to refute all attempts to say what moral properties really are.⁹

In Plato's view, however, this argument for conventionalism depends on the false assumption that a correct definition would have to reduce moral properties to observable properties. Once we abandon this assumption, we can identify moral properties with objective properties. Plato's argument from irreducibility to objectivity sketches a conception of moral properties that is taken up by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Platonists, especially Cudworth and Price.

28. Rational v. Non-Rational Desires

According to Socrates, we do not need to mention correct desire in our account of virtue. All my desires aim ultimately at my own good; hence, if I know that an action is fine and good for me, I want to do it. Virtue is the knowledge of what is good for me, and vice is the lack of this knowledge.¹⁰

In Plato's view, Socrates is right to believe that we have rational desires, because we have desires that respond to beliefs about what is on the whole better and worse. If all our desires were rational, Socrates would be right to say that knowledge of what is better ensures that we will do it. But he is wrong to say that all our desires are rational.

According to Socrates, no one who knows or believes that *x* is better than *y* will choose *y*. If we believe *x* is better, but choose *y*, we act on a temporary false belief that *y* is better than *x*. Plato replies that some desires (e.g., to drink) persist in the face of our belief that it is better not to satisfy them (e.g., the belief that it would be unhealthy or dangerous to take this drink). If the strength of our desire for *y* sometimes fails to match our evaluative judgment that *x* is better than *y*, we have non-rational desires that do not respond to beliefs about the good.¹¹

These non-rational desires belong to two non-rational parts of the soul, the 'spirited' and 'appetitive' parts. The non-rational parts sometimes conflict with

⁷ Evaluative properties: *Crito* 48b; *Euthyphro* 6b–e; *Republic* 336cd.

⁸ Standing firm: *Laches* 191a–192b.

⁹ Protagoras: *Theaetetus* 166–8, 177c–179b. Arguments from variation: §§55–6, 277. Socratic refutations: *Republic* 537e–539d.

¹⁰ Socrates on knowledge and virtue: §§19–20.

¹¹ Non-rational desires: *Republic* 438a–439d; §47 (Aristotle); §92 (Aquinas); §§174–5 (Butler).

each other, and sometimes conflict with the rational part. The appetitive part consists of desires (e.g., hunger, thirst, sexual desire) that move us whatever we may believe about the goodness or badness of their objects. The spirited part includes anger, resentment, pride, shame, and love of honour. These emotions have objects that appear good or bad; we take pride in something that we take to be good about ourselves, and we are ashamed about something that we take to be bad. But such emotions sometimes conflict with rational desires for what is best all things considered. Hence I might be angry at you for getting a job you wanted, even though I also recognize that you are not to blame, and I have no reason to be angry at you.¹²

The division of the soul into parts with potentially conflicting desires helps to explain how weak will (incontinence) is possible. We do not always act on the desires of the rational part, because desires of the other two parts may oppose it and may sometimes overcome it. Contrary to Socrates, we have strong desires that do not directly respond to reasoning about the good, but sometimes move us to action none the less.

29. Rational and Non-Rational Aspects of the Virtues

This feature of non-rational desires explains why, in Plato's view, Socrates is wrong to believe that a virtue consists only in knowledge. Since we have non-rational desires that can interfere with the desires that rest on true belief about the good, a virtue requires not only true belief, but also the adaptation of our non-rational desires to this true belief. We need to have suitable pleasures and pains formed in our non-rational parts when we are young, so that when we acquire rational judgment we will welcome and accept what it says.¹³

Each of the four 'cardinal' virtues (wisdom, bravery, temperance, and justice) requires the appropriate functions and structure of the three parts in an individual soul. Bravery involves endurance, the condition of the spirited part that prevents us from being swayed by unreasonable fears. Temperance involves the right order in the appetitive part, so that we have restrained and orderly appetites. Wisdom requires the appropriate knowledge in the rational part, supported by properly trained desires in the other two parts.¹⁴

Though Plato recognizes these differences between the virtues, he agrees with Socrates about the reciprocity of the virtues—that we have one of the virtues if and only if we have them all. If we have wisdom in the rational part, we know what needs to be done in different circumstances. If our non-rational desires did not listen to wisdom, we would not do what needs to be done, but if we are temperate, these non-rational desires are properly controlled so that we follow wisdom. Similarly, if we restrain our fears and rash feelings of confidence, we face dangers in the appropriate way, and act bravely. In the virtuous person, then, each part carries out its proper role under the guidance of the wisdom in the rational part. Since wisdom grasps what is

¹² Conflict involving the spirited part: *Republic* 4393–441d.

¹³ Preparation for reason: *Republic* 401e–402a. Aristotle on moral education: §42.

¹⁴ The virtues in the tripartite soul: *Republic* 427e–435c, 441d–443b. 'Cardinal': Aquinas, *ST* 1–2 q61 al sc.

good for the whole soul, I achieve my own good if I act wisely, and therefore act on all the virtues. By this argument Plato defends Socrates' conviction that those who act virtuously have the best life, because one's virtue promotes one's own happiness.¹⁵

30. An Unanswered Question: The Problem of Justice

This defence of Socrates mentions three virtues, but Socrates and Plato recognize four cardinal virtues. The fourth virtue is justice, and the defence of the other three virtues is not easy to apply to the fourth. Bravery and temperance might be treated as self-regarding virtues that control our non-rational desires so that we achieve our own good. We might understand wisdom as wisdom about one's own good and how to achieve it. But if we think of the virtues in this way, justice does not seem to fit. It seems to be essentially other-regarding; just actions are just not because they benefit the just agent, but because they show respect for the interests and rights of others.

Socrates affirms none the less that he is better off by being just. In his view, we live well and happily by living justly, and the just person cannot be harmed. But he does not defend this conviction. Plato regards Socrates as the most just person he has known, but he does not believe that Socrates has adequately defended justice. In the *Republic* he tries to offer a better defence of justice.¹⁶

Opponents of justice argue that my justice is bad for me precisely because it is 'another's good'. It is good for other people, but harmful to me.¹⁷ If I pay my debts and keep my promises, I benefit someone else at my expense. Since the general observance of rules of justice maintains a stable society from which I benefit; I have good reason to want other people to obey the rules. But apparently I will be even better off if other people obey the rules and I get away with injustice.¹⁸ Thucydides supposes that this is the attitude that people take to morality in times of war and civil conflict. Opponents of justice take a similar view about the place of justice within a society.

In the *Republic* Glaucon illustrates this point with a thought experiment. Gyges the Lydian had a ring that made him invisible whenever he liked, and so allowed him to commit injustice without being found out.¹⁹ Glaucon suggests that almost all of us would choose to use Gyges' ring if they had one, and that therefore they act justly only if they are compelled by fear of detection.

According to this view, justice is, at best, a purely instrumental good, to be chosen only for the sake of its good causal consequences. If I argue that I ought to be just because other people will trust me and I will benefit from their trust, I appeal to the results of appearing to be just. But I can achieve them by appearing to be just while really being unjust (using Gyges' ring, or the equivalent, if I have the chance). In that

¹⁵ Reciprocity of virtues: *Protagoras* 329e; §§19, 47. Guidance by the rational part: *Republic* 441d–442b.

¹⁶ Socrates the most just: *Phaedo* 118a. The argument of the *Republic*: Annas, *IPR*.

¹⁷ The opponents are Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus (who do not agree with Thrasymachus, but restate his case so that Socrates can reply to it). They present some of the objections raised by Callicles in *Gorgias* 482c–484c. See §21.

¹⁸ The case against justice: *Republic* 357a–367e.

¹⁹ Gyges' ring: *Republic* 359b–360d.

case, I have only a 'façade' of justice. I have no reason to be just, therefore, but I am better off if I am unjust and keep up the appearance of justice.²⁰

Glaucon supports this view of justice with a second thought experiment. Consider a just person who is badly off in every way, except in being just, and an unjust person who is well off in every way except in being unjust. Is it not clear that the unjust person is better off than the just person? Justice, therefore, cannot be a great enough good to make the just person better off than everyone else.²¹

This comparison of lives is not merely imaginary. Socrates suffered for his devotion to justice and morality. Perhaps he did the right thing in behaving justly. But was he not worse off than those who have power, wealth, and the freedom to do as they please, even if they maintain their position by unjust means?²²

In Plato's view, the just person always comes out better in this comparison of lives. Justice is a component of happiness, and is therefore to be chosen for its own sake, and not simply as an instrumental means to other goods.²³ Moreover, it is a dominant component of happiness; in other words, we are better off being just than being unjust, no matter what else is true of the just and the unjust person. Justice is to be chosen over any combination of the other components of happiness.

We might express this idea by considering all the possible circumstances ('possible worlds') in which I am unjust. In some of them I am rich, in some poor, and so on for every other good and bad thing other than justice and injustice. Similarly, I may consider all the possible worlds in which I am just, and in which I am more or less well or badly off in other ways. Plato claims that if we compare the worst of the worlds in which I am just with the best of those in which I am unjust, I am better off in the former world than in the latter.

These claims do not vindicate Socrates' belief that the virtuous person is happy. To vindicate Socrates, the Cynics claim that virtue and its necessary results are all we need for happiness. In the *Republic* Plato does not endorse this Cynic claim. In his view, a just person who suffers poverty, ill-repute, torture, and premature death loses some elements of human well-being, but justice is so great a good that these harms cannot outweigh it. Though just people are not necessarily happy, they are happier—i.e., closer to being happy—than anyone else.

These claims about the nature of happiness, and the relation between justice and happiness need fuller discussion than Plato gives them. We find a fuller discussion in Aristotle.²⁴

31. Why Justice Is Always Better than Injustice

In Plato's view, those who deny that we are better off by being just are misled by a mistaken conception of themselves. We are rational agents, but we also have

²⁰ Facade of justice: *Republic* 365c; *Phaedo* 69b.

²¹ Benefits of injustice: *Republic* 343c, 360e–361d. Questions about justice: 367e. Later discussion of this argument: §66 (Epicurus); §124 (Grotius); §134 (Hobbes's fool).

²² Is justice beneficial? *Gorgias* 470c–471d.

²³ Justice to be chosen for itself: *Republic* 367b–d.

²⁴ Aristotle on parts v. instrumental means: §47. Justice and happiness: §22 (Socrates); §41 (Aristotle); §70 (Stoics).

non-rational desires that do not necessarily respond to our beliefs about the good. Hence we need the virtues that order the parts of the soul. The cardinal virtues of wisdom, bravery, and temperance are elements of a well-ordered soul, and so our real interest requires these virtues.

To show that justice is also a necessary element of a well-ordered soul, and therefore a cardinal virtue, Plato describes justice in a city. Justice consists in the right relations between the different parts (individuals, groups, and classes) in a city, when each of them does its proper work for the good of the whole city. Since the soul also has parts, it needs to be ordered, as the city does, and so it needs the virtue that is analogous to justice in the city. This virtue is justice in the soul. A just soul has its different elements ordered so that each of them does its proper work for the good of the whole soul.²⁵

If we lack a just soul, therefore, we are not reliably guided by the aims and desires of the rational part of the soul, which aim at our overall good. If we are not controlled by the rational part, we simply react to non-rational desires. A just soul fits our nature as rational agents. If happiness requires the fulfilment of our nature, a just soul is necessary for happiness.²⁶

This claim about justice and happiness assumes that a person's good depends on the nature of a person, just as what is good for a knife or a tree depends on the essential properties of the knife or the tree. Since we are essentially rational agents, our good requires the expression of reason, and especially of practical reason. Domination by non-rational desires would not be bad for us if we were non-rational animals, but, since we are rational animals, our good requires guidance by reason.²⁷ Since a just soul is ruled by practical reason, the agent who has a just soul lives the life of a rational agent. Those who lack a just soul live the life of an animal, but constantly struggle with their rational aspects.

This assumption about the good of a person needs more defence. Aristotle, among others, defends Plato's assumption more fully.

32. An Objection: Is Plato's Argument Irrelevant to the Question?

Plato has argued that the person with psychic justice is better off than anyone else. But has he answered his original question about just and unjust lives?

When Glaucon and Adeimantus asked whether justice is good for the just person, they relied on the intuitive and plausible assumption that the just person obeys laws, does not cheat, and does not seek unfair advantages. Since they assumed that justice is an other-directed virtue, they inferred that justice benefits others but harms the just agent.²⁸

²⁵ Justice and one's proper work: *Republic* 432d–435d.

²⁶ Benefits of a just soul: *Republic* 443c–445b. Fulfilment of nature: 352d–353e, 443c–444b. Aristotle on nature and reason: §39.

²⁷ The good of a rational agent: *Philebus* 20d–21d.

²⁸ Other-directed characteristics of justice: *Republic* 343c–e, 349bc, 358e–359b, 362bc, 367c.

Plato has argued that psychic justice is control by reason. But is this psychic justice other-directed justice? Apparently I could be controlled by reason, but still lack other-directed justice. I might have trained myself to avoid acting on non-rational impulses, so that I control my temper and my appetites in my own interest. But suppose I do all this in order to advance my own interest at the expense of others. Is this not psychic justice combined with other-directed injustice?

Apparently, then, Plato has not answered the question about justice that he set out to answer. The question was about the other-directed virtue of justice. A convincing answer needs to show that psychic justice and other-directed justice are not two virtues, but one, because control by reason includes the appropriate concern for others.

33. Plato's Answer: A Diagnosis of Injustice

Plato examines the supposed attractions of injustice. We might think it obvious that unjust action is often good for us, and just action often bad for us, because unjust action helps us to get what we want, and just action often prevents us from getting what we want. This argument rests on two assumptions: (1) Our well-being consists simply in the satisfaction of our desires. (2) The desires that are satisfied by injustice are stronger than our other desires.

Plato questions these two assumptions. Unjust actions seem attractive if we have the immoderate and uncontrolled desires that are absent from just souls. Unjust actions offer me unjust gains at other people's expense. But such gains appeal to me only if I have misguided non-rational impulses: I may want lavish and expensive foods, or the unrestricted sexual pleasures that are gained by flattery, force, and deception, or I may want to be admired for my wealth and I may feel ashamed if I am despised for my poverty. I have these strong desires and act on them because my non-rational parts are uncontrolled. If I am rationally controlled, I am free of these unreasonably demanding desires.²⁹

This is a negative defence of justice. Unjust actions do not attract us if reason controls us. Therefore agents who have just souls avoid unjust action, and conform to other-directed justice.

34. The Outlook of Reason Requires Other-Directed Justice

We may still ask, however, whether Plato has a positive defence of other-directed justice. If we have just souls, have we any positive concern for the good of others?

In the *Republic* Plato answers this question in the special case of the philosophers who rule the ideal city. This city is organized, as all cities should be, so as to secure the common good of all the citizens, and not to benefit one class at the expense of others.³⁰ Pursuit of this common good makes the city just. It is ruled by its rational

²⁹ Unjust actions and disordered souls: *Republic* 442d–443b.

³⁰ The good of the whole city: *Republic* 419e–421c.

part—the philosopher rulers who understand the human good. In this respect it is analogous to the well-governed soul, which reason rules in the interest of the whole soul.

The ideal city is neither democratic nor oligarchic. Plato believes that these forms of government result from domination by one class over another—by the rich in an oligarchy and by the poor in a democracy. The only escape from the cycle of class struggle, instability, and violence is a political system that is reliably guided by the common interest. This is the political system that makes a society just, and it requires rule by philosophers.

But why should philosophers want to rule in a just society? Can we rely on them to rule it justly? Since a philosopher's soul is just, it is ruled by the rational part in the interest of the whole soul. But why should philosophers not decide to spare themselves the tiresome task of ruling, and get on with something more interesting? Plato observes that philosophers will think they are in the Isles of the Blessed while they are wholly absorbed in the contemplation of the forms (i.e., justice, goodness, beauty, and the other things that Socrates tried to define). He seems to imply that for someone who is able to contemplate the forms, everything apart from the life of pure intellect will seem trivial.³¹

This, however, is not Plato's conclusion. The philosophers are 'compelled' to take part in ruling, because it is rationally required, and hence compulsory for them. They care about the just society because it embodies the rational order that they want to maintain in their own souls. It would be half-hearted and inconsistent to care about maintaining the rational order in oneself while being indifferent to rational order elsewhere. Though ruling may be irksome, philosophers want to take their part in ruling, because it extends the rule of reason in the world. In the philosopher, a rationally ordered soul turns to the study of philosophy, but this is not the only form of rational order. A well-ordered community also embodies rational order, and therefore is an appropriate aim for a philosopher.³²

The pursuit of rational order in the world is not confined to philosophers, and political rule is not its only object. The social and political aims of the philosophers are expressions of our basic rational desire. Plato calls this basic desire 'love' (*erôs*), which is concern for our future well-being. Since we desire our future well-being, and not simply our future existence, we want to remain in existence with the traits, and especially the rational order in our souls, that we correctly value in ourselves. We would achieve this if we could be immortal and could continue to possess these traits for ever. But since we cannot be immortal in this way, we can achieve the next best thing if we can reproduce in other people the rational order that we value in ourselves. This sort of reproduction does not require us to bring a new person into existence; it can also be achieved by reproducing the rationally ordered traits in someone who already exists. This sort of reproduction is the basis of concern for the well-being of others, as individuals and in society. Hence we have a reason to be

³¹ Contemplation: *Republic* 519bc; *Theaetetus* 172d–177a.

³² Compulsion and rule by reason: *Republic* 500d, 519c–521a.

concerned about other people as well as ourselves. Agents who have just souls seek to benefit others by producing just souls in them.³³

Plato's account of concern for self and others is his fullest reply to the opponents of justice. He explains why those who think other-directed justice is harmful to the just agent have the wrong conception of benefit and harm. The rational basis of self-concern also requires concern for others.

Plato, therefore, defends one of Socrates' central moral claims. Contrary to Socrates, not all of our desires are rational desires directed to the good. We need to develop the rule of reason within our desires, so that we aim at our present and future good, and are not distracted by non-rational desires for short-term satisfactions. But rational desire for one's own future good cannot be confined to oneself, because the correct understanding of one's own good requires the development of self-concerned desire into desire for the good of others. Socrates was right, therefore, to maintain that the just person is always better off than the unjust.

35. Morality, Reason, and Self-Interest

Throughout the *Republic* Plato assumes that we have a good reason to care about justice only if we can show that justice is better for us than injustice would be.³⁴ He shares this assumption with Socrates, and their historical circumstances might seem to support it. They experienced some of the violent conflicts that arose in Greek cities when different individuals, groups, and classes thought they had something to gain by injustice.

All these antagonists saw the prospect of wealth, power, and domination for themselves or for their own party, at the expense of others. In Plato's view, a city that is divided by these perceptions of conflicting interests is no longer a real city, but simply a collection of struggling factions and classes.³⁵ The only cure for this condition is the recognition of one's real interest. Those who suppose that morality inevitably conflicts with self-interest confuse their interest with the gratification of their desires for wealth, power, domination over others, and the various satisfactions that may result. But when we think about our nature as rational agents, we see that this purely acquisitive and competitive conception of our interest is mistaken. If we try to express rational agency in our own lives, and in the common life of our society, we see that we share this interest with others. We do not have to explain how it could be rational to follow morality against our own interest. Those who believe that this question needs to be answered have not understood their own interest, because they have not understood their own nature.³⁶

³³ Reproduction in self and others: *Symposium* 206b–208b. 'In this way' avoids any conflict between the *Symposium* and Plato's doctrine of immortality. Concern for others: *Symposium* 208c–212a; *Phaedrus* 250e–253c.

³⁴ Objections to this interpretation of Plato: White, 'Plato's ethics' 37–40.

³⁵ Disunity in cities: *Republic* 422e–423a.

³⁶ Further discussion of self-interest and morality: Aristotle §§50–1; Aquinas §102; Butler §§192–5; Green and Bradley §§265–6.

4

Aristotle

36. Aristotle and Plato: What Is Happiness?

Aristotle agrees with Plato's rejection of the two Socratic claims that virtue is sufficient for happiness and that knowledge is sufficient for virtue. He agrees with Plato that virtue requires the cooperation of the rational and the non-rational parts of the soul, and that the virtuous person is always better off than the non-virtuous, even though virtue alone is not sufficient for happiness.¹

He also agrees with Plato's conviction that we need ethical theory if we are to grasp the proper aims of political society. Ethical theory should be useful to legislators, especially to those who undertake moral education. The human good is too complex to be left to individual effort; human societies also fail to achieve it, because they are wrong about the nature and sources of human happiness.

Aristotle follows Plato on these basic principles, but he raises new questions. Socrates and Plato have views about what happiness consists in and how it should and should not be pursued. But they do not ask Socrates' 'What is it?' question about happiness.² Aristotle believes that if we ask and answer this question, we can see where different views about happiness are right or wrong.

37. The Right Method Requires the Systematic Examination of Initially Plausible Beliefs

Aristotle's main works on ethics are not dialogues in the Platonic style, but they adapt Socratic and Platonic methods of argument to a more systematic inquiry. Aristotle examines the most widespread and plausible views about happiness. We begin from our intuitive judgments (i.e., those that seem initially plausible, but are not explicitly based on an articulated theory) and examine them in relation to one another.³ Sometimes these initially plausible intuitive judgments seem to lead us to apparently contradictory conclusions. Like Socrates' interlocutors, we are puzzled, and we are not sure which way to go.⁴

¹ Aristotle's works are translated in CW, ed. Barnes. Translations of *Nicomachean Ethics*: Ross (ed. Brown); Irwin. General guides to the *Ethics*: Hardie, *AET*; Broadie, *EWA*. Aristotle and later Greek ethics: Annas, *MH*.

² Aristotle seeks a real definition, as Socrates and Plato do.

³ Intuitive judgments v. intuition: §190 (Price); §§239, 248, 254 (Sidgwick).

⁴ Starting points: *EN* 1095a28–b8; 1145a2–7. Puzzles (*aporiai*): §15 (Socrates); §55 (Sceptics).

We can find a way forward from these puzzles, through reflexion on our initial beliefs and their apparent consequences. Sometimes we find that our initial beliefs only appeared to imply contradictory conclusions, because at least one argument was flawed, or because the conclusions are not really contradictory. Sometimes, however, we have good reason to reject one of our initial beliefs in favour of another. Suppose, for instance, that if we reject *p*, we also have to reject some of our most basic ethical beliefs, but if we reject *q*, we leave the rest of our ethical views relatively untouched. In that case we have good reason to reject *q*, but retain *p*, and so resolve the contradiction between our initial beliefs.

This procedure is not peculiar to moral beliefs. If we believe that a straight stick immersed in water becomes bent and then becomes straight again when we pull it out, our strange claims about the behaviour of objects in and out of water would be inconsistent with any plausible physical theory. In this case we conclude that our initial belief was mistaken. Aristotle invites us to apply the same sort of reasoning to our moral beliefs.

Aristotle describes this method as ‘dialectic’. It is Socratic argument applied to initially plausible beliefs. Aristotle believes, as Socrates does, that moral philosophy is accessible to those who are honest and persistent enough to examine their basic convictions and the connexions between them. Sidgwick and Rawls, among others, elaborate this Aristotelian approach to moral inquiry, and many others follow it implicitly.⁵

38. Since Happiness Is the Ultimate End, It Must Be the Complete Good

Aristotle applies this dialectical method to familiar conceptions of happiness. He argues that some apparently plausible views seem to conflict, but none the less suggest a more satisfactory conception.

Those who agree with Polus in the *Gorgias* suppose that Archelaus the king of Macedon was happy because he was rich and powerful, and had all the resources he wanted for the satisfaction of his desires. On the other side, Solon warned Croesus that no one should be called happy until he is dead. All the wealth and power of Croesus could not guarantee that he would suffer no disasters before his death. Those who live a more obscure life without disaster are happier than Croesus.⁶

According to Aristotle, disputes about happiness express different views about the ultimate good. This is an end that we want for its own sake alone, and for the sake of which we want everything else (1094a18–19). Why believe there is any such thing?

Rational action is goal-directed. A carpenter who makes a chair is guided by a conception of a chair, and a golfer who plays a stroke aims to move the ball nearer the hole. Each of these immediate goals is in turn a means to some further end: the carpenter perhaps wants to make chairs in order to earn money, again for some

⁵ Dialectical method: *Topics* 100a18–21. See §239 (utilitarianism); §286 (Rawls).

⁶ Archelaus: Plato, *Gorgias* 470d5–471d2. Croesus: Herodotus i 29–33.

further end, and the golfer wants to win the game, perhaps for some further end. In looking for the ultimate end, Aristotle looks for the end of all rational action.

We might object that there is no such thing, because each of us has many ultimate ends. We might want to have an interesting career, to be good athletes, to enjoy the pleasures of eating and drinking, to play a musical instrument, and so on. Each of these is an ultimate end, chosen for its own sake, and not merely as a means to some further end, but none of them is the ultimate end.

Aristotle replies that we also choose each of these ends for the sake of happiness. Our conception of happiness expresses our view about the relative importance of the different ends that we choose for their own sake. It is not simply one ultimate end, but the ultimate end.⁷

Since happiness regulates choice and action in this way, it is the complete good. For if it is reasonable for us to choose everything for the sake of happiness, and happiness is the ultimate end, not chosen for the sake of anything else, we must have reason to believe that no genuine non-instrumental good lies outside happiness. If, then, we can still identify a non-instrumental good outside our account of happiness, we have not yet found the right account of happiness. Popular conceptions of happiness fail this test.⁸

39. Happiness Has to Be Understood through the Human Function

These general conditions do not tell us what kind of life achieves happiness. Aristotle seeks a more definite account of happiness by connecting it with the human 'function'.⁹

The function of an expert in a craft, or of an artefact, or of an organ in an animal's body, is the goal-directed activity that makes them the kinds of things they are—the activity that is essential to them as things of those kinds. Something is an axe because it has the function of cutting. Its matter is wood and iron; the organization that suits its function of cutting is the form. In artefacts the function determines the form. Natural organisms as well as artefacts have forms and functions not because organisms are designed, but because they are essentially organized for specific goal-directed activities. The activities of different kinds of organisms mark different kinds of lives and different functions.¹⁰

The human function, according to Aristotle, is a specific kind of life, distinct from plant and animal life. This function is the activity of the soul expressing reason. In *On the Soul* Aristotle argues that the soul is the form of the living body; something has a soul in so far as its matter (limbs, organs, tissue, etc.) is suitably organized for vital activities. The soul, then, is what makes a body the body of a living creature. Different kinds of life (of plants, animals, human beings) correspond to the different kinds of soul. The human good is determined by the life and activity that are characteristic of

⁷ Further discussion of the ultimate good: §93.

⁸ Happiness is complete (*teleion*: other translations 'perfect' and 'final'): *EN* 1097a15–b21. See §§93–4.

⁹ 'Function' (*ergon*) might also be translated by 'work'. Plato on function: §31.

¹⁰ Cf. Hegel on 'actuality': §226.

human beings in contrast to other things. The characteristic activity is essential to a human being, just as a purely nutritive life is essential to a plant, and a life guided by sense-perception and desire is essential to an animal. Since a human being is essentially a rational agent, the essential activity of a human being is a life that is guided by practical reason.¹¹

The life that is good for a human being, therefore, is guided by practical reason in accordance with virtue (goodness, excellence; *aretê*), where 'virtue' is understood simply as the state that makes its possessor live well. The human good is an actuality of the soul in accordance with the best and most complete virtue, in a complete life. A life that is not guided by reason might be good for some other sort of creature, but not for a human being.¹²

Does Aristotle assume without warrant that reason is the unique attribute of human beings? Why should we focus on reason rather than on other features that might distinguish human beings from other animals? Why suppose that what is unique must be especially important? Why should the fact (if it is one) that we differ from other animals in our capacity for thought show that we ought to spend as much time as possible on thinking?

These questions rest on misunderstanding. In Aristotle's view, reason does not merely happen to be unique to human beings. It is essential to human beings, in contrast to other animals, that they guide their actions by reason. He does not mean that the human good consists primarily in thinking or reasoning. He means that it consists in a life that reason controls and guides.¹³ Aristotle does not deny the importance of other human activities besides reasoning, but he emphasizes the essential role of rational reflexion in human action and life.

When Aristotle affirms that happiness consists in living well, in living according to reason, and in a complete life, he does not understand 'living' and 'life' as simply being alive. He takes it to consist in living a life and following a way of life (as we might speak of 'the farmer's life', 'the American way of life', and so on). The life of a rational agent includes rational planning; we decide what matters most to us, what we care about for its own sake, and what we want to achieve.¹⁴ As rational agents, we want our lives to have some structure that reflects the role of rational reflexion and planning, and we care about this role of practical reason for its own sake.

The human good does not consist merely in the exercise of practical reason, for we can exercise it badly or perversely, in ways that harm us. The good consists in the good exercise of reason; hence happiness consists in activity that exercises practical reason well. Since the virtues are the states that make us live well, by making us exercise practical reason well, happiness is activity in accordance with the virtues.

Aristotle does not explain why it is appropriate to argue from human nature to the human good. Later philosophers argue at length about whether this sort of argument is legitimate.¹⁵ We can see why it is at least plausible if we consider how Aristotle uses

¹¹ Different types of life: EN 1097b32–1098a18.

¹² Definition of the human good: EN 1098a16–20.

¹³ Theoretical reason, however, has an important place in happiness: §52.

¹⁴ See *Eudemian Ethics* i 2. ¹⁵ Nature: §98 (Aquinas); §123 (Suarez); §172 (Butler).

his claims about nature and function to argue for and against different conceptions of happiness.

40. This Conception Is Preferable to Other Conceptions of Happiness

Though Aristotle has presented only an outline of happiness, he thinks it is definite enough to guide our further deliberation.¹⁶ The life that is suitable for a rational agent is not devoted purely to pleasure. I could be immensely pleased, not at all dissatisfied with my life, and entirely convinced I was getting everything I wanted, and still fail to achieve happiness. If I had a brain operation or an accident that reduced me to the condition of a contented child, I would be worse off, not better off, even if I experienced great pleasure and no pain. Such examples show that a life of pleasure can be made better, in other ways than by increasing its quantity of pleasure, pleasure is not the complete good. Hence it is not the ultimate good.¹⁷

Moreover, if we care about rational planning, we will not agree that the human good is simply the accumulation of pleasure or satisfaction. If rational planning matters, the structure of one's life and actions matters for its own sake. Aristotle, therefore, rejects the hedonist conceptions of the good that Socrates and the Cyrenaics maintain. Later defenders of different versions of hedonism include Epicurus, Mill, and Sidgwick, who reply to Aristotle's objections in different ways.¹⁸

For similar reasons, Aristotle rejects a subjective conception that takes happiness to be the satisfaction of our desires, or of the desires that we would form if we knew the effects of satisfying various desires. If my initial desires are foolish but tenacious, I will still want to satisfy them, but I will make myself worse off by satisfying them. If, for instance, I am irrationally attached to the toys I played with when I was a child, I may prefer to play with them no matter what I learn about the other possibilities that might be open to me, but I do not make myself better off. Human well-being requires objective as well as subjective conditions, and cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of one's desires.¹⁹

Though Aristotle rejects hedonist accounts of happiness, he regards pleasure as an essential element of happiness. His account of pleasure is meant to explain both why it seems plausible to identify pleasure with happiness and why pleasure is not happiness. These views on pleasure are relevant both to Aristotle's account of the virtuous person's distinctive pleasures, and to the revival of hedonism by Epicurus.²⁰

¹⁶ Outline: *EN* 1098a20–2.

¹⁷ The life of pleasure: *EN* 1095b19–20. See §249. Childish pleasures: 1174a1–4. Pleasure is incomplete: 1172b28–32. Cf. 1097b16–20 (§38 above). Virtue: 1095b31–1096a2; cf. 1153b19–21. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 361b–d. Pleasure: *EN* 1174a1–4.

¹⁸ Quantitative hedonism: Socrates §19; Cyrenaics §24; Epicurus §§61–3; Mill and Sidgwick §§245–50; Bradley §263.

¹⁹ Subjective v. objective conceptions of the good: Suarez §123.

²⁰ Virtue and pleasure: §45. Aristotle and Epicurus: §65.

41. Happiness Is Partly, But Not Wholly, Vulnerable to External Circumstances

Once we see that rational agency is central to the human good, we can estimate the effect of external circumstances on happiness. Aristotle confronts an old question in Greek ethical thought. When Herodotus represents Solon advising Croesus to call no one happy until he is dead, he implies that human happiness is easily lost through misfortunes such as those that happened to Croesus.²¹ Socrates, however, denies that good or bad fortune has any role in happiness, because he believes that virtue is sufficient for happiness, no matter what happens to a virtuous person.

On this question, Aristotle is closer to Socrates than to common beliefs. Since happiness consists in the exercise of rational agency, it depends more on what we do than on what happens to us. Plato is right, therefore, to maintain that virtue is the dominant component of happiness, so that virtuous people, however badly off they may be in other respects, are happier than vicious people, however well off they may be in other respects.²²

Rational agency, however, does not simply aim at its own exercise, with no further result. It also aims at success, and if it does not succeed, our life is to that extent incomplete. External misfortunes impede rational activity and take away happiness. Hence Socrates (in the *Gorgias*) and the Cynics are wrong to maintain that virtue is all that matters in happiness.²³

42. Happiness Requires Virtue of the Rational and the Non-Rational Soul

Happiness is activity that exercises practical reason well, and therefore in accordance with complete virtue, because the virtues are the states that exercise practical reason correctly. This connexion between happiness and virtue does not tell us what the specific virtues are. Greeks recognized a number of states of character called 'the virtues', including the four cardinal virtues discussed in the Socratic dialogues and in the *Republic*. Aristotle believes that happiness consists in the exercise of these virtues in a complete life.

To defend this answer, he needs to show that the recognized virtues exercise practical reason correctly. He defends this claim in his account of the virtues of character.²⁴ Since, as Plato argues, human beings have both rational and non-rational desires, the excellent and virtuous condition of the soul requires cooperation between these two types of desire.²⁵ The more we are dominated by non-rational desires, the less rational activity is present in our lives. In someone who has the right view of happiness and acts on it, rational desires control and organize non-rational desires,

²¹ Herodotus: §38. ²² The dominance of virtue: Plato §30.

²³ Misfortune: *EN* 1100a5–9; b29–30; Socrates §18; Cynics §25; Stoics §70.

²⁴ Aristotle's expression for virtue of character (*êthikê aretê*; see *EN* i 13) is the origin (by way of the Latin 'virtus moralis' of the term 'moral virtue'. See §49.

²⁵ Rational and non-rational desire: Plato §§28–9; Aquinas §92; Butler §175.

and non-rational desires cooperate with them. This is the condition of a virtuous person.

Since virtue requires the appropriate modification, but not the elimination, of non-rational desires, and since these are formed and modified by practice and habit, moral education requires habituation. Before we understand why it is sometimes better not to act on our angry or greedy impulses, we have to get used to restraining them, so that gradually we stop feeling them on the wrong occasions. If this training is delayed until we understand why it is better not to lash out on the least provocation, it may be too late for us to change, and it may be difficult to convince us that we ought to change. This is why moral education is a task for the state as well as for parents and teachers. Since our habits are formed by the society we grow up in, a good society needs to oversee moral education from the beginning, as Plato saw.²⁶

43. A Virtue of Character Is a State That Elects

Aristotle defines a virtue of character as (1) a state (2) involving election, (3) lying in a mean that is relative to us, (4) defined by reason, as the prudent person would define it.²⁷ The different elements in the definition introduce some of Aristotle's theoretical terms (state, election, mean, prudence). To understand the definition, we need to explain these terms.

A virtue is a state, not simply a capacity or a feeling, though it involves both capacities and feelings.²⁸ I may have a capacity without using it properly on the right occasions; I may have medical skill, e.g., even if I do not bother to use it at all, or I use it to poison my patients. But I am not a generous person simply because I know how to give money on the right occasions; generosity requires an actual desire and disposition to give the money. Similarly, I may have generous feelings or impulses, but if they are completely misguided, they do not constitute generosity. A virtue is a state that includes the correct desire and disposition to regulate capacities and feelings.

Moreover, a capacity or feeling that produces the right sort of behaviour may not be a virtue. Actions may be virtuous (just, honest, temperate, etc.) even if they are not done for the virtuous person's reasons, but agents are not virtuous unless they act from the right state of character. When we praise virtuous people we value not only their reliable tendency to produce virtuous actions, but also the state of character that they display in their actions.²⁹

The appropriate state of character involves the correct election of the virtuous action for its own sake. Election results from wish (*boulêsis*) and deliberation in the rational part. Wish is rational desire, aiming at the ultimate good, but our desire for the ultimate good is too general to move us to any particular action here and now. Our wish determines our action only if it is specified through deliberation. Once it

²⁶ Aristotle does not agree with Plato about the kind of society that is needed for the best moral education. See *Politics* ii, vii.

²⁷ Definition of virtue of character: EN 1106b36–1107a2.

²⁸ State (*hexis*): EN ii 5.

²⁹ Virtuous actions contrasted with virtuous agents: EN 1105a26–b9, 1144a11–20; Reid §186; Kant §§202–3.

has been specified enough to concentrate my attention on a particular action, I elect that action.³⁰

If, for instance, I am wondering whether to take the weekend off or to work overtime, I need to bear in mind that I care about having some time off, and I care about having enough money. On reflexion I realize that I have enough money and that I have taken no time off for the past six months, and so I conclude that it would be better to take the weekend off. On the strength of this conclusion, I elect to take the weekend off. My election causes me to act on my view of what is best.³¹

In this simple piece of deliberation it is easy to identify the ends that matter to me in this context (leisure, the ends for which I want money), and how one or another action promotes them. But sometimes I may be unsure what should matter more to me. That is when I need to deliberate about what is best in life as a whole. I have an overall rational desire for my happiness; but before I can translate that into the appropriate action, I need to understand that (e.g.) my happiness requires the virtue of temperance, and temperance requires me to avoid this harmful pleasure here and now. In this deliberation I do not simply ask what will satisfy my desires; I ask about what is best, so that I am guided by the merits of different courses of action, not merely by the strength of my desires for different options. As Butler puts it later, I am guided by the rational authority of my choices, not simply by the strength of my desires. Since virtue aims at what is best, it includes the correct rational wish and deliberation, resulting in the right election. Since virtuous people make the right election, they choose the right action for the right reason.³²

44. The Virtues Lie in a Mean State, in Actions and in Feelings

Though moral education aims at the formation of the correct wish, deliberation, and election, it is not only about the rational part. Since happiness is complete, satisfaction of non-rational desires—e.g., the desires for food, drink, sex, honour, and reputation—has a legitimate place in a human being's life. A life that includes these satisfactions is, to that extent, better than one that lacks them. Hence happiness, being complete, should include them. A virtuous person, then, allows the proper place to these non-rational desires, and keeps them in harmony, not in conflict, with rational plans.

This state of the virtuous person is the 'mean' (or 'intermediate') state of feelings and appetites, between total suppression and total indulgence. Aristotle does not say or imply that if we achieve the mean in relation to fear or anger (e.g.), we will be only moderately angry or afraid. On the contrary, the virtuous person will be extremely—though not uncontrollably—angry if extreme anger is called for. A virtue is a mean

³⁰ Election (*prohairesis*): EN iii 2–3. I follow the Latin translation 'electio', used by Aquinas. Other translations are 'decision' and 'choice'. Wish (or 'will', *boulêsis*): iii 2, 4. Augustine on sin and the will: §85. Aquinas on will: §92.

³¹ Prudence and deliberation: §47.

³² Reason and desire: Aquinas §92; Hobbes §128; Hutcheson and Hume §150; Butler and Reid §§175–6.

state because it neither endorses all our non-rational attitudes nor rejects them, but adjusts them to the correct rational desires.³³

Virtuous people reject the lazy attitude that leaves non-rational impulses uncontrolled and unaltered by beliefs about the good. They do not simply aim at control by the rational part over the non-rational part; for mere control allows conflict rather than harmony between the two parts. Nor do they want to eliminate non-rational desires. They allow reasonable satisfaction to their appetites; they do not suppress all their fears; they do not disregard all their feelings of pride or resentment, or their desire for other people's good opinion.³⁴

Brave people, therefore, are not distracted from pursuit of their rational plans by excessive fears. Nor, however, are they so reckless that they fear nothing, or so indifferent to their survival that they do not care if they are killed. They are appropriately afraid of serious danger, and if the cause is not worth the danger, they withdraw. But if the cause justifies standing firm, they do not have to struggle against their fear. Bravery does not eliminate fears altogether, but it directs them towards what deserves to be feared.³⁵

Similarly, temperance controls and shapes basic biological appetites for food, drink, and sex. It does not eliminate them or stop us enjoying their objects, but it modifies our enjoyments and their occasions. Temperate people are not distracted from their rational plans by excessive attachment to particular appetites and enjoyments, but they satisfy these appetites in the right circumstances. Rational agents benefit from this harmony of their rational and non-rational desires.

If we achieve the mean in emotions and impulses, we also achieve the mean in actions. The appropriate impulses for (e.g.) bravery are those that move us to do what we are rationally required to do in the appropriate circumstances. As Aristotle puts it, we achieve the mean in actions in so far as we do what we ought, when we ought, towards the people we ought, and so on.³⁶

45. Pleasure in the Appropriate Objects Is Necessary for Virtue

Our pleasures are signs of whether we are virtuous or not, because they indicate the harmony or disharmony between our non-rational and rational desires. Virtuous people enjoy many of the pleasures that other people enjoy, to the proper degree and on the proper occasions. In this respect, the virtues of character regulate our pleasures. But virtuous people also have their distinctive pleasures, which are directed to virtuous objects. Brave people take pleasure in facing the dangers that they have to face. Temperate people take pleasure in avoiding misguided pleasures. In this respect, the virtues reform our pleasures.³⁷

This claim about the distinctive pleasures of the virtuous person depends on Aristotle's view about the nature of pleasure. We take pleasure in many different

³³ The mean: *EN* 1106a14–b28.

³⁴ Defective emotions: e.g. *EN* 1126a3–8.

³⁵ Bravery and fear: *EN* 1115b10–20.

³⁶ The content of this 'ought' is discussed in §48.

³⁷ Pleasure and virtue: *EN* ii 3.

objects (lying on the beach, solving a crossword puzzle, listening to music, taking a walk). This is not like getting water from many different taps. We do not have a uniform sensation of pleasure from these many different sources; we have different types of pleasure that are distinguished by their objects. The pleasure of solving a crossword puzzle does not feel like the pleasure of lying on a beach in a deck-chair, and we cannot simply measure one against the other. On the contrary, the specific pleasure that we gain from a given activity depends on our pursuing that activity for its own sake. Pleasure is a 'supervenient end' that results from the primary end—from the activity that one pursues for its own sake.³⁸

Virtuous people exemplify this pattern. Since they elect the virtuous action for its own sake, they find a distinctive pleasure in virtuous action as such. They regard pleasure as one non-instrumental good, but not the only one. Since pleasure is a supervenient end, we gain the best pleasures only through the best ends on which these pleasures supervene. These are the ends that the virtuous person pursues for their own sake.³⁹

46. Vice and Virtue Are Different from Incontinence and Continence

Aristotle's conception of virtue as a mean distinguishes four conditions that we can illustrate in the case of temperance:

- Vice (e.g., intemperance). Both our rational and our non-rational desires aim at sensory gratification.
- Incontinence. Our rational desires are correct, but our non-rational desires aim at sensory gratification and move us to pursue it even when we ought not to.
- Continence. Our rational desires are correct, and move us to avoid inappropriate sensory gratification, even though our non-rational desires aim at it.
- Virtue. Both our rational and our non-rational desires are correct, and we have non-rational desires for appropriate sensory gratification.

In both the virtuous and the vicious person rational election and non-rational desires agree. In the continent and the incontinent person they disagree.⁴⁰

The vicious person is worse than all the others. Though his rational and non-rational desires agree, his non-rational desires do not follow reason. He forms his election simply to suit his non-rational desires, not by independent rational reflexion. The other three are better because each of them has formed the correct election. The incontinent acts against a correct election, because misguided non-rational desires are too strong. The continent person follows a correct election, but misguided non-rational desires struggle against it. In the virtuous person, the election is correct and the non-rational part agrees with it.

³⁸ Pleasure and its objects: Butler §193; Sidgwick §247. Pleasure is a supervenient end: *EN* 1174b31–3. The underlying activity: 1176a3–29.

³⁹ The virtuous person's pleasure: *EN* 1099a7–21, 1104b3–11.

⁴⁰ The four conditions are implicit in, e.g., *EN* i 13.

Aristotle's description of incontinence is meant to explain what is true and false in Socrates' claim that we cannot choose the course of action we believe to be worse. Socrates denies the possibility of incontinence. Plato's division of the soul seeks to explain how genuine incontinence is possible.⁴¹ Aristotle agrees with Plato on this point. Socrates treats the allegedly incontinent person's error as ignorance about what is better and worse, and hence not genuine incontinence at all. According to Aristotle, however, incontinence results from disordered non-rational desires that induce incontinent agents to disregard their correct election.⁴² I might recognize that I ought not to drink a double whisky before I drive, and I recognize that this is a double whisky. But since I also enjoy a double whisky, my recognition of this double whisky makes me strongly aware of the pleasure of drinking it, and inattentive to my previous recognition that I ought not to drink it. Since I do not attend to what I previously recognized, I do not, at the time of acting incontinently, consciously acknowledge that this is what I ought not to do. In Aristotle's view, this last point is the element of truth in Socrates' position. Socrates is right to suppose that incontinence involves some sort of ignorance, but he fails to see that misguided desire, rather than ignorance, is the basic explanation.⁴³

47. Virtue of Character Requires Practical Reason and Deliberation

According to Aristotle's definition, virtue of character lies in a mean defined by reason, as the prudent person would define it.⁴⁴ Prudence⁴⁵ is the virtue of intellect that ensures the correct deliberation and election. The prudent person deliberates well about 'living well as a whole', and good deliberation produces the right election.⁴⁶ Hence the virtues of character (those that involve both rational and non-rational desires) require prudence, which is a virtue of intellect.

This deliberative role of prudence explains how the correct election is necessary for virtue. At first sight, Aristotle seems to be committed to incompatible claims: (1) All deliberation is about means to ends, not about ends themselves. (2) Every election is the product of deliberation. (3) The virtuous person elects virtuous action for its own sake. (4) To elect something for its own sake is to elect it as an end. Aristotle appears to rule out the type of election that is characteristic of the virtuous person.

To reconcile these four claims, we need to distinguish two ways in which one thing might be a 'means' to another.

- First, x may be an instrumental means to y: i.e., x causally contributes to y, without being part of y. That is how shopping for food contributes to eating our dinner.

⁴¹ Incontinence: *EN* vii 2–3. Socrates and Plato: §§20, 28.

⁴² The correct election: *EN* 1148a13–17, 1151a5–7, 1152a17.

⁴³ The incontinent person's ignorance: *EN* 1147b9–17.

⁴⁴ Definition of virtue: §43.

⁴⁵ Aristotle's term '*phronêsis*', rendered by Latin translators as '*prudentia*', might also be rendered '*intelligence*'.

⁴⁶ Living well as a whole: *EN* 1140a25–8.

- Second, x may be a part or component of y, so that x partly constitutes y. Serving partly constitutes playing tennis, and eating the soup is part of eating the meal.⁴⁷

Prudence deliberates about means to happiness, not only about instrumental means, but also about the actions that are means to happiness by being parts of the happy life, and are therefore to be chosen for their own sake. Virtuous people, therefore, elect virtuous action for its own sake. Their deliberation identifies the actions that are non-instrumentally good components of happiness.⁴⁸

Since prudence involves deliberation, it needs to grasp true general principles about the nature of the virtues and their contribution to happiness. We have sketched some of these principles in the previous discussion of virtue.

But general principles are not enough for a correct election. If deliberation produces a correct election about what to do here and now, the prudent person also needs to grasp the relevant features of a particular situation. The right moral choice requires experience of particular situations, since thoughtless application of general rules will not yield the right choice. One aspect of prudence, therefore, is a sort of perception or intuitive judgment about the relevant aspects of particular situations.

For instance, if we have the virtue that regulates anger, we know that we ought not to be too quick to get angry and we ought not to keep our anger for too long; nor, on the other hand, ought we to be so indifferent that we get angry about nothing. In some situations, an expression of anger is an appropriate protest against injustice, but in others an angry reaction may simply make things worse for everyone. To identify the relevant features of situations, we need the trained perception that comes from experience of assessing the different questions that arise.⁴⁹

Since different non-rational desires have to be trained, the virtues are distinct. But they all need prudence, because each virtue aims to achieve what is best. To find what I should do for my friend, I need to grasp the requirements of justice, since friendship does not allow me to violate justice (it is not an act of genuine friendship to steal from a beggar to give my rich friend a gift he does not need). To find the appropriate action in the sphere of one virtue we need the cooperation of the other virtues, and therefore we need prudence.⁵⁰

48. Virtues of Character Include an 'Ought' That Is Directed towards the Fine

We have seen how the prudent person deliberates about 'living well as a whole' and finds the mean that is characteristic of the virtues. We achieve the mean to the extent that we do what we ought to do, towards the people to whom we ought to do it, in the

⁴⁷ Choosing non-instrumental goods for the sake of happiness: *EN* 1097b1–6. Hume recognizes only this instrumental role for practical reason: §151.

⁴⁸ Prudence and deliberation: *EN* 1140b4–7. Choosing parts for their own sake: Plato §30; Aquinas §97.

⁴⁹ The virtue proper to anger: *EN* iv 5 ('mildness'). Inexactness of general rules: 1103b34–1104a11. Perception: 1109b22–3; 1143a32–b5. Cf. Ross §285.

⁵⁰ Virtues require prudence: *EN* 1144b1–1145a2. Relations between the virtues: §§19, 29.

circumstances in which we ought to do it, and so on. How are we to understand 'ought' in all these contexts?⁵¹

In Greek as in English, 'ought' may have a purely hypothetical use, for something that is needed or appropriate for some further desired end. 'You ought to keep your temper' might be understood as 'If you want to avoid saying things you will later regret, keeping your temper is appropriate'. 'Ought' might be understood hypothetically in the case of the Aristotelian virtues that seem to aim at the agent's own good (e.g., temperance, magnanimity).

A purely hypothetical use of 'ought', referring to the agent's self-interest, is difficult to apply to the virtues that concern the good of others. Aristotle agrees with the characters in Plato's *Republic* who insist that justice is 'another's good', because it is directed to the good of others. Other Aristotelian virtues, including bravery, mildness (regulation of anger), and generosity, are directed to the good of others as well as the agent. The principles that guide brave, generous, and just agents tell them what they ought to do for the benefit of others.⁵²

In such cases Aristotle maintains that the virtuous person chooses virtuous (temperate, brave, just, etc.) actions 'for the sake of the fine' or (equivalently) 'because they are fine'. Concern for the fine is not an exclusive concern for one's own interest. On the contrary, when everyone concentrates on fine action, their action promotes the common good. Fine actions display great virtue in so far as they especially benefit others. We find the mean, and we do what we ought to do, in doing fine action.⁵³

The virtues aim at the common good of a community, not primarily at the good of the individual agent. This is how virtuous people reach the mean and do what they ought to do. The 'ought' that defines the virtues, therefore, is not a purely hypothetical 'ought' that depends on the agent's desires. It is a categorical 'ought' (in Kant's terms) because it asserts that something is a good reason for rational agents, irrespective of their desires.

49. Are Aristotelian Virtues Moral Virtues?

When we speak of 'virtues' and of what we 'ought' to do, we might assume that we are speaking of moral virtues and of moral obligation. But this assumption is open to question. When we speak of someone's virtues or vices, we may have their moral qualities in mind; virtues include honesty, kindness, trustworthiness, and so on. Greek writers, including Aristotle, often use 'virtue' (*aretê*) to refer to the qualities that we need in order to live well and to achieve *eudaimonia*.

Once we appreciate the broad scope of 'virtue', we can see why the moral virtues, such as those we have mentioned, are candidates for being virtues, but not the only ones. Indeed Thrasymachus, Socrates' opponent at the beginning of Plato's *Republic*,

⁵¹ Prudence and 'living well as a whole': *EN* 1140a25–8.

⁵² Justice and the good of others: *EN* 1129b25–1130a5. Cf. Plato §30.

⁵³ The fine (*kalon*, sometimes translated by 'beautiful' or 'noble'; translated by 'right' in §70): *EN* 1104b31; 1120a11; 1121a27–30; 1123a31–2. The Latin equivalent is 'honestum'; cf. Suarez §120. Virtue and the fine: 1169a6–11; 1122b6–7.

argues that injustice, normally regarded as a vice, is really a virtue, and that justice, normally regarded as a virtue, is not a virtue at all. By this he means that we can live a better life, as Thrasyarchus understands it, if we are unjust, and so we are willing to cheat other people (e.g.) when we can get away with it, than if we are just. Thrasyarchus does not value the moral virtues, but he still asks Socrates' question 'How ought we to live?' As Socrates and his opponents understand his question, it raises the question 'What is the best life for us?', or, in other words, 'What life is the happiest life and how can we get it?' Since Greek ethics sets out from this question about what is good for us, it does not set out from a question about morality.

This is clear in Aristotle. His ethical theory is about one's own happiness.⁵⁴ Morality, we might suppose, deals with a narrower set of questions; it is not self-interested, but impartial, since the moral point of view expresses impartial concern for everyone's interest. We often suppose that a moral question arises when a proposed action affects everyone's interest, and especially the interest of other people apart from the agent. It may be foolish of me to waste my evenings in front of the television or surfing the web, but (we might say) it is not morally wrong unless it interferes with what I owe to other people. Greek writers, including Aristotle, speak of a wider range of virtues. They do not explicitly distinguish moral questions from questions about the agent's happiness, and they do not explicitly distinguish the basis of the moral 'ought' from the basis of purely hypothetical 'oughts'.⁵⁵

None the less, Greek writers recognize moral considerations and requirements, even if they do not explicitly mark them. Even though they differ about the character of happiness, most agree that to achieve happiness we need bravery, temperance, wisdom, and justice. The point of these virtues is to secure one's own good and the good of others. While justice especially concerns the interests of other people, the other three virtues are both self-regarding and other-regarding. All the major Greek philosophers treat friendship as a central element in living well. More exactly, they take this view about *philia*, which refers to a wider range of relations to others (including allies, members of one's family, and fellow-citizens) than 'friendship' in English normally refers to; here too a familiar rendering may mislead us.

These points are especially clear in Aristotle. We have just discussed the necessary connexion between the virtues and acting for the sake of the fine. Action is fine in so far as it promotes a common good, not only the agent's self-confined good. In this respect, the Aristotelian virtues display the unselfish and impartial outlook that is characteristic of morality.⁵⁶ The 'ought' that belongs to the virtues is not a purely hypothetical 'ought' that is derived from the agent's interest, in contrast to the interests of others. It is a categorical 'ought' that prescribes the actions required by impartial concern for the common good. It is appropriate, therefore, to speak of Aristotle's conception of morality and of the moral virtues.

⁵⁴ Hegel's objection to Aristotle: §229.

⁵⁵ Hypothetical v. categorical 'ought': Kant §§200–1.

⁵⁶ Virtue and a common good: see the description of the virtues in *Rhetoric* 1366a33–b22.

50. Are We Better Off if We Have the Virtues?

If Aristotle recognizes moral virtues and moral duties, a question arises about his argument in the *Ethics*. He defends two claims:

1. Happiness is activity in accordance with complete virtue.
2. Complete virtue is moral virtue (i.e., it aims at the fine and the common good).
Can he legitimately infer that happiness requires moral virtue?

We might object that this inference equivocates on ‘complete virtue’. Aristotle’s argument for the first claim does not assume that (e.g.) the cardinal virtues are the virtues that belong to happiness; at this stage he takes virtue to be simply the state of character that is good for a rational agent. But we might doubt whether the virtues that he actually describes are really good for a rational agent. Hence we might ask whether ‘complete virtue’ in the two claims above really refers to two different types of virtue.

In reply to this question, we may observe that the virtues are good for a rational agent. They harmonize rational and non-rational desires, under the guidance of practical reason that results in the correct election. If the virtues achieve this harmony and this correct election, they belong to happiness.

But if the virtues that Aristotle describes aim at the common good, rather than the good of the individual agent, how do they belong to the individual’s happiness? This question brings us back to the attack by Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus on other-regarding virtues.⁵⁷

Aristotle replies that a human being’s welfare depends on the human function and on human nature. A human being is a political animal, because human capacities and aims are fulfilled only in a community that achieves the good of its members. The individual’s happiness, therefore, includes the good of fellow-members of a community. We lack a complete life that fulfils human nature if we lack effective concern for the good of other people; for we deny ourselves the relations of cooperation and mutual concern and trust that are necessary for the fulfilment of human capacities.⁵⁸

51. Friendship Connects One’s Own Good with the Good of Others

Aristotle’s discussion of friendship explains how the good of others partly constitutes one’s own good. The relevant type of friendship includes concern for others because of themselves and for their own sakes, not simply as sources of advantage or pleasure to oneself. The friend is ‘another self’, so that if A and B are friends, A takes the sorts of attitudes to B that A also takes to A.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Other-regarding virtues: Plato §30.

⁵⁸ Self-sufficiency and community: *EN* 1097b7–15. Social nature: Aquinas §§101–2; Grotius §126.

⁵⁹ Aristotle’s term ‘*philia*’, usually rendered by ‘friendship’, actually covers many more cooperative relations (e.g., between business partners, allies, members of families) than we would readily regard as friendships; and Aristotle’s classification recognizes the many varieties of *philia*. He distinguishes three kinds of friendship—concerned, respectively, with advantage, pleasure, and goodness.

This concern for others promotes one's own good, in a complete and self-sufficient life. Friendship involves living together (i.e., sharing the activities one counts as especially important in one's life), and especially the sharing of reasoning and thinking. Friends cooperate in deliberation, election, and action; and the thoughts and actions of each provide reasons for the other to think and act in specific ways. If A regards B as another self, A is concerned about B's aims and plans, and A is pleased by B's successes no less than A is pleased by A's successes. Action on this concern makes us capable of aims, achievements, and cooperative activities that would not be open to us otherwise.⁶⁰

These expanded aims and capacities are relevant to well-being because I am better off to the extent that I have a wider range of aims and concerns that I can satisfy. Those who care about very few things find very little to absorb their interest, and diminish their prospects of well-being. Concern for other people makes us interested in aims and activities that would otherwise not interest us, and makes us capable of activities that would otherwise be beyond us. We will not even be able to play in a team or an orchestra unless we have some concern for the success of some cooperative activities. Cooperation expands the range of activities that are open to me, and thereby allows me to achieve my good more completely. Since happiness requires a complete and self-sufficient life, and since those whose aims are confined to states of themselves cannot achieve such a life, the happy life requires friendship.

Aristotle applies this claim to friendship between individuals, and to the friendship that forms a political community, the 'complete community' that achieves the complete life that constitutes happiness. He defends justice, not because he believes we ought to sacrifice our own good to the claims of justice, but because he believes we harm ourselves if we ignore the claims of justice. Thrasymachus argues against justice by arguing that it sometimes requires me to sacrifice my good for the good of the community. Aristotle agrees that justice sometimes requires the sacrifice of some goods; but he argues that it actually advances my good. His general strategy is similar to Plato's; but his account of the benefits of friendship and community supports his distinctive defence of justice.⁶¹

52. Two Conceptions of Happiness?

One side of Aristotle's argument emphasizes these other-regarding, social aspects of happiness. But another side seems to lead in a different direction. He is sometimes taken to identify happiness exclusively with pure intellectual activity—the contemplation of scientific and philosophical truths, apart from any application to practice. Plato sometimes seems to suggest that the philosopher will be wholly absorbed in the contemplation of Forms. Even if this is not Plato's considered view, we can see why someone might adopt this view as a result of thinking about Plato. Aristotle seems to share Plato's contemplative ideal, without the Platonic Forms.⁶²

⁶⁰ The other self: *EN* 1170b5–19.

⁶¹ The political community: *Politics* 1252a1–7, b27–30. Friendship and justice: Aquinas §101.

⁶² Intellectual activity (*theôria*): *EN* x 6–8. Plato on contemplation of Forms: §34.

The contemplative life is a candidate for being the happy life on two grounds: (1) The connexion between the human function and human happiness supports contemplation. For contemplation is the highest fulfilment of our nature as rational beings. It is the sort of rational activity that we share with the gods, who are rational beings with no need to apply reason to practice. (2) The life of contemplation is most self-sufficient. It does not require many resources outside it, whereas virtuous activity is vulnerable to external misfortunes and failures that may impede happiness.

For these two reasons, the contemplative life is the happiest life available to us, in so far as we have the rational intellects we share with gods. Measured by this standard, the life of virtuous activity is a second-best form of happiness.⁶³

But Aristotle does not claim that contemplation fully satisfies the criteria for happiness, and therefore he does not infer that by itself it is happiness. The restrictive clause 'in so far as we have the rational intellects we share with gods' implies that happiness is more than contemplation. If we were pure intellects with no other desires and no bodies, contemplation would be the whole of our good (as it is for our immortal souls after our death, as Plato conceives them in the *Phaedo*). But since we are not merely intellects, our good is the good of the whole human being.⁶⁴

In Aristotle's view, therefore, contemplation is the highest and best part of our good, but not the whole of it. Since happiness is complete, neither virtue alone nor pleasure alone is happiness. Nor is contemplation the complete human good, since other goods (e.g., virtue and honour) can be added to it to make a better good than contemplation alone.⁶⁵

Aristotle does not explain how we should decide on particular occasions whether to pursue contemplation or to prefer one of the other components of happiness. But he does not suggest that we ought to be constantly asking ourselves whether a particular occasion offers us an opportunity for extended contemplation at the cost of some wrongdoing. (Suppose, e.g., it would be easy to defraud a multi-billionaire of a few thousand pounds that would allow me to spend a year on uninterrupted contemplation.) As he conceives the moral virtues, they constitute the framework within which we can develop our capacity to contemplate, so that contemplation is appropriate once the claims of the moral virtues have been fulfilled. Aristotle's high esteem of contemplation does not undermine his conception of happiness as a compound of rational activities that assigns a central and dominant place to the moral virtues.⁶⁶

⁶³ Contemplation and happiness: *EN* 1177a18–1178a10.

⁶⁴ The intellect and the human being: *EN* 1178b3–7.

⁶⁵ Completeness: *EN* 1097b16–20. See §38.

⁶⁶ Wrongdoing for the sake of contemplation would be analogous to direct utilitarian thinking. See Hobbes §132; Hume §167; Mill §243.

5

Scepticism

53. The 'Hellenistic' World and Later Antiquity

In the period between the death of Aristotle (322 BC) and the development of later Platonism and of Christian theology and philosophy (from the second century AD), the most significant contributions come from the schools founded by Epicurus and by Zeno the Stoic. Both Epicurus and Zeno taught in Athens in the generation after the death of Aristotle, and their ethical theories are formed by the disputes that we discussed in the previous chapters.

The Epicureans and Stoics are the major philosophical schools of the 'Hellenistic' period, from 323 BC to 31 BC (the beginning of the principate of Augustus).¹ Not all of them are Greeks; some belong to different regions of the Hellenistic kingdoms that followed the death of Alexander in 323. In this period, some elements of Greek social life, culture, and thought spread from the Greek cities of Greece, Sicily, and western Asia through parts of the Middle East and North Africa. The areas ruled by the Hellenistic kings were in turn conquered by the Romans, and from the middle of the first century BC to the fifth century AD much of Europe (as far north as Britain), Western Asia, and North Africa belonged to the Roman Empire.

The Romans absorbed Greek literature and thought into their higher education. From the first century BC onwards Greek philosophy (i.e., philosophy as initially expressed in the Greek language) was also part of Roman culture. Some of the leading philosophical writers, including Lucretius, Cicero, and Seneca, wrote in Latin. Greek remained a living language in the eastern Roman Empire, and among the Roman educated class. Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor, but he was also a Stoic philosopher who wrote philosophy in Greek. Jewish writers in Alexandria wrote in Greek. Similarly, the New Testament was written in Greek by writers of whom all or most were born in western Asia.

The diffusion of some elements of Greek culture helps to explain the diffusion of philosophy in the Hellenistic world. The different schools argue about the questions that were discussed by Socrates and his successors. Eventually, they apply their theories to some of the questions that confronted a Roman citizen in the late Republic or the Empire. These questions are discussed by Cicero and Seneca.

¹ The misleading term 'Hellenistic' (as opposed to 'Hellenic') was coined in the nineteenth century, to insinuate that the Greek culture of the period was less than fully Greek. Hellenistic history and culture: Walbank, *HW* chs. 4, 8–10, 13.

54. Hellenistic Ethical Theories Are Systematic

Among the sources of the two main Hellenistic schools are the 'one-sided' successors of Socrates, the Cyrenaics and the Cynics. Epicurus identifies happiness with pleasure, but tries to avoid the excesses of the Cyrenaics. The Stoics identify happiness with virtue, but try to avoid the excesses of the Cynics. Both schools defend a position that might reasonably be attributed to Socrates.² Plato and Aristotle are not the explicit topic of discussion—in our surviving sources—before the first century BC.

The Hellenistic ethical theories are Socratic in their outlook, but not in their philosophical structure. In contrast to Socrates, both the Epicureans and the Stoics place ethics in a general theory of knowledge and nature, so that their ethical theories are also parts of wider philosophical systems. Epicureans are atomists, who believe that human beings, like every other part of the world, are simply chance collections of atoms that come together and disperse. Hence they reject the immortality of the soul, and deny natural teleology and divine providence in the world. The Stoics reject atomism and accept natural teleology and divine providence.

These wider philosophical views affect Epicurean and Stoic ethics, as we will see. But neither Epicureans nor Stoics regard ethics as simply a consequence of metaphysics. They also argue, as their predecessors do, from premisses that will seem plausible to someone who reflects on ethical questions, without having answered wider philosophical questions.

The combination of ethics, metaphysics, and theology in the Hellenistic theories helps to explain why they are combined in Hellenistic Judaism and in Christianity. Jewish and Christian theological outlooks are quite different, both in their content and in their epistemological basis, from the Hellenistic systems. They claim that a historical revelation in the history of a single people gives us grounds for belief in a transcendent God. Christians go further, and rest beliefs about God partly on the life of a single person who is both God and man, The belief that this transcendent God was also incarnate in a human life often appeared to be (as St Paul said) 'to the Greeks, foolishness'.³ However, Christians addressed those who took ancient ethics seriously, and tried to show that such people had reason to pay attention to Christian ethical views. That is why some discussion of Christian views on ethics is a natural sequel to the discussion of the Hellenistic schools.

Hellenistic Scepticism tries to cast doubt on philosophical claims about ethics, on the basis of arguments that also seek to undermine the credibility of philosophical theories in general. This aspect of Scepticism fits the systematic character of Hellenistic philosophy. For Sceptics try to undermine belief systematically, by deploying epistemological assumptions that are not peculiar to ethics; systematic destruction is the reverse of the systematic construction of Epicureans and Stoics. The Sceptics are not the last people who have tried to show, on general epistemological grounds, that ethics is not philosophically respectable.⁴ Their arguments are a suitable preliminary to the discussion of Epicurean and Stoic systems, since both of

² Socrates: Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum*.

³ Foolishness to the Greek: 1 Corinthians 1:23.

⁴ Scepticism about ethics: §276.

these systems reply to Sceptical attacks. Once we consider the Sceptical objections, we can ask how Epicureans and Stoics answer them.

55. The Sceptics Describe a Route to Suspension of Judgment

The modern terms 'sceptical' and 'scepticism' refer to arguments that cast doubt on claims to knowledge and warranted belief. These terms are derived from the views of the ancient *skeptikoi* (investigators).⁵ These investigators notice the variation in different people's views, on ethics among other things. Protagoras discusses some of these variations between the ethical beliefs of different societies and he concludes that morality is nothing more than conventions that are relative to a particular society.⁶ Socrates also investigates conflicting ethical views, but draws no explicit conclusions. He claims not to know the answers to his questions, and his inquiries end in puzzlement (*aporia*).⁷ Some of Plato's successors emphasize the negative side of Socrates' inquiries. In the third century BC Arcesilaus led the Academy in a Sceptical direction that it retained until the first century.⁸

The Sceptics begin by being disturbed and puzzled about which views they should accept. They ask which views are true and which are false, assuming that a decision on this point will lead them to tranquillity (i.e., freedom from disturbance). Investigation of conflicting views about ethics leads them to tranquillity, but not because they resolve the conflicts. They discover that they cannot resolve the conflicts, because opposing appearances seem equally credible ('equipollent'); and so they suspend judgment about the truth of any of the opposing appearances that puzzled them. This suspension of judgment leads to tranquillity.⁹

The Sceptic attacks 'dogmatists' by pointing out conflicting appearances in different areas.¹⁰ Against those who believe that some actions are right and others wrong, he adduces conflicting appearances about conduct.¹¹ Opposed beliefs turn out to be equipollent, and we cannot maintain our belief in either one of a pair of equipollent views. We suspend judgment.

Do conflicts between appearances necessarily suggest equipollence? In some of Sextus' examples we might say that one of the opposing views is mistaken; for instance, it may be wrong to sacrifice human beings to the gods, even though some people think is right. In other cases each of two 'conflicting' practices might be equally acceptable because it is sanctioned by custom. Greeks and Indians, for

⁵ Much of our evidence about the ancient Sceptics comes from Sextus Empiricus. Scepticism and ethics: Annas, *MH*; Bett, 'Scepticism'.

⁶ Protagoras: §27.

⁷ Puzzles (*aporai*): Socrates §15; Aristotle §37. Cf. Ps-Plato, *Clitopho* 410b–d.

⁸ Pyrrhonians and Academics: Bett, in *OHHE* 114–19. Arcesilaus: Cic. *F* ii 2 = LS 68J; Sextus, *P* i 232–4 = LS 68I. Carneades' Sceptical arguments: LS 70; Cicero, *De Fato* 23 = LS 20E; *De Republica* iii 9; Stoics §75; Grotius §124.

⁹ Disturbance and tranquillity: *P* i 12; Epicurus §62. Suspension of judgment: *P* i 8–10.

¹⁰ 'Dogmatists': i.e., believers, those who hold specific beliefs, *dogmata*. Variation: §§235, 277.

¹¹ Conflicting appearances: *P* i 145 = LS 72K.

instance, have different ways of showing respect to the dead, and they may be right to show respect in the customary ways.¹²

56. Aristotle Argues That Variation Does Not Support Scepticism

These Sceptical arguments raise meta-ethical questions about the character of moral properties, and how we know about them. Some of Aristotle's remarks about conflicting appearances cast doubt on claims about equipollence, and thereby cast doubt on the epistemological argument from conflicting appearances to the meta-physical conclusion that moral properties are conventional, and not objective. Aristotle recognizes that variations in fine and just things suggest to some people that nothing is fine and just by nature.¹³ But he answers that good things also vary; in some circumstances goods such as bravery and wealth may be harmful in some respects. Such variations do not show that nothing is good by nature and that all goods are merely matters of convention.

This brief reply relies on a strategy that Aristotle often relies on in his claims about goods. Whatever is really good for us is good for us as having the nature we have; that is why we need to find the function of human beings in order to find the human good. All genuine goods are good 'by nature', because their nature makes them good for us, given our nature.

But the goods he mentions are not good for everyone in all circumstances. Medicines are good for some and bad for others; even virtue benefits some and harms others. How, then, can their nature and ours make them good?

Aristotle replies that natural goods are good only for the right sort of person in the right circumstances. We do not show that wealth is not a good if we find that it harms some people in some circumstances; these are the people who do not know how to use it. Similarly, a good diet for a healthy person is not good for sick people.¹⁴ To be good is not to be good irrespective of the person or the circumstances, or in every respect. Virtue is the most unrestricted good, because it is good, all things considered, for everyone in all circumstances. But it is not good in every respect; if a tyrant persecutes just people, their being just causes some harm to them, though it is still good for them on the whole.

This treatment of variation in goods helps Aristotle to explain natural justice. Some requirements of justice are based on law or convention. Different states pass different laws about weights or measures, or about the prescribed form of sacrifice, justice requires the keeping of these different laws, and hence requires different things in different places. But not all requirements of justice depend on laws in this way.¹⁵ The one just political order suits good people in good circumstances, but it would not suit every society in all circumstances.

¹² Human sacrifice: *P i* 149 = LS 72K. Treatment of the dead: *P i* 157; Herodotus iii 38.

¹³ Convention v. nature: Plato, *Theaetetus* 166d–167d; §§27, 141–2.

¹⁴ Aristotle on nature and convention: *EN* 1094b14–19; 1129b1–6; 1173b22–5; *Topics* 115b11–35.

¹⁵ Conventional v. natural justice: *EN* 1134b18–1135a5.

57. Tranquillity: Does the Sceptic Achieve Happiness?

Even if we are doubtful about Sceptical arguments, Scepticism might attract us because it promises tranquillity, and hence frees us from disturbance and anxiety. Uncertainty about what is true, or (in the case of ethics) good and bad, or right and wrong, is a source of anxiety. If we want to do what is right but we do not think we know what is right, we worry about what to do and about what we are doing. The Sceptics achieve tranquillity by suspending judgment. Once they achieve tranquillity in matters of belief, they appear to achieve 'the most complete happiness'.¹⁶

Should other people try to achieve this tranquillity? Sceptical inquiry ought to appeal to us if and only if we are confident that tranquillity is more desirable than any result we could achieve if we avoided Scepticism. We will be confident about this, however, only if we are confident that the ultimate good, happiness, is simply tranquillity. But Plato and Aristotle reject this conception of happiness.

Given this disagreement about whether happiness is tranquillity, we may find that the opposed positions are equipollent, and suspend judgment about its truth. In that case, we cannot decide whether or not to engage in Sceptical inquiry. Apparently, then, we have no reason to believe that the Sceptic who achieves tranquillity and moderate passion thereby achieves happiness. Moreover, the Sceptic's conviction that he achieves happiness by being tranquil also seems insecure. If he has to suspend judgment on this question, will he not have to admit that it is possible that he does not achieve happiness? And will this admission not undermine his tranquillity?

58. If Sceptics Have No Beliefs, Are They Inactive?

This question about the Sceptic's beliefs introduces a broader question about the sort of conviction that is available to the Sceptic, and about whether it is sufficient for action. The Stoics argue that since the Sceptic refuses to assent to any appearances, but action is impossible without assent, the Sceptic makes action impossible.¹⁷ The Stoic argument relies on cases where we can distinguish an appearance (e.g., that I am holding up a hand, or that a stick in water is bent) from assent to it (e.g., I assent to the appearance that I am holding up my hand, in so far as I take it to be true, and believe that I am holding up my hand, but I do not assent to the appearance that the stick is bent, because I believe it is not bent, but straight). If something appears a certain way, but I do not assent to the appearance, I do not act on it. If, e.g., there appears to be an orange in the fruit bowl, but I suspect that it may be a plastic orange, I do not assent to its being an orange, and I will not try to peel it. Generalizing from such cases, we may infer that action presupposes assent, and therefore belief. Without beliefs, therefore, the Sceptic is incapable of action.

As the Stoics conceive belief, it rests on assent, which results from some recognition (not necessarily explicit consideration) of the evidence for and against the truth of an appearance and a conclusion about whether the evidence favours the truth or the falsehood of the appearance. I assent to the stick's being straight, and so believe

¹⁶ Tranquillity and happiness: Sextus, *M* xi 141–61; *P* iii 235–8.

¹⁷ Appearance and assent: Stoics §74.

that it is straight while appearing bent, because I recognize that straight sticks immersed in water appear bent, and I see that this stick is immersed in water and appeared straight before being immersed.

The Sceptics answer that they are not inactive. They do not assent, but they 'yield' to an appearance that things are a certain way.¹⁸ If I have an appearance of a fierce dog, but I believe he is not really fierce but only playful, I may still react as though he were fierce. In that case the Sceptic says I yield to the appearance that the dog is fierce, whether or not I believe it. Since we can act on our yielding, the lack of assent and beliefs does not make us inactive. Once I have put my hand on a hot stove, I do not need to be taught not to do it again; the appearance of a hot stove near my hand (whatever I might believe about it) results in a further appearance of painfulness that causes me to move it away. Similarly, training me not to steal will create an aversion to stealing. Training causes carpenters to use a saw correctly, whether or not they believe that this is the right way to hold the saw. People can be trained to feel so guilty about the thought of doing something they have been told is wrong that they (as we say) 'cannot bring themselves' to do it.

This distinction between appearance and belief may provide a partial answer to the previous question about tranquillity and happiness. Sceptics do not suppose that they need to believe that tranquillity is happiness. It is enough, in their view, if they have the strong appearance that tranquillity is happiness, and act on this appearance. Such appearances, they might claim, are stable enough to underlie a way of life. Sceptics who live by appearances without belief take themselves to follow everyday life. In their view, they follow nature, the passions, the customary laws and practices, and the various crafts.¹⁹

59. What Sort of Life Can Sceptics Live without Beliefs?

Critics object that the Sceptic cannot really live without beliefs that are responsive to evidence and reasons. If a tyrant threatens him with death unless he gives false evidence against an innocent person, will he not act on his belief about which course of action is better?²⁰ If so, he cannot after all live without beliefs.

The Sceptic replies that he will refuse to do what the tyrant wants, if his feeling of repugnance is strong enough. He can refuse to act wrongly without believing that the repugnant action is really wrong.

In some cases, however, the strength of our desire depends on our view of the merits of the proposed course of action. If further reflexion convinced us that there is nothing wrong with what the tyrant is pressing us to do, we might decide to do it, even if we still found it repugnant. Our view about the merits of the action affects both how strongly we want to do it, and what it would take to change our mind about doing it.²¹

¹⁸ Assenting v. yielding: Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1122a–d = LS 69A; Cicero, *Academica* ii 37–9 = LS 40 O; Sextus, P i 20, 193. Appearance and belief: see Burnyeat and Frede, OS.

¹⁹ Everyday life: Sextus, P i 23–4; ii 102, 246; M ix 49. Cf. Aristotle on habituation, §42.

²⁰ The Sceptic and the tyrant: M xi 164.

²¹ Reason and strength: Butler §174.

Ordinary life, therefore, contains resources for rational alteration of the strength of our appearances and impulses. If the Sceptic lacks these resources, he does not live an ordinary life. A life without these resources for determining the strength of our impulses and desires would not be a human life. If the Sceptic lacks these resources, something may be wrong with the arguments that lead to suspension of judgment.

6

Epicurus

Happiness as Pleasure

60. A New Defence of Hedonism

In Plato's *Protagoras* Socrates identifies happiness with pleasure. This answer does not satisfy Plato and Aristotle. In their view, we cannot maintain Socrates' commitment to the virtues if we take happiness to be pleasure; pleasure has a place in the best life, but it is not the only component.

The more extreme successors of Socrates agree that a hedonist account of happiness undermines the defence of the virtues. The Cyrenaics prefer pleasure to virtue. The Cynics prefer virtue, and reject pleasure.

Epicurus, however, argues that hedonism supports Socrates' commitment to the virtues. In his view, anyone who tries to pursue pleasure without virtue does not know how to maximize pleasure.¹

Hedonism, like eudaemonism, may be presented as a psychological doctrine (we always pursue pleasure as our ultimate end) or as a doctrine about practical reason (it is rational to pursue pleasure as our ultimate end, precisely because it is pleasant). Epicurus relies on the first doctrine in order to defend the second.

61. Pleasure Is the Ultimate End

To show that happiness is pleasure, Epicurus assumes that happiness is the ultimate end, and is therefore chosen for its own sake and not for the sake of any further end. On this basis, pleasure seems to be an ultimate end; if I ask 'Why are you doing that?' and you answer 'Because I enjoy it', I do not need to ask 'But why are you doing what you enjoy?' The pursuit of enjoyment seems self-explanatory and self-justifying.²

We recognize this feature of pleasure from its place in our mental development. All animals immediately recognize that pleasure is good, and pursue it as their end. Children pursue pleasure spontaneously before they have any conscious beliefs about pleasure and good. Their instinctive pursuit of pleasure shows us the natural goal of our affections. Pleasure is the primary good because it is the basis of all our natural

¹ Texts relevant to Epicurus: LS; Inwood and Gerson, *HP*. Epicurean ethics: Erler and Schofield, 'Ethics'. In contrast to the chapters on Sceptics and Stoics (where it is difficult to distinguish the contributions of different individuals; see §68), this chapter is headed 'Epicurus', since later Epicureans differ comparatively little (for present purposes) from his views.

² The ultimate end: Aristotle §38. Pleasure is an ultimate end: Eudoxus in Aristotle, *EN* 1171b8–15.

conceptions of goodness. It is the ultimate good because we aim at it in all our actions. Our attitude to pleasure manifests our reliance on sensory experience in general. If we refuse to rely on the senses, we fall into sceptical doubt and confusion. If we ignore pleasure, we have no reliable basis to guide our action. So far the Cyrenaics are right.³

But Epicurus criticizes the Cyrenaics for ignoring our mature attitude to the senses. We begin, as other animals do, by simply following our senses, but gradually we learn to discriminate. If we immerse a straight stick in water, it looks bent, but if we ask how it will look when we remove it from the water, we rely on our recollection of its looking straight. We do not reject the evidence of our senses, but we rely on it selectively. Similarly, we discriminate among pleasures. Though every pleasure is good, and everything good is good precisely because it is pleasant or a source of pleasure, we do not choose every pleasure. We learn to act so as to obtain pleasure reliably over time, and therefore we need the ‘measuring craft’ of the *Protagoras*. Consideration of present and future tells us when we should avoid some pleasure now for the sake of greater overall pleasure.⁴

This emphasis on time and selection opposes the Cyrenaic emphasis on the present, and supports the eudaimonism of the *Protagoras*. Epicurus advocates maximum pleasure over one’s whole life, including the pleasures of recollection and anticipation. If I care about my life as a whole, I enjoy the memory of the pleasures in my past life, and I enjoy future pleasures by anticipation when I can look forward to them.

62. Tranquillity Maximizes Pleasure: A Reply to Callicles

Epicurus believes that the measuring craft corrects errors about how to maximize pleasure. One of these errors is the view of Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias*, that maximum pleasure requires the expansion of desires that require ever-expanding resources.⁵ To find these resources, we have to violate the rules of justice. Justice requires us to respect the right of other people not to be harmed and to use their property without interference, but if we are to find resources for our pleasure, we may need to violate other people’s rights.

This single-minded pursuit of maximum pleasure conflicts with Socrates’ commitment to such virtues as temperance and justice. The argument against Callicles in the *Gorgias* assumes that the pursuit of pleasure leads to this conflict with the virtues.

Epicurus replies that when he identifies pleasure as the supreme good, he does not mean that we should pursue extravagant and demanding pleasures of the sort that Callicles advocates. We should pursue not the pleasure of the moment, but maximum pleasure over our whole lives. If we consider the course of our whole lives, we see that a life full of fear and anxiety is worse than one that allows us to face the future without fear. But the life of sensual pleasures increases anxiety, since we achieve more intense

³ Pleasure is our natural goal: DL x 137. Ultimate good: DL x 128–9 = LS 21B Cyrenaics: §24.

⁴ Pleasure over time: DL x 129–30 = LS 21B. The measuring craft: Socrates §19.

⁵ Callicles: §21.

pleasures only if we suffer more severe pains, fears, and needs, and have the external resources to satisfy these needs. Dependence on external resources that are not in our control is a source of anxiety. We are better off if we have desires that are easily satisfied.⁶

Enlightened hedonists, therefore, choose the 'static' pleasures of satisfied desire and freedom from disturbance. They avoid transitory 'kinetic' pleasures to the extent that they arise in the process of satisfying intense desire and removing severe pain. Since they do not choose gross sensual pleasures, they avoid the vicious actions that secure the resources for such pleasures. Epicureans follow the pattern of the gods, who are secure in their pleasures, and free from the external hazards that cause fear and apprehension. They gain the tranquillity that the Sceptics vainly sought through suspension of judgment.⁷

63. Epicureans Achieve Tranquillity, and Overcome the Fear of Death

Epicurus' views on the bad effects of anxiety and fear help to explain his attitude to the fear of death and his advice about how to overcome it. He believes that the fear of death deprives us of happiness because we are afraid of what we might suffer after our death. We try to distract our attention from this fear, by finding activities and pleasures that hold our attention. These are the pleasures that result from strong appetites and severe pains. Since these pleasures cause us more fear and anxiety, our attempt to avoid anxiety through dissolute pleasures actually creates more anxiety about finding the resources for these pleasures.

Epicurus promises release from this cycle of fear. His natural philosophy assures us that we do not survive death, and hence we experience nothing when we are dead. Since nothing except mental disturbance is bad for us, and we suffer no mental disturbance if we are dead, we have no cause for anxiety. Since Epicureans do not fear death, they do not seek distraction from fear of death through dissolute pleasures. Since death does not lead to post-mortem suffering, the prospect of death need not disturb us.⁸

Once we recognize these facts, we will not cling to life. We will not suppose that a longer life is better for us than a shorter life, if both lives are equally tranquil, and we will not suppose that the ending of life is bad for us.

64. What Should a Hedonist Choose? Epicurus, Aristippus, and Callicles

Epicurus' route to tranquillity assumes, against the Cyrenaics, that we should consider our extended lives and interests. The Cyrenaics might ask why we should take

⁶ We should not pursue extravagant pleasures: DL x 131–2.

⁷ Kinetic v. static (katastematic) pleasures: DL x 136 = LS 21R. Sensual pleasure: DL x 142 = LS 21D. Tranquillity: Lucretius iii 18–24. Sceptics §55.

⁸ Fear of death: Lucretius iii 830–end.

this attitude. Epicurus does not reply that it is obvious to the senses. On the contrary, he believes that we ought to go beyond the senses and immediate pleasures, to a rational concern for our whole lives.

But even if we adopt this concern, can we justify a preference for tranquillity? Hedonist reasons are open to hedonist objections. Callicles might grant that his preferred 'kinetic' pleasures produce more pain and anxiety than he would have if he had more moderate pleasures. But if these pleasures give him more enjoyment, does the ecstasy not outweigh the agony? A purely quantitative measuring craft does not seem to settle this dispute.

65. Is Pleasure the Only Non-Instrumental Good? Epicurus and Aristotle

Even if Epicurus is right to prefer freedom from disturbance to Calliclean pleasures, has he found the right conception of happiness? Some of Aristotle's objections to hedonism are relevant to this question.⁹

First, if we can secure tranquillity through foolish and vicious activities, some lives that achieve tranquillity lack other goods, and so these lives cannot, in Aristotle's view, be happy. If we had only the pleasures of animals and children, however tranquil we might be, we would not have achieved the complete good for rational agents. The human good requires the pleasures that belong to rational consciousness.

Secondly, Aristotle gives us some reason to doubt whether tranquillity alone could be the whole of happiness. Epicurus' conception seems too close to Socrates' purely adaptive conception. One might object that it underestimates Aristotle's claim that happiness requires activity, and not a mere state of satisfaction.¹⁰

Thirdly, if we agree that the pleasure that constitutes happiness has to be some sort of activity rather than a mere state, we need to ask what activity this is, and what makes it a valuable activity. According to Aristotle, the value of a pleasure depends on the value of the objects that we take pleasure in. If, then, the nature of a pleasure depends on the nature of its object, and if some pleasures can be enjoyed only by valuing their objects for their own sake, a hedonist outlook is self-defeating. If we take pleasure to be the only non-instrumental good, we have to forgo the pleasures that depend on our recognizing non-instrumental goods other than pleasures. Epicurus claims that static pleasures are better and pleasanter than kinetic pleasures. He is right, if the objects of static pleasures are better than the objects of kinetic pleasures. But in order to show this, he needs to acknowledge that the objects of pleasure—and hence other things besides pleasures themselves—are non-instrumentally good.

If Aristotle is right about pleasure, therefore, Epicurus' position is unstable. Though he maintains that Calliclean kinetic pleasures are inferior to static pleasures, he maintains that only pleasure is good. He does not concede that the objects of some pleasures are non-instrumental goods in their own right. But if we care only about pleasure and gratification, and not about the objects of different pleasures, we cannot (according to Aristotle) achieve the good. We pursue the pleasures that really

⁹ Aristotle on pleasure and happiness: §§40, 45.

¹⁰ Socrates' adaptive conception: §22.

contribute to our good only if we pursue good rather than bad pleasures. The goodness of these pleasures must be measured by standards other than pleasure. These standards are fixed by the virtues. If, then, we want the pleasantest life, we ought to choose the life of virtue, not the life devoted to pleasure.

66. An Enlightened Hedonist Chooses the Virtues

Plato and Aristotle maintain that the virtues are parts of happiness, and deserve to be chosen for their own sake. As Glaucon puts it in the *Republic*, anyone who chooses justice purely for its consequences appears to be just, but is not really just. Epicurus, however, denies that the virtues and fine action are valuable in their own right, apart from any resulting pleasure. Pointless disputes about the non-instrumental value of the virtues allow an opening for Scepticism and suspension of judgment, but hedonism allows no such opening. Since pleasure is good, the virtues are good, if they are means to pleasure.¹¹

If we seek maximum pleasure through tranquillity, we need to regulate our desires to make them depend less on external circumstances. We will therefore value the results of temperance. Since we do not need many external resources, we ought not to be afraid of heavy losses in a good cause. Hence cowardice ought not to attract us. Epicureans are not greedy for power over others, since it causes anxiety and insecurity. They understand that they benefit from mutual aid and physical security, and therefore they follow rules of justice. Since they value freedom from anxiety, they are averse to risk, and want to avoid injustice because of the risk of punishment.

Human society is the product of responses to insecurity and danger. The needs that create the state also tell the Epicurean hedonist to conform to justice.¹² If we cared most about wealth, power, and the resources for sensual gratification, we would violate rules of justice when we could avoid the normal penalty. If, however, these goods cause unwelcome anxiety, they do not warrant the further anxiety that results from unjust action and the fear of punishment.¹³

Epicureans value not only the larger society that relies ultimately on the use of force to deter injustice, but also the smaller voluntary societies that result from friendship. Epicurus rejects Aristotle's view that the best type of friendship values the friend for the friend's own sake, and not simply for one's own benefit. He values friendship instrumentally, because it makes us more secure against dangers, and it gives us the opportunity for shared pleasures that are the basis of shared memories and anticipations. Since Epicureans find mutual aid and pleasure in the company of friends, they cultivate friendships.¹⁴

Epicurus concludes that the pursuit of pleasure, properly understood, requires the cultivation of the moral virtues.

¹¹ Choosing justice: §30. The fine has no value apart from pleasure: Plutarch, *Non Posse* 1091b; Cicero, *F* ii 69 = LS 21O.

¹² Justice: DL x 141, 150–1 = LS 22A–B. Evolution of society: Lucretius v 925–61 = LS 22J, 988–1027 = LS 22K.

¹³ Aversion to risk: Hobbes §134; Hume §169; Rawls §288.

¹⁴ Virtues: DL x 132 = LS 21B; 148 = LS 22E. Friendship: Cicero, *F* i 66–70 = LS 22O.

67. Difficulties in a Hedonist Defence of the Virtues

This argument faces some objections in the case of bravery. Brave people face some apparent harm to themselves—perhaps death or imprisonment or enslavement—for the sake of some apparent good that outweighs the harm—the safety of their fellow-citizens, for instance. Since Epicureans do not regard the apparent costs of virtuous action as serious harms, fear does not prevent them from doing what the brave person does. Nor, however, do they seem to have any reason to care about the causes that the brave person cares about. Though Epicureans have no reason to fear danger, they seem to have no reason to face it. Their indifference to external conditions apparently makes them indifferent to goods that should matter to a brave person.

For similar reasons, we may question the Epicurean commitment to justice and friendship. Even if the threat of punishment deters Epicureans from all or most unjust actions, they seem to have no reason to care about the good of others for its own sake. If they cared about it for its own sake, they would believe that it is a non-instrumental good; but they regard pleasure as the only non-instrumental good. If an Epicurean is indifferent to the interest of others in their own right, he seems to have no reason for doing any good to them, except when it promotes his own pleasure. Moreover, friendship seems to bring fears and anxieties—about the welfare of one's friends—that an Epicurean rejects. If we have no such fears and anxieties, we do not seem to have the attitudes of friends.

If, therefore, Epicurus retains his hedonism, he seems to leave his commitment to the virtues uncertain.

7

The Stoics

Happiness as Virtue

68. Socrates, the Cynics, and the Stoics

Epicurus tries to defend some aspects of the Cyrenaic reaction to Socrates, without accepting the extreme consequences of Cyrenaic hedonism. The Stoics take a similar attitude to the Cynic reaction to Socrates.¹

The Cynics argue that virtue ensures happiness, because virtue is the only good and nothing else deserves rational concern. Plato and Aristotle avoid the extreme Cynic position by denying that virtue ensures happiness. In their view, a virtuous person is always better off than a vicious person, no matter what else may be true of them. Virtuous people are happier (i.e., closer to being happy), because virtue is the dominant component of happiness; but they are not necessarily happy, because happiness has other components besides virtue.²

The Stoic position has two parts: (1) Virtue is sufficient for happiness, because it is the whole of happiness.³ Hence Plato and Aristotle are wrong. (2) Goods apart from virtue (as Plato and Aristotle conceive them)—health, wealth, good fortune—deserve rational concern even though they are not goods and contribute nothing to happiness. Hence the Cynics are wrong.

The Stoics acknowledge that each of these claims may seem strange, and that they may seem to conflict. We need to understand what these claims mean, how the Stoics argue for them, and how, in the light of the Stoic arguments, they are consistent, and indeed support each other.

69. The Development of Virtue

In the Stoics' view, the good life for a human being is a life in accordance with nature. Since virtuous people live in accordance with nature, their life is good and happy.⁴

We learn the types of actions that agree with nature through our natural development and our pursuit of natural advantages (health, physical security, social relations, family life, and so on). This development is guided by the self-love that

¹ The works of the three founders of the Stoic school—Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus—do not survive. Only a few passages are quoted by later writers. An account of Stoic ethics has to be constructed from various sources; see LS: Inwood and Gerson, *HP*. Discussions of Stoic ethics: Inwood and Donini, 'Ethics'; Brennan, *SL*.

² Components of happiness: §§30, 38, 47.

³ Virtue sufficient for happiness: §§18, 25.

⁴ Living according to nature: Cicero. *Off.* iii 21–8; DL vii 89. Butler and the Stoics: §173.

maintains our nature and constitution. The adaptation—the Stoics call it ‘conciliation’—of agents to their environment is systematic and consistent.⁵

All animals have this self-love, but rational agents are distinctive because they gradually form convictions about what is good for them. When we apply these rational convictions to our actions, we achieve a more coherent life.⁶ To secure the goods we seek for our nature and constitution, we exercise practical reason.

At first we use practical reason instrumentally, as a means to securing more of the natural advantages. But later the instrumental exercise of practical reason leads us to prefer ‘order and concord’ in our actions over the natural advantages that we initially seek. Natural impulses introduce us and ‘commend’ us to reason; but once we have recognized it, we value it more than we value the natural advantages. Since we would rather achieve our objectives by rational planning than by some other equally efficient means, we value practical reason non-instrumentally.⁷

The different virtues prescribe actions that recognize the non-instrumental value of practical reason. In the Stoic view, we cannot have the virtues if we do not see that they are non-instrumentally good, and hence elements of the final good. If we separate the final good from virtue, we measure the final good by our own private advantage, and not by rightness, and so we cannot consistently cultivate friendship, justice, generosity, or bravery.⁸ The virtuous person chooses virtuous actions because they are right in themselves apart from their consequences.⁹ This virtuous person—the Stoic sage—acts reasonably, and thereby lives in accordance with the nature of a rational agent. No one has achieved this condition fully, but we can approach it by trying to acquire the virtues.¹⁰

70. Only the Right Is Good

So far, the Stoics support Plato’s and Aristotle’s claim that virtue is the dominant component of happiness. But they claim more than that for virtue. In their view, natural development shows us that natural advantages are not genuine goods, and that virtue is the only good. Virtuous people live in accordance with nature, because they live in agreement with their rational nature, and thereby achieve happiness. If we regard other things as goods, we must regard them as parts of happiness. In that case, we have to ask whether we ought ever to prefer some combination of these goods to virtue. If we raise that question, we do not live wholly in agreement with reason, as virtuous people do. If we do not live in agreement with reason, we cannot achieve happiness. Hence nothing except virtue is good.¹¹

⁵ Conciliation (*oikeiōsis*); DL vii 85 = LS 85A, Cic. *F* iii 16–20 (part in LS 59D); Seneca, *Ep.* 121.17, 24. Grotius §125.

⁶ Coherence (*homologia*); DL vii 85–9 (part in LS 57A).

⁷ Natural impulses and reason: Cicero, *F* iii 21–3 = LS 59D, 64F.

⁸ Virtues and final good: Cic. *F* ii 35; *Off.* i 5.

⁹ ‘Right’ renders ‘kalon’ (Latin, *honestum*), which might also be rendered ‘fine’ (as in Aristotle, §48): Seneca, *Ep.* 76.9; Cic. *F* iii 27; DL vii 100.

¹⁰ The virtues: DL vii 85–9.

¹¹ Virtuous people are happy: Cic. *F* iii 25 = LS 64H; iii 27 = LS 60N. Fear of losing non-moral goods: Epictetus i 22.13–14; Cic. *F* iii 29; Tusc. v 41–2 = LS 63L.

Ancient critics of Stoicism reject this conclusion on the ground that non-moral goods (i.e., goods other than virtue), such as honour, wealth, and so on, are obviously goods. The Stoics reply that these supposed non-moral goods are not wholly good, because they are sometimes bad for us, if they are misused.¹² The only unqualified good is virtue. Since happiness is the complete unqualified good, virtue is identical to happiness.

The Stoics support this conception of happiness by appeal to Aristotle's claim that happiness is stable and in our control as far as possible. If happiness has these features, it must be the life of virtuous action. Virtuous agents take control of their lives, and guide them by their rational choice; they take the appropriate attitude to their lives, and manifest their virtuous character in their actions. It is within their power to fulfil this aim, because they can fulfil it no matter what the external conditions may be. It is not within our power to be sure of gaining non-moral goods, but it is within our power to make the appropriate rational effort to gain them. The most skilful archers may still fail to hit the target, but they succeed in doing all they can to hit it. Similarly, happiness consists in something that is in our power, in making the appropriate attempt that the virtuous person makes to gain non-moral goods.¹³

Aristotle, however, does not see that only virtue satisfies his demand for stability. Since he does not (in the Stoic view) recognize the implications of his own demand, he supposes that happiness is exposed to fortune, and to that extent unstable. Contrary to Aristotle, Socrates was right to claim that the good person cannot be harmed.¹⁴

71. Objections to the Stoic Account of Happiness

If virtue is sufficient for happiness, everything else that we might regard as good is, as the Stoics put it, 'indifferent'—neither good nor bad—because such things do not affect happiness. Since health is not good, and sickness is not bad, but both are indifferent, health is no better than sickness, and wealth is no better than poverty.

These claims may seem to align the Stoics with the Cynics. It seems pointless to protect people from physical violence, since it does them no real harm, or to respect their property, or to improve their health, or to keep our promises to them, since wealth, health, and the advantages gained from fulfilled promises do not benefit them.

But if Stoic virtue is not concerned about the suffering, health, safety, and security of other people, is it really virtue? How can we attribute justice or bravery or sympathy to someone who does not see anything good about the welfare (as we normally conceive it) of other people?¹⁵

¹² Non-moral goods: Cic. *F* iv 48–9. Misuse: DL vii 103 = LS 58A. Cf. Plato, *Euthydemus* 281b–e.

¹³ The archer: Cic. *F* iii 22.

¹⁴ Happiness and fortune: Socrates §18; Cynics §25; Aristotle §41.

¹⁵ Indifferents: Sextus, *M* xi 59–64 (part in LS 58F).

72. Appropriate Actions Aim at Preferred Indifferents

The Stoics answer such objections through their account of preferred and non-preferred indifferents. Though preferred indifferents are neither good nor bad, they are not indifferent in relation to all reasonable human concerns. Preferred indifferents have value because they are more in accordance with nature.

Stoic ethics includes the appropriate attitude to indifferents. Happiness and virtue consist in ‘acting reasonably in the selection of things according to nature’ and by ‘completing all the appropriate actions’.¹⁶ Since the Stoic account of conciliation gives us reason to pursue the natural advantages, and since virtue itself is the exercise of reason in doing all we can to secure them, Stoic sages do their best to secure the natural advantages.¹⁷

We have good reason, therefore, to pursue preferred indifferents, and to avoid non-preferred indifferents, to the extent permitted by virtue. Virtuous people normally select health over sickness, safety over danger, and so on, both for themselves and for other people. If they suffer painful illness, or poverty, or torture, they have lost something that they have a reason to prefer. But they have lost none of their happiness, and therefore have not been harmed, because they are still virtuous.

This is why the Stoics maintain that they reconcile plausible views about happiness and success that might appear to conflict: (1) Happiness is stable and in our control. (2) It consists in the actions that fit human nature. (3) It is reasonable to aim at success in these actions. (4) But success in such actions is not wholly in our control.

The Stoics accept all four claims. Since (3) and (4) are about preferred indifferents, they are consistent with (1) and (2), which describe goods.

We might still question the Stoic position. The actions that fit human nature, according to the Stoics, are virtuous actions, because they fit our rational nature. But why is it reasonable to aim for external success in these actions? The Stoics answer that these actions secure natural advantages, which are suitable for our human nature. If this is so, are the Stoics entitled to say that rational action is all that is needed to fulfil human nature?

The Stoics answer that only an unqualified good can be a part of happiness. Natural advantages are not parts of happiness because they are not unqualified goods, but need to be regulated by virtue.

73. Indifferents Matter, Though They Are Neither Good Nor Bad

The importance of indifferents in Stoic ethics can be illustrated from an extreme case. The Stoics believe that unfavourable external conditions may justify a sage in committing suicide. Since sages remain virtuous, they remain happy, and so they do not commit suicide because their happiness is threatened. They are influenced, however, by the actual or threatened loss of preferred indifferents for themselves or

¹⁶ Appropriate action (*kathêkon*, officium) and correct action (*katorthôma*, recte factum): DL vii 107 = LS 59C; Cic. *F* iii 58–9 = LS 59F.

¹⁷ Acting reasonably: DL vii 88; Seneca, *Ep.* 92.11 = LS 64J.

for people they care about. Imprisonment, hunger, sickness, indignity, humiliation, may all give reasons for thinking the price of staying alive is too high. Hence the Stoics believe that in some conditions suicide is, as they put it, the 'rational departure' from life.

This doctrine that happy people will commit suicide because of external conditions that present no threat to their happiness strikes opponents of Stoicism as bizarre. But the status of indifferents makes the Stoic doctrine intelligible. On the appropriate occasions, the sage treats preferred indifferents with the appropriate seriousness.¹⁸

74. Passions Are Mistaken Assents

The division between goods and indifferents underlies the Stoic claim that wise and virtuous people are free of passions. In the Stoic view, passions (or emotions; *pathê*) result from the false opinions that external 'goods' and 'evils' are really good and evil (and not simply preferred and non-preferred indifferents).¹⁹

I form an opinion by having an appearance and assenting to the appearance.²⁰ If for instance, I appear to be holding up a hand, and I see no reason to doubt the appearance, I assent to it, and believe that I am holding up a hand. In the case of passions, I have an appearance of something bad (e.g., this snake appears dangerous, and therefore bad), and I assent to it, so that I believe something bad will happen if I do not take avoiding action. This immediate assent to its being bad is the passion of fear. If I had thought for a moment, I would have remembered that this kind of snake is not dangerous at all, and so I would not have formed the opinion that something bad will happen, and I would not have been afraid.

Passions, then, are immediate and unreflective assents to appearances of good and evil. If I thoughtlessly assent to the appearance that imprisonment or torture is really bad, or that it is really good to take revenge for an insult, my assent constitutes fear or anger.²¹ Since passions are thoughtless assents, Plato and Aristotle are right to claim that acting on passions is in some way opposed to acting on reason. But they are wrong to infer that passions belong to a non-rational part of the soul. Similarly, they are wrong to believe that virtues require well-trained passions.²² Since passions treat indifferents as goods and evils, the virtuous person has no passions.

This conclusion may appear to discredit the Stoic view. We normally expect a virtuous person to show some concern and sympathy for other people who suffer misfortunes. Passions such as grief, regret, and pleasure are the normal expressions of this concern. If the Stoic virtues eliminate passions, they seem to deprive us of the sort of concern that we expect from virtuous people.

The Stoics reply that, though virtuous people lack the false beliefs that arise from thoughtless assents, they still have the appearances that lead other people into passions. If brave people see some immediate threat to their safety, they have a vivid appearance of impending harm. They do not assent to this appearance; but they

¹⁸ Suicide: DL vii 130 = LS 66F; Cicero, *F* iii 60–1 = LS 66G.

¹⁹ Passions: Cic. *TD* iv; LS 65.

²⁰ Appearance and assent: Sceptics §58.

²¹ Passion and goodness: Galen, *Hipp. et Plat.* iv 2.1–6 = LS 65D.

²² Virtue and passions: Aristotle §§42, 44; Aquinas §§92, 96.

assent to the appearance of some impending non-preferred indifferent, and their assent prompts an effort to avoid the impending threat, unless there is a better reason to face it.

Virtuous people follow rational judgments about the real value of indifferents. Hence, they care about their family, friends, and community, and attend to different people's needs for preferred indifferents. They sometimes face the unwelcome possibility of losing preferred indifferents, but such a loss does not cause exaggerated and unreasonable laments.²³

75. The Stoics Apply Their Ethics to Social Theory

Different aspects of Stoic social theory reflect different sides of their moral doctrine. The supremacy of virtue underlies radical and utopian views, in the tradition of Plato's *Republic* and its early Cynic critics. Zeno argues that many of the institutions that people take for granted as essential for a just city and a decent way of life are really indifferent, and need to be examined to see whether they really achieve the appropriate results in specific circumstances. A city of perfectly virtuous people would not need the institutions found in actual states.

The Stoics' treatment of friendship supports their belief in a community of virtuous people. They agree with Aristotle's view that the highest form of friendship is between virtuous people. They infer, contrary to Aristotle, that virtuous people are all friends to one another, because they share in a common way of life guided by virtue, whether or not they live in the same territorially limited state. This community of virtuous people is not limited to human beings; for the Stoics conceive God as a rational being who exercises providence for the good of the whole universe. Since virtuous people harmonize their wills with the will of God, they belong to one community extending throughout the universe.

This one community also has one law. The rational principles that guide God and wise human beings constitute the natural law. These principles are a law because they are norms for the guidance of individual and social life. They are a natural law because they rest on characteristics of human nature, and especially on the characteristics of rational nature. The Stoics reject sceptical attempts, especially by Carneades, to revive Glaucon's and Adeimantus' objections to justice as simply the product of a desire for security.²⁴ In their view, societies regulated by justice conform to the needs of human nature, and therefore conform to natural law. Actual states are better or worse to the extent that they follow or violate natural law.²⁵

The community of the wise and virtuous transcends, but does not replace, attachment to other communities. Human beings naturally seek the society of others, and so they form families, friendships, and larger communities. Since these express

²³ Stoic substitutes for passions: Cicero, *TD* iv 28–32 (part in LS 61O); *F* iii 35; Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 5 = LS 65U.

²⁴ Carneades: Cicero, *De Republica* 9–11, 27–33.

²⁵ The basis of society: Cicero, *F* iii 62–70 = LS 57F; *Off.* i 11–23; *De Legibus* i 28–34; ii 11. Early Stoicism: DL vii 32–4 = LS 67B; 188; Sextus, *P* iii 200. Later views: Cicero, *Off.* i 21–2, 114; ii 73 LS 67V. Later developments of natural law: §§82, 98–9, 123–4.

natural desires and fulfil human nature, Stoics value them. Since justice, honesty, and courage maintain a stable community resting on mutual trust, Stoics cultivate these virtues, and since a community needs to be governed, they want to take part in government when the good of the community requires it. Civic life offers scope for appropriate actions aimed at preferred indifferents, and Stoic writers compiled works 'On appropriate actions' that include guidance for civic life.²⁶

Since Stoics believe in the value of a human community, they aim to be reliable public servants. During the later Roman Republic and early Empire, Stoics were recognized as upright, courageous, and resolute in public life. During the principate of Augustus, Stoicism was recognized as an acceptable public philosophy. Some of Horace's later *Odes* are celebrations of the Stoic virtues; and Aeneas, the hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*, gradually learns the Stoic virtues of courage, loyalty, resolution, justice, and piety.²⁷ In the next century, the emperor Marcus Aurelius was both a Stoic philosopher and a devoted public servant.

Stoic engagement in public life relies on the principle that human society and its advantages are preferred indifferents, but not goods. Epictetus presents another side of this Stoic principle. Having been a slave, he could not participate fully in social and political life, but he could achieve his good none the less. For him slavery and freedom are indifferents, though freedom is preferable. He advises us to love our family and friends, but not to regard their death as a real harm to us, since it is indifferent to our happiness. He affirms Socrates' doctrine that a good person cannot be harmed.²⁸

76. The Cosmos Displays Intelligent Design and Providence

The Stoics agree with Plato's view that the cosmos is a product of intelligent design, but they agree with Aristotle in claiming that, contrary to Plato, teleology (i.e., the ordering of processes towards a goal) does not require an external designer.²⁹ The world displays self-regulation, selection of suitable means to beneficial ends, and evidence of a design that is superior to anything that a human being could achieve. The Stoics infer that the cosmos includes some intelligence that is superior to human intelligence, and that it is itself a rational animal.³⁰ It is a system in which particular rational and non-rational animals are sub-systems. The nature and proper goals of these sub-systems are determined by their role in the larger system of which they are parts, just as the nature and proper goals of organs are determined by their place in the larger organism that they belong to.

According to this organic conception of the cosmos, God does not exist outside the world. Following Plato's *Timaeus*, the Stoics attribute a soul to the cosmos as a whole,

²⁶ Cicero uses a work of Panaetius as the basis of his *De Officiis*. The Latin title might be rendered 'On appropriate actions', or 'On duties', since it discusses the duties of a citizen from the Stoic point of view.

²⁷ Stoic views in Horace: *Odes* i 23.1–8; iii 3.1–8. Virgil: see e.g. *Aeneid* vi 724–32.

²⁸ See Epictetus, *Discourses* iii 24.84–94; *Enchiridion* 7, 15. Socrates: *Discourses* iii 23.32; iv 1.159–69.

²⁹ Plato gives an account of creation in the *Timaeus*. Aristotle on natural teleology: *Physics* ii 8–9.

³⁰ Cosmic rationality: Cicero, *ND* ii 16–17 (part in LS 54E).

but, unlike Plato, they identify God with the cosmic soul that animates the cosmic organism. This is the immanent rationality in the world order. The processes in the world require a benevolent agent who aims at the good of the whole and of its parts.

The apparent imperfections in the world seem to cast doubt on the providence and benevolence of God, and therefore on the Stoic account of nature.³¹ The Stoics answer that some features of the cosmos may be unwelcome to us, but still belong to an order that can be seen to be good in some wider perspective. Hence these apparent imperfections are subject to the providential order in the mind of God. Despite our limited understanding, we can recognize the goodness of the cosmic order clearly enough to believe in the immanent providence of nature.

Stoic theology, natural philosophy, and ethics are closely related. The world is designed for the good of the whole, and rational agents can take a conscious part in the fulfilment of the design of cosmic reason. Participation of our individual reasons in cosmic reason presents us with ethical aims to guide our lives. To live in accord with nature is to live in accord both with our nature as human beings and with cosmic nature as a whole. We do not understand the details of the providential order. None the less we can be confident that when virtue requires us to give up some preferred indifferents, this is not a pointless sacrifice, but has its proper place in nature. To promote the good of the whole is to achieve our own good.³²

77. A Question About Stoic Determinism: Aristotle's Conditions for Responsibility

Since the Stoics believe in an immanent designing intelligence, they believe that the cosmos reveals an order rather than a mere series of events, because it follows unchanging laws in regular and predictable ways. Rivers flow downwards rather than upwards, apples rather than rocks grow on apple trees, and later events are determined by earlier events according to laws. The Stoics hold the determinist view that every event is caused by a previous event according to laws that determine the later event.³³ To deny determinism would be to admit uncaused and random events that would lie outside universal providence.

Determinism has seemed to many critics, from Epicurus onwards, to threaten our belief that we are responsible for our actions and characters. Belief in responsibility underlies the assumption that we can be justly praised and blamed for acting well and badly, and that it is in some way in our control whether we are virtuous or vicious people. If determinism undermines the belief in responsibility, it seems to threaten the basis of ethics, including Stoic ethics.

We can see how these questions arise if we go back to Aristotle. He believes that his account of virtue supports the common belief that we are justly praised and blamed for virtuous and vicious actions. The proper objects of praise and blame are the things for which we ourselves, rather than necessity or fortune, are responsible.³⁴ We

³¹ Cosmic imperfections: Lucretius v 195–9. ³² Epict. ii 6.9–10 = LS 58J. ii 5.24–6.

³³ Universal causation and fate: Sextus, *M* ix 200–3; Alexander, *De Fato* 22.

³⁴ Our responsibility: Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1223a9–15.

are responsible for our voluntary actions, which are caused neither by force nor by ignorance, but have their 'origin in us', in so far as we know the particular circumstances of the action.³⁵ These actions are the appropriate objects of praise and blame.

Aristotle extends these claims from virtuous and vicious actions to virtue and vice themselves. Not only our actions, but also our beliefs, feelings, character, and outlook are open to justified and effective criticism, because we are responsible for how they all develop, and for whether they develop into virtues, vices, or neither.³⁶ Since we have some control over the development of our character, we bear some responsibility for the resulting state of character. As later philosophers put it, we have free will in relation to our actions and character.³⁷

According to Aristotle, my voluntary action is 'up to me'—I am free to do and not to do it—and 'the origin is in me'—I am the cause. These conditions are closely related; if I were not free to do and not to do an action, the cause would not be me, but it would be some event or condition external to me, so that the action would not be up to me. The origin of my stealing the wallet or not stealing it is in me whenever my choice about whether to steal or not to steal explains the wallet's being returned or not returned to its owner. If you had slipped the wallet into my pocket without my knowledge, or had tied me up and put it in my pocket, I would not be responsible for what happened.

But how (we might ask Aristotle) do I know that my choice, and not something else, is the cause? If my choice has some cause, is the cause of my choice also the cause of my stealing the wallet? If the chain of causes goes back to a time before I was even born, my choice does not seem to be the real cause of my action.

78. Epicurus: To Defend Responsibility, We Must Reject Determinism

Epicurus believes that if we pursue these questions that arise from Aristotle, we see that determinism and responsibility are incompatible. If past states of the world that are beyond my control determine my action, I am not free not to do the action. But if every event is caused by some past event, all my actions are determined by the past. Hence determinism excludes responsibility.³⁸

This argument for incompatibilism (i.e., the incompatibility of responsibility and determinism) creates a difficulty for Epicurus. If we are incompatibilists, but we affirm responsibility, we have to reject determinism. But Epicurus' natural philosophy seems to commit him to determinism. He revives Democritus' atomism, and Democritus—as Epicurus agrees—is a determinist.³⁹ In Democritus' view, all natural processes are the necessary results of atomic movements, with no external interference from gods; the only laws that govern these processes are laws about atomic movements. The same patterns are repeated in nature because the same atomic forces necessarily produce the same results. According to this atomist determinism, all our

³⁵ Voluntary actions: *EN* 1111a22–4.

³⁶ Responsibility for character: *EN* 1114a4–9.

³⁷ Free will: §§85, 95, 106.

³⁸ Aristotle: *EN* 1111a22–4. Fate: *DL* x 134. Epicurus against determinism: *On Nature* 34 = *LS* 20C.

³⁹ Democritus: *LS* 20C §13.

actions are nothing but the necessary result of atomic movements, all the way back to the infinitely distant past.

Epicurus affirms the reality of freedom and responsibility. His ethical advice presupposes that it is up to us to decide how to live, and hence that we are free to accept or to reject different ways of life. If this is so, our characters and actions are not fixed independently of our choices. Responsibility is compatible with atomism because atomism does not require determinism. Sometimes atoms undergo a random and imperceptible swerve from their normal motion. This swerve introduces an uncaused motion. Our acts of choice involve atomic swerves; therefore they are undetermined. This indeterminist version of atomism upholds our experience of the world and our belief in free will.⁴⁰

This indeterminist solution is open to doubt. If a choice involves an atomic swerve, it is uncaused, and therefore is not caused by my past choices and my states of character. But actions that are unconnected to my past and my character seem to be aberrations for which we are not responsible. Epicurus' view implies, then, that I am no more responsible for any of my 'free' actions than I am for aberrations from my character. He seems to undermine claims of responsibility, not to vindicate them.

But even if the atomic swerve is not the best defence of indeterminism, Epicurus' argument deserves attention. If we believe in freedom, but we also agree that determinism and freedom are incompatible, we need to defend some form of indeterminism.⁴¹ Alternatively, if we believe in freedom, but do not believe that indeterminism supports it, we need to ask whether determinism really excludes freedom.

79. The Stoics: Determinism Must Allow Co-determination

The Stoics believe that their providentially ordered and deterministic universe allows us to be responsible for our actions. In their view, being virtuous and vicious is up to us, and therefore happiness is up to us. In reply to Epicurus, they defend a compatibilist view of responsibility and determinism.

Epicurus argues that the Stoic view rules out responsibility for our actions. Since the Stoics believe that events in the distant past make my action inevitable, they must admit—according to Epicurus—that these events cause my action, and that my choice and decision do not cause it. Therefore they must admit that I am not responsible for my action.

The Stoics reply that this Epicurean argument rests on an equivocation. To say that A makes B inevitable might mean (i) that A all by itself ensures B, no matter what else happens (complete inevitability), or (ii) that A begins a sequence of events in which each later event is determined by an earlier event, and which results in B (causal inevitability).

To see why we need to distinguish these two types of inevitability, we should consider the 'Lazy Argument':

⁴⁰ Swerve: Lucretius ii 251–93 = LS 20F.

⁴¹ Indeterminism: Cic. *Fat.* 23 = LS 20E.

- (1) Either it is now inevitable that I will pass the examination tomorrow or it is inevitable that I will fail it.
- (2) If it is now inevitable that I will pass (fail), then I will pass (fail) whether I study or not.
- (3) Hence there is no point in my studying, since it will make no difference.

The first premiss is true only if it refers to causal inevitability; and the second is true only if it refers to complete inevitability. But the conclusion requires both premisses to involve complete inevitability. No interpretation of the premisses yields a sound argument.

This distinction between types of inevitability applies to natural laws. According to the Stoics, some events are 'co-determined'.⁴² Given the laws of nature and the past, it follows that if the outcome is determined, some specific means to the outcome is determined. If, for instance, it is determined that you will drive your car from London to Glasgow tomorrow, it is not thereby determined that you will drive it whether or not there is fuel in the tank. If your driving is determined, it is co-determined that there will be fuel in the tank tomorrow.

Once we see the flaw in the Lazy Argument, we also see, according to the Stoics, the flaw in the inference from the premiss that our actions are determined to the conclusion that we lack freedom. If my choice to study affects whether I pass the examination, then, if it is determined that I will pass the examination, it is co-determined that I will choose to study and that I will pass the examination as a result of choosing to study. Hence, my choice makes a difference to whether I pass or fail.

80. The Stoics: We Are Responsible for Our Co-determined Actions in a Deterministic Cosmos

Rejection of the Lazy Argument shows how responsibility is possible. But to see how we are actually responsible for some of our actions, we need to apply the Stoic account of choice and action. My action depends on appearance and assent (or refusal to assent). The appearance is not up to me if my having or not having an appearance of a tomato depends on whether there is a tomato-like object in the environment. But my assenting to the appearance and judging that a tomato is in front of me depends on me, because it depends on my rational estimate of the appearance. If I can think of nothing abnormal in the situation, I assent to its being a tomato, but if I suspect that there are plastic tomatoes around, I do not assent. Whether I assent or not, and whether I take a bite of the tomato or not, depends on my estimate.⁴³

Action that is caused by my assent is up to me, because my rational capacity determines how I assent, and my rational capacity is essential to me, since I am

⁴² They call these events 'co-fated', using 'fate' for the deterministic causal order. Their belief in fate is not the view that is normally called 'fatalism' (which maintains complete inevitability).

⁴³ Appearance, assent, and action: §74; Cic. *De Fato* 28–30 = LS 70G; 39–43 = LS 70C, Alexander, *De Fato* 13.

essentially a rational agent. Praise and blame are justified, because they influence my assent and rational judgment, and these determine my action. If praise and blame are appropriate ways of affecting our rational assent, they are appropriate for the actions that result from my assent. If praise and blame are appropriate for these actions, we are responsible for these actions.⁴⁴

Assent matters for the freedom of rational agents, because it manifests reason. It depends on our assessment of the situation, on what we think we have better reason to believe or to do. The Stoics claim that our estimate of a situation causes how we choose to respond to it. The point of praising and blaming is to lead rational agents to see things differently, or to confirm them in seeing things as they do. Since my estimate make a difference, it is fair to praise me for what I do well and to criticize me for what I do badly. Hence the Stoics claim to have shown that we are responsible for our actions.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Praise and blame: Alexander, *De Fato* 35, 37.

⁴⁵ Responsibility: Epictetus, *Ench.* 53 = LS 62B.

8

Christian Belief and Moral Philosophy

Augustine

81. Connexions between Christian Doctrine and Moral Theory

Socrates asks how we ought to live. He answers that we ought to try to acquire the virtues, and that we ought to care less about all other forms of success than about making our souls the best we can make them. Christian teaching asks a similar question and gives a similar answer. Jesus asks 'For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?'¹ When people ask him 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?', he tells them that they already know the answer: love God and love your neighbour.²

Jesus derives this answer from the Jewish Scriptures, not from moral philosophy. But some of those who tried to understand his answer engaged with the Greek and Roman philosophical tradition, and offered their own account of the virtues that belong to the best life. Christian literature pursues the main themes of ancient ethics, from the theological perspective derived from the Old Testament. The results of this reflexion on ancient ethics can be studied in Augustine. He discusses questions about virtue, happiness, passions, reason, and free will. In his moral, theological, and homiletic works he uses the moral theory and the theory of action that he derives mainly from Stoicism, to understand the theology and morality of St Paul.

82. Divine Commands and Rational Morality

Paul's account of the Christian gospel begins with the Jewish law. The law that God gave to Moses covers all aspects of life, both the service of God and social life.³ It presents divine commands, and its rules carry the promise of rewards for obedience and of punishment for disobedience. But some specific laws are not simply divine commands. They also deserve to be kept because of their inherent wisdom, which everyone can recognize. The memory of slavery and gratitude for liberation should

¹ Concern for oneself: Luke 9:25.

² Eternal life: Luke 10:25–8.

³ Scope of the law: Deuteronomy 4:2.

encourage sympathy and generosity.⁴ We should take an impartial point of view towards our own conduct. Since we reject selfish and cruel behaviour in others when we look at it impartially, we learn to reject and to avoid it in ourselves.⁵

An appeal to moral reasons underlies the division between the moral and the ceremonial aspects of the law. If the law deserved obedience simply because God commands it, the law against murder and the law about the proper way to perform a sacrifice would be binding to the same degree, and for the same reason. But different Old Testament writers assert that the social effects of injustice show that it should be avoided apart from its being prohibited by God. Injustice, fraud, and theft are grave offences that matter more than violation of the ceremonial law.⁶

According to this aspect of the Old Testament, moral principles are accessible to natural reason. The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo asserts, in agreement with the Stoics, that divine moral law is natural law, because its principles are suitable to human nature. He observes that Abraham was faithful and just without the guidance of the Mosaic law or any other positive law. Similarly, Paul observes that Jews and Gentiles have the same capacity to grasp the moral law, so that they are 'law to themselves'. They grasp the requirements of morality without external legislation because their conscience guides them. Augustine agrees that the natural law allows everyone some natural understanding of morality.⁷

In these respects, Christians add nothing to the moral law. They recognize the love of God and one's neighbour as an adequate summary of the demands of the moral law as a whole, and they take these two great commandments to indicate the relative importance of different provisions of the law. The law that is summarized in these two great commandments is both the Mosaic law and the natural law.

83. The Letter and the Spirit of the Moral Law: Jesus and Paul

Jesus maintains that he does not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to complete them.⁸ He accepts the moral law that is accessible to natural reason, but he argues that when we recognize what the law requires, it is not easy to fulfil it. We are required to love our neighbours because they have the same needs and rights as we have. The Good Samaritan behaved as a neighbour should behave to the injured person. He recognized that the law is not restricted to people who are our neighbours in the sense of living close to us, or being associated with us; it applies to other human beings who need the sort of help we would reasonably want for ourselves.

Why do we not act on this requirement? Jesus argues that we demand less from ourselves and from others because we see that we and they are unlikely to fulfil the demands of the law. But this is our fault, the result of 'the hardness of our hearts', not

⁴ The wisdom of divine law: Deuteronomy 4:6–8; 5:6; 6:21; 10:19; 26:5–10.

⁵ Impartiality: 2 Samuel 11:2–12:23

⁶ Moral v. ceremonial law: Micah 6:6–8; Jeremiah 7:22–3; Isaiah 1:11–15; Amos 2:6–8.

⁷ Natural law: Philo, *Abraham* 275–6; Stoics §75. Law to themselves: Romans 2:14–15; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* vi 8.6–12 = Cic. *Rep.* iii 33; Augustine, *Ep.* 106.15. See also Aquinas §98; Grotius §124; Butler §173.

⁸ Law and Prophets: Matthew 5:17.

a restriction inherent in the law itself.⁹ The moral law requires us to be 'perfect'. We ought not only to do what most people would regard as fulfilling their moral obligations, but also to 'hunger and thirst for justice'.¹⁰ As Jesus understands the moral law, it prescribes the love of one's neighbour as oneself, without the restrictions that human limitations impose on this attitude.

Similarly, Paul argues that the point of the law is to prohibit not only wrong action, but also all misguided desire. The fulfilment of the law includes the universal love of other people.¹¹ If we take it to require any less than this, we underestimate its demands in order to suit ourselves.¹²

84. The Moral Law and Sin

Once we understand the moral law, we see why we cannot keep it. Jesus commends the honest confession of someone who recognizes that he does not keep the law. He criticizes the arrogance of someone who imagines that he keeps the law.¹³ Paul affirms that Gentiles and Jews alike have turned away from their natural knowledge of God and the moral law, and have turned to lust, greed, and conflict.¹⁴ Though we can understand the moral law through our natural reason, we cannot keep it by our own efforts.

Augustine believes that the pagan world ignores the pervasiveness of moral error. Adam and Eve wanted to please themselves rather than follow the moral law that would acknowledge their dependence on God. The arrogance that they displayed is the beginning of all sin.¹⁵ Arrogant self-love is the source of conflicts, because it refuses to accept others as our equals.¹⁶

The Greek and Roman philosophers suffer from this arrogance, because they believe we can achieve the virtues by our own efforts, through training and learning, without reference to the help of God. Augustine answers that if we understand the extent of human sin and arrogance, we see that we cannot achieve virtue and happiness, as Aristotle and the Stoics conceive it, in this life.¹⁷ Happiness, in their view, requires a stable virtuous character; but since we cannot acquire such a character in this life, we cannot achieve happiness in this life either.

85. Sin and Free Will

If we admit our inability to keep the moral law, how are we to explain it? The Christian diagnosis may appear inconsistent. A sin is a blameworthy action, so that we must be responsible for it; but if we cannot avoid sin, is it not beyond our control, so that we cannot be responsible for it or justly blamed for it?¹⁸ Though Augustine

⁹ Love of neighbour: Leviticus 18:9; Luke 10:36–7. Hardness of heart: Matthew 19:9; Romans 7:12.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:6; 19:8–10. ¹¹ The scope of the law: Deuteronomy: 5:21; Romans 13:8–10.

¹² Letter and spirit: 2 Corinthians 3:6. ¹³ Honesty v. arrogance: Luke 18:9–14.

¹⁴ Turning away from the moral law: Romans 1:18–32; 3:9–20; 4:15; 5:13.

¹⁵ The sin of Eve and Adam: Augustine, *CD* xiv 13. 'Sin' (hamartia, peccatum) refers to error in general. It is not confined to offences specifically against God.

¹⁶ Arrogance: *CD* xv 5; xix 12.

¹⁷ Happiness: *CD* xix 4.

¹⁸ Freedom and responsibility: §77.

denounces the arrogance of any who claim to be capable of avoiding sin, he affirms that God justly condemns sin and that we are rightly blamed for it.

Sin presupposes free will.¹⁹ But our will necessarily pursues whatever we take to promote our happiness. Our passions explain why the wrong things attract us, but only the will explains why we sin—do something blameworthy—when we do what attracts us.²⁰ We are capable of refusing consent to sinful passions, but we do not always refuse consent when we should. That is why we do not avoid sin.²¹

These claims are consistent, in Augustine's view, because our will is free to follow whatever we judge to be best, but our understanding is weak and often makes false judgments. Adam and Eve had plausible reasons to eat the apple. Eve saw that it looked good to eat, the persuasive serpent assured her she would not die, she encouraged Adam to eat it, and they had the pleasure of asserting themselves against God's instructions.

Further reflexion would have shown them that these reasons were not good enough. The serpent was not to be trusted against God, the attractive appearance of the apple should not have mattered so much, and so on. Eve and Adam did what seemed best to them at the time, but if they had thought more about it, and attended less to what seemed immediately attractive, they would not have done what they did. Though we can avoid each sin, we cannot realistically expect that we will take account of everything we ought to take account of every time.

Augustine argues that divine creation and foreknowledge do not prevent us from acting on our will. God's foreknowledge allows us 'to do by our will whatever we recognize and know is not done by us except by our willing'. Since God creates and foreknows the whole order of causes, he creates us and foreknows the actions resulting from our will.²²

86. Grace, Justification, and Free Will

These difficulties that we face in trying to keep the moral law may seem strange from a theological point of view. Christians believe in an omnipotent and benevolent God, who freely creates the world and human beings. If God has made us aware of a moral law that we cannot keep, and blames us for not keeping it, what is the point of creating us to be in this situation? If God loves the creation, and if nothing stops God from doing what love for the creation would require, what is the point of leaving human beings as they are? If the natural moral law is also a divine law, why would God leave us unable to live by it?

Augustine answers that God makes us able to live by divine law. We sin by our own power, but we cannot achieve virtue without the grace of God. According to Augustine's opponent Pelagius, we can free ourselves from sin by our own effort, and divine grace simply helps us in response to our effort. Augustine rejects the priority of human effort. He replies to Pelagius that only God's action turns us to God, so that

¹⁹ Sin, happiness, and freedom: Aug. *Lib. Arb.* i 21; iii 2; *CD* xiv 3–4; *Prop. Rom.* 13–18; 44; *Iul.* ii 13; iii 62. Will (*voluntas*): §§43, 92.

²⁰ Consent and sin: *CD* xiv 11; xiii 14b; xii 8a; xix 12; *Prop. Rom.* 13–18; 60.

²¹ Sin is unavoidable: *CD* xiv 9; xxii 23; *Ep.* 98.1.

²² God's foreknowledge: *CD* v 9–10.

we recognize that we are subject to sin and conflict in this present life. We call on the help of God to reduce the power of misguided desires and aims. God through Christ provides the remedy for the condition that we recognize through reflexion on the moral law.²³

This primary role of divine grace captures, according to Augustine, the point of Paul's claim that we are saved by the grace of God, through faith in Christ, in order to do good works that fulfil the aims of the moral law.²⁴ God's action is grace because it is 'gratuitous', not a response to anyone's merits. Divine grace justifies through the work of Christ, who 'redeems', i.e., releases, human beings from their sin by suffering on their behalf. Human beings are justified 'as a free gift, by God's grace, through redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God predetermined to be an expiation through faith in his blood'. The death and resurrection of Jesus are the means of securing justification by faith, because they express God's grace towards sinners.²⁵

These claims about the redemptive work of Christ refer partly to his role as an example. He displays the integrity of a morally perfect person who resists the evil in the world, and is not corrupted by it: 'he was tested in every way similarly to us, without sinning', and 'in so far as he has undergone it himself, by being tested, he is able to come to the help of those who are being tested'. Christ shows that the ideal demands of morality are achievable.²⁶

But Christ does not simply give an example. He also gives us the power to imitate the example. Divine grace gives us the desire and the ability to follow Christ, by freeing us from domination by the motives that interfere with the will to love our neighbour as ourselves. That is why Paul calls on Christians to share in Christ's resurrection from death, by living appropriately. We can reasonably aim to keep the moral law only to the extent that we rely on God. Divine grace and the resulting faith produce justice because sin has lost its domination over us, once we are no longer under law but under grace. In this condition it is still open to us to sin, but because we have been freed from domination by sin, we ought not to subject ourselves to it.²⁷

Faith is the response elicited by God's unearned favour. This faith is a divine gift, but it operates through our assent, which comes from our will, and therefore is up to us. Grace operating through faith releases us from domination by sin. It is 'justifying' grace because it results in a way of life that manifests justice.²⁸ We become capable of living according to the letter and the spirit of the moral law.

Morality aims at love of God and one's neighbour, free from the limits that are imposed by those human aims and impulses that conflict with appropriate concern for oneself and one's neighbour. The life of Jesus shows us how a human being can be guided by love of one's neighbour without being subject to the restrictions that separate the explicit provisions of the moral law from its spirit.²⁹ We can rely on

²³ Sin and grace: *CD* xv 21; xv 6; xxii 23. Cf. Romans 7:24–5.

²⁴ Paul on grace: Ephesians 2:8–10.

²⁵ Justification: Romans 5:18; 8:3–4. Redemption: Romans 3:24–5.

²⁶ Testing ('temptation' in older English versions): Hebrews 4:15; 2:18; cf. Luke 4:1–13.

²⁷ Living under grace: Matthew 5:48; 19:21; John 1:12; Romans 6:11–14; 8:1–14; 1 Corinthians 9:24–7; Philippians 4:12–16; Luke 17:7–10; Ephesians 2:12. Love and the law: Romans 13:8–10; Augustine, *Prop. Rom.* 13–18.

²⁸ Grace, faith, and assent: Romans 3:20; 5:17–21.

²⁹ The spirit of the moral law: Ephesians 5:1–2.

hope, which does not let us down, because it has a firm basis in the example of Christ. The example 'inspires' us not only in the ordinary sense in which an admirable person serves as an inspiration, but also in so far as God the Holy Spirit actually moves us to act on the example of Christ.³⁰

If we have the realistic hope that rests on belief in the example of Christ, we can reject the persistent tendencies that cause us to act against the spirit of the moral law. Recognition and acceptance of the love of God makes it realistic to aim at goals that might otherwise be dismissed as products of wishful thinking. Christians can form the outlook that is guided by the Holy Spirit, so that they take a new attitude towards the provisions of the law. They can now grasp the demand for perfection embodied in the moral law, and they can do something about fulfilling it.³¹

According to the Christian analysis, therefore, the moral law points beyond itself. Morality prescribes a way of life that transforms our goals and aspirations for individual and social life. Instead of simply wanting to prevent various offences against our neighbour, we seek to love our neighbour as ourselves. Once we aim at this end, we look for the resources to fulfil it. If we agree that our natural resources cannot fulfil it, Christian doctrine seeks to explain how we can achieve the aims of morality.

87. Christian Morality in the World

Some aspects of the Christian view may appear to conflict with other views of morality. Augustine even claims that Christians and pagans form two 'cities', two different societies. He defines a people as 'an association of rational beings united by a common agreement on the things it loves'.³² The character of a particular society reflects its objects of love. The two cities are separate because the citizenship of Christians is in heaven and not on earth. In the city of God the love of God prevails, and in the earthly city the love of self prevails. The Christian community distinguishes itself from the pagan world by its different aims and goals.³³

Since the difference of aims is sharp enough to constitute two distinct societies, the ethical outlook of one society might appear to be opposed to the ethical outlook of the other. Since one's conception of happiness determines the direction of one's love, we can direct our love rightly only if we form the right conception of happiness. The outlook of the heavenly city exposes the errors in the conception of happiness that underlies the earthly city. In the present we can achieve happiness only in hope, by recognizing that we can attain it fully only in the afterlife.³⁴ If we emphasize this aspect of Augustine's outlook, he seems relatively indifferent to the welfare (as ordinarily conceived) of earthly societies and of their members.

But this is only one side of Augustine's attitude to morality. Though the welfare of the earthly city is less important than eternal welfare, it is not thereby unimportant. The good of a human society is 'earthly peace'. Compared with the 'heavenly peace'

³⁰ Inspiration: Romans 5:5–8; Ephesians 2:12–15; 4:22–4.

³¹ Attitudes to morality: Colossians 3:1–2; Romans 12:2.

³² Common loves: Augustine, *CD* xix 24.

³³ The two cities: Philippians 3:20; *CD* xiv 13; 28.

³⁴ Happiness: *CD* xix 4; Aquinas §94.

sought by the city of God, it is incomplete and unstable. But a Christian does not lose interest in earthly peace in the light of heavenly peace. The goods that belong to earthly peace belong to the human good. The Christian faith, therefore, encourages not only the growth of virtues that turn us towards the city of God, but also the virtues that support human communities.³⁵ The peace of the earthly city is necessary for this mortal life, and a way towards heavenly peace. Earthly peace helps to achieve the human good, to the extent that it can be achieved in present conditions.³⁶

Christian writers agree that the pursuit of earthly peace requires law and government, and that therefore Christians should obey rulers and conform to the laws and institutions of their society, so that, for instance Christians who own slaves and those who are slaves should willingly carry out the obligations that belong to their distinct roles. But the attitude of Christians to rulers and governments is not wholly uncritical. In 390 Ambrose used his authority as bishop of Milan to denounce the Emperor Theodosius. He required Theodosius to do public penance not for any offence specifically against religion, but for killing innocent victims in a massacre (to suppress a rebellion).³⁷

Christian moral thought, therefore, includes both transcendent and immanent ethics. Transcendent ethics aims to fulfil the spirit of morality; it is the outlook of those who have been justified by divine grace and look forward in hope to the complete fulfilment of their ethical goals in the afterlife. Immanent ethics seeks the cohesion of human society, through cooperation with those who do not share the aims of transcendent ethics. Both aspects of Christian moral thought influence later ethical views.³⁸

³⁵ Virtues: Aug. *Ep.* 138.17; Aquinas §104.

³⁶ Peace: *CD* xix 17; 27.

³⁷ Ambrose: Letter 3, tr. Beyenka (to Theodosius, in 390); Lunn-Rockliffe, 'Early Christian', 146–7.

³⁸ Cf. Strawson, 'Social morality'.

9

Aquinas

88. From Ancient to Mediaeval

At the time of Augustine's death (in 430) the Roman Empire in North Africa was collapsing under pressure from the migration of the Vandals. Similar migrations by the tribes of Eastern Europe and Western Asia eventually ended Roman rule in Western Europe as well. Angles, Saxons, Lombards, Franks, and others took control from Britain to Northern Italy. The Romans were pushed back to Central Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean.

A conventional date for the 'fall' of the Roman Empire is 476.¹ But this date is misleading in two ways. First, the Roman Empire did not end then; it remained in the 'new Rome', Constantinople (formerly Byzantium, now Istanbul) and the territory that it controlled. The Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire lasted until Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453. Secondly, Roman institutions, practices, and intellectual life did not all collapse when the government and administration of the Western Empire collapsed. The successor states maintained, to different degrees, the language (as altered in the various Romance languages), the law, and the culture of the Roman Empire. In western Asia, North Africa, and southern Spain, Muslim invasions displaced the Roman Empire. Muslims and Christians sometimes fought and sometimes coexisted peacefully. Most of Northern and Western Europe was converted, or re-converted, to Christianity, and acknowledged the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

The states that succeeded the Roman Empire were less organized and less stable. The various tribal groups gradually formed larger units. England was unusual in Western Europe in being fairly unified from 927 onwards.² The Franks gradually became dominant in part of the territory of modern France. In the twelfth century the Capetian kings established their seat of government in Paris. Germany and Italy, by contrast, achieved this degree of unity only in the nineteenth century. The territory of these modern states was divided into many smaller political units. Italy included a series of city states, somewhat analogous to the ancient Greek poleis, but part of it was controlled by the Papacy, and part of Southern Italy was for a time united with Sicily under Norman rule. Even when larger political units were formed, the most powerful figures were still the nobles who owned the land and commanded

¹ In 476 the supposed 'last Roman Emperor of the West' (actually a usurper), Romulus Augustulus, was deposed. The late Empire: Markus, 'West'; Cameron, *MWLA*.

² England: Van Caenegem 'Government', 183–5. In 927 Aethelstan became King of the English.

armies of their personal followers. French, English, and Scottish kings, for example, had to rule through coalitions of nobles who were strong enough to depose the king.

If, then, one compares Europe from roughly 500 to 1500 with the Roman Empire or with the modern world, the most striking feature is the absence of relatively stable and efficient governments. In the Roman Empire the governmental and administrative system extended around the Mediterranean and beyond. In the modern world (after 1500) relatively stable states controlling smaller territories have been usual.³

Though mediaeval Europe was politically and administratively unstable, some areas shared elements of common culture. The Church maintained Latin as the language of worship, government, law, and thought. Cathedrals and abbeys maintained schools that taught the Latin language and Latin literature. Latin was used widely in government, law, and diplomacy. Since the Church was a large international organization, it formed diplomatic relations with the various kingdoms, and church officials often served in government and administration.⁴

A church official travelling from Scotland or Norway to Rome would pass through many different states, often at war with each other, with different languages, legal systems, and customs. But he would be able to communicate with the limited number of people in each of these states who knew Latin, and had received the sort of education that he had received. When he went to church, the forms of worship would be different in different parts of Europe, but the Latin language and a Latin version of the Scriptures would be common to them all.

89. The Rediscovery of Aristotle

Augustine's reflexions on ancient philosophy concentrate on Plato and the later Platonists, and on the Stoics and Sceptics, to the extent that he knows them through Latin sources (especially Cicero). In Western Europe after his death, the knowledge of ancient sources contracted still further. Outside the Byzantine Empire, the knowledge of Greek was mostly lost except in Southern Italy and Sicily. Moreover, the texts of Aristotle were mostly unavailable over much of Europe; Augustine's greater interest in Plato than in Aristotle illustrates the gradual loss of interest in Aristotle in late Antiquity outside the Byzantine Empire. It is more surprising that Plato, even in Latin translations, was not read, apart from the *Timaeus*.

One stimulus for mediaeval philosophy was the rediscovery of Aristotle in Western Europe. This partly resulted from contact with the Arabs (in Southern Spain, for instance) who had continued to study Aristotle and translated him into Arabic. It also resulted from contact with Byzantium. In England Robert Grosseteste learned Greek from Greek-speakers in his household, and translated some works of Aristotle into Latin together with some Greek commentaries. Some of the Greek Christian writers were also translated into Latin, and became available to readers of Latin in Western Europe.

³ Mediaeval government and society: Van Caenegem, 'Government'.

⁴ The development and institutional environment of philosophy: Marenbon, 'Emergence'; Marrone, 'Universities'; Luscombe, *MT* chs. 2–4.

Some of the previous points about the unifying elements in mediaeval culture are illustrated by the life of Thomas Aquinas. He was born into the local aristocracy in Aquino (south of Rome, part of the Kingdom of Sicily). His parents expected him to take his place in public life as one of the nobles, but he refused. Against the wishes of his family, he joined the Order of Preachers, also called Dominicans. This society of itinerant preachers was founded by the Spaniard Domingo Guzman to preach Christianity more widely and effectively, especially among the Muslims. Aquinas was educated in Naples, by (among others) Petrus Hibernus (probably a Norman from Ireland). In Paris he met the German Dominican Albertus Magnus, whom he followed to Cologne. He also taught theology and philosophy in Rome, Orvieto, Naples, and again in Paris. He died while he was travelling from Naples, on the instructions of the Pope, to attend the Council of Lyon in 1274.⁵

Aquinas, therefore, worked in universities in the modern states of France, Germany, and Italy. But he did not work in three different systems of higher education, and he did not belong to French, or German, or Italian culture and society, because there were no such things. The institutions in which he worked had common interests in theology and philosophy.

Aquinas both learned and taught philosophy and theology within the Dominican order. An equally important and equally international order of itinerant preachers were the Order of Friars Minor, also called Franciscans, founded by Francis of Assisi. The Franciscans developed a distinctive theological and philosophical outlook, often opposed to the Dominican outlook. The Scottish Franciscan John of Duns (Duns Scotus) studied and taught in Oxford, Paris, and Cologne. The English Franciscan William of Ockham studied and taught in Oxford, Avignon, and Munich. Scotus and Ockham are two leading Franciscans, and two leading critics of Aquinas.

Dominicans and Franciscans follow earlier Christian writers who both argue with pagan Greek and Latin philosophers and use them to construct their own philosophical and theological views. The Latin versions of Aristotle are their major philosophical authority. Albert and Aquinas write commentaries on Aristotle, and write philosophy and theology under Aristotelian influence. Scotus and Ockham also explain and discuss Aristotle in order to present their own philosophical views. But Aristotle is not the only authority for these mediaeval writers. In their ethical arguments they also use and discuss other sources: (1) the Bible; (2) earlier Christian writers, including Augustine; (3) Platonic and Stoic views found in these Christian sources. They share the aim of finding a philosophical exposition of these sources that is both Christian and Aristotelian.

90. Ancient and Mediaeval: Questions About Morality

Aquinas and his successors pursue some questions that the ancients do not completely answer. Among their questions are these:

1. What is a human agent? Aquinas tries to combine Aristotle's remarks about the rational and non-rational sides of a human being into a connected description

⁵ The life and work of Aquinas: Finnis, *Aquinas*; McCluskey, 'Thomism'.

of human mental capacities. He presents an account of reason, will, passion, and their interactions.

2. What is freedom, and are we free? Ancient philosophers believe that virtue is an element of happiness that is in our control. It is to some degree up to us to choose whether to form our character in the way that we suppose to be best for us, whereas it is not up to us to determine our date of birth, or whether our journey will end in a shipwreck. But what makes something up to us? Aristotle's brief answer to this question provokes more elaborate treatment by Epicurus, the Stoics, and by Christian writers. Aquinas draws on some of these sources in order to reaffirm Aristotle's doctrine, as he understands it. He argues that freedom is to be found in the control of our actions by our will (i.e., our rational desire). His account of freedom does not convince Scotus and Ockham, who argue that we cannot act freely unless our will is undetermined by antecedent causes. They revive a view defended by Epicurus and by Alexander.
3. What makes an account of the virtues correct? Aristotle maintains that his account of virtue and happiness does not simply express the views and conventions of his contemporaries, but rests on the human function and human nature. Aquinas incorporates Aristotle's claims into his doctrine of natural law, which also draws on Stoic sources. This doctrine supports a naturalist and objectivist account of moral facts. It is naturalist because we can discover the moral facts from a correct understanding of human nature. It is objectivist because the relevant facts are not constituted by what we want or prefer, or what our society has agreed on, but by features of human beings that would belong to us independently of what we thought or believed or preferred. Aquinas' naturalist objectivism provokes critical discussion by Scotus and Ockham. They recognize a natural law, but they believe that Aquinas' doctrine conflicts with God's freedom of choice.
4. Aquinas' doctrine of natural law supports his defence of Aristotle's claim that human virtues include friendship and justice. Aristotle maintains that these virtues are appropriate for the nature of human beings as social and political animals, and Aquinas develops this claim in his argument to show that natural law requires the maintenance of human societies that aim at the common good of their members. We do not need to persuade people to pursue the good of others by sacrificing their own good; on the contrary, we cannot achieve our own good as social animals without aiming at the good of others as well. This attempt by Aquinas to combine his claims about happiness, morality, and natural law does not convince Scotus. In his view, practical reason is impartial, and not necessarily concerned with one's own good. Morality prescribes impartial concern for the good of others; it does not necessarily agree with the conclusions of enlightened self-interested reasoning.

91. The Place of Ethics in Aquinas' Philosophy

Aquinas expounds Aristotelian ethics in the second part of his major work, the *Summa Theologiae* (i.e., summary of theology). This work follows the pattern of a disputation, which presents arguments from reason and authority on each side of a

question, followed by the author's statement of his own position and his replies to the objections.⁶

The *Summa* takes us from God in himself, to God in creation, to the created order, including human beings, to the return of human beings to God, their ultimate end.⁷ The first stage in this return is the cultivation of the virtues that are studied by moral philosophy; the second stage is the life that depends on divine grace (i.e., a gift of God that is independent of our merits or deserts), on the virtues that flow from divine grace, and on the life of the Church.

Moral philosophy, therefore, is part of Aquinas' theological argument. But he believes that we can grasp principles of moral philosophy through natural reason. Theology goes beyond moral philosophy, but relies on it. In Aquinas' view, nature, including natural reason, is part of God's creation. We acquire our knowledge of God both through the nature that God has created and through the revelation that we receive by divine grace. Since the same God is the source of both created nature and of divine grace, we have some reason to believe that nature and grace will agree. Therefore, we have reason to examine the arguments and conclusions of natural reason. Aquinas finds such arguments and conclusions in Aristotle. Hence, he expects that study of Aristotle will tell us what we can learn about God, the world, and the actions that fit our nature. These conclusions of natural reason are the foundation for the further knowledge that we can acquire through divine grace and revelation.

Aquinas expounds an Aristotelian conception of morality. He defends this conception on philosophical grounds. He argues that it also satisfies the theological and moral demands of Christian doctrine. His claims invite questions: Has he got Aristotle right? If so, does Aristotle's theory rest on firm foundations? If he has got Aristotle wrong, can we give a better account of Aristotle?

He also examines Christian doctrines from an Aristotelian point of view. If these doctrines rested on conceptions of freedom, responsibility, or merit that are unintelligible or repugnant from the point of view of moral philosophy, they would be open to objection. But they avoid this objection if they are both intelligible and morally plausible.

92. We Have both a Rational Will and Non-Rational Passions

In Aquinas' view, ethics is about human beings in so far as they are made in the image of God, and thereby initiate their actions through their will and through their power over their actions. These features of human beings answer Socrates' question about how we ought to live. The nature of the will, and its relation to intellect and to

⁶ The structure of the *Summa*: *ST* Prologue.

⁷ God the ultimate end: *ST* 1–2 q1 a8 (i.e., *Summa Theologiae*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 1, Article 6; other references to *ST* are given in this form without the name of the work).

passion, reveal the source of freedom, the basis of ethics, and the foundation of virtue.⁸

Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that ‘thought itself moves nothing’ without desire. In rational agents, rational desire, which Aquinas calls ‘will’ (*voluntas*), necessarily pursues an ultimate end; they deliberate about what promotes or constitutes that end, they elect the action that appears best as the result of deliberation, and they act on their election. The nature of will, deliberation, and election explains why rational agents are free and responsible, why they necessarily pursue their own happiness, and why they need virtues, both moral and intellectual, to achieve their happiness.⁹

Human beings are not purely rational agents. Unlike God and the angels, they share some of their nature with plants and with non-rational animals. Like plants, they engage in nutrition and reproduction. Like non-rational animals, they have sensory, non-rational desires, which Aquinas calls ‘passions’. These passions include the states of the soul that Plato and Aristotle attribute to its two non-rational parts.¹⁰

Passions differ from will because each passion attends exclusively to its particular goods. If I am angry or afraid, I tend to react to the insult or to the danger without asking whether it is good or bad on the whole to react in this way. Passions and sensory desires aim at these particular goods, but the will aims at the universal good that is grasped by reason. The passions follow the immediate judgment of the senses, but the will relies on comparison and inquiry.¹¹ I need to compare the goodness or badness of retaliating (and perhaps making things worse) with the goodness or badness of leaving things alone. I can compare these things through inquiry and deliberation. The desire that responds to a comparative judgment is my will. Unlike the passions, the will desires something because it is good overall, without being determined to choose any particular good.¹²

Aquinas’ account of the relation between will and reason causes some dispute. Scotus and Ockham agree that the will is rational, but they believe that Aquinas’ account of its rationality leaves too little room for its freedom. Later philosophers, especially Hobbes, Hutcheson, and Hume, go further, and deny the essential rationality of the will. Butler and Reid answer with a defence of Aquinas’ view. To understand these disputes, we should explore how Aquinas’ conception of the will influences the rest of his ethical theory.¹³

⁸ ‘Will’ renders ‘*voluntas*’, the Latin rendering of Aristotle’s term ‘*boulesis*’; see §43. Will and power over one’s actions: *ST* 1–2 Prol.

⁹ Thought and desire: §§43, 128, 150. ‘Election’ (*electio*) renders ‘*prohairesis*’. See §43.

¹⁰ Stoics on passions: §74. Will and rational agency: 1–2 q6 a2 ad 1; 1a q80 a2; *De Veritate* q22 a6 sc1–2.

¹¹ Particular goods v. universal good: 1a q80 a2 ad2; 1a q82 a5; 1–2 q1 a2 ad3. Immediate judgment: v. comparison: 1–2 q17 a7c, ad1; q45 a4.

¹² Deliberation, comparative judgment, and will: 1–2 q13 a1 ad 1. Rational desire of the will: 1a 80 a2 ad 2; q82 a2 ad1; 1–2 q10 a2.

¹³ Reason and action: §§150, 176.

93. If We Have a Rational Will, We Pursue the Ultimate Good

Aquinas argues that if we have wills that respond to judgments about comparative goodness, we necessarily aim at the ultimate good that Aristotle identifies with happiness. The ultimate good is the one good that we pursue in the choice of particular goods, through a comparative judgment about goodness.¹⁴

We form a conception of the ultimate good by trying to combine our different rational aims. If we simply had a list of things that we care about for their own sakes, but had no idea of their relative importance to us, we could not make reasonable decisions about how far to pursue any one of them, or about what to do if they cannot all be satisfied. If we decide not to buy a new car because the cost of it would leave us with nothing to pay the rent, we show that we think a place to live matters more than a new car. If we decide not to buy a new car because we could not afford it unless we swindled our friends, we show that we think honesty towards our friends matters more than a new car. In Aquinas' view, our decision shows that we implicitly believe that friendship counts for more than a new car in our conception of the ultimate good.

Similarly, I reveal my implicit conception of the good in the way I coordinate different ends. If I want to be both a painter and a weightlifter, but weightlifting makes my hands shake and prevents me from painting, it is wise not to lift just before I paint. To achieve the total result I want, I will have to combine, on some rational principles, the different activities I have reason to pursue.

We all have a conception of an ultimate good, because we recognize, to some degree, that our ends ought to be coordinated. We reveal our conception of the ultimate good to the extent that we articulate what we ultimately aim at in our lives, and we understand why it is worth our while to aim at our less ultimate ends. Different people dispute about whether we are well off by enjoying ourselves, by devoting ourselves to the good of others, or by pursuing our intellectual or artistic development. These are disputes about the character and constituents of the ultimate good.

The ultimate good is happiness, which is 'the ultimate perfection of a rational or intellectual nature'.¹⁵ It is composed of the ends that are rationally ordered in relation to one another. Since it includes all these ends, it is a perfect, complete, and comprehensive good.¹⁶

94. Human Happiness Is Imperfect in This Life, but Perfect in the Afterlife

Since a rational will necessarily pursues a single, complete end in all its actions, this end should be stable; if it could be destroyed by circumstances entirely outside our control, it would not be a reasonable aim for all our actions. On these grounds

¹⁴ Aristotle on happiness: §39. The ultimate good: 1–2 q1 a5–6.

¹⁵ Perfection: 1a q62 a1.

¹⁶ Complete good: 1–2 q3 a2 ad 2; a3 ad 2.

Aquinas argues that the primary constituents of the ultimate good cannot be wealth, honour, or other external goods (as Aristotle describes them).¹⁷

Though human happiness is not wholly subject to external circumstances, it is not as stable as the Stoics believe it to be; for it can be lost through misfortune, as Aristotle believes. We can seek to be happy to the extent that human beings can be happy, but it is unreasonable to try to escape all the vicissitudes of human life. Happiness requires both external goods and the activities that express a human being's social nature. The happiness we can achieve in this life can be lost, though part of it remains as long as virtue remains intact.¹⁸

Though we ought to aim at the human happiness that we can achieve in this life, we ought also to aim at a grade of happiness that is free of human limitations. Aristotle regards theoretical contemplation as the element of happiness that is most stable and most independent of external circumstances. Aquinas goes further; he believes we can achieve completely stable happiness only through the knowledge of God. The happiness of our present life fulfils a human being's natural tendency to live in society, but perfect happiness fulfils our natural desire to find out the truth about God. We achieve this happiness in the next life, in the vision of God. Our unsatisfied desire for complete happiness includes an inexplicit reference to God, because all the goodness that we seek in different goods is completely achieved in the knowledge of God.¹⁹

Aquinas' views about happiness explain why the moral virtues partially constitute happiness, and are not simply merely causal and instrumental means to it. In the next life the vision of God will belong to the soul alone or to the soul united with a spiritual rather than an animal body.²⁰ But in our present life we ought not to ignore the needs and interests that result from our having an animal rather than a spiritual body. We should value the moral virtues because our happiness depends on our nature as human beings who have bodies and passions. Reflexion on this human nature helps us to discover the sources of our happiness and the virtues that achieve happiness.

95. Rational Agency Is Free Agency

Aristotle asserts that we are rational agents, that we pursue a final good, and that we are responsible for our actions. Aquinas believes that Aristotle's second claim follows from the first, because rational agency implies pursuit of a final good. He also believes that Aristotle's third claim follows from the first, because rational agency implies freedom and responsibility; 'a human being has free will from the very fact that a human being is rational'.²¹

¹⁷ External goods: 1–2 q2 a3 ad 3; Aristotle, *EN* 1101a19.

¹⁸ Happiness in this life: 1–2 q4 a7–8; q5 a4.

¹⁹ Truth about God: 1–2 q94 a2. Reference to God: 1–2 q3 a8; q5 a3; 1a q12 a1.

²⁰ Constituents v. means: §47. Knowledge of God: 1–2 q4 a7.

²¹ Free will: 1a q83 a1; 1–2 q1 a2. Aquinas' term for will (*voluntas*) is not part of the phrase normally translated by 'free will' (*liberum arbitrium*). The claim that *liberum arbitrium* belongs to the *voluntas* is not a tautology (as 'free will belongs to will' might seem to be).

Rational agents guide themselves towards their ends, because they act on their wills. They are self-movers because they have control over their actions, by having free will (*liberum arbitrium*), which is a capacity of will and reason. 'Human actions', properly so called, belong to human beings as such, who differ from non-rational creatures by controlling their own actions through will and reason. Will and deliberation result in election (i.e., decision, deliberate choice), and the resulting actions are properly human actions.

These actions that proceed from will and deliberation are free actions. We do not act freely by getting older, or falling when we are pushed, because we do not control these things. But we act freely if we think about whether to stand up or not, it seems better to us to stand up, and we stand up for that reason. The fact that we have deliberated about these alternatives (standing v. not standing) makes us act freely. Since deliberating reason is capable of going in both directions, the will is also capable of going in both directions.²² Hence the 'root' of freedom is the will, but the cause of freedom is reason. Because reason can form different conceptions of the good, the will can be moved freely towards different things.

Will and freedom, so understood, make us responsible for our actions, and subject to justified praise and blame.²³ We are responsible for actions that we control because they are subject to our will and deliberation. If we are praised, we are encouraged to think about our future actions in the same way, and if we are blamed, we are encouraged to change our minds; but these responses to us would be pointless if we did not control our actions through our deliberation.

Sometimes we act on passions, not on deliberation and will; but we often take ourselves to be responsible for these actions as well. We are right, in Aquinas' view, because our passions are often 'subject to the command of reason and will'.²⁴ When I am angry and have an impulse to hit back, I can think better of it, and I can act on this thought. Hence I can fairly be blamed if I foolishly hit back. My responsibility depends on will and deliberation.

On this basis Aquinas explains the role of the passions and the will in incontinence. The incontinent person's misdirected passion misleads reason and will, so that he does not recognize the overall badness of what he is doing. Though he is moved by passion, he is not beyond the control of his will; for his will consents to his misguided passion.²⁵ Since his will has this role, he acts freely and is responsible for his action. The incontinent person allows himself to be persuaded that it is best to follow his passion here and now, because he attends more to the appealing object of the passion than to his considered views about good.

Aquinas' views on freedom and responsibility are similar to Aristotelian and Stoic views, to the extent that they do not require any of our actions or mental states to be undetermined by previous events. He rejects the Epicurean view that freedom requires the absence of causal determination.²⁶ Freedom to act requires our action to be up to us, in so far as it depends on our rational will, but it does not require the

²² Reason and will: 1-2 q6 a2 ad 2; q17 a1 ad 2.

²³ In this respect Aquinas is a compatibilist; see §§78-9.

²⁴ Passions are subject to the will: 1-2 q24 a1.

²⁵ Consent: 1-2 q6 a7-8; q77 a2; *Mal.* q3 a12 ad 11.

²⁶ Epicurus: §78.

properties of our will to be undetermined. Our will is capable (in the way that Aquinas describes) of choosing between alternatives, but those who misunderstand this capacity insist that freedom excludes determination.²⁷

If we understand free will, we can understand virtue and happiness. The virtues are concerned with distinctively human actions, and therefore with free actions. Since happiness, being the good proper to a human being,²⁸ involves free human actions, the actions that are characteristic of the virtues are especially relevant to happiness. Virtues belong to free agents because virtue is the good use of free will.²⁹

96. Virtue of Character Is the Right Use of Free Will

Aquinas argues not only that the right conception of will and passion justifies Aristotle's claims about happiness and freedom, but also that it supports the Aristotelian account of the virtues of character. According to Aristotle, these virtues are states of character that we form through the training that makes the non-rational parts of the soul follow reason. In Aquinas' view, we can see that Aristotle is right, once we consider the sorts of virtues that we need if we have wills and passions.

We need virtues because we have free will about how to pursue happiness. We necessarily pursue happiness because we necessarily pursue some end that we think is complete, leaving no good outside it. But to form the correct conception of what happiness is, and to execute this conception, we need the moral virtues; for 'the proper ends of the virtues are directed towards happiness as towards the ultimate end'.³⁰

Virtues of character harmonize the non-rational parts of the soul with the rational part. The human actions that affect virtue and happiness include not only the actions that result directly from will and election, but also the other actions that are in our control, including actions that result from passions. Since passions can either impede or support reason in particular actions, they need to be trained to support reason. With this support from well-trained passions virtuous human beings are better off than they would be if they were guided simply by practical reason.³¹

Appropriate passions result from the right elections (rational choices). A passion absorbs some of our attention, and makes us view its object more favourably than we otherwise would. This absorption of attention makes us readier to avoid evils and to pursue goods, and so disposes us to virtuous actions. The emotions of helpful people are engaged by the thought that someone needs help, rather than by the thought that it will be a great nuisance to give the help that is needed; and so their emotions highlight the appropriate features of the situation. We need to be predisposed to react appropriately, so that we do not always have to rely entirely on deliberation to work out the right answer on each occasion.³²

²⁷ Scotus and Ockham criticize Aquinas on this point: §106.

²⁸ The good proper to a human agent: 1-2 q6 intr.

²⁹ Good use of free will: 1-2 q55 1 ad 2.

³⁰ The virtues and the ultimate end: 1-2 q13 a3 ad 1.

³¹ The non-rational parts are the 'subjects' of these virtues: 1-2 q56 a4 sc. Passions in virtues: 1-2 q56 a4; q58 a2.

³² Will and passion in virtue: 1-2 a30 a1 ad1; q77 a6 ad 2. Passions and the right aim: 1-2 q58 a4; q59 a3.

The different roles of passions and election also explain how different sorts of sin (i.e., deviation from correct reason) can arise. If our passions are misdirected, they may distract us from attending to our rational convictions and elections, but without actually perverting them. These are sins through passion. But if misdirected attention becomes habitual, it obscures our rational conviction, so that we act on a mistaken belief that what we are doing is the best thing to do, and our will turns away from the right conception of the good. In Aquinas' view, these different sources of sin can be partly removed by the appropriate moral education. Their more complete removal depends on divine grace.³³

97. Practical Reason Is Concerned both with Means and with Ends

Virtues, as Aquinas understands them, belong to the passions to the extent that the passions conform to reason and a good will. Virtue is the good use of free will, and free will depends on will and deliberative reason. Hence the virtues consist not only in well-trained passions, but also in the deliberation that reaches the right conclusions and elections.

This deliberation discovers the appropriate states of character. Aquinas speaks of 'universal prudence' in this role, because it begins from the universal end, the final good that is the necessary object of the will. We need a more specific conception of a complete end that contains all non-instrumental goods properly ordered. Through deliberation we elect ends that are directed towards the ultimate end. Prudence, therefore, directs all the virtues of character, because it takes us from the universal end grasped by natural reason to the proximate end of virtue.³⁴

A second task for prudence defines 'particular prudence', which deliberates about what we ought to do in particular cases. Particular prudence does not view each virtue in isolation. Prudence is concerned with the whole of human life, and the end it grasps is 'the common end of all of human life'.³⁵ Since we need to grasp this common end in order to guide our practical reasoning, particular prudence relies on universal prudence. The virtuous person grasps the implications of this common end in the elections that put particular prudence into practice.

Aquinas' distinction between universal and particular prudence is not explicitly marked by Aristotle. Nor, however, is it alien to Aristotle. Aquinas sees that Aristotle has different deliberative tasks in mind for prudence, and that deliberation about 'living well in general', as Aristotle puts it,³⁶ includes the two stages that Aquinas marks as universal and particular prudence.

³³ Sin: 1–2 q71 a1; a6 ad5. Sources of sin: 1–2 q78 a1; a4; SG iii 10, §1950. Sin and grace: §103.

³⁴ A conception of the end: 2–2 q47 a7. Prudence and election: 1–2 q13 a3 ad 1; q94 a3; 2–2 q123 a7.

³⁵ The common end: Aquinas, in *EN* §§1163, 1233. Aristotle on prudence: *EN* 1140a25; 1144a31–6; cf. Aquinas, in *EN* §§1273–4, 1288.

³⁶ Aristotle, *EN* 1140a25–8. See §47.

98. How Can Natural Law Be a Law?

How does universal prudence reach the correct conception of the ultimate end that belongs to the virtuous person? Aquinas' answer relies on Paul, Lactantius, Augustine, and other Christian writers who connect Stoic views about natural law with divine moral law.³⁷ Aquinas incorporates his belief in natural law in his Aristotelian account of practical reason and prudence. Natural law underlies practical principles that do not depend on the rules and practices of particular societies, but rest on facts about human nature. These natural facts are normative; in other words, they give reasons that justify our acting one way or another.³⁸

We might reject belief in a natural law, if we consider laws that are (1) imperative in form, (2) the product of deliberate acts of legislation, by (3) legislators recognized as being authorized to legislate for a particular society or in a particular area.³⁹ These laws suggest if something lacks an imperative character, or is not the result of any deliberate act, or is the act of someone who is not socially recognized, it is not a law. According to these three conditions, a natural fact cannot be a law.⁴⁰

99. Natural Law Consists of Rational Principles

Aquinas affirms that a law is a rule that involves commands, moves agents to action, imposes obligation, and requires publication.⁴¹ These features suggest that a law essentially involves legislation and a legislator. If that is so, a natural law requires both natural facts and a legislator who prescribes observance of the relevant items of legislation. Since the legislators who prescribe rules for particular societies do not prescribe moral principles that are independent of the agreements of particular societies, the legislator of the natural law is a divine legislator. Hence Aquinas might appear to treat morality as essentially the product of legislation by a divine legislator.

But this is not his view. He explains the relevant features of law without reference to acts of legislation, and hence he rejects the second condition for a law. Commanding and forbidding belong essentially to practical reason; since law commands and forbids, law belongs to reason. Since law is a rule and measure of human acts, the application of practical reason to action introduces law. Natural law embodies natural justice. The nature of a human being 'in so far as he discerns wrong and right in accordance with reason', is the basis for natural justice and for natural law.⁴²

Morality states the requirements of natural law. The natural law prescribes the actions of all the virtues, in so far as it prescribes actions in accordance with nature. Aquinas believes in a divine legislator, but he does not make divine legislation essential to the existence of a natural law. Natural law consists essentially in facts

³⁷ Natural and divine law: §82.

³⁸ Justifying reasons v. motivating reasons: §150.

³⁹ Necessary conditions for law: Hart, *CL*; Finnis, *NLNR*.

⁴⁰ Naturalism and voluntarism: Suarez §§117–19.

⁴¹ Conditions for law: 1–2 q90 a1–4. Aquinas on natural law: Finnis, *Aq* chs. 3–5.

⁴² Practical reason and law: 1–2 q90 a1; q91 a2 sc; in *EN* §1019.

about rational nature. If we recognize the natural law, we see that the virtues give us authoritative principles for guiding our action because they discover the law that suits the nature of human beings.⁴³

100. From Natural Law to the Virtues

Since the natural law belongs to rational nature, it conforms to the first principle of practical reason, which directs us towards the ultimate good. This first principle states that good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided. Our grasp of this first principle of natural law is infallible and inextinguishable; someone who did not accept this principle would not refer actions to an ultimate good, and therefore would not be a rational agent. Recognition of the first principle of natural law does not distinguish the virtuous person from any other rational agent.⁴⁴

We need to make some rational progress if we are to advance from the universal end to the virtuous person's conception of the end. The first step takes us to a principle such as 'We ought to control passions so that we can act in accordance with reason'. To find more specific principles, we need rational inquiry. Universal prudence is the virtue that inquires correctly. The principles that universal prudence discovers tell us the content of natural law.⁴⁵

These principles of natural law tell us the actions that are natural for human beings because they accord with our nature as rational beings. Our natural judgment gives us a natural inclination towards these actions. Some principles concern self-preservation, others concern the satisfaction and control of bodily appetites, and others concern social life. These principles require us to act in accordance with reason, but we need further inquiry to decide what is involved in acting in accordance with reason.⁴⁶

Specific precepts are derived from reflexion on the naturally social character of human beings. These precepts include the Ten Commandments. The precept against killing, for instance, is derived from the more general precept against harming. The needs of a human community explain the provisions that are found in different forms in different human societies for property, exchange, and so on. Hence the law of nations—i.e., the laws and institutions found universally in different nations—is derived from the law of nature by a conclusion that is close to the principles.⁴⁷

Reflexion on the needs of a human community tells us that (for instance) every community needs to assure some protection, security, and support for human social life; but it does not tell us how to fulfil these aims in different circumstances. Some principles of the natural law are obvious consequences of the most general principles, but other principles can be reached only by further reflexion. Human society needs

⁴³ Natural law and the virtues: 1–2 q94 a3; *De Veritate*, q16 a1.

⁴⁴ The first principle of natural law: 1–2 q90 a2; q94 a2. Aquinas calls this grasp of the first principle 'synderesis' (Greek *sunterêsis*, 'observance'). It is the universal aspect of conscience. See Butler §183.

⁴⁵ Universal prudence: 1–2 q94 a3; 2–2 q47 a7; q56 a1.

⁴⁶ Natural inclination: *Summa contra Gentiles* iii 129. The content of the principles: 1–2 q94 a2, a4; q95 a4; 2–2 q47 a7.

⁴⁷ Social human nature: 1–2 q95 a4. Commandments: 1–2 q100 a1. Derivation of precepts: 1–2 q95 a2–4.

some way to punish wrongdoers, but it does not require this or that punishment. A specific law of punishment prescribes a specific way, not required by natural law, to fulfil the generic requirement of natural law.⁴⁸

In such cases natural law underlies, but does not prescribe, the law of a particular state, which Aquinas calls 'positive' law.⁴⁹ Natural law requires some positive law, because the needs of human society require specific rules for (e.g.) property or punishment. But though natural law requires some rules in these areas, it does not require any specific rules; and so positive law is distinct from natural law. Some positive law may conflict with natural law, and in such cases obedience to it cannot be justified by appeal to natural law. Natural law, therefore, allows us to justify, to regulate, and to criticize different aspects of positive law.

Aquinas' doctrine of natural law fits Aristotle's conception of the virtues. In Aristotle's view, the virtues fulfil the human function, and therefore they are suitable for human nature. Aquinas' views on natural law expound the implications of Aristotle's views about the relation between morality and human nature.⁵⁰

101. Natural Law Requires Social Virtues

Aquinas argues that the content of the different virtues is determined by the different aspects of human nature. Since we have both wills and passions, we need virtues that control fears and appetites that might distort our judgment and therefore mislead our wills. We also need the virtues that attend to the good of others, because these virtues respond to the fact that human beings are social creatures. The virtue that maintains a human community is justice, which (as in Aristotle) has two forms. General justice directs the actions of all the virtues towards a common good. Special justice directs an individual's actions in relation to other particular individuals, so that we respect one another's rights.⁵¹

To explain why human beings are inclined to form societies, Aquinas refers to friendship. He agrees with Aristotle's claim that the type of love that belongs to friendship is love of others in their own right (*secundum se*). This results from the recognition of similarity between oneself and the other, an 'apprehension of unity', in which one recognizes the other as 'another oneself'. The recognition of the other as another oneself produces 'intimacy' (*inhaesio*)—concern to know the other as one knows oneself.⁵²

Aquinas calls this concern 'intellectual' love, as opposed to purely 'appetitive' love, because it rests on a distinctive type of concern. Sometimes we take our concern to be warranted, because our reason for the concern rests on the value of the object of our concern, and not simply on our antecedent liking. This sort of value-oriented concern is characteristic of our attitude to ourselves; we seek our own good in what is valuable, not simply in what pleases us. Since we recognize other people as similar to ourselves we recognize them as appropriate objects of value-oriented

⁴⁸ Reflexion and specific laws: 1–2 q95 a2; a4 ad1; q100 a1, 3.

⁴⁹ 'Positive' because it is 'laid down' (*posita*) by a particular human act of legislation.

⁵⁰ Aristotle on human nature: §39.

⁵¹ Social nature and justice: 1–2 q94 a2; 2–2 q58 a6–7.

⁵² Friendship: 1–2 q26 a1; q27 a3; q28 a1; Aristotle §51.

concern, and hence as proper objects of intellectual love. When we act on this sort of rational concern for others, we recognize them as equals. We accept the outlook of justice, which rests on a certain kind of equality, because it takes everyone to be equally entitled to their rights. In this way, justice directs and coordinates our actions for the common good.⁵³

Aquinas derives this concern for a common good from the desire for one's own ultimate good. To aim at my ultimate end is not to care about my own interests over the interests of others. I have reason to care about appropriate objects of my rational concern, those that fulfil my nature as a rational agent. When I discover that as a rational agent I have good reason for concern about the good of others for their own sakes, I discover something about my own good.

102. Why Does My Good Require the Good of Others?

Aquinas' view that one's own good essentially depends on the good of other people follows Aristotle and the Stoics. His view supports a social conception of natural law that derives concern for a common good from concern for one's own good. This conception influences some of his successors, including Suarez, Grotius, and Butler. But other theorists of natural law reject this view. Hobbes and Pufendorf, for instance, maintain that the good for an individual is confined to states of that individual, and does not extend to states of other people. Should we prefer this self-confined conception of one's good?

One might argue that the self-confined conception clarifies the main questions about morality, but Aquinas' extended conception obscures them. Morality seems to be 'another's good', as Plato puts it.⁵⁴ When we are told to refrain from cheating and stealing, we are not being told to look out for our own interests, but to consider the interests of others. Why should we obscure this demand of morality by pretending that what does not seem to be in our interest really is in our interest, but in a less obvious sense?

The extended conception of self-interest might be defended in two ways. First, even if we supposed that one's good is determined by the content of one's rational desires, we could hardly exclude the good of other people. Many of us care about other people for their own sakes, and if they are harmed, it is also bad for us. Many people would believe that their lives had gone badly, if their children and close friends had died or had lived lives of suffering and deprivation. If a tyrant killed your children and friends, but you knew nothing about it, your ignorance would not alter the fact that he had harmed you and made you worse off. If this is so, your welfare is inseparable from the welfare of these other people.

The second defence of the extended conception denies that one's good is determined by one's rational desires. It asserts that my good is determined by my natural capacities, and that those who have very limited desires that ignore most of their capacities do not achieve their good.⁵⁵ Human beings are capable of communication,

⁵³ Different types of concern: cf. Kant on duty and inclination, §200. Equality and rights: 2–2 q57 a1–2; a11. Common good: 2–2 q58 a8.

⁵⁴ Justice is another's good: §30.

⁵⁵ Good and nature: Suarez §120.

cooperation, and shared life with others, and someone who chose to ignore all these capacities would not achieve the good for a human being. Given this connexion between someone's nature and their good, the good of an individual has to include the good of other people with whom one shares relations of cooperation and mutual concern.

These arguments support Aquinas' extended conception of a person's good. His claims about the social nature of human beings and about the social aspects of an individual's good rest on familiar claims about persons and their good. If he is right, a self-confined conception relies on an arbitrary and unreasonable restriction of a person's good. If we reject this restriction, we have some reason to agree with him about friendship and justice.⁵⁶

103. Sin and Grace

Aquinas' ethical theory is part of his account of how human beings return to God their creator. We are free agents who are responsible for our actions. We acquire virtues, therefore, from internal sources—from the aims and motives that determine our choices and actions. But these internal sources are not our only means for returning to God. God is an external source. Our internal sources depend on God as creator. They make us capable of 'works leading to some good that is proper to the nature of a human being'. We are capable of acquired virtue by our natural ability without divine grace, and this allows us to achieve a 'proportionate' good through the acquired virtues. This proportionate good leads us towards the good that is proper to human nature, but we cannot achieve that whole human good by our natural ability. In human life we are subject to the effects of sin. To overcome them, we need the direct help of God through grace.⁵⁷

Sins include the different ways in which we fail to act on the virtues, either through vice or through the less serious deviations from virtue—weakness (incontinence) or deliberate neglect or rejection of the virtuous course of action. Since we are free agents, we are capable of avoiding sin on a particular occasion. But since we have passions, and since our wills are easily misled, we do not avoid sins altogether. Our misguided passions and intellect present us with false suggestions that we sometimes accept. We are capable of not sinning, and when we sin, we sin by our own fault. But we cannot expect to avoid sin through our unaided resources. And so we cannot expect to achieve the good that fulfils our nature, if we rely only on our own resources.⁵⁸

God helps us through grace, because we cannot earn this help, and it is not a reward for anything. Contrary to the Pelagian view, Aquinas maintains that we can prepare ourselves appropriately to receive divine grace only if we already have the help of God. In this way 'the gift of grace exceeds all preparation of human virtue'. Preparation includes turning ourselves towards God through our free will; but a free

⁵⁶ Cf. Hegel on ethical life, §229. Common good: §§264–5.

⁵⁷ God as external source: 1–2 q90 pref. Natural good: 1–2 q109 a5; 2–2 q136 a3 ad2. Natural ability: *in 2Cor.* iii 1.

⁵⁸ Avoiding sin: §84. Sin and natural good: q109 a2; a8.

will can turn to God only if God moves it to turn. When God infuses grace, God at the same time moves the free will to accept grace.⁵⁹

Can Aquinas consistently claim both that God acts on us and that God moves us to act freely? We might suppose that if God acts on us, the result is inevitable; how then can our free will bring the result about? Aquinas answers that our freedom does not require causal independence of every other causal source.⁶⁰ If our action is externally determined, but we act on our judgment about good and bad, we act freely. If you offer me a choice between a million dollars and a slow and painful death, and there is nothing else to be said for or against either option, you can ensure that I choose the million dollars, but I still act freely in choosing it. God determines the options that face me, and therefore determines what will appear better to me, in the light of my other beliefs and desires; but I can still act on my beliefs and desires about good and bad.

God's grace moves us towards the condition of justice, by forgiving our sins and infusing grace. It is not simply an action of God, but also changes us, by making us worthy of eternal life. The Holy Spirit infuses love, and therefore enables us to act both freely and well. The fact that we depend on the grace of God for inspiration by the Holy Spirit, and the fact that intervention by the Holy Spirit is effective, do not remove free will. If the Holy Spirit initiates the right sort of deliberation and election in us, our actions are the product of free will and therefore can claim merit.⁶¹

In Aquinas' view, the conception of the will and of freedom that is needed to explain these Christian claims is also the conception that allows us to understand rational agency. If we understand how the will is free in relation to the passions, and how we can act freely and responsibly in choosing and rejecting virtuous action, we can understand sin and grace. Aquinas defends his moral psychology and ethics from a Christian point of view, and he defends Christian doctrine from a philosophical point of view.

104. Acquired and Infused Virtues

Divine grace produces virtues that are infused by the Holy Spirit, and not acquired by our own effort and training. We need these infused virtues because of the nature of happiness. One sort of happiness is proportionate to human nature. Human beings can achieve it through principles that belong to their nature. Since another sort of happiness exceeds human nature, we can achieve it only by divine power. The virtue that directs us towards it is also beyond our ability, and hence is infused in us by the grace of God. The three primary infused virtues—the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity—turn us towards supernatural happiness in so far as they turn us to God. Though we lack a natural capacity to acquire complete happiness, we have free will 'by which one is capable of being turned towards God who makes him happy'.⁶²

⁵⁹ Grace and preparation: 1–2 q109a6; q112 a2–3. Grace and free will: 1–2 q110 a4 ad1; q113a3–4. Pelagians: §86.

⁶⁰ Causal independence: Stoics §79.

⁶¹ Grace and merit: q113a2; q114 a4.

⁶² Grace and infusion: 1–2 q62 a1. Turning to God: 1–2 q5 a5 ad1.

Among the infused virtues that turn us towards God, charity (*caritas*) is primary. Charity is the love of God, and of other people, in so far as they are 'in God', or in so far as something of God is in them.⁶³ Aquinas agrees that we are capable of loving other people for their own sake, by acquiring the natural virtues. But we need the infused virtue of charity to gain the insight into the nature of God that shows us what is really worth loving in human beings. Love for God extends to all rational creatures in so far as they are God's creation and participate in God's rational nature. This is why it extends to strangers, enemies, and the vicious. Since charity extends an individual's concern more widely than the acquired moral virtues extend it, charity introduces new moral demands. But the outlook of the acquired moral virtues shows us that the demands of charity are reasonable; for it shows us that it is reasonable to love God's creation if we love God.

Aquinas' contrast between the acquired and the infused moral virtues returns to Augustine's contrast between the virtues that promote earthly peace and those that lead us towards heavenly peace. The theological virtues surpass, but do not annul, the acquired virtues of character. We can acquire genuine, though imperfect, virtues without theological virtues. These imperfect virtues rest on a conception of happiness that is correct as far as it goes, though it is a conception only of imperfect happiness. The absence of the higher end does not imply the absence of the lower, and hence it does not imply the absence of the goodness appropriate to the lower end.⁶⁴ The Christian virtues develop, but do not reject, the virtues that perfect human nature in relation to its natural end.

⁶³ Love for God and for other people: 2-2 q25 a1, and ad 1.

⁶⁴ The goodness of acquired virtues: 2-2 q23 a7 ad 1; *in Rom.* 14:23 (§1141); *De Malo* q2 a5 ad 7. See Augustine §87.

10

Scotus and Ockham

105. Critics of Aquinas

Aquinas argues that Aristotelian moral philosophy is both rationally defensible and in harmony with Christian theology. Since his argument is both bold and complex, it is not surprising that not everyone believed him about Aristotle, or philosophy, or theology. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the ‘Scholastics’ (i.e., members of different philosophical and theological ‘schools’) carried on lively and instructive debates about questions raised by Aquinas.

Both Scotus and Ockham were Franciscans. They helped to form a distinct Franciscan tradition that offered an alternative to Aquinas and the Dominicans.¹ In Chapter 11 we will discuss a later Scholastic, Suarez, who belonged to the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), founded in the sixteenth century. Suarez discusses his predecessors, and tries to defend a revised version of Aquinas.

Aquinas’ conception of the rational will is the basis of his moral theory. He relies on it to defend an Aristotelian conception of happiness, and to explain how human beings are free agents. It underlies his theory of natural law, since the different provisions of natural law aim at the ultimate good for human nature. Scotus and Ockham believe that Aquinas’ basic error lies in his views about the will and its freedom. Their disagreement with him on this point supports objections to Aquinas’ moral philosophy in these other areas.

106. The Will Is Free because It Is Undetermined

Aquinas’ account of how the will is both rational and free is ‘intellectualist’ (or ‘rationalist’) because he believes our will is free in so far as it is determined by deliberative reason, which allows a choice between alternatives. We deliberate about doing x or y, we conclude firmly that x should be done rather than y, and we necessarily will x rather than y. We have chosen freely because we have acted on our capacity to choose between alternatives through deliberative reason. Scotus partly agrees with this analysis of freedom, but partly disagrees. He agrees that the capacity for choice is a mark of freedom, but he disagrees with Aquinas’ description of the relevant capacity. In his view, the capacity to choose an alternative must still be present even when we have decided one way or the other, and for this reason a free

¹ Dominicans and Franciscans: §89; Williams, ‘Franciscans’.

will cannot be determined by deliberative reason. Even if we have concluded that x should be done rather than y, it is still possible, in Scotus' view, that we will y rather than x. This is his 'voluntarist' reply to Aquinas.²

A will is that is free and therefore capable of alternatives cannot, in Scotus' view, be necessarily determined to pursue anything, even happiness. The will naturally desires happiness both in general and in a particular case.³ But if it is free, it is capable of rejecting even its natural and necessary desires, and so it is not necessarily determined to will any end, even happiness. Our pursuit of happiness, therefore, is not necessary. The will often freely chooses to follow its natural inclination to happiness, but can still reject it.⁴

Similarly, Ockham maintains that the will is a free capacity, and can therefore receive two contrary actualities, so that it is indifferent between them.⁵ If we always have the capacity for contrary actualities, no past conditions can determine us to actualize our capacities in one way rather than the other. If no past conditions can determine our will, it is not causally determined.⁶ We know from experience that we have this capacity for contraries, because whenever reason prescribes something, the will is still able to will or not to will or to reject it.⁷ According to this argument, Aquinas cannot consistently combine his belief that the will is essentially free with his Aristotelian belief that the will necessarily pursues happiness. Since our freedom gives us the capacity for alternatives, we are capable of refusing to pursue any possible object of desire, including the ultimate good.

If Scotus and Ockham are right, it is easy to answer Socrates' question about how we can freely choose something that we acknowledge to be worse for us. Intellectualists find it hard to answer Socrates, because they suppose that a rational will is determined by what one firmly believes to be best. To explain how incontinence is possible, Aristotle maintains that it results from a certain kind of ignorance. Aquinas combines a reference to ignorance with the claim that the will consents to the incontinent action.⁸ Given an intellectualist conception of the will, it may appear that Aquinas should either deny that we act freely when we act incontinently or admit that the will does not always desire the ultimate good. Scotus and Ockham prefer the second option.

² Aquinas on deliberation and will: *ST* 1-2 q6 a2 ad 2. See §95. Voluntarism: see Hoffmann, 'Intellectualism and voluntarism'.

³ Scotus on the natural desire for happiness: *4Sent.* d49 q10 schol. = W 182-4. There is no convenient and reliable edition of Scotus. The references apply both to the older edition by Wadding and to the more recent (and incomplete) Vatican edition. (The work that Wadding refers to as the Sentence Commentary is the one that the Vatican edition refers to as 'Ordinatio'.) The selections in Wolter include the Latin with an English translation. Williams offers a better translation, but without the Latin.

⁴ Freedom to reject happiness: *4Sent.* d49 q10 = W 190.

⁵ Ockham on freedom and indifference: *1Sent* d1 q6 = *OT* i 501-2; *4Sent* q16 = vii 350-3. Ockham is cited by volume and page of *OT*. There are no extensive selections from his ethics in English.

⁶ The will is not determined: Ockham, *Quodl.* i q16 a1 = ix 87.12-15; *1Sent* d1 q6 = i 501.8-11.

⁷ The will is free to reject reason: *Quodl.* i 16 = ix 88.25-8

⁸ Incontinence: Aristotle §46; Aquinas §95.

107. The Desire for Happiness Cannot Be the Basis of Morality

Scotus believes that Aquinas' eudaemonism (i.e., his belief that one's own happiness is always the ultimate end of one's rational action) conflicts not only with the freedom of the will, but also with the demands of the moral virtues, and, more specifically, with the obligatory character of morality.

Moral principles often provoke the question 'Why should I?' They seem to demand compliance, not simply to invite or advise us to do something, and they often arouse reluctance. If we are already inclined to do something, we do not usually need a moral principle to tell us to do it. Morality enters to insist that we do something that we were not already inclined to act. When the critics of justice in Plato's *Republic* argue that we are just 'unwillingly',⁹ they recognize that some moral principles tell us to do something that we would not otherwise want to do. None the less, we conform to morality because we see some reason to conform. This reason-giving character of morality is often expressed by saying that morality is 'normative' for us. What, then, makes it normative, or, in other words, what is the source of moral reasons?

Morality is normative in a special way. If we accept moral principles, we do not suppose that they give us some very small consideration in favour of doing an action. We suppose that there is a compelling reason, so that we ought to do what morality tells us, and we are obliged to do it. It is binding on us, even if we do not feel like following it. This compelling reason is the source of the requirement that constitutes moral obligation.¹⁰

Most ancient and mediaeval moralists hold that morality is normative because moral reasons are ultimately derived from self-interest. The derivation from self-interest explains why we are sometimes reluctant to follow morality. We are familiar with this reluctance in simple cases of self-interest. If we see that one course of action will make us worse off today, we are reluctant to do it, even if we see that it will make us better off in the longer term. From this point of view, reluctance to follow moral principles is a special case of reluctance to follow the overall interest that conflicts with more immediate aims and desires.

Scotus rejects this conception of moral reasons. In his view, moral reasons are not self-interested reasons, however broadly we conceive self-interest, and therefore self-interest cannot be the basis of moral obligation. The pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of one's own advantage, but the virtues sometimes require us to give up our own advantage, for the sake of other people. Brave people, for instance, sometimes sacrifice their lives (whether or not they believe in immortality), and therefore will the non-existence of themselves and their virtue for the good of the community. They act for the sake of the community, not for the sake of their own virtue. Therefore (Scotus infers) they choose the common good without reference to their happiness, and even at the cost of their happiness. Since people who do not believe in

⁹ We are just unwillingly: Plato, *Republic* 358c3.

¹⁰ How morality is normative: Pufendorf §138.

post-mortem happiness (e.g., pagan Greeks) are still capable of bravery, this moral virtue does not rest on a self-interested reason.¹¹

Similarly, eudaemonism cannot explain how we can love God appropriately. Since God is the supreme object of love, we ought to love God above everything else, even above ourselves. To love God appropriately, we have to subordinate our love for ourselves to the love of God. We could not do this if we necessarily pursued our own happiness as our supreme end.¹²

108. Impartial Concern for the Just Is the Basis of Morality

Scotus maintains that when virtuous people choose virtuous actions, they choose rationally, so that some rational choices are not directed to one's own happiness. The will has two primary motives, the 'affection for justice' (i.e., the motive to do what is right for its own sake) and the 'affection for advantage' (i.e., the desire for one's own happiness). The affection for justice manifests the freedom of our will, because it shows that we are capable of choosing the right instead of our own advantage. If our happiness were our supreme end, we would not be free to make this choice; nor would we be free to love God above everything else.¹³

A rational will is impartial. It identifies and considers the merits of different courses of action, and sets aside the particular inclinations of the various interested parties. We act on our affection for justice to the extent that we take this impartial point of view on ourselves and on others.

Here Scotus marks a division that is sometimes taken to be characteristic of modern moral philosophy. He denies that the ultimate rational justification of my action should refer it to my ultimate good. An equally ultimate rational justification refers to the just, as understood from an impartial point of view that gives no special place to my good. This connexion between morality and impartial reason is emphasized by later moralists, including Clarke, Butler, Kant, and Sidgwick. Scotus is the first to argue that morality is rational because it is impartial.¹⁴

But we might draw another conclusion from Scotus' arguments about morality. Granted that morality has to be separated from self-interest, we may still be no more convinced than Thrasymachus was that morality is rationally justified. Still, we may be non-rationally attached to morality, and we may be satisfied with a non-rational attachment. This is the conclusion that later sentimentalists draw; they accept Scotus' separation of morality from self-interest, but deny his rationalism about morality.¹⁵

¹¹ Happiness and one's own advantage: Scotus, 3*Sent.* d27 q1 = W 434 = Williams 170 §46. Bravery: 3*Sent.* d27 q1 = W 436 = Williams 171 §48–50.

¹² Love of oneself and of God: 3*Sent.* d29 q1 *supp* = W 456.

¹³ Two affections of the will: 3*Sent.* d26 q1 = W 178; 2*Sent.* d6 q2 = W 464 = Williams 112 §40. The affection for justice: Boler, 'Inclination'.

¹⁴ Morality and self-interest: Butler §194.

¹⁵ Sentimentalists: §155.

109. Can the Will Be both Rational and Free?

A Difficulty for Scotus

In Scotus' view, we manifest the freedom of our rational will when we act on the affection for justice rather than the affection for advantage. Sometimes he even identifies freedom with the affection for justice.¹⁶ But this should not be his considered view. For if the will retains its capacity for opposites, it must also be able to reject the affection for justice in favour of the affection for advantage. It is free in so far as it has the capacity to endorse or to reject either or both of its primary affections.

How, then, does the will choose to follow the affection for justice or the affection for advantage? If any type of rational consideration (advantage, or justice, or some third type of consideration) determines its choice, it is apparently not free (according to Scotus' argument from the capacity for opposites). But if nothing determines its choice, it chooses on the basis of no consideration. Hence its choice seems to be arbitrary, not a rational choice at all.

Scotus' voluntarism, therefore, seems to be inconsistent with the rationality of the will. If he responds that the will is not essentially rational, we might ask him how will differs from passion.

110. An Objection to Aquinas on Divine Freedom and the Natural Law

Scotus and Ockham agree with Aquinas' belief in a natural law that we grasp by natural reason. They also agree that God prescribes obedience to the natural law. But they differ from Aquinas about the relation of the natural law to the will of God. This dispute with Aquinas results from the rejection of his intellectualism about freedom.

Aquinas affirms that a law is a rule that involves commands, and that God is the divine legislator. But he does not believe that the morality prescribed by natural law depends essentially on God's acts of legislation. Natural law is present in rational creatures because they share in divine providence by exercising foresight for themselves and for others. This law consists of principles discovered by practical reason through deliberation about the human good.¹⁷

Does Aquinas' view leave room for God to act freely in giving the natural law? If God creates the world, defines the natural law, and speaks through the prophets and the Scriptures, because God recognizes that this is best, then God acts freely, according to an intellectualist conception of freedom. But a voluntarist argues that if God is free, and therefore has the capacity for contraries, God must be capable of refusing to prescribe obedience to the natural law even if practical reason prescribes it.

Intellectualists and voluntarists agree that God is free and omnipotent, but they do not agree on the relevant conditions for freedom and power. From a voluntarist point

¹⁶ The affection for justice is the freedom of the will: 3*Sent.* d26 q1 = W 178 = Williams 114 §49.

¹⁷ Laws, rules, and commands: Aquinas §98. Natural law and foresight: Aquinas, *ST* 1–2 q91 a2. Law and deliberation: *ST* 1–2 q90 a1.

of view, an intellectualist conception of God's will limits God's power. For if God necessarily acts in accordance with good reasons based on facts about human nature, God seems to be determined by them. If God is determined, God is not free not to respond to these good reasons, and so divine power and freedom are limited.

111. The Natural Law Depends on God's Free Choice

Ockham's account of the natural law fits his voluntarist conception of God's freedom and power. The natural law contains the principles of correct reason, but it depends on God's will and does not limit what God can will. The divine will is prior to correct reason, and virtue accords with correct reason only 'as long as the divine command stands', or as long as the present order stands. Correct reason requires these specific actions because it depends on the divine will. It is impossible, therefore, for God to reject the dictates of correct reason, but correct reason does not limit God's freedom. Whatever God wills thereby becomes a dictate of correct reason.¹⁸

God's freedom implies 'absolute' (or 'unqualified') power to do everything that is not self-contradictory. God was free to choose other laws than the ones God actually chose, and therefore God is free to alter those already chosen. Since (according to Ockham) it is not self-contradictory to assert that (e.g.) theft and adultery are right, God could, by his absolute power, command us to steal, and stealing would thereby be right. In the extreme case, God could make it right to hate God. We could not be moved to obey this command unless we loved God, but if we loved God we would not be obeying this command. Hence we could not obey God's command not to love God. Ockham does not mean that God does or will command us not to love God, or that we need to consider the realistic possibility of being commanded not to love God. He simply wants to explicate God's absolute power.¹⁹

He contrasts this absolute power with God's 'ordered' (or 'directed') power. God has ordered his power so as to fix the order of the universe, and therefore has fixed the natural law. God can be expected to maintain the present order, and the laws of nature that we recognize, even though they do not reflect standards of goodness that the divine will necessarily observes. God's choices are not necessarily determined by God's understanding of what is best. The principles of natural law, therefore, depend on divine freedom and power.

We grasp the principles of natural law by correct reason and by reflexion on human nature. Ockham agrees with Aquinas' view that we do not need to inquire into the divine will in order to know what the natural law requires of us. But he departs from Aquinas on the metaphysical relations between natural law and divine freedom. According to Aquinas, the facts about human nature by themselves determine the content of the natural law. According to Ockham, they do not. The fact that torturing innocent people for no reason is wrong is a fact that results from God's

¹⁸ The divine will and correct reason: Ockham, *Quodl.* iii q14 = ix 255.43–5; *Q. var.* q7 a3 = viii 363.515; *Qu. var.* q7, a4 = viii 394.440–2. Ockham's ethical theory: Adams, 'Will'. The sovereignty of the divine will: Ockham, *ISent* d41 q1 = iv 597.19–598.4. *ISent* d41 = iv 610.1–5

¹⁹ Types of divine power: Ockham, *Quodl.* q6 = ix 604.14–16; *ISent* d20 = iv 36.4–10; *2Sent* q15 ad3–4 = v 352–3.11–18. A command we could not obey: *Quodl.* iii 14 = ix 256.74–257.94.

choice to make it wrong. God's ordered power maintains the universe in which such actions are wrong, but it is within God's absolute power to require us to harm innocent people for no reason. We believe it is wrong because God has freely chosen to enlighten us about the provisions of the natural law that are fixed by God's ordered power.

112. God's Freedom and God's Justice: A Question About Voluntarism

If voluntarists maintain these claims about divine freedom, must they maintain that God is free to violate the precepts of justice? Scotus answers No. In his view, whatever God wills is just and whatever God does not will is not just. But Scotus does not explain the relation between God and justice as Aquinas explains it. Aquinas makes knowledge of justice part of God's nature. Since God's choice of moral principles does not depend on the divine will, God is not free, according to voluntarists. Scotus, however, understands justice as the result of God's choice. What is legal is defined by the decision of the legislator, and, similarly, what is just is defined by the decision of God the legislator. This is why God cannot act unjustly and cannot instruct us to violate justice.

This explanation of how God is necessarily just fits Ockham's view that justice depends on God's ordered power. God is free, by absolute power, to violate the present principles of justice, since he is free to violate the rules that, by God's ordered power, now constitute the rules of justice. But if God were to choose new rules, these new rules would be the rules of justice, so that God would still be just. In this argument both Scotus and Ockham endorse the view that Socrates rejects in Plato's *Euthyphro*, that actions are right because God commands them.²⁰

If, therefore, God had chosen to treat human beings capriciously, without reference to their merits, their desert, or their nature, that treatment would have been just, according to the voluntarist. It is just to treat people in accordance with their deserts because this principle of justice rests on God's ordered power. God still has the absolute power to alter such principles and to choose new ones that would, once chosen, be just. Our beliefs about the actual content of justice do not tell us what justice requires in all possible worlds, but only about the requirements that are maintained by God's ordered power.²¹

Is this a satisfactory account of God's justice, or of God's moral character in general? If we believe God is good, and is therefore an appropriate object of love, worship, and devotion, we appear to believe that God has some definite character that deserves these attitudes. But if God's justice imposes no limit on what it is possible for God to will, we do not seem to attribute any definite character to God or to the divine will. How, then, can we attribute goodness to God?

²⁰ Justice and God's choice: Scotus, *4Sent* d46 q1 = W 246 = Williams 323. Cf. *Euthyphro* and Socrates, §27. There is no reason to suppose that Scotus or Ockham knew the *Euthyphro*. Shaftesbury's criticism of voluntarism: §141.

²¹ God's absolute power and justice: Scotus, *1Sent.* d44 q1 sch. = W 256 = Williams 96–7.

A voluntarist may reply that divine goodness is not similar to the goodness of an ordinary moral agent. If we took it to be similar, we would overlook the transcendent nature of God that makes ordinary moral predicates inapplicable to the divine nature.

This answer invites a further question. If we leave God with no character apart from the unrestricted freedom that belongs to absolute divine power, what sort of choice do we allow to God? We saw earlier that the voluntarist conception of freedom seemed to be in danger of replacing rational choice with arbitrary choice. The same danger seems to result from voluntarist claims about divine freedom in relation to the natural law and the principles of morality.

In Ockham's view, moral principles give us reasons because they express divine commands that are embodied in the natural law. Moral reasons depend on the will of God, a legislator who is distinct from the moral agent. Moral goodness and rightness are features of actions and people not in their own right, but in relation to choices by God. They exist outside the choices and wills of human beings, but not outside choice and will altogether. God could have chosen (in an exercise of absolute power) to make different things good and right.

The conception of morality as divine legislation tries to explain two features of morality: (1) Morality does not depend on the choices and preferences of human beings. (2) Morality does not limit divine freedom. These two claims about morality are both true, in the unanimous view of Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, and other mediaeval moralists. Since Ockham accepts a voluntarist account of freedom, he can make moral facts compatible with divine freedom only if he makes morality a product of divine legislation.

We might ask, however, why the legislation that is the source of morality has to be divine. Since human legislators also express their will by issuing commands, do they not make actions right and wrong by their acts of legislation? One might reply that a mere act of legislation is not enough to create a moral obligation; the legislator must also have the authority to legislate. God, therefore, not only legislates, but also legislates by divine authority. This reply, however, does not rule out morality that is based on human legislation, since human legislators also have the authority to legislate. Hence a purely legislative theory of morality may seem to be warranted by Ockham's voluntarism. But if this is so, Ockham's defence of the second feature of morality (divine freedom) seems to conflict with his defence of the first feature (morality is independent of human choices).

Perhaps this argument does not do justice to Ockham's position. For he might still reply that the authority of human legislators is derived from divine authority, which gives them the right to command. But this reply raises some awkward questions for Ockham. In particular, we might ask about the source of God's authority. This question about voluntarism is a source of further debates in later moral philosophy.²²

²² Divine authority: §142. The later influence of voluntarism: Olafson, *PP* chs. 1–4.

11

Morality and Social Human Nature Suarez and Grotius

113. The Reformation

The writers on natural law whom we discuss next all belong to the sixteenth century or later, and therefore to the ‘modern’ period. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western European society and culture changed in some ways that are relevant to moral philosophy. Just as we should not pay too much attention to the division between ancient and mediaeval, we should not expect a sharp division between mediaeval and modern.

The efforts of Luther and Calvin to reform the mediaeval Church in Western Europe eventually resulted in the formation of Reformed churches that were formally separated from the Roman church and the Pope. This separation was marked by the Council of Trent (1545–63), which defined the doctrinal differences between the Roman and the Reformed positions. The Reformers argued that the mediaeval Church had deviated from the original doctrines of the New Testament and early Christian writers. In their view, it had abandoned Augustine’s doctrine of a human being’s total dependence on divine grace, and replaced it with the Pelagian view that God would reward the unaided efforts of human beings. The Reformers blamed the undue influence of Aristotelian metaphysics for the formulation of the mediaeval doctrine of the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements, which was unknown to the early Church. They criticized the inappropriate ambitions of the priests and bishops who had lost sight of the earlier Christian understanding of ordained ministers as servants of the Church, and had replaced it with a hierarchical priestly caste of officials who sought to dominate both religious and civil life.¹

Luther and Calvin wanted to reform the Church, not to found separate churches. But since the official church rejected their main criticisms and proposals, different parts of Europe took sides with Rome or with the Reformers. The Church of Rome responded to the Reformers with its own internal reformation and renewal (sometimes called the ‘Counter-Reformation’), including a restatement and explanation of the doctrines that were attacked by Luther and Calvin. The documents of the Council of Trent embody this Catholic renewal of belief and organization. By fixing the range of beliefs that were and were not to be accepted as authentic Catholic doctrine, they required Christians to choose between the Roman position and the Reformers (later called ‘Protestants’).

¹ Pelagius: §§86, 103.

114. The Renaissance

Luther and Calvin appealed to the Bible and to the early Christian writers against the mediaeval Latin and Aristotelian accounts of Christian theology. They gained some support from another movement that aimed to return to the original sources. During the fifteenth century in Italy manuscripts of Greek writers were brought from Byzantium, and scholars tried to extend their knowledge of the Greek and Latin writers. They wanted to recover the outlook of Classical Antiquity, free from the perspective of the mediaeval Church. They wanted to study the New Testament in Greek, free from the alleged distortions introduced by the Latin version used by the Church. This movement is sometimes called, with some exaggeration, the Renaissance, or rebirth of learning.²

Many supporters of the new learning still adhered to the Roman church. Erasmus and Thomas More, for instance, advocated the study of the New Testament in Greek and the reform of the Church, but never accepted the Lutheran or Calvinist objections. Still, the aim of recovering the original Greek and Latin Classics might easily appear to be connected with the aim of recovering the original doctrines of the New Testament and the early Church. In both cases the desire to recover the original suggested that the mediaeval Church had imposed a distorting overlay.

115. The Scientific Revolution

The Renaissance and the Reformation were two formative influences on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century thought. A somewhat later influence was the development of natural science in the 'Scientific Revolution' of the seventeenth century. This may be traced back to Copernicus, whose astronomical theories were among the starting points for the heliocentric theories of Galileo. Galileo's physical speculations were among the starting points for the arguments of Newton, who formulated a general theory of gravity.

These developments in astronomy and physics conflicted with central elements of Aristotelian natural philosophy. They encouraged some to believe that Scholastic philosophy should be abandoned altogether. This philosophical conclusion was drawn by both Hobbes and Locke. Locke advertises his anti-Scholastic empiricism as the philosophy that helps to vindicate the discoveries of Newton.³

116. Modern States and Philosophical Traditions

Mediaeval Europe mostly lacked unified nation states similar to (e.g.) contemporary France, or the USA, or the Russian Federation. On the one hand, strong central governments with exclusive domination over a considerable territory were unusual. On the other hand, some aspects of mediaeval culture, including theology and philosophy, were not divided by political or national boundaries. These features of the mediaeval world are less prominent from the sixteenth century onwards.

² On the Renaissance see *NCMH* i, ch. 2; Hankins, 'Humanism'.

³ Locke as underlabourer to Newton: *EHU*, Epistle to the Reader.

In 1558 Mary I of England died, allegedly from distress over the loss of Calais, the last English possession in France. This is a convenient date to mark the consolidation of English power in Great Britain and Ireland, and of French power in modern France. Mediaeval English kings thought of themselves as French nobles with hereditary rights to French territory. In the fifteenth century they gave up these attitudes, slowly and reluctantly. At the same time, they strengthened their control over Wales and Ireland. Scotland and France were old allies against England, but in 1603 the crowns of England and Scotland were united, and French influence in Scotland waned. England and Scotland, France, Holland, and Spain gradually became fairly centralized independent states.⁴

These changes both affected and were affected by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Mary I was the eldest child of Henry VIII, who had renounced allegiance to the Pope as head of the Church in England. Henry took this action in pursuit of his plans to secure a male heir, which led him to seek the annulment of his marriage. He did not intend to abandon the doctrine or worship of the Roman church. But his action encouraged the English supporters of the reforming movements in Germany and France, which Luther and Calvin had begun. Henry VIII was succeeded by his son Edward VI, who supported the Reformers. Edward was soon succeeded by the Catholic Mary I, who formed an alliance with Catholic Spain. Her successor Elizabeth I established a Reformed order for the Church in England, and broke with Spain.

Religious divisions sometimes produced conflicts—e.g., between Protestant England and Catholic Spain. Sometimes they created new alliances—e.g., between Protestant England and Scotland (formerly allied with France, and opposed to England). Sometimes they divided a state or region—e.g., Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands divided into Protestant and Catholic areas. France and England went back and forth, but eventually the Protestant side dominated England and the Catholic side dominated France.⁵

These divisions between different states and different religious outlooks had some effect on intellectual life.⁶ Philosophy written in England and Scotland by English and Scottish writers, writing in English, began to form a tradition that separated it from the work of Spanish, French, Dutch, and German philosophers. From the seventeenth century, English, French, and Dutch were philosophical languages; the use of German for serious philosophical purposes began in the eighteenth century. Descartes and Hobbes published their major works both in Latin and in their vernacular. Grotius and Pufendorf preferred Latin to Dutch and German. Leibniz wrote in French and Latin, not in German. Kant's major works were published in German. Different, though not wholly independent, philosophical traditions developed in different states and in different languages.

⁴ Nationalism and Protestantism: Shaw, *Saint Joan*, Scene 4.

⁵ Some of these conflicts and realignments are described in *NCMH* ii, chs. 3–7; iii, chs. 4, 7.

⁶ The claim that an 'intellectual schism' was produced by the Reformation (*NCMH* iii 66) is exaggerated.

117. The Continuity between Modern and Mediaeval Moral Philosophy

Even these few remarks about the early modern world might lead us to expect some sharp differences between modern moral philosophy and its predecessors. If we read the moral philosophers of the sixteenth century and later immediately after reading the ancient moralists, we might well think we see radical changes of interests, questions, and doctrines. We might even be inclined to say that a new conversation begins with this period of moral philosophy.⁷

This approach is not unusual in the study of the history of philosophy as a whole. Often 'modern' philosophy is taken to begin in the mid-seventeenth century. In metaphysics and epistemology, Descartes is the normal starting point. We might begin modern moral philosophy with Grotius and Hobbes, two contemporaries of Descartes. Hobbes dismisses mediaeval Scholasticism as a waste of time, and claims to have made a fresh start in moral philosophy. In the eighteenth century Barbeyrac claims that Grotius raised moral philosophy from the dead, and 'broke the ice' that had lain over moral philosophy in the Middle Ages. This attitude to Scholasticism resulted in the neglect of Aquinas and his successors in parts of Western Europe.⁸

The absurdity of this attitude to mediaeval philosophy is clear even from the brief sketch we have offered in the previous two chapters. Moral philosophy was neither dead nor frozen between the ancient and the modern world. We have seen that mediaeval Scholasticism is a critical and constructive inquiry into questions raised by ancient ethics. We can say the same about modern ethics in relation to mediaeval ethics. One obvious element of continuity between mediaeval and modern philosophy is the long debate about the character of natural law. Later Scholastics, including Suarez, and their seventeenth-century successors, including Grotius, Hobbes, and Pufendorf, pursue a debate about the natural and the imperative elements in natural law. Suarez is a Scholastic in method and outlook. Grotius and Pufendorf discuss his questions, with less subtlety. Once we give the appropriate attention to moral philosophers who are both modern and Scholastic, and especially to Suarez, we may be impressed at least as much by the continuity of these debates as by anything that is especially modern in Grotius and his successors.⁹

Aquinas argues that Aristotle's principles agree with the provisions of natural law. Facts about human nature are the metaphysical basis of ethics, and knowledge of these facts is the epistemological basis of moral knowledge. Scotus and Ockham dispute this naturalist realism on voluntarist grounds. In early modern philosophy naturalism is formulated more sharply by Suarez (among others). Voluntarist

⁷ The best history of modern moral philosophy up to Kant is Schneewind, *IA*.

⁸ Descartes is the 'first great modern' and 'last great scholastic': Moore, *EMM* 26. Modern moral philosophy: Schneewind, *MP* i 3–21; *IA* ch. 1. Barbeyrac and Grotius: Schneewind, *IA* 66–8.

⁹ Debates on natural law: Haakonssen, 'Early modern'; Tuck, 'Modern'. A specific example of continuity in Scholastic political theory is discussed by Skinner, *VP* ch. 9.

objections to this naturalist view are developed by Hobbes and Pufendorf. The history of modern moral philosophy is partly the history of a dispute between these two attitudes to moral facts.

118. Suarez: A Middle Way Resolves the Dispute About Natural Law

Aquinas and his critics all hold that the precepts of the natural law are the principles of morality (the *honestum*). They agree, therefore, that morality is independent of divine commands if and only if the natural law is independent of them. Naturalists and voluntarists about natural law and divine commands are also naturalists and voluntarists about morality.

Suarez rejects this assumption that identifies morality with the natural law. Once we reject it, we can defend a middle way that avoids the mistakes of two extreme positions that fail to distinguish morality from natural law.¹⁰ One extreme is the naturalist view that since morality is a purely 'indicative' law, showing us what is good and bad independently of any command, natural law must also be purely indicative. At the other extreme, voluntarists claim that the natural law is prescriptive, not indicative, because it expresses divine commands, and they infer that morality is also a prescriptive law. We can find a middle way that is better than either extreme, if we do not identify natural law with morality.¹¹

119. Suarez: This Middle Way Provides a Partial Defence of Voluntarism

A naturalist account of natural law is mistaken, in Suarez's view, because natural law is not purely indicative. A purely indicative law points out something that we ought to do or avoid, but it does not command anything. If the natural law were purely indicative, God would teach it to us, but would not command us to do anything. If rational nature itself were the natural law (as naturalists believe), natural law would proceed from God as creator, not as legislator.¹² But natural law is genuine law; therefore it prohibits evil and prescribes good. It results from divine commands, not simply from facts about nature itself.¹³

Similarly, naturalists do not see that natural law imposes a genuine obligation which requires a divine command. An obligation, as Suarez understands it, introduces a reason for acting that results from imposition, and hence from the will of the imposer. To impose an obligation, the imposer must be in a position to make it true, by the communication of their will for me to act in a certain way, that I have no rational alternative to acting in that way. I oblige myself when I make a promise or

¹⁰ On Suarez's contemporaries and the political controversies that they discuss see Pagden, 'Salamanca'.

¹¹ The middle way. Natural law is both indicative and prescriptive: Suarez, *De Legibus* ii 6.3–6 (part = S 76–7; 'S' refers to Schneewind, *MP*).

¹² Indicative v. prescriptive law: Pufendorf §4. Rational nature is not natural law: *De Legibus* ii 5.2. Creator v. legislator: ii 6.2.

¹³ Genuine law: *Leg.* ii 5.5. Law v. advice: i 12.4 (= S 74). Law requires divine commands: ii 6.5.

some other commitment that expresses my own will to act in a certain way. When another person is in the appropriate position, the communication of their will imposes necessity on me.¹⁴

In some familiar cases the expression of will creates the sort of obligation that Suarez has in mind. If Tim is seven years old, he might already have discovered that it is a good idea to look both ways before crossing the road. But Tim's mother does not want to leave it to Tim's judgment, and so she tells him to look both ways. Tim now has two reasons to look both ways; one depends on his views about safety on the road, and the other depends on his mother's expression of her will. Even if he ignores one, he may still act on the other.

Suarez argues that will creates obligation in the case of natural law, just as it does in the case of positive law. Sensible drivers want to stop at a junction to see if anything is coming, but the law does not leave this decision to their good sense, because it orders them to stop at junctions, and does not merely remind them that it is a good idea to stop. Similarly, then, God does not simply point out the natural facts to us, in the role of a teacher. God also commands us to follow the precepts of the natural law. Since natural law essentially obliges, and obliging requires a command that expresses the will of a superior, the natural law requires a divine command that expresses God's legislative will.¹⁵

This argument seems to align Suarez with the voluntarism of Scotus and Ockham. It does not seem to be a middle way between naturalism and voluntarism. Moreover, one may doubt whether natural law is essentially genuine law, in the sense that Suarez intends. Would facts about nature not constitute natural law, as an indicative law, in the absence of divine commands? Aquinas seems to hold that actions are right and wrong because of facts about human beings, not because of divine commands. Does Suarez reject Aquinas' position on this question?

120. Suarez: The Middle Way Provides a Defence of Naturalism

Suarez believes we can meet these objections if we distinguish natural law from morality. Voluntarists are right to insist that a prescriptive law is not simply a statement, or a piece of advice. But naturalists are right to insist that divine commands do not create right and wrong.

The precepts of natural law are not identical to the principles of right and wrong, because morality is prior to natural law. God's command and prohibition presuppose rightness and wrongness that are 'intrinsic' to certain actions (i.e., belong to the actions themselves, apart from what anyone commands), so that we are required to do and avoid these actions, whatever anyone commands.¹⁶ Similarly, doing actions that are wrong by nature is a sin apart from any divine prohibition.¹⁷ Sin and blameworthiness follow from the fact that a voluntary action is contrary to right

¹⁴ Law, obligation, and command: ii 6.10–11. 'Oblige' and 'obligation' translate 'obligare' (bind) and its cognates.

¹⁵ Divine command: ii 6.10.

¹⁶ Intrinsic rightness: ii 6.11 (= S 77); 9.6; 15.4; 16.3.

¹⁷ 'Sin' (peccatum) does not essentially refer to an offence against God. See §§84–5, 96.

reason. These moral properties are intrinsic to actions, because they are determined by rational nature.¹⁸

If God commanded nothing, there would be no natural law, but, if everything else in the universe were unchanged, there would still be right and wrong. Natural facts constitute rightness and wrongness and are sources of moral reasons; but these facts and reasons are not natural law. Rational nature, therefore, is the foundation of objective right and wrong in human moral actions. Since intrinsic rightness and wrongness depend on facts about human nature, the natural law is everlasting and immutable on the assumption that human nature remains the same.¹⁹

Suarez, therefore, agrees with voluntarists about natural law, but he agrees with naturalists about morality. Whether an action is right or wrong depends only on facts about human nature, which are the same whether or not there is any divine legislation. Principles of moral right do not essentially belong to natural law, because law requires legislation.

121. Suarez: Why Is the Middle Way Best?

Suarez's middle way endorses the voluntarist claim that natural law depends on divine commands. But since he also endorses the naturalist claim that morality does not depend on divine commands, he can answer questions that create difficulties for voluntarists: why does God command one action rather than the opposite, and what does God's justice consist in? Since Scotus and Ockham hold that God's commanding an action makes it right and just, they have to say that God's justice consists simply in the fact that God wills whatever he wills. Suarez answers that God commands actions because they are already (apart from any divine command) right, and that God's justice consists in necessarily commanding what is already right because it is already right.²⁰

In Suarez's view, God's freedom is not reduced by God's necessary approval of what is already right, just as it is not reduced if God cannot alter other necessary truths by willing their falsity. Since it is a necessary truth that (e.g.) harming an innocent human being for no reason is wrong, God cannot alter this truth by willing it to be false. If God is just, something is already right apart from God's legislation. If we reject this objective natural rightness, how else can we explain why the divine commands that constitute moral rightness are not groundless and arbitrary? A similar question arises about any attempt to understand moral judgments as commands. Cudworth later deploys this point from Suarez against Hobbes's attempt to reduce morality to legislation.

Suarez's argument about the moral sources of law makes some difference to one's views about legislation in human societies. The doctrine that the sovereign has 'absolute' (i.e., unqualified) power, and that subjects are morally bound to obey the law just because the sovereign orders them to, is the political counterpart to

¹⁸ Sin and blameworthiness (*culpa*): ii 6.18.

¹⁹ Presupposed rightness: ii 5.5–6; 6.11 18; 9.6. 'Right' renders 'honestum' (Greek *kalon*); see Aristotle §48. Natural law and human nature: ii 13.2; 16.6. Immutability: Cudworth §142.

²⁰ Divine commands and morality: §§27, 98, 111.

voluntarism about divine commands and natural law. This absolutist doctrine was defended on voluntarist grounds by James VI (of Scotland) and I (of England). From a naturalist point of view, sovereigns and their subjects are bound by the provisions of the natural law, which rests on objective natural rightness; sovereigns who violate these provisions may in some circumstances be justly deposed.²¹

122. Should Suarez Have Accepted an Imperative Conception of Morality?

From the point of view of some later moral philosophers, Suarez has almost, but not quite, seen an important point about morality. Hume argues that moral judgments are not statements of objective fact, because no such statements can explain why morality guides our actions. As Hume puts it briefly, we cannot derive 'ought' from 'is'. In the twentieth century, writers on meta-ethics have exploited Hume's assertion, by arguing that moral judgments have an essentially prescriptive or imperative character.²²

We might think that Suarez nearly anticipates these insights by distinguishing indicative from prescriptive law, and by arguing that moral obligation requires a command. But he does not conclude that these features are essential to morality. He draws the opposite conclusion, that moral judgments describe the facts about right and wrong that are presupposed by commands and obligations.

Voluntarists believe that Suarez draws the wrong conclusion. Laws give us reasons because they express a legislative will that issues commands. Voluntarists claim that morality gives us these sorts of reasons. If Suarez rejects voluntarism, he needs an alternative explanation of how morality gives us reasons—of the normative character of morality, as some describe it. Mere facts about nature do not seem to give us the right sort of explanation, because they do not show us what moves us to act on moral principles.

In Suarez's view, rational nature is the foundation of objective right and wrong in human moral actions. Facts about human nature provide a basis from which we can reach correct moral conclusions. These conclusions do not simply state our preferences; they are objectively correct, because they are derived from the objective facts. Suarez's naturalism about morality, therefore, seems to show how morality is objective. But we may doubt whether he shows how it is normative. To make morality normative, do we have to abandon objectivity?

This objection may be too hasty. Morality is normative in so far as it gives us reasons that justify our acting in the ways it prescribes. But justifying reasons are distinct from motivating reasons. I may have a good reason to walk a mile every day, but if I have no desire to do it, I have no motivating reason. One might argue that Suarez's conception of moral facts does not imply that moral facts necessarily give us motivating reasons. But this point is not clearly relevant to the question whether they

²¹ On some political applications of voluntarism and naturalism see *NCMH* iv, ch. 3; Hamilton, *PTSS* ch. 3. Cudworth on Hobbes: §142.

²² Moral judgments and imperatives: §§156, 158, 272–4.

give justifying reasons. This question about the type of reason morality gives us is more sharply defined in Suarez's successors.²³

123. Nature Is the Basis of the Human Good and of Human Goodness

The objective facts that Suarez takes to underlie moral goodness and rightness are facts about nature and specifically about human nature. His appeal to nature includes two claims: (1) Nature provides the basis for claims about the good for, or the good of, or the welfare of, a person. (2) It also provides the basis for claims about the goodness, excellence, or perfection of a person. According to this Aristotelian view, the virtues that perfect a person's nature also achieve the good of a person with this nature.²⁴

The first claim rejects a subjectivist view of a person's good. According to a subjectivist view, our good is our pleasure, or the satisfaction of our desires, or the satisfaction of our rational desires. Such a view overlooks the fact that we can enjoy and want things that are bad for us. What is good for a tree, a dog, or a human being depends on the different natures and characteristics of these organisms, and a person's desires are correct only if they match what is good for the kind of thing a person is.²⁵

A subjective view of welfare is questionable if our actions will alter the character of our own desires or of other people's. If we form someone's desires so that they are easiest to satisfy (if we want to minimize the number of unsatisfied desires) or result in the greatest pleasure, we may not have promoted their welfare. If children growing into adults, or adults modifying their desires, have only childish desires, they are missing something that would make them better off. What they are missing depends on what they are capable of, and what they are capable of reflects their nature.²⁶

That is why we promote the welfare of children, and of the adults they will become, only if we help them to develop their abilities. This development may not increase their pleasure or their satisfaction. It may even have the opposite effect; for the more they try to achieve, the greater the opportunity for frustration and dissatisfaction. But we achieve the good for ourselves only in so far as we achieve the good for the kind of thing we are. Suarez's argument that rational nature is the basis of moral right and wrong expresses this conception of the human good.²⁷

124. Grotius: Natural Law Is Relevant both in War and in Peace

Grotius' views on moral principles are contained in *De Iure Belli et Pacis*, which might be translated as 'On right in war and peace' or 'On the law of war and peace'. It

²³ Justifying v. motivating reasons: §§98, 138, 150.

²⁴ Nature: §§39, 100–1, 172–3, 251–2, 262.

²⁵ Subjectivist views of the good: Brandt, *FVM* ch. 2.

²⁶ Enjoying bad things: Aristotle, *EN* 1174a1.

²⁷ Further discussion of nature: Butler §§172–3.

covers both topics. He investigates questions about right and wrong in relations between states. On the basis of his investigation he proposes and evaluates different laws to regulate these relations. His views illustrate the application of Suarez's conception of morality and nature to some of the theoretical and practical questions that arose in the seventeenth century.

Part of Grotius' life fell within the Thirty Years War, which divided the states of Western Europe in a long period of shifting alliances, periods of uneasy peace, and destructive wars. The division between Protestant and Roman Catholic states was one source, though not the only source, of conflict. Grotius was also the victim of religious and political controversy among Reformed Christians in the Netherlands, which led to his imprisonment and escape to France. He had first-hand experience of the forces that produce conflict within and between states. He wanted to find ways to maintain peace, but also, in the event of war, ways to conduct war in ways that would make it less destructive.²⁸

Wars, both within and between states, encourage behaviour that we would never contemplate in ordinary circumstances. That is why Thucydides said that war is a violent teacher.²⁹ In a stable society we all gain by keeping the rules and we are punished if we are caught breaking them. But war removes the normal penalties for breaking the normal rules, and it sometimes seems advantageous to break them. Belligerents kill other belligerents, but they also kill innocent non-combatants, destroy property, and break promises when it seems advantageous.

Sceptics about morality generalize from these admitted facts about war, as follows: (1) In time of war we have good reason to break ordinary moral rules when we will not be punished for breaking them. (2) This shows that in general we have good reason to break moral rules when we will benefit and we will not be punished. (3) Therefore we have a good reason to keep them only if we will be punished for breaking them. Grotius finds this sceptical argument in the ancient Sceptic Carneades. It is derived from Calicles in Plato's *Gorgias* and Gyges' Ring in the *Republic*.³⁰

125. Grotius: Natural Law Rests on Facts About Human Nature

To refute scepticism, Grotius turns to the doctrine of natural law that he finds in the Stoics, in Lactantius, and in the Scholastic writers we have discussed. The natural basis of right is found in human nature, and especially in the distinctively human desire for society. This is what Aristotle means by calling a human being a 'social' (sociale) animal.³¹ The social nature of human beings justifies pursuit of the right (honestum) as well as the advantageous (utile).

²⁸ On Grotius' life see Tuck, 'Grotius' 499–503. Natural law: Schneewind, *IA* ch. 4.

²⁹ Thucydides: §12.

³⁰ Carneades: *JBP*, Prol. §2 (= S 90). His views are reported by Lactantius; see §82. Calicles: §21. Gyges' Ring: §30.

³¹ 'Social (sociale) animal' is a mediaeval rendering of Aristotle's 'political (*politikon*) animal'. See §§50, 101–2.

According to the sceptic, self-seeking behaviour is natural, but morality is simply the result of social pressure and convention, supported by the threat of punishment. Grotius rejects this one-sided account of human nature. In his view, the right agrees with our rational and social nature. Natural right (*ius*) proceeds 'from principles internal to a human being'. We know them by nature, and they are appropriate for rational agents with our nature. By 'right (*ius*) of nature,' he means that something is just (*iustum*) by nature, apart from positive legislation. In that case, the sceptical position is false.³²

This account of natural right agrees with Suarez's view that morality is intrinsic to human nature apart from divine and human commands. Hence Grotius asserts that his claims about natural right would still stand even if we were to grant that God does not exist or that God is not concerned with human affairs. We need and want society for its own sake. The Stoics refer to this social aspect of human nature in their doctrine of the conciliation (*oikeiôsis*) of each person to himself and of one person to another.³³

126. Grotius: Scepticism About Morality Is Mistaken

The social nature of human beings answers a sceptical argument. Morality sometimes requires me to consider the interests of other people, and to forgo my own advantage. Hence it involves self-restraint, which appears to be contrary to my natural concern for my own interest. If my self-restraint is good for other people, society imposes it on me for their benefit, not for mine, and this aspect of morality (the sceptic concludes) is a product of society and convention rather than nature. This sceptical argument overlooks the social aspects of human nature. It is no less natural and no less rational to try to maintain relations of cooperation and friendship with other people than to pursue my own self-confined interest.³⁴

If, as Grotius maintains, human beings are naturally social, we have no reason to regret the aspects of human life that make cooperative action necessary and beneficial for us. Rational cooperation is desirable for its own sake, because it allows us to guide our lives in accordance with practical reason. The moral virtues do not simply restrain us for other people's benefit; they also perfect us as rational and social beings. Cooperative rational agency develops and extends rational agency. In so far as morality encourages and supports cooperative rational agency, it fulfils human nature.

This Scholastic claim that rational and social human nature is the basis of morality supports Grotius' proposals about ways to keep the peace and to observe morality in war. He answers opponents who argue that no rational case can be made against self-interested arguments for going to war and for waging war without reference to morality. The rational case against these arguments comes from the relation between morality and nature.

³² Rational and social nature: i 1.10.1 (= S 98); i 1.12.1; i 2.1.1–3 (= S 99). Internal principles: Prol. §12 (= S 92).

³³ God: Prol. §11 (= S 92). Desire for society: Prol. §6 (= S 90–1). Stoics: §69.

³⁴ Self-confined and extended interest: §102.

12

Hobbes

Natural Law without Social Human Nature

127. Hobbes v. Grotius on Natural Law

Hobbes's first major work on moral and political theory, *De Cive*,¹ was published in 1642, nearly twenty years after Grotius' *On the Right of War and Peace* (1625). Like Grotius, Hobbes lived through a period of political instability, leading to civil war in England, Ireland, and Scotland in 1642–9, and to the republican government of the Commonwealth under Cromwell (1649–60). Hobbes opposed the Commonwealth, and went into exile in Paris, but returned to England in 1652 after the publication of his major work, *Leviathan*, in 1651. In 1660 Charles II returned to England as king.²

The political struggles of this period presented philosophical questions to Hobbes no less than to Grotius, but his answers are different. He agrees with Thucydides that war is a violent teacher, and believes that instability and conflict teach us the restricted role of morality.³ He infers, as sceptics do, that morality cannot be justified by reference to human nature, and that it has no place outside a 'commonwealth' (i.e., an organized state).

But Hobbes believes we can concede this much to the sceptics and still avoid the sceptical conclusion that we have no reason to follow moral rules if we will not be punished for violating them. Hobbes takes the basis of morality to be natural law, as Grotius does. Moral philosophy is the science of the laws of nature, and it discovers the provisions of natural law by practical reason, through reflexion on human nature and the human good.⁴

Hobbes agrees with Suarez and Grotius in taking human nature to be self-interested. But he rejects their view that it is also social. If human beings are not naturally social, morality does not belong to human nature in itself, and so it has no place in a state of nature, outside a commonwealth. Still, natural human self-interest makes it reasonable to maintain a system of morality, in some circumstances, for self-interested reasons. Even if I care only about myself, and do not care at all about any other people for their own sakes, I sometimes have good reason to accept a moral system that requires me to limit the pursuit of my own interest for their benefit.

¹ *De Cive* ('On the Citizen') is the title of the Latin version. The title of the English version is *Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society*.

² Hobbes's life and philosophical views in relation to contemporary political conflicts: Skinner, *VP* iii ch. 1; 9; 10; Malcolm, 'Hobbes'. Hobbes's moral philosophy: Hampton, *HSCT*.

³ Thucydides: §§12, 124. Hobbes admired Thucydides, and translated his history into English.

⁴ Moral philosophy and laws of nature: *L* 15.40 (= *R* §77).

Hobbes believes in natural facts that are the basis of morality, but he denies that there are natural moral facts. His conception of human nature agrees with the conception that underlies Thucydides' history. Morality does not fit human nature in itself, but it fits human nature in the circumstances in which an organized society can coerce wrongdoers. Apart from the benefits of peace and security that we gain from belonging to an organized and peaceful society, we have no reason to acquire the moral virtues.

This conception of human nature may appeal to anyone who doubts the conception that is common to Aristotle, the Stoics, Aquinas, Suarez, and Grotius. They all believe that morality is in my interest, and they take my interest to include my social nature, which includes concern for the interests of others for their own sake. This may appear to be an unrealistically inflated conception of human nature that leads to an unrealistically inflated conception of my interest. If we deflate human nature and self-interest to a realistic level, we find that concern for other people for their own sakes is not one of our basic motives.⁵

Hobbes's objections to Aristotelian views about morality and human nature result partly from his rejection of Aristotle's views about the ultimate good. He rejects Aristotle's view that the good for a rational being consists in the exercise of rational agency. In Hobbes's view, the good consists in getting what we desire and in assuring the satisfaction of our future desires. Hence it is in everyone's interest to live in the peace and security that promote the satisfaction of our desires. Morality does not fulfil the fictitious social nature of the Aristotelians, but it is usually the best strategy for self-interested agents, because of our usual circumstances.

This claim about morality deserves consideration even if Hobbes's deflated conception of human nature is mistaken. If we have the sorts of motives that Hobbes attributes to us, his defence of morality may convince people who are prejudiced against morality because they think it does not pay.

But though Hobbes claims to defend morality, he is often regarded as an opponent of morality. Do his opponents misunderstand him, or have they found a weakness in his position?

128. The Will Is Not Rational Desire

Hobbes believes that moral philosophy is the science of the laws of nature, because he believes that a law of nature is a rule of practical reason about the means to self-preservation. He believes this because of his conception of practical reason.⁶

Hobbes agrees with the Scholastic view that when we act voluntarily and freely, we act on our will. But he rejects the Scholastic conception of the will. Scholastics agree that human action essentially proceeds from the will and not only from passions. The will is rational desire that differs from passion (sensory desire) because it is guided by rational deliberation, and does not simply follow sense-perception. Hobbes answers that the will is not rational desire, but simply the 'last appetite' (i.e., desire) in

⁵ Nature: §§39, 101–2, 125. Hobbes against his predecessors: Darwall, *PE* 87–90.

⁶ Law of nature and self-preservation: *L* 14.3 (= *R* §96).

deliberation. Desire is anticipatory pleasure or pain, which is the internal movement explaining action. We move towards ends, and these ends are nearer or more distant. We deliberate by being struck in succession by different attractive features of a situation. The strongest appetite that emerges from that process and immediately precedes action is the will.⁷

This account of action is simpler and more uniform than the Scholastic account. We understand how sensory passions explain the actions of non-rational animals. The ancient Sceptics argue that these passions also explain human behaviour; once we give up the search for rational belief, we will simply act on how things appear to us, not on what we think we have reason to do. Hobbes argues that in fact we all act in the way the Sceptic claims to act, because acting on reasons is simply acting on appearances. When we think we are acting on a better reason, we are only acting on a more forceful appearance. Hutcheson and Hume defend this analysis of will more fully. If we accept such an analysis of reasons, we reject any conception of normative reasons that are distinct from strength of desires.⁸

129. In the State of Nature Practical Reason Does Not Recommend Morality

Hobbes, therefore, rejects the Scholastic doctrine that rational agents pursue some ultimate good that is the object of a desire based on reason. If no desire for a non-instrumental good is based on reason, desires are rational only to the extent that they result from deliberation about how to satisfy some further desire. Our basic and overriding desire is for our own pleasure, and especially for the greatest possible long-term pleasure in the future. Hence Hobbes maintains that a human being seeks to 'assure the way of his future desire'; we seek means and opportunities for satisfying our desires, both present and future. Practical reason prescribes and guides action only to the extent that it informs us about means to achieving our desires. In particular, it informs us about what we need to do to preserve ourselves, so that we can satisfy our future desires.⁹

Since the laws of nature are the laws that practical reason discovers for guiding our actions, the laws of nature prescribe means to self-preservation. This reinterpretation of natural law vindicates the traditional view that natural law is the basis of morality, because in some circumstances morality is in our interest. Hobbes, therefore, tries to distinguish the circumstances in which morality is bad for us from those in which it is good for us.

He contrasts a 'state of nature' with life in a commonwealth. The state of nature is not only the hypothetical condition in which individuals live without belonging to any commonwealth, but also the actual condition in which different nation states or

⁷ Will and reason: Aquinas §92; Scotus §106. Will: *L* 6.53 (= *R* §33). Desire and pleasure: *Human Nature* 7.1–6 (= *R* §§3–4). Deliberation: *L* 6.49 (= *R* §33).

⁸ Sceptics on action: §58. Normative reasons: Aquinas §§92–3; Suarez §122; Pufendorf §138; Hutcheson §150; Butler §174; Darwall, *PE* 94–5.

⁹ Hobbes sometimes takes practical reason to be especially connected with our long-term welfare. Hume rejects this view: §§151–2. Psychological hedonism: Epicurus §61; Butler §193.

different sides in a civil war face each other. Neither of these leaves any room for morality. A commonwealth is a state with an acknowledged, legitimate, and effective government. Such a government (Hobbes's 'sovereign') is effective in so far as it ensures compliance with its orders, by the use of force if necessary. By its credible threat of force it prevents any competing use of force. If we do not live under a commonwealth, we are in a state of nature in relation to each other.

In a state of nature we have no reason to follow principles of morality, but in a commonwealth we have a good reason to follow them. Practical reason sometimes tells us to follow morality, but not always. Sometimes, therefore, but not always, the laws of nature include moral rules.

Reason advises me not to observe moral rules or practices in the state of nature, because it does not pay. If I keep promises, I will be the victim of people who see that they gain by breaking their promises to me. I have good reason not to be a victim of other people's dishonesty, because in the state of nature I have the right to preserve my own life and interest. I would act against this 'right of nature' if I foolishly assumed that other people would consider my interests. The result is that we compete for scarce resources, without any moral restraint.¹⁰

130. Practical Reason Shows Us the Way Out of the State of Nature

In the state of nature we can see that we would all be better off if we could get out of it—if we could rely on one another to keep promises, tell the truth, protect our physical safety, and so on. In this situation we would be at peace. Hence self-interested reason advises me and everyone else to seek peace. If we see that we would all be better off living in peace, we try to coordinate our actions. If we agree not to harm one another, we can coordinate our actions for our mutual benefit. Hence we all have self-interested reasons to keep such an agreement.¹¹

But we are incompletely rational agents, in two ways: (1) We are subject to passions that may divert us from the rational course of action. If I am angry, I may not stop to think that it would be better for me if I did not lash out, and so I retaliate. (2) We are short-sighted. If I thought about it, I would see that in the long run I am better off if I live in peace with my neighbours, and that living in peace is better than the short-term gain from cheating on this occasion. But I do not always think about the long run; I sometimes act on the prospect of short-term gain. If I thought about it, I would see that I am likely to be caught if I violate the speed limit at a point where the police are often watching. Moreover, I would see that, even if the police were not watching, it would be better for me to observe the speed limit that increases everyone's safety on the road. But I am late for an appointment, and so I try to save time by violating the speed limit, even though I would admit on reflection that being on time for my appointment matters less to me than staying safe.¹²

¹⁰ Right of nature: *L* 14.1 (= *R* §55), with Curley's notes. Clarke's criticism: §144.

¹¹ Reason and peace: *De Cive* 3.31 (= *S* 133).

¹² Socrates and the Stoics believe that we are subject only to the second source of irrationality. See §§20, 74.

If I know this about my neighbours and about myself, and they all know this about me and about one another, we will all see that a mere agreement to live in peace will not result in peace; for, even though it is in everyone's long-term interest to keep the agreement, we do not always act in our own long-term interest. We need a means to enforce our agreement. We need a sovereign who has a monopoly of the use of force, to assure us that neither impulsive people nor short-sighted people will violate the agreement. If the sovereign is effective, we will all comply, since we believe that those who do not comply will be coerced. Once we are induced to form a commonwealth that has the power to compel us to observe rules that preserve peace, we have good reason to observe these rules. The benefits of stability and non-aggression are so great and so evident that we must, if we think clearly about our interest, want them to continue.¹³

The commonwealth removes the reasons that moved us to violate moral principles in the state of nature. Observing moral principles is no longer so costly, because the commonwealth removes the competitive advantage that others might gain from double-crossing me after I treat them well. The recognized principles of morality are those that self-interested agents would want to be the rules governing a commonwealth.

Recognition of the benefits of peace imposes an obligation to make a 'covenant', or social contract, to set up a sovereign. The sanctions that the sovereign can apply remove the remaining incentives to violate the terms of the covenant. These sanctions are the basis of our obligation to keep the rules imposed by the sovereign.¹⁴

131. Some, but Not All, Obligations Rest on Commands

In his claims about obligation Hobbes agrees with Suarez's view that laws impose obligation. In his view, however, obligation is simply the removal of liberty through a dominant motive. In some circumstances, therefore, the laws of nature create an obligation for us. If we see that observance of them promotes our interest, our anticipation of future good to ourselves dominates every other motive, and so compels us to act. This compulsion is obligation, which removes our freedom to violate the laws of nature. Our obligation to abide by moral principles results partly from the motives that are attached to peace and partly from the motives that result from fear of punishment for violation.¹⁵

This is what Hobbes means by saying that the laws of nature and the virtues connected with them oblige us, and are laws, in the court of conscience. The fulfilment of the natural law is 'all we are obliged to by rational nature' (i.e., by nature that seeks the means to self-preservation).¹⁶ The specific laws of nature tell us what we need to do if we want to preserve ourselves. They create obligations by telling us about means to self-preservation. If they were not about self-preservation,

¹³ State of nature: *L* 13 (= R §§47–54), Compliance: *L* 15.3 (= R §67).

¹⁴ Social contract: Hampton, *HSCT*. See Hume §166; Rousseau §196; Rawls §287.

¹⁵ Suarez on obligation: §119. Anticipation of good from observance of laws of nature: *L* 15.36 (= R §76). When natural law obliges: *De Cive* 3.26 (= S 132).

¹⁶ The court of conscience and rational nature: *De Cive* 3.29–30 = S 132–3; 12.2.

we could not explain how reason could prescribe them, or how they could oblige everyone who understands them. Even if a particular law of nature does not mention self-preservation, it creates an obligation for us in so far as we recognize that its observance is a means to self-preservation.

The laws of nature oblige us in a second way. Provisions of civil law oblige us because they are commands of a sovereign, with sanctions attached to them. Similarly, provisions of natural law oblige us because they are divine commands, with sanctions attached to them. In so far as the laws of nature are genuine laws, they have to be imposed by a command. On this point Hobbes agrees with Suarez.¹⁷

But he rejects Suarez's view about the natural basis for natural law. According to Suarez, this natural basis is the morality that belongs to human nature in itself. In Hobbes's view, there is no such natural morality. The facts that are the basis for morality and for civil or divine laws are non-moral facts about nature and self-preservation. Moral facts result only when the relevant laws of nature are imposed by civil authority or by divine commands. Without this imposition, the laws of nature would, in Hobbes's view, be simply advice about self-preservation. Though they would still oblige us, they would not carry the obligation that belongs to a law.¹⁸

132. Morality Can Be Defended by Its Consequences: Indirect Consequentialism and Indirect Egoism

The different moral principles and virtues constitute a set of rules that aim at desirable consequences—the preservation of the state and of 'peaceful, sociable, and comfortable living'. Justice, gratitude, modesty, equity, mercy, and the other recognized virtues promote these good consequences.

Such consequences are not the immediate aim of these moral rules. The rules do not tell us to try to secure comfortable living. They simply tell us to keep promises, leave our neighbours in peace, and so on. If I always had to estimate whether keeping this promise would secure comfortable living, I might often decide to break a promise. But if individuals decide to break promises too often, the conditions for comfortable living break down. Hobbes implicitly recognizes that we need an indirect consequentialist defence of moral rules. It is indirect because the consequences that we want the rules to bring about are not those that the rules should explicitly aim at, and are not those that we should think of when we observe the rules. The desirable consequences will be secured only if the rules do not mention them and agents do not think of them. Hobbes implicitly recognizes that we secure the good consequences of general obedience to the rules if we obey the rules for other reasons. He appeals, therefore, to indirect consequences. Later utilitarians argue for an indirect consequentialist defence of utilitarianism.¹⁹

One indirect consequence of the observance of moral principles is the preservation of the commonwealth. Since the preservation of the commonwealth preserves me, a further indirect consequence is my self-preservation. This consequence makes these

¹⁷ Agreement with Suarez: L15.41 = R §77.

¹⁸ Self-preservation, morality, and law: Pufendorf §138.

¹⁹ Indirect utilitarianism: §§167–8; 243.

moral principles laws of nature (according to Hobbes's conception) and prescriptions of practical reason. Here also, Hobbes offers an indirect consequentialist defence of observance of moral rules. He does not believe that I ought to be thinking about my own interest whenever I observe a moral rule. On the contrary, when we enter the state we give up the condition in which 'private appetite is the measure of good and evil'.²⁰ We do not assess the consequences of this or that particular violation of the laws of nature, but we bind ourselves to accept the laws of nature as the measure of good and evil. We are all better off if we adhere rigidly to the laws of nature without consideration of our own advantage.

This refusal to consider self-interest is the rational attitude for self-interested people. Admittedly, I might sometimes be better off if I violated a particular principle. But because the observance of moral principles, without consideration of their consequences, preserves the commonwealth, and the preservation of the commonwealth is always in my overriding interest. I am better off if I observe moral principles without thinking about whether I am better off from observing each of them.²¹

These arguments about indirect consequences make Hobbes's position more plausible. Some indirect arguments of this form are persuasive. We may, for instance, enjoy ourselves more if we engage enthusiastically in activities that do not directly aim at enjoyment and if we engage in them with no thought about our enjoyment. Playing a team sport would not be more enjoyable if we were always thinking about whether we are enjoying ourselves. Similarly, then, Hobbes uses indirect consequentialist argument in order to show that the desired consequences result from observance of morality without regard to the consequences for the commonwealth or for myself.

If Hobbes is right, both morality and self-interest require different levels of argument. At the higher level we consider our overall aim (peace and security, self-interest) and the system of rules and practices that would promote it. At the lower level we consider what the rules should prescribe (keeping of promises etc.), and what individuals should think about. An indirect consequentialist argument maintains that we should not introduce the higher level of argument into the lower level. If we think about the good consequences that justify the system when we are thinking about whether to obey the rules that belong to the system, we will not secure the good consequences. Both levels of moral reflexion and argument are necessary, in their proper contexts.

133. Is Morality Justified Only by the Preservation of Peace?

Is Hobbes right to claim that the point of moral principles is to preserve peace? The accepted moral rules often help to preserve peace, since observance of them reduces some dangers of conflict. But this fact does not fully explain the content of the rules, unless we can show that no other rules would preserve peace as well or better. If we

²⁰ Private appetite v. the laws of nature: *L* 15.40 = *R* §77; Gauthier, 'Three'.

²¹ Indirect egoism: Kavka, *HMPT*.

prefer the accepted moral rules to other rules that would preserve peace as well or better, the tendency to preserve peace cannot be our whole reason for accepting the moral rules.

To see whether Hobbes is right, we need to consider apparent exceptions to the requirements of the traditional virtues. In some cases the survival of the state and the preservation of peace might be better promoted by rules with certain exceptions. The exceptions might allow, for instance, the breaking of promises on the right occasions, or allowing public officials to break the law when it is expedient. If Hobbes's account of morality commits him to endorsing these exceptions, he has to reject moral rules that do not allow such exceptions.

Many moral agents and moral theorists reject Hobbes's claim about the character of morality and moral philosophy. Many suppose that moral obligations extend beyond the circumstances in which their observance promotes peace. We might suppose, for instance, contrary to Hobbes, that in some circumstances it is better to rebel than to conform to an unjust government, despite the danger to peace and self-preservation.

In Hobbes's view, such beliefs about morality rest on failure to examine the rational grounds of moral obligation. If morality must be rationally justifiable to rational agents, and Hobbes's analysis of rational agency is correct, we must accept his views about the character and basis of morality.

134. The Fool Raises a Question about Indirect Egoism

If we are members of a commonwealth, our self-preservation requires us, in Hobbes's view, to do whatever preserves peace, and hence it requires us to practise the moral virtues. Some people, however, will still believe that they are better off if they sometimes violate moral rules. Hobbes attributes this belief to a 'fool', who revives the argument of Glaucon and Adeimantus in Plato's *Republic*.²² They argue, as Hobbes does, that we have no reason to be just outside a commonwealth, and that the existence of a commonwealth requires general observance of justice. They also agree that we all benefit from living in a commonwealth rather than in a state of nature. But, in contrast to Hobbes, they argue that an individual within an ordinary commonwealth has good reason to act unjustly on the occasions when he gains enough by it. This is also the fool's view.

The fool accepts Hobbes's reasons for joining the commonwealth, but he argues that these reasons do not justify him in doing what the commonwealth requires of him, if he can gain some greater benefit by avoiding punishment for his unjust action. Hobbes replies that the fool assumes that other people make mistakes about his trustworthiness, but such an assumption is unreasonable, because the fool cannot 'foresee nor reckon upon' these mistakes.²³

What exactly does Hobbes object to in the fool? Three possible objections are worth considering:

²² Glaucon and Adeimantus: §30.

²³ The fool and Hobbes's reply: *L* 15.4–5.

- (1) The fool relies on unrealistic assumptions. No reasonable estimate of probabilities could ever justify his strategy.
- (2) A reasonable estimate of probabilities supports the fool. But the effects of being found out would be so bad that we ought not to follow probabilities. As Epicurus argues, we ought to be risk-averse in our calculations about breaking rules.²⁴
- (3) Perhaps we cannot 'reckon upon' errors of other people because we are required to assume that they are as intelligent as we are, and are likely to find us out and punish us.

The first reply seems empirically unwarranted. The second reply asserts that the fool takes unjustified risks. But the costs of being found out, even if they are severe enough to justify extreme care to avoid even an improbable result, do not seem to rule out all violation of the rules. The third reply rests on an assumption of equality. But in any fairly large and complex society, this assumption does not seem to be true often enough to undermine the fool's strategy.

These replies to the fool assume that it is reasonable for a Hobbesian agent within the commonwealth to think about his individual advantage when he asks what he should do. An answer to the fool, on this assumption, must show that observance of rules is directly beneficial to him. But Hobbes need not restrict himself to this sort of answer. His indirect consequentialist arguments also apply to the fool.

If we consider one action at a time, it is easy to see how we may profit by violating moral rules. But we ought also to consider the benefit of having them observed as a whole, in contrast to having them violated as a whole. From this point of view we can see why we need some mechanism for compelling obedience to the laws of nature. A coercive mechanism ensures obedience, obedience ensures peace, and we all benefit from peace. If this indirect reflexion shows us the benefits of observing the laws of nature, it ought to tell us which motives we need to encourage.²⁵

The argument with the fool shows us some motives that we ought not to encourage. We will all be better off if we are not like the fool, always ready to calculate our advantage in particular situations. It is better to confine our calculation of advantage to the initial calculation of the benefits of peace and general observance of the laws of nature. Just people do better for themselves than fools do. The fact that everyone else has equally good reason to draw the fool's conclusion, and everyone will be worse off if everyone draws it, can be turned to Hobbes's advantage. Prudential calculation, carried out at the right level and in answer to the right question, shows why we are better off if we do not think as the fool thinks.

This indirect consequentialist argument, however, does not entirely answer the fool. Even if he agrees that people ought to be trained to obey the laws of nature without question, his training may still leave him aware of the possible advantages of violating the laws of nature. He benefits if other people obey the laws of nature and abandon the calculation of individual advantage. He also benefits if he appears to be like other people in these ways. But he may benefit even more if he is different from other people and seizes his opportunities for disobedience.

²⁴ Aversion to risk: Epicurus §66; Rawls §288.

²⁵ Motives to be encouraged: Gauthier, 'Three'.

In reply to this argument for the fool's position, we might take the indirect consequentialist argument a step further. Anyone who considers a direct egoist argument may reach the fool's conclusion. If, therefore, we allow ourselves to deliberate as direct egoists, we undermine the system that we try to set up in our collective interest. It is in everyone's interest, therefore, to advocate a system of moral education that trains everyone not to think of their individual interest. This may be the best system for indirect egoist reasons, but we ought not to allow people to ask about its indirect egoist basis; for if they ask that question, they believe it is rational for each of them not to follow the requirements of the system.

This indirect consequentialist argument implies that the higher level of argument (the justification of the system of rules v. the requirements of the individual rules) is opaque, i.e., not visible at the lower level. If I know the egoist justification of the system, I will think as the fool thinks, and the system will not secure the consequences that the egoist wants. We secure the consequences that egoists want only if we do not know the egoist justification. In this respect, the higher level has to be opaque to the lower level.

If Hobbes accepted this conclusion, he could still maintain that knowledge of his theory of human nature and the basis of morality is useful for the cultivation of the moral virtues. But it will be useful only in so far as people who know Hobbes's theory can use it for the cultivation of moral virtues in people who do not know Hobbes's theory. The opacity of the higher level makes Hobbes's theory 'esoteric'; it does its work only on people who do not know it. This conclusion supports those opponents of Hobbes who regarded his views as dangerous to morality.²⁶

Moreover, if Hobbes accepts an indirect argument from self-preservation to morality, he casts doubt on the psychological assumptions that make morality rest on the desire for self-preservation. An indirect argument assumes that we can act for reasons that do not seem to us to promote our own interest. The opacity of the higher level to the lower implies that we must follow moral rules without knowing their egoist justification. How can we do that, if we follow the laws of nature only because of our desire for self-preservation?

²⁶ Secret utilitarianism: Sidgwick, *ME* 489. Hobbes's critics: Bowle, *HC*, esp. ch. 7; Mintz, *HL*, esp. ch. 7; Goldie, 'Opponents'.

13

Voluntarism, Naturalism, and Moral Realism

Pufendorf, Shaftesbury, Cudworth, and Clarke

135. Objections to Hobbes

Hobbes argues that morality promotes the preservation of a peaceful society, and so helps to prevent the sorts of conflicts that dominated parts of Western Europe during the Thirty Years War, and broke out in Great Britain and Ireland during the Civil War. The ‘true and only moral philosophy’ is the study of the laws of nature. These laws are rules for the preservation of peace. Hence observance of the laws of nature, which specify the content of morality, preserves peace. This conclusion vindicates morality to a Hobbesian egoist, because morality preserves peace, and therefore benefits each member of society.

Some of Hobbes’s readers, however, question his account of morality and its social function.¹ His critics maintain that Hobbes undermines morality because he confines it to the circumstances of the commonwealth and believes that its normal provisions do not obtain in the state of nature. Hobbes believes morality is reasonable for me only when I can expect it to pay, and therefore only in the commonwealth.

Hobbes’s critics try to answer his arguments to show that morality does not suit human nature in itself. But they disagree about where Hobbes is right and wrong. The first series of critics include voluntarists, who take morality to consist in commands that express the will of God, and naturalists, who take it to consist in facts about human nature. Pufendorf argues on the voluntarist side. Shaftesbury, Cudworth, and Clarke all argue on the naturalist side of this question.²

136. Pufendorf: A Voluntarist Argument Refutes Hobbes

Pufendorf was born and educated in Germany, but spent part of his life in Sweden. After holding professorships in Germany and Sweden, he served as official historian first for the Swedish and then for the Prussian court. His reading of Grotius and Hobbes encouraged him to discuss natural and international law. He represents

¹ Hobbes’s critics: §134, last note.

² Voluntarism and naturalism: Scotus §111; Suarez §§118–20.

himself as the successor of Grotius, and takes his voluntarism to clarify Grotius, not to contradict him.³ He presents a clear voluntarist argument against Hobbes.⁴

Hobbes supports scepticism about natural morality but rejects scepticism about morality, on the ground that morality is usually, though not always, advantageous. Pufendorf rejects Hobbes's derivation of morality from the pursuit of advantage. Hobbes argues that ordinary moral rules do not apply in the state of nature, but since he recognizes that the natural law expresses divine commands, he needs to explain why God does not prohibit violations of natural law in the state of nature. He has to assume that God agrees with Hobbes that we are not required to act against our self-interest (considered apart from divine sanctions). In Pufendorf's view, we should not agree with Hobbes on this point; we have good reason to follow morality even if we are in a state of nature outside any commonwealth.

Pufendorf shares Grotius' belief in natural law as the source of rational principles for the just conduct of social life and of relations between nations, both in peace and in war. But he opposes the naturalist belief in natural morality. Naturalism misunderstands morality, because (1) morality is natural law (contrary to Suarez), and (2) natural law requires divine commands (as Suarez argues). If we are to recognize the impartial, non-egoistic side of morality, we need to recognize that morality consists in divine commands.

137. Pufendorf's Arguments for Voluntarism: (1) Moral Properties Are Not Natural, but Are Imposed on Nature

Pufendorf argues that naturalism about morality conflicts with modern natural science. Science shows that nature consists simply in bodies in motion, and their effects on one another. No morality can be found simply in movement or in the effects of physical power, since mere physical movements cannot be right and wrong. Since physical science does not recognize right and wrong, they do not belong to nature, and are not part of the fabric of the world. They are the result of imposition, i.e., of human choice, convention, and legislation. It is not a natural fact about the world that 'dog' or 'cane' or 'chien' is the name of a certain kind of animal. The use of these names is imposed on nature. Similarly, moral facts, not being about mere physical movements or states, must be imposed, not natural facts.⁵

Does this objection to natural moral facts prove too much? If Pufendorf maintains that the properties recognized by physical science are the only ones that belong to nature, what are we to say about the properties recognized by biological and medical sciences? Apparently, he has to say that facts about health and sickness, for instance, are merely imposed on nature, and are not genuine natural facts. But this is a strange

³ If the account of Grotius in §125 is correct, Pufendorf misunderstands him by failing to recognize his naturalism about morality.

⁴ A position similar to Pufendorf's is defended by an English critic of Hobbes, Cumberland in *LN*. On Cumberland and Pufendorf see Schneewind, *IA* chs. 6–7.

⁵ Moral properties and the physical world: Pufendorf, *JNG* i 1.4 (= S 173); 2.6 (= S 175–6); Mackie, *E* 15. See §276. In Shaftesbury's terms, Pufendorf is a 'nominal moralist': §141.

conclusion; it seems to be a fact about nature that a large dose of arsenic is bad for my health.

Perhaps Pufendorf can explain how medical facts are physical facts, and not simply imposed on nature. Physical facts about us determine what is healthy, unhealthy, beneficial, and harmful for us; hence this sort of goodness is natural, not imposed. The physical facts constitute the medical facts.⁶

Might one argue, then, that moral facts are natural in the same way, even though they are not part of physics? Why should physical facts not constitute moral facts, just as they constitute medical goodness? Moral facts do not simply tell us about matter in motion, but they may still be natural facts.

138. Pufendorf's Arguments for Voluntarism: (2) Natural Goodness Is Insufficient for Morality

Pufendorf's second argument concedes that morality depends on facts about human nature, harm, and benefit. He insists that these facts are not moral facts. Giving a cup of water to an innocent person dying of thirst is beneficial to a human being and has natural goodness, but it is neither right nor wrong unless someone has commanded it through an act of legislation. Apart from the legislative will of God, actions have no moral goodness or rightness.⁷

Pufendorf's argument against the naturalist view is this:

- (1) The relevant moral concepts—right, wrong, duty, and so on—presuppose some reference to a norm and a law.
- (2) A law requires a command by a superior.
- (3) Hence morality requires commands that express the will of a legislator.

Each premiss is open to question. Suarez, for instance, accepts (1), but only if 'law' includes purely indicative law. He accepts (2), but only if 'law' refers to a prescriptive law. According to Suarez, God imposes the natural law by commanding actions that are right and wrong in themselves. Pufendorf's argument, therefore, rests on an equivocation between indicative law (in (1)) and a prescriptive law (in (2)). If we take 'law' in the same sense in both premisses, we have reason to reject one of them.⁸

Pufendorf might defend (1), by arguing that morality requires a prescriptive, not merely an indicative law. An indicative law simply tells us what is the case, and does not try to move us in one direction or another. But moral principles, according to Pufendorf, are intended to influence our action in a way that indicative laws are not. They are essentially practical, or (as some say) essentially normative, because they give us reasons that move us to act. The reasons that belong to morality require

⁶ Non-imposed natural goodness: *JNG* ii 3.5.

⁷ Morality and natural facts: ii 3.13–15. Law necessary for morality: i 2.6 (= S 175). Pufendorf on Grotius: i 2.6 (= S 176); ii 3.19–20.

⁸ Suarez on indicative v. prescriptive law: §118.

legislation. These questions about reasons and motivation receive further discussion in later debates between sentimentalists and rationalists.⁹

139. Pufendorf's Arguments for Voluntarism: (3) Only Voluntarism Explains the Disinterested Character of Morality

Thirdly, Pufendorf maintains that if moral principles are more than self-interested calculations, they must be divine commands. He argues:

- (1) Moral reasons are distinct from reasons of self-interest.
- (2) Natural facts give us only reasons of self-interest.
- (3) We act on reasons that are distinct from reasons of self-interest if and only if we act on divine commands.
- (4) Therefore morality requires divine commands.

According to Pufendorf, self-interest does not ensure the mutual trust that morality requires. Moral principles appeal to what is right and required from an impartial point of view apart from my own interest. If an action is morally right, it deserves to be chosen for its own sake, apart from its pleasure, and apart from any further advantage. But no natural property gives us a moral reason.¹⁰

Reasons arise from natural properties (according to Pufendorf) in combination with our desires. The fact that an action has certain results gives us a reason only if we already want these results. If natural properties give us only these conditional reasons expressed in hypothetical imperatives (as Kant puts it), and moral reasons are not conditional, moral properties are not natural.¹¹ Moral requirements do not depend on inclination, but override considerations of pleasure and advantage. They could not do this if they arose from natural goodness.

According to Suarez and Grotius, however, moral rightness and duty belong to nature. Moral rightness and justice aim at the common good, which is good for human beings as rational and social animals. This aspect of human nature supports communities in which individuals regard one another as proper objects of concern for their own sake, not simply as means to selfish ends. Human sociality is a sufficient basis for morality. Hence voluntarists do not recognize the distinctive character of morality.¹²

We can pursue this argument through some English critics of voluntarism. They argue that, though Pufendorf tries to separate himself from Hobbes, he is open to the same basic objections.

140. Critics of Hobbes and Voluntarism

Hobbes addressed his account of morality to readers who lived through a generation of social and political instability and conflict in the Civil War. The restoration of

⁹ Obligation and normativity: Korsgaard, SN 21–7 (taking justifying reasons to be motivating reasons); Suarez §120; Sentimentalists §§150, 155–6; Non-cognitivism §273.

¹⁰ Advantage v. morality: ii 3.20.

¹¹ Kant on imperatives: §200.

¹² Suarez and Grotius on moral rightness (*honestum*) and duty (*debitum*): §§120, 126.

Charles II in 1660 was not the end of violent revolution, or the threat of it, in Great Britain and Ireland. Conflict between the Catholic King James II and his Protestant opponents led to the unsuccessful rebellion led by the Duke of Monmouth (executed in 1685), and then to the successful invasion led by the Dutch ruler William of Orange (1689), who expelled James and became William III. James II's son James Stuart (the 'Old Pretender') led an unsuccessful invasion of Scotland in 1715. A further invasion of Scotland and England was led by James Stuart's son, Charles Edward Stuart (the 'Young Pretender') in 1745. Hume saw the invaders take possession of Edinburgh, but the invasion of England eventually failed.

None of these rebellions after 1660 was as prolonged or as disruptive as the Civil War. But the persistent sources of instability in Great Britain reminded readers of Hobbes that the conflicts and potential conflicts of his time were not over. Similarly, Hobbes's questions about natural law and morality continued to attract the attention of his critics.

Three of his English critics were acquainted with some Scholastic sources, but were also influenced by a revival of interest in Plato. Cudworth lived in Cambridge both during and after the Civil War, and drew on Grotius, Suarez, and the Scholastic tradition. He was one of the 'Cambridge Platonists', who were inspired by Plato, later Platonism, and the Christian Fathers. Clarke was influenced by this Cambridge Platonist outlook. Shaftesbury was influenced both by Platonism and by Stoicism.¹³

These critics of Hobbes attack his voluntarism. In their view, he treats the rules of morality as commands, human or divine, which we have a reason to observe if and only if it is in our own interest to observe them. Moral rightness, however, in the view of these critics, does not depend on the will of any legislator, human or divine, but on facts about what is right in itself. These facts give us reasons to observe morality apart from self-interest, as Hobbes conceives it.

141. Shaftesbury: Moral Realism Opposes both Egoism and Voluntarism

Shaftesbury defends naturalism both against Hobbesian egoism and against the theological voluntarism of Pufendorf. Hobbes (in Shaftesbury's view) does not recognize that moral rightness is distinct from the pleasure and advantage of the agent. According to theological voluntarism, actions are morally good or bad only in so far as they are determined to be so by legislation.¹⁴

Shaftesbury describes Hobbes and theological voluntarists as nominalists about morality, and himself as a moral realist. According to the Scholastic division, a realist, as opposed to a nominalist or conceptualist, about universals believes that things fall into natural kinds because of what they are in themselves, and not because anyone's names or concepts classify them as they do. Similarly, then, a moral realist believes that moral properties are objective, because they belong to actions, agents, and so on,

¹³ Cudworth and later British moralists: Mackie, *HMT*; Darwall, *BMIO*; Schneewind, *IA*; Gill, *BM*. Selections in R, S, SB.

¹⁴ Theological voluntarism: *Sol.* 3.3 = K 157; *Sens. Comm.* 2.1 = K 42. Shaftesbury's main targets are Locke and Cumberland, but his criticisms apply to Pufendorf.

in their own right, not because of their relation to any legislative will. Shaftesbury, therefore, agrees with Suarez and Grotius, who take moral properties to be objective, fixed by the nature of human beings.¹⁵

Nominalists about universals believe that things do not fall into natural kinds distinguished by real universal properties. Universals are not part of the objective world, but simply the result of our convention of using the same name for a number of things. This convention is what Pufendorf calls 'imposition'.¹⁶ Neither egoistic hedonists (such as Hobbes) nor theological voluntarists (such as Pufendorf) are moral realists, because they do not take the character of moral properties to be determined by the things they belong to. According to these nominalists, the justice or goodness of an action does not consist in the properties of the action itself, but in someone's declaring it to be just or good in relation to their own pleasure (according to egoistic hedonism), or to divine legislation (according to theological voluntarism).

Against the moral nominalists Shaftesbury maintains that we have a 'moral sense' that detects objective moral goodness and rightness. We do not believe that actions are right, or that people are good, as a result of considering whether they promote someone's pleasure. We approve of them from an unselfish point of view that considers the public interest. Just as the five senses detect perceptible features of the objective world, our moral sense detects objective moral features. The reality of this moral sense supports a realist conception of moral properties.¹⁷

142. Cudworth: Voluntarism Cannot Account for the Stability of Moral Principles

In the *Treatise on Eternal and Immutable Morality* Cudworth defends some of Shaftesbury's moral realism.¹⁸ In Cudworth's view, both Hobbes and the theological voluntarists ignore the fact that morality is 'eternal and immutable'. Since morality is part of nature, it is as stable as the nature of human beings. Shaftesbury's nominalists ignore the stability of moral properties. A positivist view identifies morality with the requirements of some positive law. The ancient defenders of this view assert that moral properties rest on convention and not on nature. Cudworth believes that his objection to moral positivism applies with equal force to theological voluntarists, who identify morality with divine commands.¹⁹

Both positivists and voluntarists suppose that a command, expressed in an act of legislation, imposes a moral obligation to obey it. Cudworth replies that it creates an obligation only if the commander has a moral right to obedience. Commands, therefore, create a moral obligation only if some moral obligation is prior to any

¹⁵ Moral realism: *Mor.* ii 2 = K 262. Objectivity of morality: *Mor.* ii 3 = K 266–7.

¹⁶ Imposition: Pufendorf §137.

¹⁷ The sense of right and wrong: *ICV* i 2.3 = 173 K (= R §200–2); i 3.1 = 178 K (= R §203–4). Different accounts of the moral sense: Hutcheson §154; Hume §157; Reid §177.

¹⁸ Neither Cudworth nor Shaftesbury mentions the other. Cudworth's *EIM* was not published until 1730.

¹⁹ Positivism: *EIM* i 1.5 (= R §119). The ancients: *EIM* i 1.1; ii 1–3 cites Protagoras in Plato, *Theaetetus* 167c. See Plato §27.

command. In particular, divine commands create moral obligations only if some moral principles about obeying specific commands are true apart from any divine command. If we have a moral reason to obey a command, the command must come from an authority whom we morally ought to obey.²⁰

This objection to Pufendorf is derived from the argument in Plato's *Euthyphro* to show that the pious cannot be defined as what the gods love, because the gods love actions only because they are pious. Plato's distinction (between 'pious because loved' and 'loved because pious') is similar to a Scholastic distinction between actions that are 'bad because prohibited' and those that are 'prohibited because bad' or 'bad in their own right'. According to Pufendorf, moral rightness and wrongness depend ultimately on actions that are bad because prohibited or good because commanded. Cudworth answers that if any actions are bad because prohibited, they presuppose that some actions are prohibited because bad.²¹

Pufendorf, therefore, faces a dilemma. Either (1) some moral principles (including the one that says we ought to obey divine commands) are true independently of divine commands, or (2) we have no moral reason to obey divine commands. In either case the obligation to obey divine commands cannot be the basic moral principle.

Similarly, Hobbes does not show that morality can be derived from legislation imposed by a commonwealth. Hence he loses one support for his view that there is no morality apart from a state that imposes observance of the laws of nature by means of commands and sanctions.

143. Hobbes and Pufendorf: A Defence of Voluntarism?

Even if these objections refute Pufendorf's voluntarist account of morality, they do not vindicate naturalism. Perhaps divine commands are the foundation of morality, but are neither morally right nor morally wrong in themselves. According to this form of voluntarism, the basis for moral principles is non-moral. As Hobbes argues, God is a legitimate legal authority because God has power to compel us to obey, through fear of punishment. This basis for divine authority is non-moral.

Pufendorf, however, rejects this voluntarist answer. He agrees with Cudworth's objection that divine power does not by itself create a moral obligation, because overwhelming force does not create a moral justification. Since we distinguish the orders of a tyrant from the laws of a legitimate authority, we assume that moral reasons are distinct from reasons of pleasure and advantage.²²

This objection to Hobbes collapses if it rests on a mistake about the distinctive character of moral reasons. We therefore need to decide whether the distinction—recognized by both Pufendorf and Cudworth—between mere force and genuine authority is justified. According to Hobbes, it is not justified, because acting on a

²⁰ Legislation: *EIM* i 2.2–3 (= R §121–2). Promises, commands, and obligation: *EIM* i 2.4 (= R §124). Cudworth's argument appeals to an 'open question'. Cf Price §179; Moore §269.

²¹ *Euthyphro*: Plato §27. Bad because prohibited and bad in their own right: Aquinas, *2Sent* d21 q2 a2 sc1.

²² At *JNG* i 6.9–17 Pufendorf discusses Hobbes, *De Cive* 15.5.

better reason is nothing more than acting on a stronger desire. The distinction between force and authority needs to be discussed.²³

144. Clarke: Hobbes Has to Recognize Morality in the State of Nature

Clarke argues that this answer to Cudworth is not open to Hobbes, because Hobbes recognizes moral obligations in the state of nature. Hobbes assumes that we have a 'right of nature', which includes the right to self-preservation, and therefore allows us, in the state of nature, to ignore the principles of morality. But if I have a right to do something, I am morally protected in doing it, and it would be morally wrong of you to prevent me from doing it. In the state of nature, therefore, people have rights that it would be wrong to violate.²⁴

One might object that Clarke simply misunderstands what Hobbes means by 'right'. Hobbes treats the right of nature as simply freedom from constraint. He means that in the state of nature everyone is free to do, and therefore has a right to do, what they think necessary to preserve their life. This freedom does not imply that it would be wrong to prevent them from preserving their life.²⁵

But Clarke suggests that this non-moral concept of a right does not fit everything Hobbes says. According to the non-moral concept, we have a right in the state of nature not only to do what we think necessary for self-preservation, but also whatever else we feel like doing to other people. Wanton and pointless cruelty, for instance, is not necessary for our self-preservation, but in the state of nature we are free to engage in it (i.e., nothing prevents us). Hence Hobbes should say we have a right to engage in it. But in fact Hobbes does not suggest that we have a right to do this. He does not confine himself, therefore, to a non-moral concept of a right. Hence he assumes that some things (e.g., wanton and pointless cruelty) would be wrong in the state of nature.²⁶

Clarke concludes that moral considerations matter in the state of nature, even if they do not tell us to do what they would tell us to do in a more stable situation. Even Hobbes implicitly concedes that they matter. Observance of ordinary moral rules does not always impede self-preservation; when it does not, it is right, for all that Hobbes has shown, to observe them.

145. Clarke: Moral Facts Are About Fitness

Clarke's criticism implies that even Hobbes cannot avoid Cudworth's conclusion that moral principles are obligatory in their own right. Contrary to Hobbes, their obligation is not limited to a stable commonwealth in which the sovereign—human or divine—commands us to observe them. On the contrary, a commonwealth is legitimate only in so far as it conforms to the natural rights that we are required to

²³ Authority: Butler §174.

²⁴ Clarke on Hobbes and the right of nature: *DNR* = H ii 609–10 (= R §227); ii 632 (= R §253).

²⁵ Hobbes on right of nature: *L* 14.1 (= R §55).

²⁶ Limits on the right of nature: Clarke, H ii 616 (= R §236).

recognize apart from any social order. In his political theory, Locke relies on this account of a natural right in order to argue that a legitimate state must rest on a social contract that expresses the basic moral constraints on a state. Locke agrees with Clarke against Hobbes's view that the social contract is the basis of moral rules and is not constrained by them.²⁷

According to this criticism of Hobbes, legislation is not the basis of morality. Apart from all divine or human legislation, some things are more fit (i.e., fitting, suitable) and appropriate than others. This is the conception of morality that Shaftesbury describes as moral realism, as opposed to Hobbes's nominalism. Naturally fit and good things include an obligation. Moral facts, therefore, are eternal and necessary fitnesses in things.²⁸

Clarke compares moral facts with mathematical facts. When we grasp the nature of squares and circles, we understand that the squaring of a circle is incongruous and unfit for the square and the circle. Some basic moral principles also describe relations of fitness and incongruity. Since, for instance, God is infinitely superior to us, it is fit (appropriate) for us to honour, worship, obey, and imitate God. It is appropriate for God to do what is best for the whole creation, rather than to aim at the misery of the whole. Similarly, in relations among human beings, benevolence is more fit than universal destructiveness; hence it is fit to treat people justly, but unfit (incongruous) to consider only one's own advantage, and it is fit to preserve the life of innocent people, but unfit to kill them or to let them die without any reason or provocation.²⁹

We may object that the moral cases are different from the mathematical cases. The unfitness of a circle being squared is a logical impossibility, but we cannot say this about the unfitness of God's not being benevolent. Clarke might reply that the two cases are analogous in the relevant respect. In both of them we can see that a specific property is inappropriate for a subject with that specific nature.

We know these facts about fitness because they are evident (in Clarke's view) to an unprejudiced subject. Someone who denied that there is light while looking at the sun would fail to recognize something that is as obvious as anything could be. If someone entertained any doubt on this point, it would be pointless to argue with them, or to try to convince them on any question that depends on the evidence of the senses, just as it would be pointless to argue about geometry with someone who rejected its basic assumptions. Some basic principles have to be recognized as inherently fit without reliance on any further justifying principle. This is rational intuition because we have to rely on reason to make us aware of these moral facts. In speaking of 'intuition' we mean not only that the judgment is intuitive (i.e., not explicitly based on an articulated theory), but also that it is known to be true without any inferential justification from any further beliefs. In treating these basic principles as objects of rational intuition, Clarke assumes a foundationalist epistemology (i.e., he believes that inferentially justified beliefs rest on beliefs that are non-inferentially justified) that is further articulated by later rationalists.³⁰

²⁷ Locke on natural rights: *STG* chs. 2, 9, 11; Ryan, *OP* ch. 13; See §§166, 197, 236.

²⁸ Fitness and obligation: Clarke, *H* ii 611 (= *R* §228). Moral facts are fitnesses: *H* ii 608 (= *R* §225).

²⁹ Moral fitnesses: *H* ii 609–11 (= *R* §§226–9).

³⁰ Intuitions and foundationalism: §§190, 239, 254, 285.

146. Clarke: Basic Moral Principles Are Easily Recognized

Clarke believes that the strongest argument against his position is 'the difficulty there may sometimes be, to define exactly the bounds of right and wrong', and the different views that have been held on these questions in different historical periods and in different societies. He replies that this is not a compelling objection to objective fitness. Two colours may blend into each other so gradually that we cannot say definitely where one begins and the other ends, but there is still a clear difference between red and blue, or white and black. Similarly, then, difficult or indeterminate cases in morality do not rule out a clear distinction between right and wrong.

The basic principles of morality require us to honour and to obey God, to deal with everyone equitably, as we want them to deal with us, and to preserve ourselves to perform these other duties. Anyone who rejects these principles is no less irrational than someone who rejects basic arithmetical principles about addition. We do not always observe moral principles, because we have free will and because we are liable to passions that distract us from a clear grasp of these principles and make us 'endeavour . . . to make things be what they are not, and cannot be'.³¹ But when we clearly consider basic moral principles and understand them, we assent to them in conscience.

The principle of equity, for instance, requires us 'so to deal with every man, as in like circumstances we would reasonably expect he should deal with us'.³² Clarke requires us to take an impartial and equitable view of our own desires as well. We acknowledge this equitable view whenever we consider the actions of other people that do not involve our own interest. We acknowledge that the impartial point of view has authority over us even when it appears to conflict with our own interest.³³

147. Clarke: Morality Requires Benevolence, Regulated by Justice

'Universal love or benevolence' requires us to aim at the greatest good we are capable of achieving for everyone.³⁴ Clarke derives this principle from the fitness of aiming at the greater rather than the lesser good. He might equally have derived benevolence from the obligation to prudence combined with the obligation to equity. If we rationally aim at our own interest, and we recognize that what is rational for us to want for ourselves is equally rational for others to want for themselves, equity justifies the extension of benevolence to everyone.³⁵

In Clarke's view, universal love requires us to pursue everyone's welfare. This is the love that God shows towards us. Clarke is not a utilitarian, however. Principles connected with justice limit the pursuit of maximum utility. It is fit and reasonable in itself to keep a promise, to show gratitude to a benefactor, to avoid harm to an

³¹ Attempting the impossible: H ii 613 (= R §232).

³² Equity: H ii 619 (= R §241).

³³ Impartiality: H ii 616 (= R §237).

³⁴ The utilitarian principle: Hutcheson §§163–4.

³⁵ Benevolence: H ii 621–2 (= R §244). Reciprocity: see Sidgwick's comments on Clarke, *ME* 384–5.

innocent person, and so on. But the principle of utility may require us to violate these principles of fitness, since breaking promises, violating ties to particular people, and overriding the rights of the innocent, may maximize utility. Even if utility does not in fact require us to violate these principles, a utilitarian denies that they are fit and reasonable, and so morally obligatory, in themselves.

The principle of utility, therefore, is not the supreme moral principle. Clarke agrees that on the whole the good of the universal creation coincides with what is right, and that God wills virtue to be rewarded by happiness. But utility is not the criterion of rightness. Some moral requirements are clear and uniform in some cases where the demands of utility are obscure and variable. If a utilitarian view were correct, we would need to answer some complicated questions about utility before we could know that a certain type of action is morally right; but we can sometimes know what is right without having answers to all these questions. Even if the answers would eventually favour our moral principle, the fact that we do not need them shows that the principle is not based on predictions about utility.³⁶

³⁶ The moral law v. utility: H ii 630–1 (= R 251). Further discussion of Clarke's objections to utilitarianism: §189.

Sentimentalism: A Non-Rational Ground for Morality

Hutcheson and Hume

148. Reason v. Sentiment: The Basic Division

We have now discussed the first critics of Hobbes, who attack him from the voluntarist side (Pufendorf) and from the naturalist side (Shaftesbury, Cudworth, and Clarke). Their debates continue and develop among British moral philosophers in the eighteenth century.¹

Historians commonly distinguish ‘British Empiricists’ (including Locke, Berkeley, and Hume) from ‘Continental Rationalists’ (including Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz). Both sides of this division in epistemology and metaphysics are represented within British moral philosophy. Rationalists include Cudworth, Clarke, Balguy, and Price. Sentimentalists (i.e., empiricists) include Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith.

This broad division is too simple. A particular philosopher may not be wholly a rationalist or wholly a sentimentalist. Shaftesbury, Butler, and Reid do not fit perfectly into either division.² Moreover, the division in moral philosophy is not exactly the same as the division in epistemology and metaphysics. Still, the division offers a rough guide to the debate in moral philosophy.

The successors of the voluntarists (Hobbes and Pufendorf) are sentimentalists, who take morality to rest on feelings and emotions. The successors of the naturalists are rationalists, who take morality to rest on reason rather than emotion. Disputes about the emotional and rational foundations for morality are not the same as the earlier disputes about facts of nature and facts about the divine will, but some of the earlier disputes reappear in the later.

Rationalists and sentimentalists all respond to Hobbes’s attack (as they suppose) on morality.³ Sentimentalists accept most of his deflated conception of human nature and reason, but they reject his psychological egoism. Rationalists reject more of Hobbes’s assumptions about the basis of morality.

Sentimentalists believe that rationalist claims about the powers of reason are incredible, and therefore open the door to Hobbes, unless a sentimentalist defence

¹ Further reading on the British moralists: §141.

² Shaftesbury on the moral sense: §141. Butler on rationalism: §172. Reid on senses: §177.

³ Hume is more sympathetic than Hutcheson towards Hobbes. See §166.

of morality can be found. Rationalists believe that sentimentalism offers no good grounds for accepting morality, and therefore opens the door to Hobbes, unless a rationalist defence of morality can be found.

To make the course of the debate clearer, this chapter and the next present some of the main problems, rather than a discussion of each philosopher in turn. Study of the debate gives us an idea of what can be said on each side of these questions, and may help us to decide who has the better case.

We need not wholly endorse either the rationalist or on the sentimentalist side in these disputes. Perhaps one side is right about some things and wrong about others, or perhaps neither side asks the right questions. This latter view is Kant's view of the dispute.⁴

149. The Basis of Moral Judgments

Rationalists and sentimentalists differ primarily over questions in moral epistemology. They ask whether claims to knowledge of moral principles rest ultimately on our sympathetic emotions, or rest on rational principles that are true independently of our emotions.

Emotions apparently justify some actions. I have a reason to pull a pin out of my finger, because it hurts. I have a reason to go to a film, because I think I will enjoy it. I have a reason to do a good turn for you, because I feel grateful to you for having helped me. My reason for action comes from an emotion, combined with a belief about how to satisfy it.

We might try to explain moral judgments in the same way. If I ought to do something, or it is right to do it, I can ask why I ought to do it, or what makes it right. One possible answer mentions some emotion or desire that would be satisfied if I did the action. According to sentimentalists, this answer is basically right.

Rationalists answer that our aims and goals are open to forms of rational criticism that conflict with the sentimentalist analysis. Similarly, our views about the nature and justification of moral principles would not be justified if the principles were based on our emotions. Sentimentalists maintain that emotions explain and justify our actions, but, from the rationalist point of view, this appeal to emotions overlooks the ways in which emotions are formed by judgments about which emotions are appropriate in different situations. If we allow reciprocal connexions between emotions and rational judgments, we need to compare sentimentalist and rationalist views about the character of these connexions.

150. Hobbes and Hutcheson: Practical Reason Is Subordinate to Non-Rational Desire

The sentimentalists' theory of morality rests on their theory of action. In their view, we underestimate the role of emotion in morality, and overestimate the role of reason, because we misunderstand the explanation and justification of action.

⁴ Kant on rationalists and empiricists: §197.

Different types of reasons are relevant to the understanding of action. (1) Sometimes we ask 'Why did you do that?', when we mean 'What was your reason for doing that?' We seek an explanation that identifies what motivated or excited you to act. Your motivating reason is what actually moved you (e.g., 'I hit him because I wanted to pay him back for insulting me'). (2) Sometimes we ask 'Why should I do that?' meaning 'What reason is there for doing that?' We are not asking about anyone's actual motive, but we want a justification that would provide a normative reason by referring to an appropriate justifying norm (e.g., 'You shouldn't hit him because you shouldn't retaliate'). Though we do not always act on the normative reasons we recognize, some normative reasons become our motivating reasons (hence 'I ought to retaliate' is the normative reason that becomes a motivating reason when I retaliate).⁵

Aristotle and his Scholastic followers maintain that reason can guide our action. In their view, our will aims at the ultimate end that is determined by practical reason. Morality moves our will because it presents us with the principles, found by practical reason, that we need to follow in order to achieve the ultimate end. In the Aristotelian view, action requires a motivating reason, but some motivating reasons come from the recognition of normative reasons. We find these normative reasons by the deliberation that discovers the constituents of the ultimate end. This is what Aquinas means by saying that the will is rational desire.⁶

Hobbes rejects this conception of rational will and its relation to practical reason, and therefore rejects the division between rational will and non-rational passion. In his view, practical reason simply finds means to ends, but non-rational desires fix the ends.⁷ Rationalists reply that we are moved by moral principles because we grasp them by reason.⁸

Hutcheson supports Hobbes's position against the rationalists. He argues that the ends of action depend on desire. To aim at an end, we have to desire it. Knowing about the end, or being given arguments for aiming at it, will not make us aim at it. I might say I want medicine because I believe it is good for my health, but this belief will not move me unless I already want to be healthy. To avoid an infinite regress of wants and beliefs, I must eventually come to something that I want for no further reason. Hence choices and actions result from basic, non-rational instincts that rest on no further reasons.⁹

Hutcheson maintains that in both cases my starting point is a desire. He describes motivating and normative reasons in these terms: (1) S has an 'exciting' (i.e., motivating) reason p to do x if and only if p is a truth presenting a quality in x that excites S to do x. My exciting reason for going to the shop was the fact that I could buy something that I wanted to eat. (2) S has a 'justifying' (i.e., normative) reason p to do x if and only if p is a truth presenting a quality in x that engages S's approbation. My justifying reason to help you across the road is the fact that your

⁵ Normative reasons: Aquinas §99; Suarez §122; Pufendorf §138. Types of reason: Smith, *MP* ch. 4.

⁶ Aquinas on will: §100. ⁷ Hobbes on the ends of action: §128.

⁸ Clarke on reason and motivation: H ii 612 (= R §230).

⁹ Hutcheson on the ends of action: *IMS* §1 = Peach 122–3 (partly in R §§361–2). Cf. Peach 227; *IMGE* 3.15 = Leidhold 23; *SMP* i 3.1, 38.

need to cross the road, together with your inability to cross without help, engages my sympathy.¹⁰

According to this division, justifying reasons, no less than exciting reasons, depend on one's actual desires and feelings. Deliberation proceeds by the awareness of desires or sentiments aroused by different considerations that strike us. A consideration is a justifying reason in so far as I feel approval towards it.¹¹

151. Hume: Reason Has Only Limited Functions in Action

Hume defends Hutcheson's view by looking more closely at the functions of reason in action. We may disagree with Hutcheson because we suppose we refer to a role of reason when we really refer to a non-rational desire. Hume believes we can see that Hutcheson is right, once we grasp the different functions of reason and of non-rational desire, which Hume calls 'passion'.

Hume allows reason only two functions: (1) Reason points out that a desire rests on some false assumption; I desire *x* as *F* (e.g., I desire to drink this clear liquid on the assumption that it is gin), and reason points out to me that *x* is not *F* (e.g., I discover that it is vinegar). (2) Reason points out that a desire for *x* rests on the false assumption that *x* is a means to *y*. The second function is a special case of the first, since it tells me that the object of my desire lacks a feature because of which I desired it.

These limited roles for reason restrict the ways in which an action can be rational or irrational. Reason cannot provide motivating (exciting) reasons; for Hume's two kinds of reasoning cannot motivate without some prior desire for an end. The discovery that *x* is *F*, or that *x* is a sufficient means to *y*, does not motivate me to pursue or avoid *x* unless I already care about *x*'s being *F* or being a means to *y*.

Nor can reason provide normative (justifying) reasons; for it cannot show that this or that action deserves to be approved. If I find that *x* is a means to *y*, I still have no reason to approve *x*, unless I already want *y*. My approval of *x* presupposes some prior approval of *y*, which must rest on some desire for *y* as an end or some approval of *y* that in turn rests on a desire for something else as an end.¹²

Reason does not even prescribe the choice of the best means to an end. Suppose I want to travel from London to Rome, and I could book a flight on one airline for 200 euros, or on another airline for 300 euros, and there is nothing else to choose between the two flights. Reason itself (according to Hume) does not tell us to choose the flight that costs less. Either flight is a means to my end, and reason itself is indifferent between them. I choose the cheaper flight only if I already desire the cheaper way to get to Rome.

Hume concludes that reason is and ought to be only the slave of the passions.¹³ His description of the functions of reason supports Hutcheson's rejection of the

¹⁰ Exciting v. justifying reasons: *IMS* §1 = Peach 121 = R §361.

¹¹ Deliberation: *IMS* §1 = Peach 129 = R §363; Peach 226–8. Contrast Butler §174.

¹² The role of reason: Hume, *Treatise* ii 3.3.1–2 = R §§480–1.

¹³ The slave of the passions: *T* ii 3.3.4 = R §482.

Scholastic division between passion and will. According to Aquinas, the will is responsive to reflexion on how one or another action on a specific desire will affect my overall good, and so it is a rational desire.¹⁴ In Hume's view, however, this belief in essentially rational desires rests on confusion about the functions of reason. We may desire our overall good and use reason to find the means to it. But equally we may desire an end that conflicts with our overall good, and use reason to find the means to this end. In both cases, desire and reason are present, but neither desire is more rational than the other.

152. Hume: We Tend to Confuse Passion and Reason

Hume acknowledges that his explanation does not fit our familiar experience of (apparently) acting on reason. I may have no desire to undergo a surgical operation, but I recognize that I ought to undergo this operation for the sake of myself and my family. If a desire for the operation arises from the recognition of these facts, it may not be a strong desire, but none the less I recognize that it is a rational desire, and I may act on it. Hume rejects our apparent observations in this case. He supposes that we believe in essentially rational desires (such as the one just described) because we overlook the presence of the relevant non-rational desires.

First, he observes that it is easy to overlook some desires because not all desires are strongly felt; some may be present without being especially vivid or forceful. Perhaps, e.g., I have been hungry all day, but I have not felt any strong sensation of hunger, because I have been absorbed in watching an exciting football game. When the game is over, and I pass a shop window where I can see and smell a chicken roasting on a spit, my hunger becomes more vivid and forceful to me. But it was present even before it became vivid to me. Hume believes that this fact about unnoticed desires explains our tendency to believe in essentially rational desires. If we overlook fainter and less vivid passions, we may falsely suppose that we are moved by reason.

For instance, we have desires about next year, but since we cannot imagine next year as vividly as we can see what is happening now, the desires about next year are less forceful than my desire to withdraw my hand from the flame. When one of these less forceful desires—Hume calls it a 'calm passion'—is present at the same time as a more forceful desire—a 'violent passion'—we may falsely believe that our only current passion is the violent passion. We overlook the calm passion, and so we think reason moves us to oppose the violent passion. Apparent conflicts between passion and reason are conflicts between violent and calm passions.

Because we overlook calm passions, we falsely infer that our concern for our future good comes from reason, not passion. This false inference suggests that we act against reason if we prefer to avoid the scratching of our finger at the cost of our future good or someone else's. But the mere belief that something will be better for me does not move me. I am moved only by the relevant desire, which is a calm passion.¹⁵

¹⁴ Aquinas on will: §93.

¹⁵ Concern for the future: contrast Hobbes §130. Hume may be expounding the view that Hobbes is implicitly committed to. Cf. Hume on justice, §166.

This is Hume's purely instrumental conception of practical reason. The Aristotelian and Scholastic belief that some desires are formed by reason, and that they rest on normative reasons that are irreducible to motivating reasons, results from inattention to the role of calm passions in motivation.

153. Hutcheson: Since We Have a Moral Sense, Hobbesian Egoism Is False

Hutcheson agrees with Shaftesbury's view that, contrary to Hobbes, morality is part of human nature. One of his targets is Mandeville's elaboration of Hobbes's view that both motivating and normative reasons rest on the desire for one's own pleasure. According to Mandeville, we assume that there are genuinely virtuous people because we assume that some people act on motives that are not purely self-interested. But if we look more closely at allegedly virtuous people, we can see that this assumption is baseless; for sometimes we do the virtuous action for the sake of praise and to improve our reputation with other people, and sometimes we do it to remove our feelings of pain or guilt when we see other people suffering. In all such cases, our ostensibly virtuous action is really self-interested, because we can see that such actions result in our own pleasure or advantage.¹⁶

Hutcheson replies that if this egoist analysis of our motives were right, we would have to reflect on the remote and indirect consequences of our actions before we could ever choose any benevolent action. But the egoist analysis is wrong, because we act on our own benevolent motives, and approve of these motives in others, without any thought of our own gain. We act on these motives because we have a natural and disinterested (i.e., not purely self-interested) concern for morality. Moral judgments do not result from instrumental reasoning about self-interest, since some of them are immediate, without any reasoning. Hutcheson, therefore, agrees with Shaftesbury's belief in a moral sense.¹⁷

This attack on egoism also attacks theological moralists who treat moral motivation as the result of a desire for rewards and fear of punishment. Hutcheson argues that such motives cannot explain why we admire morally good action. If we believed that other people act exclusively from the desire for rewards after death, we would admire them no more than we admire people who do the right actions only for the sake of more immediate rewards. Moral admiration presupposes disinterested motives.¹⁸

If moral motives are not derived from self-interest, they provide motivating and normative reasons by themselves. Our recognition that this action promotes the public good—combined with the relevant desire—gives us a reason for doing it, without appeal to self-interest.

Moral goodness, however, is not a mere desire for the good of others for their own sake. Morally good people also approve of this desire both in themselves and in

¹⁶ Mandeville on self-interest: *FB* i 56 (Kaye) = R §270. Butler on pleasure and desire: §193.

¹⁷ Disinterested benevolence: Hutcheson, *IMGE* §1 = R §§307–11.

¹⁸ Rewards after death: *IMGE* 2.4 = L 222 = R §320.

others. If we make a moral judgment on an action, we imply that some desire is right and appropriate for an agent in these circumstances. This judgment belongs to the moral sense.

154. Hutcheson v. Shaftesbury: Objectivist v. Subjectivist Conceptions of the Moral Sense

Hutcheson believes in a moral sense because he takes moral judgments to be analogous to ordinary sensory judgments. We see that a tomato is red simply by looking at it, and we are aware of the saltiness of sea-water just by tasting it. Similarly, we see a kind or a cruel action, and at once we approve of one person's kindness and disapprove of another person's cruelty.¹⁹

In these claims about the moral sense, Hutcheson and Hume follow Shaftesbury.²⁰ But they reject Shaftesbury's claim that our moral sense detects objective features of the world, just as our other senses do. In their view, we cannot both believe in a moral sense and believe that moral properties are objective.

Hutcheson and Hume take our moral sense to be analogous to other senses. They argue that colours and sounds (and other 'secondary qualities') are not objective features of the external world, but sensations ('ideas') resulting from the interaction between objects and our sense-organs.²¹ In this respect secondary qualities differ from primary qualities (size, shape, etc.), which are real features of external objects. Our ideas of primary qualities are similar to the qualities themselves, but our ideas of secondary qualities are not similar to any objective qualities. Since objects themselves are not, for instance, coloured, our ideas of secondary qualities do not correspond to actual qualities of the objects. Secondary qualities are ideas caused by objects, not qualities in objects themselves. Similarly, beauty is an idea 'raised in us' (i.e., aroused) by objects, to which no similar quality in the objects corresponds. When we find an object beautiful, we are aware of its objective properties, such as order, symmetry, and proportion; but though these properties arouse the idea of beauty in us, they are not beauty in the object.²²

In the same way, then, the rightness of an action or the goodness of a person is not a feature of the action or the person, but an affective reaction in our minds. The fact that an action causes pain to an innocent victim is a fact about the action and the victim, but the fact that the action is wrong is a fact about our reaction to it. In a benevolent action we distinguish (1) the agent's action; (2) the beneficiary's reaction to the agent's action; and (3) the spectator's reaction to the agent's action and to the beneficiary's reaction. The spectator's reaction to the agent and the beneficiary involves a feeling of approval. This feeling of approval corresponds to the idea of colour in the case of sight. A moral judgment, therefore, is similar to a sensory

¹⁹ The moral sense and other senses: *IMGE* 1.1 = L 90 = R §307; 1.8 = L 218 = R §314.

²⁰ Shaftesbury on the moral sense: §141.

²¹ This is Hutcheson's and Hume's interpretation of Locke on secondary qualities in, e.g., *EHU* ii 8.15–16.

²² Ideas of secondary qualities: Hutcheson, *SMP* i 1.3, 5; *Beauty* 1.9 = L 23; 1.17 = L 27.

judgment because it refers both to the external world and to the state of the person making the judgment.

We might be surprised by this account of moral judgments. We might assume that if we want to know whether an action is wrong, we should examine the action and its circumstances. If we discuss whether an action is right or wrong, we support our case by pointing to features of the action—e.g., the harm it causes, its obvious unfairness, its lack of consideration for other people. We do not do much to support our case if we simply report our feelings about the action; the whole question is about whether our feelings are misguided or not.

Hutcheson and Hume do not necessarily reject this view about how we try to decide what is right or wrong. They reply, however, that the considerations we appeal to do not give a wholly accurate picture of the facts that make an action right or wrong. Since moral judgments belong to a moral sense, it follows—given their conception of a moral sense—that the qualities recognized by this sense are subjective rather than objective. We can now consider their main arguments for this conception of the moral sense.²³

155. Moral Judgments Include Emotions

According to Hutcheson, the moral sense is the product of sensation and passion, not the result of reasoning. Its response to a kind or a cruel action is not purely cognitive, but also affective. If it is favourable, it disposes us to imitate the kind action, but if it is unfavourable, it disposes us to avoid the cruel action, and to try to prevent it. We might infer that the moral sense includes two components: moral judgments, and further affective reactions. Hutcheson, however, argues that the affective aspects of the moral sense belong to moral judgments, and are not added to them.

In defence of this claim Hutcheson observes that moral judgments are a source of justification and motivation. We recall, from his arguments about reason and desire, that passion (emotion), not reason, gives us justification and motivation. Moral judgments impose obligations, which give us motivating and normative reasons, and therefore they include motives. Hence they include passions, and do not simply describe actions or people.²⁴

Hume defends Hutcheson's contention by an argument from the practical character of moral judgments. Hume argues: (1) 'Morals have an influence on the actions and affections'.²⁵ (2) They have this influence only if moral judgments include motivation. (3) They include motivation only if they include passions. (4) Therefore, they include passions.²⁶

Hume takes his first step to be a matter of common experience. If people say they believe it is wrong to steal, but they habitually steal when they have the chance, we normally infer that they do not really believe it is wrong. Hume argues that moral judgments have this practical character only if they necessarily include motivation.

²³ Moral sense and external reality: Hutcheson, *IMS* 163 = R §371.

²⁴ Moral reasons and obligation: *IMS* 130.

²⁵ Morality and action: Hume, *Treatise* iii 1.1, 5–6 = R §489.

²⁶ A short account of Hume's ethics: Norman, *MP* ch. 5. A fuller account: Mackie, *HMT*.

He therefore affirms an internal connexion between moral judgment and motivation ('internalism').²⁷

156. How Are Moral Judgments Connected to Motivation?

If we compare moral judgments with other judgments that have some role in motivation and action, we may doubt internalism. We act on our judgments about our health, by taking medicine or exercise, and we act on our judgments about the weather, by wearing a raincoat or a sunhat. But these judgments do not include any motive. As Hume maintains in his discussion of reason and passion, beliefs about our health are relevant to action only if we want to improve our health. He agrees that we are externalists about the relation of these beliefs to action. If we are externalists about moral judgments, we will say that they are relevant to our action only if we have the further desire to do the right thing.

Hume might reply that externalism does not explain the specific practical role of morality. We take an externalist view of judgments about health or weather, because we are familiar with people who are indifferent to their health or to getting wet or sunburnt. These people lack the relevant desire, and so we can readily separate the judgment from the desire in these cases. But we are not indifferent to morality in these ways. Hence the comparison with judgments about health and weather does not refute internalism about moral judgments.

But might some people be amoralists who know what they morally ought to do, but do not care? Even if it is difficult for most people to be amoralists most of the time, might some people be indifferent to morality some of the time? If this is possible, we can separate moral judgments, no less than medical or meteorological judgments, from motivation. Hutcheson and Hume have to reply that amoralists do not really make moral judgments, but falsely suppose they make them.

157. Moral Facts Are Not Objective

Hutcheson and Hume rely on internalism in order to argue not only that moral judgments include passions, but also that moral rightness and wrongness are not objective properties.

Moral properties seem to be objective, since they seem to belong to actions independently of the emotions of the spectator who makes moral judgments about them. My judgment that A has borrowed money from B, has promised to pay it back, and has not paid it back, is a judgment about A and B. Similarly, my judgment that A's treatment of B is dishonest seems to be a judgment about A and B and the relations between them. My feelings do not seem relevant to the fact that A's treatment of B is dishonest, and therefore wrong.

²⁷ Internalism: Smith, *MP* ch. 3. Non-cognitivists also rely on internalism; see §271. Hume, however, does not endorse non-cognitivism; see §158.

In Hutcheson's view, however, this conception of moral facts ignores their internal connexion with obligation. If A's action is wrong, it ought not to be done, and we have an obligation to avoid it. If I am obliged to avoid something, I have a reason to avoid it. But I have a reason to avoid it only if I have a motive (according to Hutcheson's view of normative and motivating reasons). Hence the wrongness of an action includes a motive to avoid it. The fact that A's treatment of B is wrong is a fact not only about A and B, but also about the emotion of a spectator. Moral rightness and goodness, therefore, are not objective properties, because they include a subjective state of the spectator.

Suppose, for instance, that an objective property such as benevolence is itself a type of moral goodness. In that case we can sometimes judge truly that an action is morally good, by judging that it is benevolent. But it is possible to judge that it is benevolent while being indifferent to benevolence, feeling neither favourable nor unfavourable towards it. If we are indifferent to it, moral goodness does not include any obligation, as Hutcheson understands obligation. Since, however, moral goodness includes obligation, it belongs to the spectator, and not simply to the action.

This subjectivist conclusion about moral judgments results from internalism about moral judgment and motivation. If morality provides justifying reasons, moral properties belong to our reactions and feelings, not to the external reality that we react to.

158. We Cannot Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'

Hume supports this subjectivist account of moral properties and facts by arguing that 'moral distinctions are not derived from reason'. By this he means that moral judgments are not justified conclusions from any possible deductive or inductive reasoning ('relations of ideas' or 'matters of fact') that is entirely about facts and objects in the world.²⁸

Hume argues that consideration of an object or event in the world 'in itself'—i.e., without any reference to our feelings about it—reveals no moral facts. A complete description of the objective facts about a murder, for instance, does not include the properties that constitute its moral badness. Hence, Hume concludes, moral goodness and badness cannot be anything 'in the object' itself.²⁹

We are not justified, therefore, in arguing from 'is' to 'ought'. Moral judgments are about obligations, and hence they contain an 'ought'. But facts about the objective world do not constitute any obligation. Hence the objective facts do not tell us what we ought to do, or what is right or wrong. If we know that John has killed Bill, that Bill was innocent, and that John wanted to take Bill's wallet, we still cannot infer that John ought not to have killed Bill.³⁰

²⁸ Moral distinctions and reason: Hume presents a simpler version of these arguments in *IPM* App. 1 = R §§594–607, and a fuller version in *T* iii 1.1 = R §§487–504. Relations of ideas and matters of fact: *T* iii 1.1, 9 = R §490.

²⁹ Moral badness is not in the action itself: *IPM* App. 1.13–14 = R §603.

³⁰ Is and ought: *T* iii 1.1.27 = R §504. Hume's argument: Darwall, *PE* 21–5.

The role of our passions and sentiments in moral judgment explains why 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is'. Judgments about 'is' are about the objective world, and from them we can never derive an 'ought' judgment, which includes motivation (since internalism is true). To reach an 'ought' judgment, we have to supplement our 'is' judgments with a judgment about our subjective states of approval or disapproval; once we have done this, we can derive an 'ought' judgment. Since moral judgments are not simply judgments about objective facts, but they also require a reaction of approval or disapproval in the observer, they belong to a moral sense.³¹ When we say that an action is right or wrong, we report both on non-moral properties of the action that are distinct from its rightness or wrongness, and on our reaction to the action.

Hume, therefore, rejects the objectivist account of moral judgments and moral facts that we have traced in Suarez, Shaftesbury, Cudworth, and Clarke. He argues for the position that Suarez rejects and Pufendorf accepts, that moral judgments are essentially imperative. But, in contrast to earlier imperative accounts, he argues that if moral judgments are imperative, moral properties are not objective.³²

159. The Moral Sense Takes the Viewpoint of an Impartial Observer

According to this subjectivist conception, the moral sense is a feeling of approval. But not just any feeling of approval belongs to the moral sense. If I am offering you a bribe to do me a favour, I may feel approval of you when you accept the bribe, but my selfish reaction is entirely non-moral. What specific feeling, then, belongs to the moral sense? Hume assumes that we can introspect the distinctive quality of the sentiment that belongs to moral approval, just as we can introspect the distinctive pleasures that result from listening to music and drinking wine.

First of all, the moral sense is disinterested. If I think about whether I will benefit or suffer from an action, this is not moral approval or disapproval. A moral judgment requires me to set aside my own benefit and harm, and to consider the action from a disinterested point of view. But not every disinterested reaction marks a moral judgment. The Roman Emperor Heliogabalus is supposed to have killed Christians because he found the combination of colours produced by red blood on green grass aesthetically pleasing. His aesthetic reaction was disinterested, but without any moral approval.³³

Hume suggests, then, that moral sentiment must also include a favourable response to the interests of those who are affected by the action. If I see you being pleased, I imagine myself being pleased, and I actually feel pleasure of the sort that you feel. This is 'sympathy' for another person; we 'feel together with' the other, by sharing their feeling. But mere sympathetic pleasure is not the moral sense, because it is too variable. Different people's concerns may make them sympathetic to different

³¹ The moral sense: *T* iii 1.2.3–4 = R §§506–7.

³² Imperatives: Suarez §122; Pufendorf §138.

³³ Disinterested sentiment: *T* iii 1.2.4 = R §508.

degrees towards different sorts of people, in ways that are irrelevant to moral judgment.³⁴

To identify the moral sense, Hume uses an analogy with perception. Different observers have different perspectives on a physical object, so that a penny, for instance, looks elongated and elliptical from the side. None the less we agree that it is round, because we agree to take the point of view of someone who observes it from the front. Similarly, different disinterested observers of a benevolent action may attend to different aspects of the situation. Some may sympathize more with the benefactor who suffers a loss; others may sympathize more with the beneficiary who gains. If we want to capture a genuine moral judgment, we need to agree on the stable judgment that what the benefactor does is morally good. We need to take the point of view of an observer who is not biased towards either party. This unbiased observer, seeing that the beneficiary gains more than the benefactor loses, approves of the action as right. Moral sentiments belong to this unbiased and impartial observer.³⁵

Moral judgments, therefore, proceed from a sentiment that we can all share, apart from our particular perspectives, if we contemplate actions that affect human interests. To the extent that we share that sentiment, our moral evaluation expresses a common point of view. It is the point of view of humanity rather than the point of view of the agent or of the person affected. The sympathetic outlook of the moral sense is the attitude of benevolence to others. Benevolence leads us to wider concern for others, so that our moral sense, formed by the appropriate experience, eventually approves of the good of humanity in general.³⁶

Hume adds that I may learn to judge that something is good from the moral point of view, even if I lack the appropriate sentiment. I recognize what an impartial observer would feel, but I need not share that feeling. My moral judgment, therefore, describes not my feelings, but the feelings of a hypothetical observer. This conception of moral judgment conflicts with Hume's internalism. If I believe that the impartial observer would form a favourable sentiment towards a given action, but I do not share the sentiment, I still judge that the action is right. In this case, then my judgment that the action is right does not move me to act. Contrary to Hume's initial claim, moral judgments are not necessarily motivating.³⁷

160. Correct Moral Judgments Are About Utility

Hume's reference to an impartial observer suggests that a moral judgment involves a belief about the reactions of someone who observes the pain suffered by one person and the pleasure enjoyed by another, and whose reactions result from these different observations. But if we simply speculate on the reactions of such an observer, we may

³⁴ Hume's use of 'sympathy' reflects its derivation from the Greek 'sumpatheia' (being affected together with another). Being 'sympathetic' in the usual modern sense requires the further development of Humean sympathy that we discuss next.

³⁵ Variability and uniformity: *T* iii 3.1, 14–15 = R §§553–4.

³⁶ The point of view of humanity: *IHU* ix 4–6 = R §§588–90. Hutcheson on benevolence: *IMGE* 3.6 = L 231 = R §331; *Passions* 2.2 = R 357. Maximizing: *IMGE* 3.8 = L 125 = R 333; *IMGE* 3.9 = L 125 = R 343.

³⁷ Judgment without sentiment: *T* iii 3.1.16–18 (part in R §554); iii 3.3.2. The hypothetical observer: *T* iii 3.1.18. Cf. Smith *TMS* i 1.3–4 = R 770–80, on judgments about propriety.

be uncertain in our moral judgments. Ordinary impartial observers may be forgetful, or careless, or less sensitive to some kinds of suffering than to others. They will not all give the same answers about right and wrong, because their reactions will vary.

But we need not speculate about different possible impartial observers. We consider an ideal observer who accurately observes the gains and losses of those who are affected by an action, and favours the course of action that maximizes the balance of pleasure over pain overall. This balance is what Hume refers to when he speaks of the public good, or the public interest. Facts about the public interest are facts about the effects of actions on different people, not about the emotional reactions of hypothetical observers. If we hold that these facts about the public interest determine right and wrong, we are utilitarians.³⁸

Hume, therefore, seems to accept this argument:

- (1) The moral point of view is the perspective of the ideal impartial observer.
- (2) The ideal impartial observer favours the public interest.
- (3) Therefore moral judgments are about the public interest.
- (4) Therefore facts about the public interest constitute the moral rightness or wrongness in an action.³⁹

161. Is Hume's Position Consistent?

If we recall Hume's defence of internalism and subjectivism about moral judgments, and we compare it with this argument for a utilitarian conception of moral properties and facts, we find that further questions arise about his overall position. From the utilitarian conclusion that we have just reached (in (4) above) three things follow:

1. Internalism is false. Whether or not we share the feelings of the ideal observer, we can make true moral judgments, as long as we can say what would promote the public good.
2. One form of subjectivism is false. Moral facts are facts about the public interest. These facts are independent of the feelings of any spectator or judge.
3. We can reach 'ought' from 'is'. If an action would promote the public interest, by achieving a surplus of pleasure over pain, it ought to be done; for this is the action that our moral sense approves, and whatever the moral sense approves ought to be done. These three consequences of Hume's utilitarianism cast doubt on his conception of the moral sense.

Should we, then, abandon internalism and subjectivism? Moral judgments usually move us to action, because we usually favour the common and impartial point of view that cares about the public interest. But if this is why we are moved by moral judgments, we need not accept internalism. Similarly, if we have found the objective

³⁸ Public interest: *IHU* iii 30–2; 48 = S 555–6.

³⁹ This utilitarian account of morality is set out fully by Adam Smith, who takes it to capture the point of view of the impartial observer (with some exceptions: see §168). Smith accepts the argument that we have traced in Hume. Schopenhauer on the ideal observer: §225.

properties that are moral goodness and badness, Hume has not shown that moral distinctions are not founded in reason.

Instead of drawing these conclusions, we might question the argument for utilitarianism. Or we might argue that acceptance of utilitarianism, properly understood, does not cast doubt on internalism and subjectivism. At any rate, Hume's views about the moral sense are not clearly consistent.

162. The Moral Sense Explains Rightness and Wrongness

If right actions are those that maximize utility, and if the moral sense approves them, we can still ask what makes them right. Are they right because the moral sense approves them? Or are they right because they maximize utility, and does the moral sense approve them because they are right? This question about the direction of explanation is the question that Socrates raises for Euthyphro (about piety and what the gods love) and Cudworth raises for Hobbes (about what is right and what is commanded).⁴⁰

Hutcheson and Hume answer that actions are right because the moral sense approves of them. Right actions are those that maximize utility because the moral sense approves of maximizing utility. The moral sense does not detect some rightness that already exists in actions and people, in the way that a smoke detector detects smoke. The reactions of the moral sense determine what counts as morally right and wrong, in the way that what certain people wear determines what clothes are fashionable in a given year. Just as fashionable clothes are fashionable because certain people wear them, what is right is right because the moral sense approves of it.

According to this view, our feelings of approval are not the content of our moral judgment. Our judgments are about an objective condition—the public good. In this respect, moral properties are not like secondary qualities, as Hutcheson and Hume conceive them. None the less, one might maintain a subjective element in the grounds of moral judgment, if one maintains that action in the public interest is right because it appeals to an impartial spectator. This subjectivist view denies that impartial spectators judge correctly because they detect objective moral rightness. If Hume were to endorse this form of subjectivism about moral properties, he would come close to the combination of objectivist and subjectivist claims that Adam Smith defends in his discussion of moral properties and their relation to moral sentiments.⁴¹

On this point, then, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith agree with a voluntarist account of morality rather than a naturalist account. Do the objections that naturalists urge against voluntarism also apply to sentimentalism? In Chapter 15 we will discuss Balguy's arguments on this question.

⁴⁰ Euthyphro: §27.

⁴¹ Smith on moral sentiment v. moral sense: *TMS* vii 3.3, 321.

163. A Utilitarian Conception of the Moral Sense

Both ancient and mediaeval moralists discuss virtues such as bravery, justice, equity, and so on. Sometimes they speak of the fine (*kalon*), the right (*honestum*), and the common good; but they do not offer any general description of what makes an action right or conducive to the common good. If we identify the good with pleasure or desire-satisfaction, and we say that the right is what maximizes the good, so understood, we have a more precise criterion for the right. In the nineteenth century, Mill calls this account of the right 'utilitarianism'. In the eighteenth century, both Hutcheson and Hume defend the utilitarian doctrine (without using this term) on the basis of their sentimentalist meta-ethics.

Hutcheson and Hume believe that sentimentalism and subjectivism in meta-ethics support utilitarianism in normative ethics. If practical reason cannot tell us what we ought to do independently of our actual desires and aims, the task of normative ethics (which seeks to tell us what makes right actions right) is to find the actions that appeal to our moral sense. But the moral sense approves actions and agents from an impartial, disinterested, and sympathetic view that favours the maximum possible total good for those who are affected. According to Hume, our moral sense takes the 'common point of view', or 'the point of view of humanity', which is also the benevolent outlook. This outlook approves of the actions that promote the public interest, which are the actions that maximize the overall good.

Sentimentalists, therefore, believe that the moral sense endorses these features of the utilitarian outlook:

1. Morality is impartial. It does not aim at the good of some people rather than others, but at the good of all those affected by an action. We do not owe anything to our parents, or children, or friends, benefactors (e.g.), that might result in less total good.
2. Morality is teleological and instrumental. Moral rules and principles are to be followed not for their own sake, but for their causal consequences.
3. Morality assumes a maximizing conception of the end to be achieved. The end is the maximum total quantity of good, however it is distributed.⁴²

Do all these attitudes really belong to the moral sense? Some doubts are worth considering.

164. Is the Outlook of the Moral Sense Utilitarian?

Both Hutcheson and Hume argue from the impartiality of the moral sense to its utilitarian outlook. Hume argues that we need to reach a steady and uniform view that abstracts from the peculiar perspectives of the different observers of an action (just as we need a steady and uniform view of the penny that abstracts from the view of observers in different places). This impartially benevolent point of view considers

⁴² Benevolence and love of one's neighbour: *IMGE* 3.6 = L 231 = R §331.

the overall balance of pleasure and pain that results from an action. Hence it endorses the utilitarian outlook.

Is the moral sense purely benevolent in this way? Even if it approves of benevolence, might it not approve of other things as well? Clarke maintains that some actions seem right and fit in themselves. We seem to approve of keeping promises, of showing gratitude to someone who has helped us, of treating equally deserving cases equally, and so on. We do not consider all the probable consequences of these actions in order to decide whether they are right. Smith is a sentimentalist who agrees with Clarke's doubts on this point. He argues that our moral sentiments are not confined to benevolence, and they do not all appeal to the consequences of the actions that they approve of. Gratitude and resentment, for instance, respond to good and bad features of different situations without reference to the overall consequences.⁴³

Even benevolence may not always favour the action that a utilitarian would approve of. We may admire a spontaneous act of generosity without believing that it will have the best overall effects. We might even believe that it would have been better, from the utilitarian point of view, not to have done that particular benevolent action, but we may approve it none the less.

Even if we approve maximum overall good, is it the only thing we approve? And do we always approve it most? Might we not disapprove of an action because it is unfair, even if it produces a greater good? If, for instance, the police pretend that someone has committed a murder and they secure his conviction and execution, their action may have good consequences; for it may persuade people that a murderer has been punished, they may feel more secure, and society as a whole may benefit. But if the action was unjust, our moral sense may disapprove. Perhaps, then, utilitarian benevolence is not the only thing the moral sense approves.

In Hutcheson's view, non-utilitarian attitudes result from lack of impartiality. They are influenced by a bias in favour of (e.g.) the benefactor who seems to us to deserve gratitude, or the victim who seems to us to deserve justice. Since the genuinely impartial observer has no such biases, these effects of bias do not count against the utilitarian interpretation of the moral sense.

This reply, however, raises a further question about impartiality. Why should it discount the concerns about gratitude, justice, and so on, that seem to inform our moral judgments? Sentimentalists cannot reply that these concerns lead us to false moral conclusions because they conflict with the utilitarian view. Since sentimentalists take our actual moral sense to determine what is morally right, they cannot appeal to facts about right and wrong that are independent of our actual moral sentiments.

If these are good objections to Hutcheson's position, he has to choose between utilitarianism and sentimentalism. If the morally right is essentially what the moral sense approves, but our moral sense is not wholly utilitarian, utilitarianism is false. If, however, utilitarianism is true, the morally right is not essentially what the

⁴³ Clarke on good consequences: §147. Smith on moral sentiments that do not refer to good consequences: *TMS* iv 2.11 = R §§830–3.

moral sense approves, and we have some access to the morally right apart from the moral sense.

165. Hume: The Moral Sense Approves of both Natural and Artificial Virtues

Hume answers some of these difficulties through a more complex account of the relation between the moral sense and utilitarianism.

If our moral sense is moved by sympathy—or, more exactly, by what the impartial but sympathetic observer would feel—the qualities that appeal to this outlook are the virtues. In Hume's view, we value virtuous actions only in so far as they express a virtuous character. But not all the virtues appeal to sympathy in the same way. Hume questions Hutcheson's view that the virtues are all forms of benevolence.⁴⁴

If I consider the outlook of a kind person, I immediately approve of it, because I see that it is directed to the welfare of others. A sympathetic observer readily approves of acts of kindness and generosity in situations where it is easy to see that the agent acts with the intention of benefiting someone and that someone actually benefits. The observer recognizes the kindness of the agent, and approves of the actions as signs of the approved trait in the agent. The traits that immediately appeal to a sympathetic observer in these ways are 'natural virtues'.⁴⁵

But not every aspect of morality belongs to the natural virtues. We may not immediately approve of a just outlook, because some just actions may offend a sympathetic observer. Suppose that Bob has borrowed 500 euros from Ebenezer and has promised to pay it back, Bob needs 500 euros to pay for medicine that will save the life of his son Tim. Ebenezer is so rich he does not need an extra 500 euros. The sympathetic observer approves of Bob's keeping the money. None the less, Ebenezer is within his rights in demanding repayment, and it would be wrong of Bob (Hume assumes) to break his promise to repay. In Clarke's terms, it is right and fit in itself, however regrettable, that Bob pays back what he owes to Ebenezer. In such a case the benevolent observer may not approve of the demands of justice. None the less, Hume asserts, justice is a virtue, and the moral sense approves of it. If we agree with Hume on this point, we might infer that the outlook of the moral sense is not wholly utilitarian.

Hume, however, rejects this inference. He maintains that justice is no exception to his claim that the moral sense approves of maximizing utility. Justice differs from generosity, kindness, and the other natural virtues, by being an 'artificial virtue'. Generous action benefits other people, and therefore appeals to the moral sense; hence generosity is a natural virtue. But since just action often does not benefit other people, it must be a virtue for some other reason. To find this reason, we need to study the artifice in the artificial virtues. If we see both how a system of justice arises, we can see how its effects, once it has arisen, appeal to our moral sense.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Virtue, motive, and character: Hume, *T* iii 2.1.2, 6–7 = R 512–13; iii 3.1.4. Reid's objections: §186.

⁴⁵ Natural v. artificial virtues: *T* iii 3.1.12 = R §551.

⁴⁶ The origins of justice v. the basis of our approval of justice: *T* iii 2.2.1 = R §522; iii 2.2.24 = R §533.

166. Justice Is Not Based on a Contract, but on a Convention for Mutual Advantage

To describe the growth of a system of justice, Hume returns to Hobbes's arguments from self-interest and coordination. In contrast to Hobbes, he denies that government and society require any sort of agreement or promise or contract (Hobbes calls it a 'covenant'). He rejects not only the Hobbesian version of a social contract, but also Locke's version, which relies, as Clarke does, on natural rights. According to Locke, we should understand government and society as a means to preserve and protect natural rights, which provide the moral basis for society. Hume rejects this belief in a natural right that is independent of society.⁴⁷

This disagreement between Locke and Hume about natural rights and the social contract is connected with a dispute about legitimate government. According to Locke, the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, which replaced James II with William and Mary, was justified because James had violated the rights of his subjects, who asserted their rights by deposing him. In Hume's view, such appeals to rights to justify changes of government are worthless. In his view, we can explain all that we need to explain about justice without appeal to independent natural rights. We need to recognize that rules of justice result from our coordination of our actions by conventions without contracts.⁴⁸

If you and I both need to cross a river, and the only available boat is too big for either of us to row alone, and each of us understands this, neither of us will try to row alone. But if we can row the boat together, both of us benefit if we both row. If we are self-interested, we can coordinate our actions by rowing together. These mutually beneficial, coordinated actions result from a convention—the mutual understanding of the two rowers—without any promise or contract.⁴⁹

The use of language, the use of money, and other complex conventions rest on similar mutual understandings. The benefit to each party depends on what the other parties do. Since their conduct is interdependent, each gets the expected benefit if and only if others play their parts.

In some simple conventions, cheating benefits no one; if either of us stops rowing, the boat stops. But when conventions involve more people, and the effects of cheating are less immediate, individuals seem to benefit from cheating. If, however, they cheat too often, the convention breaks down, and all are worse off than they would be if all had maintained the convention.

To prevent the breakdown of such conventions, we need explicit rules and agreements. We are greedy, but we see that our short-term greed may cause us to frustrate our longer-term greed. Hence we agree on rules that restrain our short-term greed. These rules result from a calm passion (our longer-term greed) that moves us to impede violent passions. If we now have a stronger desire (calm passion) to satisfy

⁴⁷ Hume v. natural rights: Sabine, *HPT* 597–604. Contrast Clarke §§144–5; Price §189; Kant §196; Utilitarianism §236.

⁴⁸ Hume and the social contract: Gauthier, 'Contractarian'. See Rousseau §196; Rawls §287.

⁴⁹ Cooperation; cf. Kant §200. Conventions v. promises: *IPM* App. iii 8; cf. *T* iii 2.2.10 = R §528; iii 2.5.1 = R §535.

our future rather than our present greed, we want to do something to safeguard our future prospects, by making it more difficult to satisfy our present greed. This is how prudence is possible, even though reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions.⁵⁰

This mechanism for impeding the present satisfaction of a type of desire in order to secure its longer-term satisfaction explains how we can form governments. We notice that we are prone to cheat because of our short-sighted passions and short-sighted calculation. We take steps to counteract the effects of these traits. Once we have formed a commonwealth (as Hobbes puts it), we benefit from observing the rules of justice, though we would not have benefited from them if we had followed them outside a framework of coordinated action. Government and society secure this framework.

The formation and maintenance of a system of justice, therefore, does not rely on the moral sense. We do not form a system of justice because we care about justice for its own sake, or because we are benevolent. We are self-interested, but we can artificially coordinate our actions. We restrain our short-sighted impulses in order to satisfy our longer-term desires. This artifice makes justice an artificial virtue.

167. Our Moral Sentiment Approves of Justice

Once a system of justice is established, benefits to the public result from the observance of the rules that maintain the system. Since our moral sense approves of the public interest, it approves of a system of justice, of the actions that maintain it, and of the character of those who maintain it. The system engages our sympathetic feeling, so that our approval spreads to particular just actions and rules. When Hume tells us ‘why utility pleases’, he mentions to the sentiment that favours the public good.⁵¹

Here, then, Hume opposes Hobbes’s egoism. He agrees with Hobbes’s view that self-interest and coordination explain how we set up systems and rules of justice. But he does not agree that coordinated self-interest explains our attitude to an established system of justice. Justice is a moral virtue because it engages the sentiment that Hume sometimes calls ‘benevolence’ and sometimes ‘humanity’. This sentiment responds to actions and institutions that promote the public good.

This is an indirect utilitarian account of justice. Within a system of justice, the observance of the rules of property is in the public interest (in Hume’s view), even though a particular act of observance would be against the public interest if it were not part of a system of justice. In the case of Bob and Ebenezer above, the violation of a rule of property would promote the public good (if Bob did not pay back his loan), if the rule were not part of a system of justice. But since this rule belongs to a system of justice, it is better to observe the rule. Therefore our approval of just actions depends on their promotion of the public good.⁵²

⁵⁰ Self-regulating desire: T iii 2.2.14 = R §531. See §152.

⁵¹ Actions and rules: T iii 2.2.24 = R §534. Benevolent sentiment and the social virtues: *IPM* v.

⁵² Indirect utilitarianism; Hobbes §132; Utilitarianism §§237, 243.

168. Our Moral Sentiment Approves of Indirect Utilitarian Rules

Hume, therefore, is an indirect utilitarian about justice. But what sort of indirect utilitarian? He might hold either of two views about why it is right to observe rules of justice:

- (1) Within a system of justice, every just action promotes the public good even though it would not promote it outside a system of justice. Bob's failure to pay back the loan has some good effects (if it saves Tim's life), but since it sets a bad precedent, makes people less willing to make loans, and so on, its overall effects are bad.
- (2) Within a system of justice, general obedience to the rules of the system promotes the public interest whether or not obedience is in the public interest in particular cases. Perhaps no one but Bob and Ebenezer will know about Bob's keeping the money, so that it will not make others less willing to lend money. It might be better, in this situation, to violate the rule of justice. Still, it might be even better to maintain a system that prohibits violations, even those violations that would be in the public interest.

Hume often appeals to cases of the first type, in which the system of justice makes a particular just action promote the public interest. But he sometimes recognizes cases of the second type in which our moral sense responds primarily to the beneficial tendency of the system, and only secondarily to particular just actions that the system prescribes. Sometimes we approve of a generally admirable trait even though it deviates from utility in a particular case.⁵³

These suggestions of Hume's are modified in Adam Smith's account of the moral sentiments and their relation to utility. Smith argues that sentimentalism does not always support utilitarianism. The impartial observer, in his view, admires both self-regarding and other-regarding virtues without reference to utility.⁵⁴ Someone who displays self-sacrificing bravery or public spirit may not be concerned about the consequences of the action. Similarly, our admiration of his bravery is independent of any expected consequences.⁵⁵

None the less, our acting on our moral sentiments tends to promote utility, because of what Smith calls a 'happy adjustment' by nature. Specific moral sentiments take root in society because they tend to maximize utility. Hume's description of conventions and their extension suggests the sort of mechanism that would have the effects that Smith describes. If our following our non-utilitarian sentiments tends to promote utility, and the moral sense approves of this tendency, the moral sense endorses the utilitarian principle as the supreme principle of morality.⁵⁶

⁵³ The benefit of justice: *T* iii 3.1.13 = *R* §551. Non-utilitarian sentiments: Hutcheson, *SMP* ii 2.3, 243–4. *IMAGE* 3.3 = *L* 118 = *SB* 112.

⁵⁴ Contrast Sidgwick's comments on Smith: *ME* 424, 463.

⁵⁵ Bravery: Smith *TMS* iv 2.10–11, 191–2.

⁵⁶ Nature: Smith, *TMS* iv 2.3 (= *R* §832). Cf. Smith's reference to the 'invisible hand': *TMS* iv 1.10 (= *R* §829); *WN* iv 2.9.

Hume and Smith claim to describe the actual character of our moral sentiments. They do not offer rational principles for reforming them. Given their views on reason and passion, no such rational principles can be found. Their claim that our moral sentiments have the consequence—unintended by the individual agents who have these sentiments—of maximizing utility is a claim about the structure and the development of particular societies. Smith tries to defend this claim, and to work out its implications, in his *Wealth of Nations*. This work had a wide influence in political economy, the discipline later known as economics. Sentimentalist moral philosophy is one source of the moral and social theories of nineteenth-century utilitarians.⁵⁷

169. The Sensible Knave Questions the Supremacy of Morality

If Hutcheson and Hume are right about the nature of the moral sentiment and the character of morality, how much does morality matter? In particular, why should we follow it even on those occasions when it seems to conflict with our other aims and preferences?

These questions recall the questions of Glaucon and Adeimantus in Plato's *Republic*. Hobbes asks the same questions through the 'fool' who does not see why he should observe moral principles when he will gain significantly by violating them. Hobbes replies that the fool has good reason, in his own long-term interest, to refrain from self-interested calculation, even in the situations in which he would notice a significant benefit from violating principles of justice.⁵⁸

Hume considers a 'sensible knave' who asks the same questions as Hobbes's fool. The knave agrees that he benefits, as everyone else benefits, from a system of justice that requires observance of the rules of justice. He believes, then, that he benefits if he usually does what an honest person would do. But he believes that he can exploit some exceptions to this rule. He will not endanger the system of justice from which he benefits, but he will break the rules if he benefits without any danger to the system. Why should he not be a knave?⁵⁹

170. Hume: A Sentimentalist Can Give Good Reasons to Care About Morality

The task of answering a critic of morality may seem especially difficult for sentimentalists. Their account of the moral sense and of its relation to moral rightness makes rightness vary according to the character of our moral sense, and gives us more or less reason to follow morality in proportion to the strength or weakness of our unselfish desires.⁶⁰ In Hume's view, these are consequences that we simply have to accept, because the arguments for sentimentalism are compelling. If, then, we have

⁵⁷ Economics: §238.

⁵⁸ Plato's questions: §30. Hobbes's fool: §134. Gauthier, 'Three'; Brandt, *FVM* ch. 10; *MUR* ch. 6.

⁵⁹ The sensible knave: *IPM* ix 22. ⁶⁰ Balguy develops these criticisms. See §181.

stronger or weaker reasons to care about morality according to the strength of our feelings, is morality to be taken seriously?

Hume replies that we ought not to regard morality as unimportant simply because our moral beliefs are not justified by facts about moral reality or about human nature. Unselfish sentiments vary in different people, but in many people they are strong, and they can be strengthened by the approval of those who take them seriously. We need no further assurance that they deserve to be taken seriously.

Hume rejects Hobbes's strategy for answering doubts about morality. Hobbes's dispute with the fool depends on whether the fool or the just person follows the best policy for the satisfaction of selfish desires. Hume believes we have unselfish desires, and that we have no reason to give our selfish desires priority. Virtuous people follow their unselfish desires. They do not even consider the advantages of unjust action, and, if they did consider them, they would never think them worth the cost.

According to Hume, the virtuous person is happier than the knave. Our moral sentiments rest on sympathy, and we do not need to be taught to be sympathetic. We develop moral sentiments by responding to situations that appeal to our sympathy. Since we take pleasure in the exercise of sympathy, we also welcome our tendency to respond sympathetically to other people, and so we welcome the exercise of our moral sentiments. A sense of morals is 'inherent in the soul'; and so, whenever we think about the origins of our moral sense, we welcome the fact that we have this moral sense. Our having this moral sense, then, contributes to our happiness.⁶¹

Is Hume right to maintain that reflexion on the origin of our moral sense will cause us to approve of it? Might such reflexion reveal some unwelcome feature of the moral sense? We might discover, for instance, that it rests on some sentiment that we do not approve of, if we were to find that it arises from fear, or guilt, or from our being deceived by society (as Mandeville supposes), or from resentment of superiority (as Nietzsche supposes). In that case our inquiry into the origins of our moral feelings might turn us against them, because they would rest on emotions that we dislike. Our moral sense would be a source of internal conflict and dissatisfaction.⁶²

Hume answers that our moral sentiments result from emotions and attitudes that we welcome. For this reason our observance of morality does not result in mental conflict and dissatisfaction, but in satisfaction and enjoyment. Morality tells us to act on our sympathetic feelings, and therefore it tells us to do something that we already enjoy doing. If, then, we are virtuous people, the outlook of the sensible knave does not appeal to us. For the moral sentiments he opposes are a source of satisfaction to us; if we listened to him, we would suffer conflict and discontent within ourselves. We are better off, then, if we act on the sentiments that we approve of. We will not be knaves who may betray their bad character to other people.

Honest people enjoy the less expensive and less hazardous pleasures in life, and are satisfied with their own conduct. They do not weary themselves with the feverish pursuit of the expensive and dangerous pleasures that engage the knave. The knave's way of life does not appeal to them, and they do not believe they are missing anything, or have anything to regret, if they fail to get the benefits that require

⁶¹ Happiness and virtue: *IPM* ix 21.

⁶² Mandeville: §153. Nietzsche: §231.

knavery. If we acquire the moral virtues, we can 'bear our own survey', because we approve on reflexion of the attitudes and sentiments that we have formed.⁶³

This is a plausible reply to the suggestion that an honest person practises honesty only reluctantly, and always envies the knave. Callicles, Glaucon, and Nietzsche allege that we have to feel sorry for virtuous people because they suffer from envy, regret, or self-hatred. Hume replies that the sentiments of the virtuous person free us from any regret that we are not knaves.

171. Questions About Hume's Reply to the Knave

These arguments may show that a virtuous person is no worse off than a sensible knave. Do they also show that a knave has reason to regret (even if he does not regret) not being virtuous, and that he is worse off than a virtuous person?

Hume suggests that the knave is liable to suffer from anxiety and self-hatred, because the knave has the attitude that the honest person would have to knavishness. But the knave might disagree. If he is a sensible knave, he does not mind breaking the rules of justice when it suits him. Hence he does not suffer internal conflict and self-hatred if he breaks moral rules. Does he not approve of himself just as much as virtuous people do, both when he follows the rules and when he breaks them?

This answer to Hume assumes that moral sentiments can be trained to be flexible in relation to self-interest. Normally we are repelled by someone's selfish disregard for the good of others, and their repellent attitude arouses our sympathy for their victim. But the sensible knave alleges that the callously selfish person will not find his own attitude repellent.

Hume may reply that moral sentiments are not so flexible. If we have developed them, we cannot simply turn them on and off as we please. A knave who has developed sympathetic responses cannot help but respond to his own callous selfishness by sympathizing with its victims. He will find his knavish actions repellent, and will suffer from self-reproach and self-hatred.

The knave might concede that if he faces the choice between being a virtuous person and being a knave who is virtuous enough to disapprove of his own knavish conduct, he is better off being a virtuous person. But he seems to have another option open to him. Might he not have weak moral sentiments that do not bother him when he sees an advantage in breaking the rules? Though Hamlet's conscience makes a coward of him, other people's conscience may be less sensitive. A knave with an insensitive conscience might apparently be better off than a knave whose conscience is sensitive enough to disapprove of his actions.⁶⁴

Hume seems to recognize this possibility. He acknowledges that our moral sentiments may not always correspond to our moral judgments.⁶⁵ A sensible knave may agree with the judgments of virtuous people without sharing their sentiments. How, then, is he any worse off than a virtuous person? Both virtuous people and knaves may be able to bear their own survey.

⁶³ Inner peace: *IPM* ix 23–5. Cf. Epicurus' defence of justice, §66. Self-approval: *T* iii 3.6.3.

⁶⁴ Conscience: Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III i 83. Cf. Richard III, I iv 116–29 (the murderers). An insensitive knave: Hume, 'Sceptic', end.

⁶⁵ Judgments without sentiments: §161.

15

Rationalism: A Rational Ground for Morality

Butler, Price, and Reid

172. Butler: Nature Is the Basis for Prudence and Morality

The sentimentalist doctrines that we have discussed all maintain that emotions and sentiments are the basis of morality, and that attempts to connect morality with reason rely on indefensible assumptions about the scope and the powers of practical reason. Hutcheson and Hume defend their instrumental conception of practical reason because they reject the view of Clarke (among others) that pure reason can both move us to action and show us what is morally right. In Clarke's view, we can see, e.g., that gratitude is a fitting response to a benefit, and, once our reason grasps this fitness, we act.¹ Hutcheson and Hume answer that both action and morality depend on human nature, not on pure reason. Our actions depend on our passions, to which reason is and ought to be a slave. Similarly, our moral judgments depend on passions and sentiments. A true account of morality does not reveal rational principles of pure reason; it describes the actions and characters that appeal to human nature.

We can begin discussion of rationalist replies to sentimentalism by examining alternatives to Hutcheson's and Hume's views on practical reason. It is useful to begin with Butler because, at first sight, he seems to agree with the sentimentalist starting point. He follows Hobbes, Hutcheson, and Hume by beginning with human nature. But his aim is different from theirs. He sets out 'to explain what is meant by the nature of man, when it is said that virtue consists in following, and vice in deviating from it; and by explaining to show that the assertion is true'. He says that this claim about nature is the view of the ancient moralists, and of the Stoics in particular. A correct account of human nature should explain why morality is worthwhile for each human being.²

Butler agrees with Hutcheson that human nature includes not only self-interested desires, but also moral attitudes, which Hobbes ignores. Hence Butler mentions benevolence, as well as particular passions.³ Hutcheson, however, accepts Hobbes's

¹ Clarke on fitness: §145.

² Virtue and nature: Butler, *Sermons*, Preface (cited as P) §13 = R §375. Stoics on nature: §§69–70.

³ Human nature: Butler, *Sermons* (cited as S), i 6–8 = R §§388–90. Hobbes: P 18–21 = R §378.

assumption that the appeal to human nature is simply the appeal to fundamental desires. Hobbes appeals to self-interest, and Hutcheson appeals to unselfish sentiments. Butler replies that human nature is not primarily a set of desires, but a system or constitution in which practical reason has an essential role that is not subordinate to non-rational passions. The character of the system explains how morality is based on reason.⁴

173. Butler: 'Nature' and 'Natural' Have Three Senses

To explain what he means by 'nature' and 'natural', Butler distinguishes three senses. Some type of action *F* is natural for some species *G* if and only if (1) *F* is in accordance with some natural impulse of *G*; or (2) *F* is in accordance with *G*'s strongest natural impulse; or (3) *F* is required by *G* as a whole, not merely by a part or aspect of *G*. This third sense reveals the role of nature in morality.⁵

The first two senses capture Hobbes's and Hutcheson's appeals to nature. Hobbes looks for an account of human nature that identifies the basic impulses that explain all the movements and tendencies of a human being. If, then, morality is suitable for human nature, it is attractive to us (once we understand it), given our actual desires. Similarly, Hutcheson believes that virtue is natural because it is based on benevolence, one of our natural sentiments. Human nature, in these first two senses, is the aggregate of traits and characteristics that human beings share apart from those they acquire socially.⁶

The third sense of 'nature' connects nature and system. If we understand a system, we grasp both the operation of the whole and the roles of the parts in this operation. We understand a watch, for instance, only if we grasp the contribution of the parts to the ends that belong to the whole. The nature (third sense) of a watch is to tell the time, but it is natural (first sense) for watches to run fast or slow, break down, and so on. The parts constitute some organized whole in which they have different roles. The watch goes against its nature when it is (as we say) 'out of order'.⁷

According to Butler's Aristotelian conception of nature, facts about human nature as a system (third sense) are not about what human beings naturally do (in the first two senses). Aristotle connects a thing's nature with its function, its essence, and the kind that it belongs to. The essence of a natural organism is the whole goal-directed system in which different parts, processes, and activities have functions that maintain the whole. States and processes that are in accord with something's nature as a whole are suitable for the whole system. Our nature constitutes a system in so far as the different parts of it are explained functionally. They work as they do because of their role in maintaining the system.⁸

Some things that are natural (first and second senses) may not accord with a thing's nature (third sense). We have natural tendencies (first and second senses) that need to be restrained because they do not accord with our nature as a whole. If, for

⁴ Further reading on rationalists: §140.

⁵ Three senses of 'natural': P 14 = R §376; S ii 5–8 = R §§398–9.

⁷ The watch: P 14 = R §376. Against nature: S ii 10 = R §400.

⁸ Nature: Aristotle §39; Aquinas §§98–9; Suarez §123.

⁶ Nature: see Mill, 'Nature' 399.

instance, we fall ill, or eat or drink too much, or tire too easily, or exert ourselves too much, we follow natural tendencies, but we act against our nature as a whole.

When we consider our welfare, we try to strengthen some natural tendencies (first sense) and to weaken others, in order to strengthen the natural system (third sense) as a whole. Our judgments about our nature as a whole do not exclude external intervention. On the contrary, medical interventions, such as transfusions of blood or transplantations of organs, may interfere with the ordinary course of nature and may conflict with strong natural tendencies (first and second senses), but they may still be in accord with our nature as a whole. In such cases we assume that we ourselves have aims and interests that are not simply the sum of the motives, desires, and impulses that constitute us. We discover our nature as human beings by seeing how our different elements constitute one system. We grasp this system not by looking at the various motives in themselves, but by considering their relations.

Butler relies on the third sense of 'nature' and 'natural' in his discussion of natural action. If we understand this third sense, we can understand why Paul was right to claim that human beings are by nature 'a law unto themselves'.⁹ The claim means that the requirements of human nature as a whole determine the appropriate basis for morality. Butler supports this claim in two steps. First, he argues that it is natural (third sense) to act in accord with superior principles. Secondly, he identifies two superior principles, self-love and conscience, and argues that conscience is the supreme principle.

174. Butler: Some Choices Are Based on Superior Principles

We grasp the character of a superior principle by reference to the relation between power and authority.¹⁰ According to Hobbes, legitimate authority is simply the power to compel, either physically or psychologically. This claim about authority follows from Hobbes's purely psychological account of reasons, which implies that acting on better reasons is simply acting on stronger desires. Cudworth rejects Hobbes's assimilation of authority to power. Authority still belongs to the lawful government even if a tyrant or a brigand has greater power. The lawful authority has the right to command and we have reason to obey, even if in fact we do not or cannot always obey it. Cudworth uses this contrast to argue that moral rules, since they have authority, are not simply commands.¹¹

Butler agrees with Cudworth against Hobbes. Superior principles have authority, because they move us not by the strength of our desires, but by the reasons that support a particular course of action. We recognize that we have or had a better reason to do *x* rather than *y*, even if our desire to do *y* was stronger.¹²

Sometimes we choose—between red wine and white wine, or between seeing one film and seeing another—simply on the strength of our desires. In such cases we see

⁹ Paul: Romans 2:14 (see §82), which Butler explains in S ii 8–9 = R §399.

¹⁰ Power v. authority: S ii 14 = R §402.

¹¹ Hobbes on reasons and motives: §128. Cudworth: §142.

¹² Strength of desires v. reasons: S ii 16–17 = R §403.

what appeals to us more ('what grabs us'), and we notice which desire is stronger. But sometimes we do not simply consider our actual preferences and desires, but we ask about the merits of different courses of action. Suppose I am angry at someone for having got a job I wanted. At first my strongest desire is to express my anger, but then I see that I have no good reason to attack my rival. I do not simply register the comparative strength of my desires, but I modify their strength by 'reflexion' (as Butler calls it) on the merits of different reactions.

Choices based on reflexion cast doubt on Hutcheson's claim that all reasons simply tell us that some action will satisfy some previous desire. This claim may be true when we simply notice the comparative strength of our desires, but it does not seem to fit reasons that result from reflexion on the merits of different actions. In the latter case we are not asking what we want most, but what we have reason to want most. The resulting desire is the one that has been formed by consideration of relative merits. It claims authority rather than mere strength.

175. Butler: Reasonable Self-Love Is a Superior Principle

Butler believes that reasonable self-love is a superior principle, and that it is natural to act in accordance with this principle.¹³ It is different from the 'particular passions', the desires or emotions that focus on specific external objects. A passion such as anger or fear pursues its objects 'without distinction of the means by which they are to be obtained'. Two passions conflict in cases where the objects of one 'cannot be obtained without manifest injury to others'.¹⁴ Reflexion decides in favour of one course of action by considering which is better.

Rational self-love differs from particular passions because it expresses my concern about the self that includes a number of affections and persists through time. I consider my self when (e.g.) I see reasons to decide against a present passion because of its future effects on me. These reasons embody the interests of my persistent self. When I act on these reasons, I act on reasonable self-love. Since this relies on authority rather than strength, it is a superior principle.

If we act on this superior principle, we act in accordance with our nature as a whole. Our selves are complex and extended in time, and they seek a rational order in our various desires. To be a rational agent who attends to rational self-love is part of the nature of a human being. If we denied this, we would conceive a human being as a mere collection of episodes of desire and satisfaction; but this would not be a conception of genuinely human agency. If I recognize that I am more than a collection of passions, I acknowledge superior principles that rely on authority rather than mere strength.¹⁵

Butler's division between rational self-love and particular passions corresponds to Plato's and Aristotle's division between the rational and the non-rational parts of the

¹³ Butler and Reid use 'principle' (i.e., origin of action) to refer to a motive.

¹⁴ Particular passions: S ii 13 = R §401.

¹⁵ Distinctively human agency: S ii 17 = R §403.

soul, and to Aquinas' division between will and passion. On this point Butler revives the view of the ancient moralists, in opposition to Hobbes, Hutcheson, and Hume.¹⁶

176. Reid: Sentimentalists Underestimate the Functions of Practical Reason

Reid uses Butler's conception of superior principles to answer Hutcheson's and Hume's argument about the limited functions of reason. He argues that rational principles provide motivating and normative reasons. One rational principle moves us to pursue what appears good for us on the whole. Our conception of our good results from reasoning about what is good or bad for us over our life. When we act prudently, and so rely on our conception of our good on the whole, we act according to reason, and reason prevails over passion.¹⁷

In Hume's view, this attempt to connect prudence with reason overlooks the limited practical role of reason. Prudence is reasonable only in so far as it relies on instrumental reasoning, but imprudent action may also rest on instrumental reasoning, and so it may be no less reasonable than prudent action (as Hume argues in his example of the scratching of my finger). Both prudent and imprudent action are equally non-rational, since both depend on a prior non-rational desire for the end to which reason shows us the means. The non-rational desire that underlies prudent action is a 'calm passion' that we do not normally notice. Prudent and imprudent action have the same rational and non-rational antecedents.

But if Butler is right about superior principles, we do not mean what Hume thinks we mean by 'reasonable'. We take a desire to be reasonable to the extent that it is guided by the merits of one action over another, and not by the comparative strength of our desires. A calm passion, like every other Humean passion, is a non-rational desire that moves us to action in accordance with its strength. But prudence relies on rational desires that depend on a superior principle; if we are prudent, we respond not only to the strength of our desires, but also to the merits of different courses of action, and we are moved by authority, not only by strength. Hume's attempt to replace rational desires with calm passions overlooks this difference.

Hume might object that our prudent desires move us only in so far as they are stronger than our imprudent desires, so that we are moved by the strength of desire, not by the comparative weight of reasons. Reid replies that Hume overlooks the difference between 'animal' and 'rational' strength, or (in Butler's terms) between power and authority. We may be initially more inclined to stay at home than to go to a film. But if we reflect on the fact that the film is supposed to be worth seeing, and that this will be the only opportunity to see it, consideration of these reasons produces a desire to go to the film, and we act on the weight of reasons when we

¹⁶ Will v. passion: Plato §28; Aristotle §43; Aquinas §92.

¹⁷ Good on the whole: Reid *EAP* iii 3.1 = HH 153–4 = R §§859–60. Reason and prudence: *EAP* iii 3.2 = HH 154–7 = R §§862–3.

go. If prudence does not rest on purely instrumental reasoning, Hume has not shown that reason is simply the slave of the passions.¹⁸

177. Price and Reid: The Moral Sense Gives Us Knowledge of Objective Moral Properties

We have discussed sentimental arguments for a subjectivist conception of the moral sense. But we noticed in our discussion of Shaftesbury that objectivists may also believe in a moral sense. Both Price and Reid argue that we can believe in a moral sense without being subjectivists about the nature of moral properties. Since belief in the moral sense implies only that moral judgments are immediate, it casts no doubt on objectivism. Price rejects Hutcheson's further claim that moral properties are secondary qualities (as Hutcheson conceives secondary qualities). In Price's view, Hutcheson argues illegitimately from the immediacy of moral judgments, through his conception of a sense, to a subjectivist conclusion.¹⁹

Reid defends belief in a moral sense on objectivist grounds. In his view, Hutcheson and Hume are right to believe that we have a moral sense, but they give the wrong account of a sense. The ordinary five senses give us knowledge because they give us access to objective properties of the world. Similarly, the moral sense gives us knowledge through access to objective moral properties.

Hutcheson and Hume attribute moral judgments to emotion rather than reason, because (according to Reid) they attribute too few intellectual functions to ordinary perception. Our judgments about the features of external objects—e.g., that one sound is loud, another soft, or that synchronous sounds are discordant or concordant—are immediate and reliable. These judgments are not purely sensory states, since they include beliefs that inform us reliably about the objective features of external objects. Similarly, moral judgments and sentiments belong to a moral sense, and result from reason and judgment.²⁰

Hence Hume is wrong (Reid infers) to claim that 'morality . . . is more properly felt than judged of', and that the matter of fact we discover in morality 'is the object of feeling, not of reason'. Moral judgments both cause and justify a feeling of approval, but they are not the feeling itself. They are judgments about the objective qualities of external objects.²¹

178. Reid: Contrary to Hume, Moral Rightness Is Objective

Reid argues that this intellectual conception of the moral sense is supported by familiar features of moral judgment. We normally assume that moral judgments

¹⁸ Animal v. rational strength: Reid, *EAP* iv 4 = HH 216–20 = R §§882–3. Cf. Kant §213. Hume on reason and passion: Reid, *EAP* iii 3.2 = HH 157 = R §864; Mackie, *HMT* 140.

¹⁹ Price on Hutcheson's subjectivism: *RPQM* 14–15 = R 657. Secondary qualities: §154.

²⁰ The senses and judgment: Reid, *EAP* v 7 = HH 348–51 = R §§914–24.

²¹ Hume on morality and feeling: *T* iii 1.2.1 = R §505. Feeling v. reason: Hume, *T* iii 1.1.26 = R §503.

mention a specific type of fact that is the basis for approval. Only some favourable feelings, on certain specific grounds, rest on moral judgments. Moral judgments claim truth and falsehood, and are open to contradiction, but feelings do not seem to be.²²

According to Reid, then, the judgment that an action is wrong is about a property of the action itself. Both the judgment and any resultant feeling in the observer are caused by the wrongness of the action, but they are not part of its wrongness. If ingratitude provokes a true judgment of (say) warranted condemnation in the observer, it has a property that warrants condemnation. This property, not the tendency to provoke condemnation, is the wrongness of the ingratitude.

If Hume were right to say there is neither rightness nor wrongness in actions, we could not understand exercises of judgment such as a judge's assessment of evidence. In Reid's view, the judge tries to discover not only the evidence, but also a further fact—'whether the plaintiff has a just plea or not'. The judge has to decide whether the relevant features of the action—the innocence of the victim, the premeditation of the agent, and so on—constitute wrongness in the action.²³

This may seem an inadequate answer to Hume. Reid appeals to ordinary assumptions about the factual character of moral judgments. But has Hume not shown that these assumptions are mistaken? According to Hume, we can know all the relevant matters of fact about an action without raising a moral question. To show that the moral goodness of an action is not one of its properties, Hume compares moral goodness with beauty. 'Euclid has fully explained all the qualities of the circle; but has not in any proposition said a word of its beauty'; hence moral goodness, like beauty, cannot be a quality of external objects themselves.

Reid answers that Euclid concerns himself only with the geometrical properties of the circle, and does not describe all its properties. Hume's argument assumes, and does not prove, that beauty is not a property of the circle itself. Similarly, Hume's description of a murder does not show that wrongness is not a property of the murder itself; for if his description leaves out the wrongness of the murder, it is not complete.²⁴

To decide whether Hume or Reid is right, we need to ask what would be a 'complete description' of the facts. From the point of view of a physiologist, perhaps a 'complete' description of my bodily movements could be given without saying whether I am driving a car or steering a boat; the same bodily movements might constitute one or the other action in the right conditions. Still, it is a fact that I am driving a car or steering a boat. Similarly, from the point of view of the psychologist who observes the murderer's behaviour, a complete description can be given without mentioning the fact that deliberate killing of an innocent person is vicious. Still, the vicious character of the action might be a fact about it.

These examples suggest that descriptions of the objective facts may be complete for some purposes, but incomplete for other purposes. A description of a murder 'in itself' may be complete for the purposes of an insurance company without

²² Contradiction: Reid, *EAP* v 7 = HH 350 = R §920.

²³ The role of the judge: Reid, *EAP* v 7 = HH 358 = R §936.

²⁴ Euclid: Hume, *IPM* App. i.14 = R 603; Reid, *EAP* v 7 = HH 358 = R §937.

mentioning the moral badness, but incomplete for moral purposes unless it mentions the moral badness. Hume's appeal to a complete description is useless until we know that moral properties are not objective properties; it does not prove that they are not objective properties.

179. Price: Sentimentalists Do Not Understand Moral Properties

Hume has another argument against objectivism. In his view, we cannot show that a moral property such as moral badness is an objective property unless we can give some definition of it. If we are looking for it, it is no help to be told that it is moral badness. But every description other than 'moral badness' seems open to objection. When Hume says we cannot find moral properties in objects themselves, he means that we cannot identify the wrongness of a murder (e.g.) with any of its non-moral features (it was deliberate, it was a homicide, etc.), because any definition in non-moral terms could be questioned.

In Price's view, this argument betrays Hume's false assumptions about whether and how moral properties are definable. A better grasp of how moral properties are and are not definable shows us where Hume is right and wrong. Hume draws attention to an essential feature of moral properties, but draws the wrong conclusion from it.

Following Plato and Cudworth, Price tries to find criteria for correct definitions of moral properties. Just as Cudworth uses these criteria against the identification of morality with divine commands, Price uses them against the moral sense, as sentimentalists conceive it.²⁵

The first criterion emerges from Price's attack on Hobbes's view (as Price interprets it) that moral rightness is conformity to laws (of God, or the magistrate, or custom). Hobbes's view implies that it would be absurd to say that rules and laws themselves are right, because that would imply that the laws themselves are imposed by a further law, and if the question about rightness could be raised again about the further law, an infinite regress would result. But the question that would be absurd if the legislative account were right is not absurd at all, but quite reasonable. Therefore the legislative account is mistaken.²⁶

In this argument Price rejects a proposed definition on the ground that some questions are reasonable that would not be reasonable if the definition were correct. These are 'open questions'. Hutcheson's appeal to the moral sense also leaves open questions: (1) 'Is the moral sense right or wrong?', and (2) 'Is what the moral sense approves of right?' These would not be open questions, if the moral sense theory were correct. But in fact they are open. Hence the moral sense theory is not correct.²⁷

²⁵ Definitions: Plato §27; Cudworth §142.

²⁶ Cudworth on Hobbes: §142. Conditions for definition: Price, *RPQM* 43 = R §675.

²⁷ Open questions: Moore §269. Though it is appropriate to speak of open questions in Price because of the similarity to Moore, the open questions he mentions are 'open' in a sense that is quite different from Moore's. In Price's argument, a question is open if it can reasonably be asked. In Moore's argument a

A rationalist account of virtue as 'acting suitably to the nature of things' (Clarke's view) is also useless as a definition, but for a different reason. According to Price, it presupposes an understanding of what is to be defined. Rightness, fitness, and obligation are all indefinable and 'convey . . . ideas necessarily including one another'. The rationalist account does not create open questions, but it is flawed because we cannot understand the definiens independently of the definiendum.²⁸

We might object that this last criterion for an adequate definition is too strict. We might reasonably try to define F through G, G through H, . . . and so on, and eventually define something through F. If this circle is not too small, we understand these different properties by reference to one another. Price agrees that moral properties are explicable in this way. When he denies that they are strictly definable, he means that they have no 'reductive definitions' (as we may call them) that define moral properties by reference to properties that can be understood wholly independently of them.²⁹

180. Price: Contrary to Hume, We Can Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'

We can now see how Price answers Hume's argument to show that moral facts cannot be facts about external objects. Hume claims that we cannot find any property 'in the object', e.g., in a wilful murder, that is its moral badness. He assumes that if we could find an objective moral property, we could define it in non-moral terms, in a reductive definition. Price replies that moral properties have no reductive definitions.³⁰

Reductively definable properties are not the only real properties. Since reductive definitions cannot go on for ever, some properties cannot be defined reductively; but if no reductively indefinable properties are real, the properties defined in terms of them are not real either. If some real properties cannot be reductively defined, why not admit that moral properties are among them?

Similarly, Hume fails to show that we cannot derive 'ought' from 'is'. When Hume considers 'is' statements, he considers only statements about objective facts that can be described without the use of moral terms. But if some objective facts cannot be described without the use of 'right' or 'wrong', we may legitimately derive an 'ought' from these facts. If moral properties cannot be defined reductively, there are true 'is' judgments about moral properties, but they cannot be replaced by synonymous judgments that include no moral terms. Therefore Hume's argument about 'is' and 'ought' fails.

question is open if it can be asked without self-contradiction. Moore's criterion creates many more open questions than Price's criterion creates.

²⁸ Useless proposed definitions: Price, *RPQM* 125 = R §726. The indefinability of rightness: Price, *RPQM* 105 = R §708.

²⁹ Price does not clearly distinguish nominal from real definitions. See Socrates §15; Plato §27; *Meta-ethics* §§279–80.

³⁰ Reduction: §280.

According to Price, Hume points to a genuine feature of moral properties, but does not grasp the real import of his arguments. Hume believes he proves that there are no objective moral properties, because we cannot find reductive definitions of them. In Price's view, Hume shows that objective moral properties cannot be reductively defined.

181. Balguy: Sentimentalists Cannot Explain the Correction of Moral Judgments

Price's account of moral properties raises doubts about Hume's argument against the objectivity of moral properties. To show that we also have positive reasons to believe in objective moral properties, Balguy and Price argue that sentimentalists cannot explain how moral judgments are corrected.³¹

In Balguy's view, sentimentalism implies that our moral judgments are infallible about right and wrong, because these judgments simply report our feelings of pleasure and pain, and our feelings determine the moral properties of actions and people.³² This is an absurd result, because we think our moral feelings are sometimes mistaken and that they can be corrected. Our pleasure in some people and actions is a sound basis for moral judgment only if the pleasure is appropriate.³³ To decide whether it is appropriate, we need to appeal beyond the moral sense (as Hutcheson conceives it) to further rational reflexion. Hence, the moral sense is not the only source of moral judgments, but it can be corrected by reflexion on whether it accurately represents the properties it purports to represent.

Hutcheson replies that his subjectivist theory allows us to correct the moral sense. We can correct the ordinary senses even though (Hutcheson assumes) sensory properties—colours, sounds, and so on—are not objective properties of external objects, but ideas in the mind of the perceiver. We correct these senses by a comparison with normal and healthy perceivers. What is red, on this subjectivist view, is what appears red to a normal and healthy perceiver.³⁴

Subjectivists understand 'normal' and 'healthy' in a statistical sense, as referring to the usual perceiver, or to most perceivers. We use this statistical conception of normality when we say that jokes are not really funny if they do not normally strike people as funny. We do not suppose that if a joke is really funny, it would still be funny if it amused only a few people. Hutcheson applies this statistical conception of normality to the senses. Since the secondary qualities accessible to the senses are not objective properties of the external objects, the senses can be corrected only in the way in which someone's sense of humour can be corrected.³⁵

But this is not how we usually correct judgments about colours. We take the healthy perceiver to be not the most frequent type of perceiver, but the perceiver who is best at detecting actual redness.³⁶ Even if most people were colour-blind to

³¹ Balguy on Hutcheson: *FMG* i = R §444.

³² More exactly: we are fallible only to the extent that we can misreport our feelings.

³³ Reasonable pleasure: Hutcheson, *IMS* 204.

³⁴ Sensible qualities: Hutcheson, *IMS* 163–4 = R §§371–2.

³⁵ Normality: cf. Schopenhauer §225.

³⁶ This point applies even though we may have different views about what actual redness is.

differences between red and green, red and green traffic lights would still differ in colour. We follow the judgments of those who are better at detecting red and green. Red and green, therefore, are not objects of the senses alone; we have some access to them independently of the senses, and we use this access to correct the senses.

Even if Hutcheson's account of the correction of sensory perceptions were right, it would not fit moral judgments. If we try to correct someone's moral judgment, we try to align it not with the judgment of normal moral agents (i.e., the moral agents who are most often encountered), but with the judgment of good moral agents, on the assumption that they recognize the relevant properties.

If this objection is sound, sentimentalism is open to Cudworth's objections about mutability. If right and wrong depended essentially on our moral feelings, they would change whenever our feelings changed. But if morality were mutable in relation to our feelings, nothing would be morally right or wrong if we lacked sympathetic feelings, and different things would be right and wrong if the objects of these feelings were different. These implications do not fit the character of moral principles, or our reason for accepting them.³⁷

If sentimentalism does not recognize the ways in which our moral sense is corrigible, it cannot grasp the nature of moral obligation and the moral 'ought'. In Hutcheson's view, obligation implies necessity. Since the necessity is not physical, it must be psychological, and so it must refer to a psychological state. According to a sentimentalist, then, I have an obligation to do x (I ought to do x) if and only if I have a motive that inclines me towards doing x. If this analysis of obligation were right, the question 'Ought I to do what my moral sense inclines me to do?' would never be reasonable. But Price objects that it is a reasonable question. When we ask whether we ought to do something, we are not asking about our favourable reactions, but we seek a reason for forming our reactions one way or another.³⁸

This argument uses Hutcheson's argument against theological voluntarism.³⁹ Both Price and Balguy argue that Hutcheson's objections to theological voluntarism and to Hobbes's legislative conception apply to sentimentalism as well. Price argues that unless we recognize objective facts about obligation, we have no reason to recognize obligation. We cannot even explain why our moral sense has any moral force. A sentimentalist can tell us what inclines us to listen to our moral sense, but that answer does not tell us why we ought to listen to it.

182. Price: Sentimentalism, Scepticism, and Nihilism

In answer to critics who believe that he does away with morality, Hume claims to acknowledge the reality of the difference between right and wrong. If 'right' and 'wrong' refer to our feelings about different actions, and our feeling of approval is different from our feeling of disapproval, right and wrong are different.⁴⁰

We may object, however, that this is not all we mean when we speak of the difference between right and wrong actions. We suppose that their rightness and

³⁷ Mutability: Balguy *FMG* i = R 438.

³⁸ Hutcheson on obligation: §157. Price on obligation: Price, *RPQM* 116–17 = R §719.

³⁹ Hutcheson on voluntarism: §153. ⁴⁰ Hume on moral distinctions: §§157–8.

wrongness are real properties of the actions themselves, rather than of how we feel about them. Because some actions are right and some wrong we are justified in feeling approval of the former and disapproval of the latter. If, then, we suppose that our belief that murder is wrong is correct because murder is in fact wrong, sentimentalists have to disagree with us. They have to deny that anything is objectively right or wrong—that is to say, right or wrong independently of seeming so to anyone.

In Price's view, this subjectivism cannot be limited to moral properties. If sentimentalists reject objective rightness and wrongness, they cannot resist parallel arguments against objectivity in general. Then they face the difficulties that follow from scepticism, or nihilism, or subjectivism, about the external world. Protagoras and other ancient philosophers extended subjectivism from ethics to other areas. They were right (Price believes) to suppose that the same arguments are equally good in these other areas.⁴¹ Subjectivists about moral properties deny that facts about right and wrong explain why moral judgments and sentiments of approval are sometimes correct and sometimes mistaken. If these assumptions about the explanatory role of moral properties are misguided, why are the analogous assumptions in other areas not equally misguided?

Later subjectivists about morality have not usually defended general subjectivism; and so they have supposed that their arguments are peculiar to morality. But if Price is right to maintain that the arguments are not peculiar to morality, part of the strategy of later moral subjectivism is misguided.

Sentimentalists, therefore, cannot—in Price's view—take morality as seriously as other people do. For if they reject objective rightness and wrongness, they admit that actions, people, and situations—in themselves and apart from how we react to them—are morally indifferent, and hence neither good nor bad, in their own right. We may have strong feelings about them, but why should we act on these feelings? If we find ourselves with strong feelings, we may decide to try to weaken them, so that we do not care so much about morality. Sentimentalists cannot explain why we would be wrong to do this.

183. Butler: Conscience Is the Supreme Practical Principle

Butler, Price, and Reid agree in rejecting subjectivist sentimentalism. For similar reasons, they also reject utilitarianism. They largely agree about the account of morality that should be preferred to utilitarianism. In their view, the different virtues, and especially those that involve duties to particular people, such as justice, gratitude, and loyalty, cannot be reduced to the general virtue of benevolence, understood in utilitarian terms.

In Butler's view, if morality were explained or justified simply by the presence of a particular desire or impulse or sentiment, the appropriate extent of our concern for morality would be determined by the relative strength of that desire. If, then, we

⁴¹ Global subjectivism: Price, *RPQM* 46–50 (parts in R §§681–3); 53–6; Plato §27; Scepticism §55. Restricted subjectivism: §276.

became less benevolent or sympathetic, we would have correspondingly less reason to take morality seriously. This sort of contingency is plausible for some reasons and aims. If I become more or less eager to visit the North Pole, then I have more or less reason to make plans to visit the North Pole. But the parallel claim about the relation between reasons to be moral and the strength or weakness of my benevolent sentiments is doubtful. We saw that Balguy rejects sentimentalism because it makes moral facts inappropriately mutable.⁴² Similarly, Butler argues that sentimentalists make mistakes about mutability because they do not recognize the role of superior principles.

Butler's view of one superior principle, rational self-love, follows Scholastic views about will and passion, and the antecedents of these views in Plato and Aristotle.⁴³ But he affirms, contrary to these Scholastic views, that self-love is not the only superior principle. The superior principle that guides our different aims and impulses by reference to moral reasons is what Butler calls 'conscience'.⁴⁴ Conscience is not simply a superior principle, but the supreme principle, and therefore superior to self-love. Practical reason is not ultimately about the agent's ultimate end. It is equally found in conscience, which is rational in its own right, and not because it is subordinate to self-love. On this point Butler agrees with Scotus against Aquinas.⁴⁵ He argues that conscience is natural, and to a higher degree than self-love.

Both principles are natural because they rely on authority rather than strength. Self-love relies on authority because it is fair to the different passions and interests that it has to consider. Legitimate government by self-love gives the fair and appropriate place to the special interest that belongs to each particular passion.⁴⁶ If self-love restrains one passion, it justifies this restraint by the legitimate interests of the other passions. Rational self-love is impartial between them, and is not biased by the strength of one particular passion. It governs by authority rather than mere power.

Similarly, conscience deals fairly with the different claims of the different individuals whose interests are involved. It is not biased by partiality to oneself, or by a self-effacing attitude that considers only the desires of other people. It takes an impartial view of all the people whose interests are involved. To ignore the point of view of conscience would be parallel to ignoring some particular passions and interests simply because others are stronger. Just as all the interests considered by self-love have a legitimate claim to satisfaction, so all the people relevant to the decisions made by conscience are real persons with claims equal to my own. If we acknowledge the reality of other people, we ought to consider them from the point of view of conscience. A particular passion has no reason to complain about enlightened self-love. Similarly, particular agents have no reason to complain about their treatment in relation to other people, if the principles of morality are observed.⁴⁷

⁴² Balguy on mutability: §181.

⁴³ Will and passion: §92.

⁴⁴ According to Aquinas, the universal aspect of conscience (*synderesis*) grasps the principles of natural law. See §100.

⁴⁵ Conscience is not subordinate to self-love: cf. Scotus §107. There is no reason to suppose that Butler knew of Scotus' views.

⁴⁶ Legitimate government and superior principles: §174.

⁴⁷ Reasonable objections: §287.

If, therefore, rational self-love is a superior principle, conscience is also a superior principle, because it relies on authority rather than mere power. If we did not take the point of view of self-love, we would ignore the distinction between authority and power, and we would not recognize that we are rational agents. But our nature as a whole includes more than particular passions that refer to ourselves alone. We also regard ourselves as deserving certain kinds of treatment by other people, and not simply as wanting it; hence our nature includes more than self-love. If we did not follow conscience, we would not recognize that people deserve certain kinds of treatment, and we could not reasonably claim that we deserve anything from them.⁴⁸

If conscience is a superior principle because it takes a fair and impartial point of view of the interests of different people, what moral outlook does conscience support?

184. Butler: The Utilitarian Elements of Morality Depend on the Rational Principle of Benevolence

Butler considers the view of Hutcheson and Hume, that the correct moral outlook is the benevolent utilitarian outlook. He argues that the sentimentalist treatment of benevolence as a passion is too simple.

One sort of benevolence is a passion that includes a desire for the good of another person. This sort of feeling is displayed, e.g., in the love of parents for children. The passion of benevolence does not define the outlook of morality. For the passion of benevolence seems to differ in different people; some are more impartial than others, and normal agents do not invariably take the utilitarian point of view. Moreover, since the passion of benevolence is simply directed towards the good of another person without regard to any other rational considerations, some superior principle needs to control benevolence. Sometimes this controlling principle is self-love, and sometimes it is conscience.

But benevolence is also a rational principle that 'is in some degree to society what self-love is to the individual'.⁴⁹ The variations between the benevolent feelings of ordinary agents do not affect what is morally right and wrong according to the rational principle (hence we avoid Balguy's objections about mutability).⁵⁰ An action that will produce more good is right, even if the beneficiaries of it happen to be relatively distant from us (physically, socially, or mentally), so that we do not care as strongly about them as we care about the lesser good that we could produce for people whom we happen to care about more. Rational benevolence, as Butler explains it, accepts the impartial and utilitarian outlook that aims at the good of humanity in general. This rational principle is the only plausible basis of the claim that benevolence is the sum of virtue.⁵¹

This utilitarian view that identifies morality with rational benevolence may be defended by an indirect utilitarian account of some virtues that are, as Butler

⁴⁸ Personality and respect: Kant §215.

⁴⁹ Benevolence: S i 6 = R §388.

⁵⁰ Balguy: §181.

⁵¹ Rational benevolence, love of one's neighbour, the whole of virtue, and the greatest good: Butler, S xii 25–7 = R §425.

recognizes, distinct from benevolence. Some moral virtues, principles, and attitudes do not explicitly consider utility, but our forming these virtues and acting on them may promote utility. We might rely on God's benevolence, as Hutcheson does, to argue that since God has given us our moral sense, the rules endorsed by our moral sense must themselves tend towards the general good intended by God.⁵²

185. Butler: Since Conscience Is Different from Benevolence, Morality Is Different from Utility

Butler argues, however, that even this hypothesis about God does not show that our overall moral outlook is or ought to be utilitarian. Some duties—for instance, fidelity, honour, strict justice—specify moral virtues, but 'are abstracted from the consideration of their tendency' to promote utility. Even if a utilitarian argument can be given for them, it does not capture their moral significance, for we still have good reason to disapprove of injustice (e.g.) without reference to its effects on general happiness. Appropriate self-love is morally good in its own right. Similarly, we have good reason to suppose that God is just, and not merely benevolent.⁵³

To show what utilitarianism leaves out, Butler discusses the connexion between conscience and morality. Approval or disapproval by conscience is not merely a favourable or unfavourable sentiment towards other people. We might feel distressed or upset that someone caused us harm, but we would not make an unfavourable moral judgment about them unless we thought they had intentionally violated some principles that they could reasonably be expected to accept. If we decide to drive the wrong way on a one-way street just to save a few minutes, we might be distressed that we collide with a bus coming round a corner, but we can hardly blame the bus driver for anything. The moral attitudes that belong to conscience are sometimes retrospective, because they attend to what individuals have done in comparison with what they could reasonably have been expected to do. Certain acts are owed to individuals, and agents are praiseworthy or blameworthy for actions or omissions, independently of the effects on utility.⁵⁴

These features of moral judgments separate conscience from benevolence. Benevolence lacks the attitudes about praiseworthiness and blameworthiness that belong to conscience. These attitudes refer to aspects of morality that are distinct from maximizing the general good. Hence some aspects of morality are not utilitarian.

In the light of Butler's explanation of why conscience is a superior principle, we can see why these non-utilitarian attitudes belong to morality. Conscience is fair and impartial, and concerned with what people deserve from each other. These aspects of conscience support the attitudes to blame, responsibility, and justice that consider what people have done and could be reasonably expected to do, and do not consider

⁵² Divine benevolence: Butler, D 8 = R §434.

⁵³ Non-utilitarian virtues: S xii 31n = R §427n. Morally good self-love: P 39 = R §384; D 6–7 = R §433. God is not simply benevolent: Butler, *Analogy* i 2.3.

⁵⁴ Approval and disapproval: Butler, D 1 = R §429. Desert: D 3 = R §431. Non-utilitarian attitudes: D 8 = §434.

the total good that might result from treating them one way or another. The utilitarian concern for the total good does not agree with the features of conscience that make it a superior principle. Hence the rational and benevolent approval of utility is not the same as conscience.

186. Reid: The Moral Goodness of Agents Is Distinct from the Moral Goodness of Actions

Reid supports this case against utilitarianism by criticizing Hume's account of justice. Hume treats justice as an artificial virtue, not a natural virtue; it results partly from Hobbesian self-interest, and partly from indirect utilitarianism. Hume relies on two assumptions: (1) An action is morally good only in so far as the agent does it from a virtuous motive. (2) An agent's motive for doing a just action cannot simply be a desire to act justly. From these two assumptions Hume infers that some consequences of justice must explain why the just agent acts justly and why we admire justice as a moral virtue. The relevant consequences are revealed by Hume's utilitarian account of justice.⁵⁵

Reid rejects Hume's first assumption, that we cannot take any moral attitude to actions apart from the motives of the agents. If an action relieves the sufferings of a person in distress, we rightly approve of it, whatever we think about the agent's motives. Indeed, we approve of motives partly because we approve of the actions that they aim at. Hume speaks indiscriminately of 'the goodness of an action' and 'the virtue of an action', but Reid distinguishes the goodness of an action from the virtue it displays, which is the goodness of an agent.⁵⁶

Hume's second assumption—that there must be some motive for just action apart from the sense of its morality—is also open to question. If just action consists in equal distribution between equally deserving recipients, we cannot aim to do just actions without some idea of equal distribution and a deserving recipient. Perhaps a just person is concerned about fair distribution for its own sake, and not because of some further benefit. If so, we do not need a further, non-moral motive for caring about fair distribution.

For these reasons, then, we might doubt the assumptions that underlie Hume's inquiry into justice.

187. Reid: Justice Does Not Depend on Utility

Hume's account of justice relies on two claims: (1) Our belief that some things are just and that just action is obligatory depends on the existence of rules or conventions that are in everyone's selfish interest. (2) Our beliefs about which actions are just and about why just actions are obligatory depend on the belief that just actions promote utility. In Reid's view, both claims are mistaken.

⁵⁵ Hume on action and motive: §165. Hume on justice: §166.

⁵⁶ Reid on actions and motive: *EAP* v 4 = HH 298–9 = R §§900–1. Cf. Aristotle §43.

When Hume argues that justice is an artificial virtue, he has both these claims in mind; for it is difficult to give a convincing utilitarian account of justice (as in (2)) unless we can tie principles of justice to rules and conventions (as in (1)). Hume argues that, while the utilitarian benefits of benevolence are evident, it is not so easy to see the utilitarian benefits of justice. To explain why justice engages our moral sentiments, we need to appeal to the effects of a system of rules.

Reid replies that our sense of justice does not depend wholly on conventions and rules. Hume concentrates on only two areas of justice, about property and contracts. But he ignores the areas of justice that are concerned with injuries to one's person, family, liberty, or reputation. Our belief that one person owes something to another in specific circumstances underlies elementary moral sentiments of gratitude and resentment.⁵⁷

These aspects of justice do not depend on any Humean convention. If you do a good turn for me at some cost to yourself, and I refuse to do one for you in return when it costs me very little, I fail to do something you can reasonably expect from me as a matter of fairness and justice. I owe you this return of benefits apart from any convention about reciprocal benefit. Gratitude is appropriate only if people do us favours beyond what they owe us, and resentment is appropriate only if they fail in something that they owe us. Our sense of what is owed and due to us does not depend wholly on rules and conventions.

For similar reasons, we care about fairness and reciprocity outside the circumstances to which Hume wants to confine justice. If, for instance, conditions of great scarcity require the suspension of ordinary rules of justice and property, this suspension is warranted if it is just and fair in the circumstances. Similarly, principles of justice apply to the conduct of war, though different actions are just in war and in peace.⁵⁸

These sentiments about justice show that not all our moral sentiments and convictions are utilitarian. Reid concludes that Hume is open to the objection raised against the Epicurean system, that it 'was justly thought . . . to subvert morality, and to substitute another principle in its room'.⁵⁹

188. Price: Indirect Utilitarianism Is No More Plausible than Indirect Egoism

If utilitarians grant that some of our moral sentiments are not about utility, they can say one of two things: (1) A utilitarian can explain them, because they strengthen our attachment to the courses of action that promote utility. Though justice often appears to conflict with utility, it has a utilitarian basis.⁶⁰ (2) Since our moral sentiments have no utilitarian explanation, we should reject them.

⁵⁷ Reid on Hume's conception of justice: *EAP* v 5 = HH 306–7. Justice and reciprocity: *EAP* v 5 = HH 309–11.

⁵⁸ Justice in peace and war: §144.

⁵⁹ Non-utilitarian elements of justice: *EAP* v 5 = HH 309–24. Contrast Mill §243. Reid on Epicurus and Hume: *EAP* v 5 = HH 302–3.

⁶⁰ Hutcheson on justice and utility: *SMP* i 11.2, 222; *IMGE* 7.8 = L 186 = SB 180.

An opponent of utilitarianism, therefore, has to show that some of our moral sentiments cannot be explained on indirect utilitarian grounds, but we have no reason to give them up. Price argues that Butler's objections to utilitarianism are sound, and utilitarians cannot accommodate them.⁶¹

Price compares an indirect utilitarian defence of morality with an indirect egoist defence. Hobbes seems to accept both indirect utilitarianism and indirect egoism. The indirect analysis avoids implausible claims about the explicit content of particular moral judgments, but still asserts that the egoist or utilitarian outlook regulates them. An indirect egoist has good reason to cultivate moral attitudes that do not explicitly aim at one's own advantage, because unselfish attitudes are justified and supported by consideration of our own advantage.⁶²

Hutcheson and Hume reject indirect egoism. In their view, we approve actions and attitudes unselfishly. Our moral approval is not concerned with our own advantage, even if considerations of advantage support it. If things changed so that our moral approval did not work to our advantage, our moral approval would not change. This counterfactual argument shows that considerations of advantage do not determine our moral approval.

But if we reject indirect egoism on these grounds, ought we not to reject indirect utilitarianism on parallel grounds? A defence of indirect utilitarianism needs to show not only that moral attitudes tend to maximize utility, but also that their basis is utility. When we consider the moral reasons that actually matter to us, we may doubt whether indirect utilitarianism captures the basis of our moral outlook.

189. Price: Utilitarian Reasons Are Not the Only Moral Reasons

In Price's view, an examination of our moral reasons shows that utilitarianism, either direct or indirect, is too simple. Even if we are unsure about the effects of a particular action or rule on overall utility, our uncertainty does not necessarily make us uncertain about whether it is right or wrong. In some cases we think it is right to distribute benefits to the deserving and not to the undeserving. Beneficial effects matter, but other things matter as well; for we would still favour distribution according to desert even if we did not consider the utilitarian effects.⁶³

The indirect utilitarian maintains that if we understand how moral rules (or motives, or traits of character) indirectly promote utility, we will agree that we ought to endorse these rules only in so far as they promote utility. Price casts doubt on this utilitarian claim by drawing attention to rights. We suppose that people have rights that do not depend on utility; but the aggregative aspects of utilitarianism rule out such rights. Utilitarianism treats questions about distribution

⁶¹ Butler's cases are 'clear and decisive': Price, *RPQM* 131–2. The utilitarian error: *RPQM* 136 = R §731. Price's pluralism: Sidgwick §256.

⁶² Indirect utilitarianism and egoism: Hobbes: §133.

⁶³ Utilitarian explanations of moral judgments: Price, *RPQM* 134–5 = R §730. Desert: *RPQM* 80–1 = R §696.

of happiness among different people as though they were parallel to questions about distribution within a single person.⁶⁴

Utilitarians defend this attitude to distribution as an aspect of the impartiality of morality. But many non-utilitarians, including Price, agree that morality is impartial. They agree, for instance, that doctors ought to be impartial between different patients with the same needs, and ought not to prefer the richest, or most intelligent, or those most like themselves. This sort of impartiality does not seem to require a maximizing strategy.

If impartiality does not support a maximizing utilitarian outlook, utilitarianism needs some different support. The utilitarian assumes that it does not matter who benefits, or how many benefit, as long as the largest total benefit results. Price's argument about distribution casts doubt on that assumption. If utilitarians aim at the largest total, they are willing to sacrifice some people simply to benefit others. We might be unwilling, however, to starve a few people to death simply because other people will benefit more from the resources that would have kept the few people alive. The mere fact that more people benefit may not seem decisive.

Even if we were willing to let one person die to keep three other people alive, we would not yet accept the utilitarian principle; for utilitarianism does not guarantee that the best action will benefit more people. As Hutcheson agrees, concern with maximizing the good may sometimes require us to harm many people for the sake of a larger good that is concentrated in a few people. It is easiest to see this point if we identify the good with pleasure, and we assume that quantity of pleasure can be measured in units. Suppose, then, that the first option open to us will result in each of 10 people gaining 5 units of pleasure, so that we create 50 extra units. But suppose that the second option will result in each of 5 people gaining 11 units of pleasure, so that we create 55 extra units. In that case, the utilitarian favours the second option even though it benefits fewer people. In such cases we might doubt the utilitarian conclusion.

These 'utilitarian nightmares' are not meant to be likely results of accepting utilitarianism.⁶⁵ They are meant to make it clear that, as Price observes, the only moral question for a utilitarian is how to achieve a higher total utility. Price replies that this is not the only moral question. Recognition of the distinct rights of distinct persons implies that questions of justice and fairness are not questions about utility.

190. Price: There Is No One Supreme Principle of Morality

Perhaps, then, a utilitarian cannot defeat all objections by appeal to indirect utility. But does this matter? We might distrust intuitive judgments about the rightness of non-utilitarian rules. If we cannot defend our views about justice, say, by appeal to some more basic and comprehensive principle, why should we take them seriously?

⁶⁴ Rights: *RPQM* 159; Mill §244; Rawls §292. Political implications: §§196, 236. Persons and distribution: *RPQM* 160; Kant §208.

⁶⁵ Nightmares: §§237, 291.

Price replies that utilitarians need to rely on an intuitive belief in the rightness of the utilitarian principle, and that they need to treat this belief not only as intuitive (i.e., not explicitly based on an articulated theory), but as also as an intuition (i.e., known without any inferential justification). Since utilitarians suppose that their principle is not simply the best explanation of our moral judgments, but a basic principle that we know to be true, and in the light of which we can correct our other moral judgments, they treat it as an object of intuition. But if the principle of utility is grasped by intuition, it is arbitrary to accept only one principle on the basis of intuition. Several other principles are no less strongly supported (in Price's view) by the sort of intuition that recognizes the truth of the utilitarian principle. We find that irreducibly different moral principles and 'heads of virtue' rest on equally firm foundations.⁶⁶

As Price sees, this pluralism allows the possibility of moral conflicts and dilemmas, if the requirements of two virtues cannot both be satisfied in the same situation. To reach a correct moral judgment about what to do in a particular case, we may need to consider all the principles that are relevant to its rightness or wrongness of this action. Conflicts between the implications of different principles do not necessarily undermine Price's intuitionism. Even if some particular cases are difficult to decide, the principles may still be clear.⁶⁷

But some conflicts raise a question about Price's belief in these different intuitions. The demands of justice and benevolence may sometimes seem to conflict, if my goodwill towards you makes me want to benefit you unjustly. But sometimes it seems clear that we ought not to confer a trivial benefit at the cost of some great injustice. We have some idea of the moral reasons that underlie both justice and benevolence, and we can give some argument to justify the conclusion that we reach in this case. We can sometimes identify situations where the public interest or some other moral consideration ought to override. We can identify them partly because we have some conception of the moral reasons that underlie both our concern for the public interest and our concern for other duties.⁶⁸

Could we argue in this way if Price's theory were right? If we can argue about when and why the public interest ought or ought not to override considerations of justice or friendship, we seem to have some view about the relations between these principles. If our moral judgments rested on several independent principles grasped by intuition, would we have the capacities for moral reasoning that we apparently exercise in comparisons between principles? Some moral reasoning suggests that Price's different 'heads of virtue' are interdependent.

⁶⁶ Intuitive judgments v. intuition: §§240, 254. The need for intuition: Price, *RPQM* 98 = R §704; Ross, *FE* 82–3; Sidgwick §239; Ross §284. Intuitionism in Price and Ross: Stratton-Lake, 'Intuitionism'. Heads of virtue: *RPQM* 165–6 = R §745.

⁶⁷ Difficult cases and self-evident principles: Price, *RPQM* 168 = R §746.

⁶⁸ Preference for the public good: Price, *RPQM* 153 = R §737.

191. How Rationalism Casts Doubt on Utilitarianism

Rationalist arguments raise questions about the utilitarian views that Hutcheson and Hume defend on sentimentalist grounds. Just as sentimentalists believe that their account of moral judgment supports utilitarianism, rationalists believe that their account of moral judgments supports a non-utilitarian and pluralist account of moral principles. Reid, Butler, and Price argue that moral judgment appeals to rational principles that cannot be reduced to sympathetic feelings. Consideration of these principles shows that moral judgment is more complex and discriminating than it would be if utilitarianism were correct. We attach some moral weight to considerations of overall good, but we also care about kindness, justice, loyalty, and fairness in their own right, even when they might conflict with utility. Hence the sentimentalist conception of morality is too simple to fit our moral judgments.

Utilitarians might answer in different ways:

- (1) They might defend the meta-ethical basis of sentimentalist utilitarianism, and refute rationalist objections to a sentimentalist account of moral judgment.
- (2) They might agree that morality consists of rational principles, but argue that all other rational principles are subordinate to the principle of utility.
- (3) They might agree that the rationalist and pluralist account of morality fits our moral judgments better than the utilitarian account fits them, but argue that our non-utilitarian convictions are mistaken, and our utilitarian convictions are more reliable.

We will trace some of these replies in later utilitarians. Mill shows some sympathy with the first answer. Sidgwick rejects it, and argues for a rationalist utilitarian position that combines aspects of the second and third answers.⁶⁹

192. Butler: We Have Good Reason to Care About Morality

A rationalist has to face Hume's question about why we should care about morality. Hume asks this question from the point of view of the sensible knave. He defends morality against the sensible knave by arguing that virtuous people will not want to change places with the knave. But we have seen that it is difficult for Hume to deny that the same is true of the knave in relation to virtuous people. This apparent equality between the virtuous person and the knave is a result of Hume's sentimentalism, and in particular of his view that no one has a reason outside their own sentiments and feelings for accepting or rejecting morality.

Butler offers an alternative to Hume's discussion with the knave. In his view, we have a reason to care about morality because morality is natural. This is not a purely self-interested reason. But once we understand why morality is natural, we can see that we also have a self-interested reason to endorse morality.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ross revives Price's critique of utilitarianism, in *RG*. See §§284–5.

⁷⁰ Butler writes before Hume, but argues against Shaftesbury, whose views are similar, on this point, to Hume's.

Both self-love and conscience are superior principles, and we act in accord with our nature in so far as we act on either of them.⁷¹ But conscience is superior to self-love, and is therefore most in accord with our nature. One principle is superior to another to the extent that it relies on reasons rather than on strength of desires, and takes account of the relevant considerations. By this standard, rational self-love is superior to particular passions, and conscience is superior to self-love.

Butler faces the objection that morality conflicts with human nature. The objector points out that, according to Butler, rational self-love is natural, but morality requires benevolence, which sometimes conflicts with self-love, and therefore requires us to act against our nature. This is Hobbes's view about the state of nature; he argues that in order to remove the conflict between morality and one's nature, one must be in the circumstances in which benefiting others also benefits oneself. Butler argues that Hobbes is wrong.

193. Butler: Not All Our Actions Aim at Our Own Pleasure

Hobbes believes (according to Butler) that it is psychologically impossible—not merely foolish—to act contrary to one's conception of one's own interest. He identifies one's own interest with one's own pleasure, and he believes that all our desires and actions aim at our own pleasure. Butler replies that each 'particular passion'—hunger, thirst, revenge, gratitude, and so on—aims at its own proper object (being fed, having thirst relieved, etc.). It does not aim primarily at the pleasure that results from achieving the object.⁷²

Hobbes's view, therefore, cannot explain why we take pleasure in some objects rather than others. We can explain this only if we assume that we already desire some objects for their own sake, and not because they are pleasant to us. We take pleasure in achieving these objects because we take pleasure in achieving things that we desire for their own sake.

Some pleasures illustrate Butler's point. Suppose I am eating a meal that I believe you have cooked for me. I might take two sorts of pleasure in eating it: (1) It might be tasty. (2) I might take pleasure in eating something you have cooked for me. If I discover that you really brought in the food from a fast-food outlet, and did not really cook it for me, I still have the first sort of pleasure (since it is still tasty), but I no longer have the second sort (since my belief was false). The second type of pleasure is belief-dependent, but the first is not. Butler's analysis contradicts psychological hedonism, because it implies that some desires pursue objects distinct from pleasure.⁷³

This attack on psychological hedonism answers one of Hobbes's reasons for believing that disinterested motives are against nature. But Butler needs some further argument against the claim that morality conflicts with self-love.

⁷¹ Superior principles: Butler, S iii 9 = R §409.

⁷² Hobbes on motives: §128. Mandeville and Hutcheson: §152. Particular passions: S xi 6 = R §415.

⁷³ Pleasure and its object: Aristotle §45; Epicurus §65; Sidgwick §247.

194. Butler: Benevolence and Conscience Do Not Conflict with Self-Interest

In Butler's view, anyone who maintains that benevolence necessarily conflicts with one's own interest has misunderstood the relation of particular passions and superior principles in human nature. Self-love is a superior principle that reflects on the particular passions and supervises them. Morality requires benevolence, and benevolence requires concern for others even contrary to my private interest—that is to say, contrary to the passions that are entirely self-centred. But benevolence does not conflict with self-love.⁷⁴

Since self-love is a superior principle, it orders and harmonizes different motives and impulses for the sake of the whole system of one's nature. Hence it sometimes restrains particular passions that cause harm. But self-love allows some satisfaction of particular passions; for without them, nothing would constitute our self-interest. The good of the whole self, therefore, requires the appropriate satisfaction of these passions. Our desire for, say, food, or physical security, or other people's esteem, may go to excess, if it frustrates our other aims. But we have no reason to reject it altogether. Similarly, if we have a benevolent desire for the good of others, our good consists partly in the satisfaction of that desire, no less than in the satisfaction of our other desires. Hence benevolence and self-love do not conflict.⁷⁵

Further questions arise, however, from Butler's conception of morality: (1) The benevolence that belongs to morality is not simply a passion, but a rational principle. If it demands more self-sacrifice than the passion of benevolence demands, does it conflict with self-love? (2) If morality includes more than benevolence, do its demands conflict with self-love?

A clearer understanding of morality helps us to answer these questions. Non-utilitarian morality, as Butler understands it, endorses some aspects of self-love. It is blameworthy to be too little concerned for one's own good and too ready to sacrifice it to the good of others.⁷⁶ Someone who has proper self-concern will refuse to sacrifice the interests of one person simply to promote the greater good of others. Moral limits on unrestricted maximizing protect legitimate self-concern against demands for self-sacrifice. This aspect of morality does not conflict with nature, since it protects the natural requirements that concern self-love.

Other aspects of morality go beyond what self-love, all by itself, requires. But they do not conflict with self-love. Self-love endorses everything that belongs to one's nature as a whole; hence, since conscience is natural, self-love endorses conscience. In Butler's view, the recognition of character and responsibility, and the correlative recognition of desert are not only essential elements of the moral point of view, but also essential elements of human nature.⁷⁷ If we did not evaluate ourselves and other people from the point of view of conscience as well as self-love, we would overlook an essential feature of ourselves. If we fulfil our nature as a whole, we follow conscience as well as self-love, and we recognize the supremacy of conscience.

⁷⁴ Morality and nature: S iii 2n= R §404.

⁷⁶ Morality and self-sacrifice: D 6 = R §433.

⁷⁵ Benevolence and self-love: xi 11 = R §419.

⁷⁷ Responsibility and desert: D 2–3= R §§430–1.

195. Butler: Self-Love and Conscience Agree

We saw earlier that Butler agrees with Scotus against Aquinas in his acceptance of two distinct superior principles—rational self-love and conscience—and in his claim that conscience is rationally supreme. But he follows Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas in believing that morality and self-love agree. Though we would have sufficient reason to follow conscience even if it clashed with self-love, it is still reasonable to ask why it is our interest to follow conscience.⁷⁸

Self-interest is not the appropriate motive for virtuous action, because virtue consists in ‘affection to . . . what is right and good, as such’. The authority of conscience does not depend on self-love.⁷⁹ But even if we were to concede—falsely, in Butler’s view—that self-love is the supreme principle, we would still have good reason to follow conscience.

Enlightened self-love endorses benevolence, because self-love aims at the satisfaction of my nature as a whole, and my nature includes my benevolent aspects. If I am concerned about the good of other people for their own sakes, the satisfaction of this concern is just as much part of my good as is the satisfaction of my self-confined desires. Similarly, then, the fact that conscience sometimes limits the satisfaction of my desires in the interest of other people does not make morality contrary to my interest. On the contrary, it is part of my nature to regard myself as deserving certain kinds of treatment from other people. Since I take this view of myself and others, my self-interest requires me to act in ways that manifest this attitude of mutual respect. Self-love seeks the fulfilment of my nature as a whole; my nature includes the outlook of conscience; therefore, enlightened self-love endorses conscience. Though Butler recognizes these two superior principles, he does not believe that they create the sort of conflict that Sidgwick later describes as a ‘dualism of practical reason’.⁸⁰

This harmony of self-love and conscience supports Butler’s claim that it is natural to follow conscience. A conflict between self-love and conscience would imply that two superior principles tend to impede, or even to undermine, each other. Human nature might form a system under the guidance of self-love, and another system under the guidance of conscience, but if the two systems tended to clash, we might wonder whether they constitute a single system.⁸¹

Butler’s conception of rational self-love presupposes a conception of one’s own good that is closer to the Aristotelian conception of *eudaimonia* than to Hume’s conception of happiness as contentment and subjective satisfaction with oneself. Butler’s answer to the questions that are raised by Glaucon and Adeimantus in the *Republic*, by Hobbes’s fool, and by Hume’s knave, is not the eudaemonist answer defended by the Greek moralists, but it relies on the central elements of that answer.

⁷⁸ Legitimate appeals to self-interest: S xi 20 = R §423.

⁷⁹ Our reason to follow conscience: S iii 5 = R §406.

⁸¹ Nature as a system: S iii 2n = R §404n.

⁸⁰ Dualism: §259.

16

Kant and Some Critics

196. Critique, Enlightenment, Rousseau

Kant published his first major philosophical work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in 1781, when he was 57. Until then his philosophical views had generally followed the German rationalists Leibniz and Wolff. But the *Critique of Pure Reason* was the first of three Critiques that go beyond rationalism and empiricism, to present his Critical Philosophy.

Kant explains the title of the First Critique, and his Critical Philosophy more generally, by saying that the present age is an 'age of criticism'. He responds to the demands of contemporary society and contemporary thought for thorough criticism through 'free and public examination' by reason.¹ The demand for the free and public use of reason expresses the outlook of 'enlightenment', which frees us from the 'immaturity' that is 'inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another'. Enlightened thinkers 'disseminate the spirit of a rational valuing of one's own worth and of the calling of each individual to think for himself'.²

Kant believes that an enlightened approach to the free and public use of reason leads us to accept principles that we have examined for ourselves, and have not simply accepted on authority. If our critique succeeds, we accept principles for reasons of our own. In this respect we may claim to be autonomous inquirers; we give ourselves the law, since we do not simply take over a law given by someone else. And we give our own law, since it is a law that we accept for our own reasons, not because we simply go along with someone else. This idea of autonomy underlies Kant's practical philosophy.

Some of Kant's contemporaries argued that the free and public use of reason requires criticism of existing societies, and radical reforms on the basis of rational principles. Critical reason was applied especially to the institutions and practices of eighteenth-century France, governed by an absolute monarchy. Rational criticism refused to accept tradition, antiquity, or established custom as good enough reasons for preserving the monarchy, the existing system of taxation, or the established laws on crime and punishment. All of these institutions and practices could be replaced

¹ Free criticism: *KrV* Axi. All references to Kant cite the marginal pages (from the standard German edition) given in translations. Many of Kant's works are conventionally cited by abbreviated German titles (see Bibliography).

² Kant, 'Enlightenment', in Kant, *PP* 35–6. Social thought in the Enlightenment: Whatmore, 'Enlightenment political philosophy', *OHPP*, ch. 18.

with something better. Price supported the American and French Revolutions because they defended the human rights that were violated by the previous regimes.³ The French Revolution claimed to rest on a 'Declaration of the Rights of Men and Citizens'.

Kant enthusiastically supported the ideals of the French Revolution, as Rousseau expresses them in his interpretation of the social contract. Rousseau rejects Hobbes's view that we need a social contract to bring us out of the state of nature, because we need stability and security. Hobbes supposes that the social contract is the work of self-interested agents who see that they need to limit their freedom for the sake of security. According to Rousseau, Hobbes misses the point of a social contract, because he does not see that the only legitimate social contract is the one that preserves freedom. In this sort of contract, an individual 'uniting himself to everyone, none the less obeys only himself and remains as free as he was before'. A legitimate state preserves, and even increases, freedom by imposing morality.⁴

197. From Enlightenment to Morality

We might question these extravagant claims about inalienable human rights and about contracts that appear to restrict freedom but really preserve it. Price's claim to know by rational intuition that human beings have these rights might not seem immediately convincing, and Rousseau's claims about binding ourselves in order to be free may seem to deny obvious facts. Should we not admit, as Hobbes does, that society limits freedom, and ask whether the price is worth paying?

Kant replies that Price's and Rousseau's claims rest on a philosophical basis that we can discover if we reflect on the character of theoretical and practical reason. His major works are 'critiques'—i.e., critical examinations—that examine the powers and limits of reason in its various functions. In Kant's view, both rationalists and empiricists have failed to see that they need a critical examination of reason. They take for granted the ability of rational intuition or sensory experience to yield knowledge of the world. The neglect of a critical examination has given the false impression that the empiricism of Locke and the rationalism of Leibniz are the only viable options.⁵

Kant was woken from his 'dogmatic slumbers' by Hume's sceptical criticism of both reason and experience. He believes that Hume's scepticism also suggests an answer to scepticism. Though Hume claims that neither reason nor experience yields knowledge, he grants that we have reason and experience. Kant argues that if we carry out a critical examination of the character and presuppositions of reason and experience, we discover that we would not have reason and experience unless we had

³ Price: §189.

⁴ Rousseau and the French Revolution: Cobban, *RMS* chs. 1–2. Rousseau, the social contract and freedom: *SC* i 4.6; 6.4; i 8.1. See Beck, *EGP* 489–91. Different uses of the social contract: §§130, 145, 166, 230, 287.

⁵ Empiricism and rationalism: §§148–9. Predecessors whom Kant has in mind include Crusius (see *S* 568–85), Leibniz (*S* 313–30), and Wolff (*S* 331–50). See Schneewind, *IA* chs. 12, 21–2.

knowledge of an objective world—the sort of knowledge that Hume denied. Since we have reason and experience, we have knowledge of an objective world.

Similarly, a critical examination of the character and presuppositions of rational agency shows us that to be a rational agent is to have good reasons to accept the basic principles of morality. Morality rests on principles founded in practical reason, not in non-rational impulse. A rational agent is essentially a free agent, because freedom consists in guidance by the rational will and not simply by inclination. Since the will is essentially rational, freedom of the will consists in guidance by practical reason. Hence legislation for oneself through practical reason guarantees freedom. If free practical reason requires morality, morality realizes the freedom of the rational agent. Morality, therefore, is neither a set of arbitrary conventions with no rational basis, nor a collection of rules whose application appeals to our sentiments, nor a device for promoting social harmony. Rousseau's ideal of a community of free citizens who maintain and exercise their freedom is justified by a true account of morality and freedom.

This approach to morality and the critique of reason aligns Kant with the rationalist critique of sentimentalism. But he does not believe that rational intuitions, as Balguy and Price understand them, give a satisfactory basis for moral knowledge. Rationalists tend to reject utilitarianism and to recognize an irreducible plurality of principles, each of which is equally ultimate and therefore cannot be further supported by argument, but is simply an object of rational intuition. This intuitionist treatment of moral principles may appear to rely on dogmatism and prejudice. Kant believes, however, that he can avoid the errors of his predecessors. In moral philosophy as in epistemology he believes he has found a new point of view that rejects the mistaken presuppositions that lead to rationalism and empiricism. Rationalists tend to reject utilitarianism and to recognize an irreducible plurality of principles, each of which is equally ultimate, and, for that very reason, cannot be further supported by argument. They accept an 'intuitionist' epistemology of moral principles, and their appeal to intuition may be found difficult to separate from mere dogmatism and prejudice.⁶

Kant believes he can explain the role of reason in morality without these unconvincing appeals to intuition. In his view, once we understand the rational basis for morality, we can also grasp the content of morality. We might find this claim surprising. If, for instance, we simply know the rational basis of scientific theories—that (say) they are found by observation and inference—we do not thereby know any scientific theories. But Kant believes that moral knowledge is different. In his view, the only principle that practical reason can correctly accept is a principle that treats rational agents as ends in themselves.

In the light of this claim, Kant argues, we can see that objections to utilitarianism do not simply rest on the groundless conviction that something is wrong with the implications of the utilitarian principle. We see that the utilitarian principle could never be accepted as a universal law by rational agents. Reflexion on rational agency does not allow us to do without consideration of the empirical consequences of our

⁶ Intuitionism: §§190, 254, 285–6.

actions; but it tells us enough to show us what sorts of consequences are relevant to morality.

This claim of Kant's to derive the content of morality from features of rational agency is not new. We could use the same terms to describe the aims of Aristotle and Aquinas, since they also try to explain the human good and human virtues by reference to human nature. Kant's argument is different, however, since he does not take the basic feature of rational agents to be their pursuit of their own good. In his view, rational agency is impartial. When we take the rational point of view, we abstract from our own peculiarities and attend to what we have in common, simply as rational agents. On this basis, Kant agrees with Scotus and Butler rather than Aristotle.

198. Reactions to Kant

Kant's theory sets the agenda for his successors; if they do not agree with him, they try to explain where he goes wrong. They offer different diagnoses of his main errors. They all believe that Kant has seen something important about morality, but he has grasped only part of the truth.

Kant begins from plausible moral convictions, and articulates them in a systematic theory that presents morality as the rationally compelling outlook for rational agents, however they may differ in their other tastes, preferences, or ideals. This is an attractive ideal for moral theory to aim at, and a Kantian outlook remains a live option in more recent moral theory. Though more recent Kantian theories often disagree with Kant on important points, they stay close enough to Kant to express the same approach to morality. Some argue that the central Kantian insights support utilitarianism. Others argue that they support a systematic alternative to utilitarian views of moral rightness.⁷

Kant's arguments for these ambitious claims about morality and reason are often disputable. Some critics have concluded that his arguments fail, and his ambitious are misguided. Hegel and Schopenhauer are among these critics. They are not entirely unsympathetic, since they also argue that Kant is right on some points. Nietzsche displays a more uniformly critical attitude. Sidgwick agrees with Kant on moral epistemology, but rejects his normative conclusions, and so defends utilitarianism on Kantian grounds. Examination of these different attitudes to Kant helps us to understand some of the main questions in later moral philosophy.

According to Schopenhauer, Kant is completely successful in describing the form of morality—what makes a principle a moral principle—but he completely fails to say what the basis of morally right and worthy action is. According to Kant, the morally good will is the one that is moved by practical reason without any need of emotion. Schopenhauer argues that morality rests on compassion, which removes the division between myself and another person and enables me to feel the other's pain as my own.

⁷ Kant, successors and critics: Reath, *OHHE* ch. 21; Höffe, *OHHE* ch. 22; Geuss, *OHHE* ch. 23. Reconciliation of Kant with utilitarianism: §§254, 256, 282–3, 292.

Hegel agrees with Schopenhauer's judgment that Kant has grasped a formal aspect of morality and has confused this with the basis of morality. Kantian morality expresses self-conscious reflexion on the habitual moral behaviour in which we are brought up in society. Kant is right to suppose that we ought not to take habitual social morality for granted, and that we ought to adopt our moral principles as universal laws for rational agents. But he is wrong to look for the right moral principles simply by asking which principles are suitable for rational agents. To find acceptable moral principles, we have to take the attitude of universal reason to a definite set of principles that constitute a particular social morality.

Nietzsche believes that in a way both Kant and Schopenhauer are right about morality. Kant is right about the universal claims of the moral point of view, and Schopenhauer is right to claim that the basic moral attitude is compassion. But because they are right on these points, we can draw a conclusion that is unwelcome to them. Kant and Schopenhauer both believe that they describe genuine moral facts that underlie true moral principles. Nietzsche, however, believes that, once we see what moral facts would have to be like, according to Kant and Schopenhauer, we can also see that there are no moral facts.

Some of these criticisms of Kant rest on controversial interpretations of some of his central doctrines, and especially of his views on the categorical imperative. We can usefully discuss some of the criticisms in this chapter, after we consider the interpretations on which the criticisms depend. We can postpone discussion of the critics' alternative suggestions until later chapters.

199. Intuitive Views About Morality

Kant follows the familiar method of arguing from intuitive beliefs about morality. But he attends less than (say) Aristotle does to beliefs about which actions are right, or which traits of character are virtues. He begins from general beliefs about the status of morality and the sorts of considerations that belong to morality.

We take morality (in Kant's view) to be *universal*, for two reasons: (1) Moral requirements apply to everyone. (2) Everyone has some moral standing, and deserves some moral consideration.

The first reason means that everyone ought to be sensitive to some moral requirements. We expect everyone not to be totally indifferent, without any special reason, to the suffering of completely innocent people. If A knows that B will suffer harm from A's action, and A could very easily refrain from the action without any great cost to A, we expect A to recognize that as a reason not to do the action.

The second reason for regarding morality as universal implies that everyone is entitled to some sort of consideration from the moral point of view, so that everyone counts for something. No one has interests or needs that do not matter from the moral perspective.

We tend to think morality is *supreme*, because moral considerations override other sorts of considerations for and against an action. If we consider some policy, and we find that it will work well from some other points of view, but we find serious moral objections to it, we reject the policy. We do not always follow the course of action that is morally required. But even if we do not, we acknowledge the supremacy of morality

whenever we try to persuade ourselves, as we often do, that it is not so wrong after all. If, for instance, we set out to deceive someone, we often argue that deception is permissible in this case. Military commanders who are planning actions that will cause the death of innocent civilians sometimes argue that the deaths are simply a regrettable side effect of legitimate attacks on military targets. If we did not attach special weight to moral considerations, we would not try to enlist them in our support as often as we do.

When we take the moral point of view, we evaluate agents as being *free and responsible* to a significant degree. If we are persuaded that some bad outcomes resulted from external factors that the agents could neither control nor predict, we tend to think it would be unfair to blame them for these outcomes. Moral evaluation of agents should be guided by what they believed, and could reasonably have been expected to believe, what they could have done, and what they tried to do. We grant that some factors are outside the agent's control, but we suppose that what is under the agent's control is the proper subject for moral evaluation.

We may decide on reflexion to reject or to modify one or more of these intuitive convictions. But if we were to reject them all, we would be close to rejecting morality altogether. In Kant's view, critical reflexion on these intuitive convictions helps us to vindicate them. We can see how each is reasonable, and how they support each other, once we grasp the nature of practical reason.

200. Is Morality Based on Preferences?

Kant argues from critical reflexion on moral convictions to a metaphysics of morals. This is a system of *a priori* principles—that is to say principles that can be known without reference to experience. It is a 'pure moral philosophy that is wholly cleared of everything which can only be empirical and can belong only to anthropology'.⁸ Empirical information about human beings, their motives, and their circumstances, should be left out of the fundamental principles of morality. Though empirical facts are relevant to morality, they are not its foundation.

To see why Kant believes that basic moral principles are *a priori*, we should consider moral reasons. If you tell me that I ought (e.g.) to keep a promise to A, or to avoid inflicting pain on B, I may ask 'Why should I do that?' A non-moral reason would be 'You will be punished for not doing it' or 'If you do a favour for B, B will return the favour'. A simple moral reason would be 'Because you made the promise' or 'Because you harm people if you inflict pain on them'. A utilitarian can offer a more general reason that appeals to rules about maximizing utility. But at that most general level we can still ask 'Why should I care about that?', and seek a further reason.

One might argue that reasons ultimately depend on my preferences. If I care about my own interest, I have a reason to act prudently. If I am a sympathetic person, I have a reason to benefit other people. I have no further reason apart from my particular preference. This sentimentalist answer provides an empirical basis for moral reasons.

⁸ The *a priori* character of morality: Kant, G 389–90.

In Kant's terms, a preference-based reason underlies a hypothetical imperative. If we say 'You ought to try Cafe Inferno if you want good coffee' or 'You ought to flatter Donald because you want him to do you a favour', the truth of our ought-judgment depends on your having the relevant antecedent preference (i.e., the preference that was present independently of the ought-judgment).⁹

Hobbes and Hume argue that morality gives us reasons that rest on preferences. Hume's two rowers agree to coordinate their actions because each accepts the imperative 'I ought to row across the river'.¹⁰ Each has the same desire to cross the river, and each sees that rowing will be a means to getting across. Their 'ought' depends on the presence of their antecedent preference, and states a hypothetical imperative.¹¹

If moral principles have this character, morality is a system of principles for coordinating our actions on the assumption of shared preferences. According to Hobbes, we would all prefer the freedom to advance our own interests without regard to other people's interests, if we were not vulnerable to aggression. But, since we see we are worse off if aggression is not restrained, we want to coordinate our actions so that we restrain aggression. Morality sets out rules for mutual non-aggression; and we have reason to accept them if we prefer the security that we gain by observing them.¹²

201. Some Reasons Do Not Depend on Preferences

Kant rejects this conception of moral reasons. In his view, there is some further reason for me to follow a moral principle, apart from my preferences. Such a reason is *a priori*, in so far as it does not depend on observed facts about me and my sentiments. Basic moral principles are known *a priori* because we can know the content of basic moral principles independently of facts about our antecedent preferences. If we judge that we ought not to cause pain to innocent people for no good reason, and this judgment is true apart from any of our antecedent preferences, we state a categorical (i.e., non-hypothetical) imperative.¹³

To see whether Kant is right to claim that a true moral principle rests on a categorical imperative, it is useful to ask two questions: (1) Are there any categorical imperatives? In other words, are there any good reasons that are not based on preferences? (2) Do moral principles rest on reasons of this sort? The first question is not about morality in particular. But it is worth asking because, if we find that there are non-moral categorical imperatives, we answer the objection that Kantian morality requires belief in a type of imperative that we would otherwise have no reason to believe in.

⁹ As the second example shows, a hypothetical imperative need not be hypothetical in grammatical form. Only the underlying reason shows whether it is hypothetical (in Kant's sense) or not.

¹⁰ Hume on justice: §§166–7.

¹¹ Hypothetical imperatives: Aristotle §48.

¹² Hobbes on moral rules: §130.

¹³ When Kant speaks of 'imperatives' he normally has in mind ought-judgments of this sort, rather than imperatives in the grammatical sense.

The general claim that all reasons are based on preferences is false if someone can be justifiably criticized for acting unreasonably, on grounds that do not depend on their desires and instrumental reasoning. Sometimes, for instance, an action may satisfy a desire at too high a price. If we can row ourselves across the river but we will be too exhausted to go on, or the bears we can see waiting on the other side will eat us, the fact that rowing satisfies one desire does not make it reasonable everything considered. Prudential considerations are relevant here. This is part of what Butler means by saying that reasonable self-love is a superior principle.¹⁴

Prudence is sometimes a source of preference-based reasons. If I care about my longer-term interest more than my immediate desire to get across the river, prudence operates through my actual desires. Not all prudential reasons, however, seem to be based on preferences. Suppose I believe that crossing the river will frustrate desires that I will care more about in the future than I now care about crossing the river, but I care more now about crossing the river than about my future desires. In this case I may act unreasonably by crossing the river, even though I do what I care most about doing. We can criticize and evaluate someone's action as reasonable or unreasonable apart from its instrumental efficiency in satisfying their preferences. We think it is reasonable for agents to have some concern for their future desires, even if they have no concern for them.¹⁵

We might also act unreasonably even if we care about our future desires and we act in ways that satisfy them. We might have a rational plan for satisfying our preferences, and we might act on our plan, but if our preferences are misguided, we have good reason to form different preferences, and (in one way) we act unreasonably if we try to satisfy our current preferences. Perhaps someone's self-esteem has been so undermined that they believe they are incapable of doing anything difficult or demanding, or they become so afraid of failure that they refuse to take any risks. Moreover, they correctly believe that they will have the same aversion to risk in the future, and they become indifferent to anything that affects their longer-term interests or that requires any effort or involves any prospect of failure. What they do is rational in so far as it fits their preferences, but it is still unreasonable because it is based on misguided preferences.

These examples suggest that some reasons are not based on preferences. If we allow such cases, we will not simply dismiss Kant's claim that morality also appeals to reasons of this sort.

202. Moral Reasons Do Not Depend on Preferences

To distinguish moral from non-moral reasons, Kant considers a shopkeeper who believes he ought to deal honestly with his customers because honest trading is good for business. If this is his only reason for trading honestly, he does not act on moral reasons. Kant's second example considers a 'philanthropist', someone who regularly acts on unselfish and sympathetic feelings. According to Hutcheson and Hume, such people act on moral reasons, because they prefer the actions that benefit other people.

¹⁴ Butler on reasonable self-love: §175.

¹⁵ Unreasonable neglect of the future: Nagel, *PA* ch. 8.

Their preferences have no further reason; it is simply a fact about human beings that we have sympathetic feelings and tend to act on them. Moral reasons, then, are those that appeal to unselfish sentiments.¹⁶

Kant argues that these 'philanthropists' do not act on a moral reason. They would act on a moral reason only if they would still see a good reason to help someone else even if they lacked their present unselfish sentiments. If their reason is based on their unselfish sentiments, it goes away whenever the sentiments go away, and it gets weaker or stronger whenever the sentiments get weaker or stronger. Such variation in the strength of a reason is the mark of a hypothetical imperative. We have a reason to act, on this view, only if we keep the relevant preference, but the imperative says nothing about whether we ought or ought not to keep the preference. A moral reason, however, does not vary with the strength of our antecedent preferences. Hence it states a categorical imperative.¹⁷

Admittedly, moral sentiments are not mere preferences that we can abandon at will. We often say we would feel too guilty to act against morality, or even that we could never live with ourselves. But feelings of guilt are not enough for a moral reason. If our moral obligation (expressed in the judgment that we ought to do something) rested only on our feeling of guilt, we could get rid of our obligation by getting rid of our feeling of guilt; perhaps we could train ourselves to feel less guilty. But we cannot get rid of our moral obligations by ceasing to feel guilty about violating them. On the contrary, if we act wrongly, but we get rid of our pangs of conscience, we deserve more criticism, not less. If we ought to retain those pangs of conscience, and any further sentiments on which they depend, this 'ought' is not based on our preferences.¹⁸

Kant concludes that a true moral judgment expresses a categorical imperative, because it relies on reasons that do not depend on the agent's preferences. Those who grasp the character of moral judgments and moral reasons, and act accordingly, have a 'good will'. They not only act in accord with duty (i.e., do what is required by morality), but also act for the sake of duty (i.e., do what is required because it is required by morality).¹⁹ The selfish shopkeeper and the sympathetic philanthropist do not act for the sake of duty, because they do not act on moral reasons. The shopkeeper does the honest thing only because it is good for business. The philanthropist helps other people only because of sympathy. They do not see that, even if their preferences changed, there would still be a moral reason to do what they are doing.

Morally good agents, then, do not suppose that moral reasons are based on preferences. They recognize that the right preferences are based on the recognition of moral reasons that are independent of preferences and prior to them.²⁰

This is why Kant maintains that moral principles are known a priori, not on the basis of empirical facts about human beings. If they depended on empirical facts, they would depend on the desires of actual human beings, and hence would express reasons that are based on preferences. According to this empirical view, we would

¹⁶ The shopkeeper: G 397–8. Hutcheson and Hume on benevolence: §§153–4.

¹⁷ Sympathy: G 398. The hypothetical imperative: G 420.

¹⁸ Guilt: §171 (*Hamlet*).

¹⁹ Acting from duty: G 397–8. Cf. Aristotle §43.

²⁰ Independence of preferences: G 414–15.

have less reason to be moral if we became a bit less sympathetic, or if we found it easier to do without other people's help or society. Hume accepts this implication of the view that morality is relative to human preferences. But Kant replies that we cannot avoid moral obligations and moral reasons simply by changing in these ways. Hence the basic principles of morality do not depend on these features of actual human beings. We have to find them by reflexion on practical reason.²¹

203. Morality Requires both Rational and Non-Rational Motives

Kant's emphasis on the role of practical reason in morality has been criticized for underestimating the value and importance of emotions in morality. Sentimentalism finds moral goodness in the appropriate state of one's sentiments and emotions, but Kant seems to allow them no place in moral goodness. Schopenhauer and Hegel attribute this view to Kant, and some more recent critics have agreed with them.²² But is it Kant's view?

Kant argues that moral worth consists in doing the right action for the right reason, precisely because it is right. But what is it to act for the right reason? We can distinguish three types of reasons for doing the right action:

- (1) You do the right action, but nothing would have induced you to do it if you had not seen the prospect of some benefit for yourself in it. This is the outlook of Kant's shopkeeper.
- (2) You do the right action, and the belief in its rightness causes you to do it, and is sufficient for you to do the action, but you have other reasons for doing it, and these make it easier for you to do it.
- (3) You do the right action because it is right, and no other motive makes it seem attractive to you.

In Schopenhauer's view, Kant insists that an action has moral worth if and only if it meets the third condition, so that any non-moral motive deprives an action of moral worth. If you see that you ought to help the victims of an accident, but you also have some sympathetic feeling towards them, it follows (according to Schopenhauer's view of Kant) that you cannot be helping them for the right reason.

Kant, however, endorses the second condition, not the third. In his view, we do the right thing for the wrong reason if we do it only because of an antecedent preference, as the shopkeeper and the philanthropist do. Even if we have a non-moral motive to do the right action, we still do it for the right reason as long as our belief that it is right gives us a sufficient motive to do it and our inclination is not our sole motive for doing it.²³

In ordinary circumstances, therefore, we can act both on the moral motive and on some preference that is independent of it. For we may be well aware both that

²¹ Morality v. anthropology: *G* 411–12.

²² Kant on mixed motives: Schopenhauer *BM* 66. Hegel *PR* §§121, 124. Schopenhauer §2. See Kant, *G*, Hill and Zweig, eds., 28–31, 151–2.

²³ Moral worth: *G* 398–9.

something is morally required and that it is agreeable, or that if we did not do it we might go to prison. In such cases we act from mixed motives. But if the moral motive is sufficient (i.e., it does not need the help of the other one in order to make us act), our action has genuine moral worth. In Kant's view, therefore, moral sentiments, properly guided by the right moral beliefs, are appropriate. On this point he agrees with Aristotle, though he rejects the more thoroughly sentimentalist views of Hutcheson and Hume.

He also suggests, however, that morally appropriate sentiments are not necessary; if that is so, some morally good people may be deeply reluctant to do the morally right thing whenever they have to do it. Kant takes emotions to be unnecessary for moral goodness because he believes they are not in our control, and so cannot have moral worth.²⁴ This claim about emotions is exaggerated. They may not be under our immediate control, if we cannot change them simply by deciding to change them. But if we can modify them over time, in this respect they are under our control. We might, then, reasonably expect morally good agents to adapt their emotions to their moral principles. People who always have to screw themselves up to overcome their selfish impulses and do something for other people's benefit are not the sort of people we admire.²⁵

204. The Categorical Imperative Requires Universal Law

Kant argues that we take true moral judgments to express a categorical, and not merely a hypothetical, imperative. What does the categorical imperative say? And what sorts of moral principles conform to it?

Kant answers that if we understand the form of a categorical imperative, we also understand the content of moral principles and reasons. Once we understand that moral reasoning presupposes a categorical imperative, we also understand what the basic principles of morality require and what they prohibit. To support his argument from the form of a categorical imperative to the basic principle of morality, Kant offers five different formulations of the categorical imperative. They describe moral reasons in different ways that all express the same basic principle.²⁶

According to Kant's first formulation, a categorical imperative states a reason that can be willed to be a universal law for all rational agents. Moral principles rely on reasons that are independent of anyone's preferences. Hence any principle that conforms to the categorical imperative of morality must rely on some reason that applies to all rational agents, irrespective of their preferences, and so it must be a universal law for all rational agents.²⁷

To explain this Formula of Universal Law, Kant asks whether it is permissible to break my promises when it suits me (for instance, when I need the money I have

²⁴ Emotions and practical v. pathological love: *G* 399.

²⁵ Emotions and cruelty to animals: Schopenhauer, *BM* 95; Kant, *MdS* §17, p. 443.

²⁶ The concept of a categorical imperative: *G* 420. The formulae of the categorical imperative: 436; Rawls, *LHMP* 162–216.

²⁷ Universal law: *G* 420.

promised to repay). Kant claims that we cannot will the rule 'I will break a promise when it suits me' to be a universal law, because the rule 'contradicts' its universalization.²⁸ The rule presupposes that people make, accept, and believe promises. But its universalization results in the non-existence of promising; for if we allowed that it is permissible for anyone may break a promise when it suits them, we would no longer believe people's promises, and we would stop making promises. Kant concludes, then, that the result of universalizing the rule undermines promising, and therefore conflicts with the presupposition of the original rule.

Kant does not argue that we ought always to keep our promises, or that no moral rule has exceptions. He asks what sorts of exceptions are morally justified. He answers that the rule 'It is all right to break a promise when I am inclined to break it (because, e.g., I feel like using the money for something else) does not mark a justified exception. If this rule were acceptable, we could make exceptions to moral principles simply on the basis of inclination; hence moral principles would depend on inclination, and would express hypothetical, not categorical imperatives. In the case of promising, exceptions based on inclination would subvert the practice of promising that we presuppose if we want to break our promises when it suits us. Kant concludes that we cannot will the universalization of breaking promises on the basis of inclination. The universalization results in a contradiction. If a moral principle expresses a categorical imperative, inclination cannot be the basis for exceptions.

It is not immediately clear, however, what Kant means in speaking of a contradiction. Clarification of his meaning makes some difference to our view about the plausibility of his appeal to universal law, and about the fairness of some criticisms of his argument. We can try to clarify his position by examining the criticisms.

205. Does the Categorical Imperative Simply Require Consistency?

Some critics of Kant, including Hegel and Schopenhauer, maintain that his Formula of Universal Law simply means that reason demands consistent, non-contradictory aims. Schopenhauer believes that Kant is right to look for an a priori principle of morality, and also right to conclude that the only a priori principle, and therefore the only categorical imperative, is conformity to a universal law for all rational beings. According to Schopenhauer, the only such law is the principle of non-contradiction. In the area of practical reason, non-contradiction requires me not to choose two contradictory states of affairs. I violate this principle if, e.g., I prefer that everyone drives on the left and that I drive on the right. The categorical imperative, therefore, requires non-contradictory choice, and nothing more.²⁹

If Schopenhauer is right to assert that Kant's idea of contradiction in the will refers to contradictory choices, the categorical imperative is simply a demand for consistency. It is morally empty, because it does not support any one internally consistent

²⁸ Kant calls a general rule of this sort a 'maxim'.

²⁹ Non-contradictory willing: Schopenhauer, *BM* 63. Schopenhauer on universal law: *BM* 73. Schopenhauer's categorical imperative: *BM* 75.

policy rather than any other. 'Let everyone rob anyone they please' and 'Let no one rob anyone else' are equally consistent policies, though one is wrong and the other is right.

How, then, could Kant suppose that an argument about self-contradiction shows that it is wrong to break promises? Perhaps he confuses two policies: (1) Everyone should keep every promise they make and I am allowed to break promises when I feel like it. (2) Everyone else should keep every promise they make, but I am allowed to break promises when I feel like it. The first policy is self-contradictory, but the second is consistent.³⁰ Kant, however (according to this interpretation), claims falsely that the second is self-contradictory.

According to Schopenhauer, Kant's false claim about the second policy rests on a tacit egoist assumption. The egoist who contemplates breaking promises believes that it would be bad for him if other people found him out and refused to accept his promises. Kant sees that promise-breaking would contradict the initial egoist assumption. If Kant accepts this interpretation of the categorical imperative, he endorses the outlook of the shopkeeper who does the right thing for the wrong reason. This outlook treats moral imperatives as hypothetical.³¹

Schopenhauer and Hegel agree that the Kant's categorical imperative is morally empty. But they draw different conclusions. Hegel argues that Kant is mistaken to confine practical reason to a categorical imperative that requires mere non-contradiction. In Hegel's view, we have to take a different route to find the rational foundation of morality. Schopenhauer, on the contrary, agrees with Kant's supposed view that practical reason tells us only to avoid contradiction. To find the principles of morality, Schopenhauer tells us to go beyond practical reason to sentiment, as Kant's sentimentalist predecessors argued in reply to Clarke. Later we will consider the alternatives to Kant's supposed position that Schopenhauer and Hegel offer.

206. Consistency and Fairness Are Not Enough for the Categorical Imperative

Are Schopenhauer and Hegel right to claim that Kant refers simply to consistent and inconsistent policies? They overlook the fact that Kant refers to the will of a rational being as such, apart from the inclinations that are distinct from rational willing.³² Hence, when he speaks of what we can will, he means 'what we can will as rational agents'; a contradiction in the will is a choice that contradicts what a rational being as such wills. By 'cannot will', therefore, Kant does not mean 'cannot consistently will', but 'cannot will consistently with what it is reasonable to will'. What, then, does he think it is reasonable to will?

The example of false promising might suggest that the rational will treats people equally and refrains from taking any unfair advantage for oneself. The false promisor proposes to take some unfair advantage of people. He has an opportunity to break promises when it suits him, because other people abide by a moral principle that

³⁰ Hegel on mere consistency: *PR* §135. Bradley, *ES* ch. 4.

³² More details on Kant's conception of will: §§213–14.

³¹ Egoism: Schopenhauer *BM* 89.

requires the keeping of promises. By abiding by this principle, they forgo a benefit that the promisor takes for himself. The reason that he acts on (that it would suit him to break the promise he has made) makes an exception for himself. And so we might conclude that the rational will, as Kant conceives it, aims at treating people impartially and equally.³³

Impartiality is part of what Kant has in mind when he speaks of what we can rationally will. But it is not all he has in mind; for not every principle that takes no unfair advantage of other people is permissible. Kant considers someone—call him ‘Solus’—who does not want to be bothered with helping other people. Solus agrees that it would be unfair to adopt the rule ‘Other people have to help Solus when he wants help, but Solus never has to help anyone else’. Solus, therefore, proposes the rule ‘No one has to help anyone else’; Solus makes no arbitrary exceptions for himself; he accepts the universal law that makes everyone indifferent to everyone else’s interests and needs. Solus seems to observe the Golden Rule of treating others as he wants them to treat him.

According to Kant, if we accepted Solus’ rule, our will would contradict itself. This is not because Solus’ rule is internally inconsistent. Kant explains the contradiction by reference to what it is reasonable to will. In many cases, he says, we would have good reason to want the love and sympathy of others but if we accepted Solus’ rule, we would deprive ourselves of it unreasonably. Since it is reasonable for me to want the help of other people when I am in difficulty, I cannot will a system in which no one helps anyone else. Solus is unfair to himself, because we ought not to forgo other people’s aid.³⁴

If this is so, Kant believes that morality is not simply consistent willing, and that is not simply refusal to take unfair advantage of others.

207. The Categorical Imperative Requires Us to Treat Rational Nature as an End

To explain why the Formula of Universal Law requires more than consistency and fairness, Kant introduces a second formulation of the categorical imperative. This Formula of Humanity asserts that humanity, or, more precisely, rational nature is an end in itself. An end in itself is an objective end that limits the pursuit of every subjective end.

Subjective ends are the product of preferences, and so they support hypothetical imperatives. If all value were founded on subjective ends, there would be no supreme rational practical principle, because our practical principles would simply be the products of our preferences. If, then, there is a categorical imperative, something must be a non-subjective end, and hence an end ‘in itself’ (i.e., a non-relative end, because it is not relative to anyone’s preferences).

An end in itself is an objective end, because it is not an end to be achieved, but a condition that limits the sorts of ends that can permissibly be achieved.³⁵ Our actions

³³ Fairness: Rawls §287. Rawls’s conception of justice, however, requires more than equal treatment.

³⁴ Contradiction in the will: G 423. ³⁵ Limit on ends: G 437.

are explained not only by the goals that we try to achieve, but also by the principles that constrain the ways in which we try to achieve these goals. Suppose, for instance, that I want to renovate a building, while preserving its original character. This original character—the height of the ceilings, the size of the rooms, etc.—does not determine in detail how I will renovate the building, but it constrains how I can change it in the course of renovation. The original character is not a goal I try to achieve, since it is already there. But it is something I respect, because its value limits the ends I can permissibly try to achieve, and the means I can adopt.

Morality needs an objective end, because morality evaluates preference-based reasons. It gives us reasons that do not depend on antecedent preferences or feelings, so that it can tell us which preferences and feelings can legitimately guide our actions. The objective end for morality is rational nature. Persons are not merely means to be arbitrarily used, because the nature of rational beings limits permissible choices. Persons are objects of respect, and are not appraised simply as means to our subjective ends.³⁶

If we accept a categorical imperative, we give priority to rational agency over subjective ends. It is reasonable for us to do this only if we value the expression of rational agency over the achievement of subjective ends. If we thought that rational beings were to be valued only as means to subjective ends—their own or other people's—we would not accept a categorical imperative. If, then, we accept a categorical imperative, we attribute to rational beings some value apart from their contribution to any subjective ends. We treat them, therefore, as objects of respect.

208. We Treat Rational Nature as an End through Respect for Ourselves and Others

Does this Formula of Humanity clarify the categorical imperative? Our understanding of the Formula of Universal Law depends on our understanding of what a rational agent, as such, 'can' will. We have now learned that a rational agent, as such, wills to treat rational agents as ends in themselves. What practical difference does it make if we treat rational agents as ends?³⁷

If we treat people as ends, we respect both ourselves and others. If we did not, we would not think persons matter more than the inanimate things that we use for our subjective ends. We would regard persons as resources, means, raw material etc., and we would consider them only in that light. If I mine coal, I want to keep it dry. If I use some tool or machine, I want it to be in working order. My concern for these resources is purely instrumental.

We lack self-respect if we take this purely instrumental attitude to ourselves—if, for instance, we neglect our longer-term interest to gratify our passing whims or appetites. Reckless indulgence may be followed by self-reproach when we realize what we have done to ourselves. Similarly, we may be willing to act in ways we despise, and to put up with humiliation, in order to gratify some more powerful

³⁶ Objective end: G 430–1. Persons are not simply means: G 428. The end in itself: G 437.

³⁷ Practical implications: Rawls §292.

person who can help us. Though we may get what we want, we may despise ourselves for having tried to get it. In both cases we lack self-respect, and we do not value ourselves at our real worth.³⁸

Some people fulfil other people's desires rather than their own, because they are too deferential or self-effacing. Their attitude may reveal their lack of self-respect. An excessively deferential servant may believe he counts for nothing except in so far as he can serve his master. An excessively self-effacing wife subordinates her own interests to her husband's, so that it never occurs to her that he should do anything for her that does not fit in with his plans for himself. Excessively self-denying parents care about nothing for themselves, but only about the welfare of their children. These people do not recognize that they count for something in their own right.

Kant's emphasis on respect opposes one-sided emphasis on the other-directed aspects of morality. Morality is concerned for the interests of others, and so is opposed to selfishness. But one might go to extremes in this direction. If I put up with insulting or patronizing treatment from a friend, or if I allow people to make unreasonable demands of me, I might be said to lack self-respect or have too little sense of my own worth. I might be criticized for not caring about what I am entitled to, or what I have a right to, or what is due to me. If we are bringing up a child, or advising someone else on how to react to different demands by other people, we try to encourage them to have some self-respect and a sense of their own worth in their dealings with other people.

209. The Principle of Respect for Persons Supports Rationalism against Utilitarianism

If Kant shows that moral imperatives depend on respect for rational agents as ends, his argument supports some rationalist objections to utilitarianism. Butler and Price argue that the utilitarian attitude to the distribution of benefits and harms between persons violates justice and fairness. These objections presuppose that individual persons deserve something in their own right, not because it increases the total happiness. In Kant's view, the rationalist criticisms of utilitarianism capture the fact that moral imperatives express respect for rational agents as ends. Similarly, Butler objects to the view that we ought to treat individuals in whatever way will promote the public good, irrespective of what they intended to do or can be held responsible for having done.

These criticisms assert that utilitarianism attributes no non-instrumental value to persons as such. It attaches non-instrumental value to the experience of persons, but not to the persons whose experiences they are. It gives a secondary place to the treatment of persons in accordance to what they decide and choose, and a primary place to the results for some larger end. Harm to many people, for instance, is justifiable if it produces benefit to a few, provided that the total benefit is large enough. This sort of compensation for harm by a greater benefit might be justifiable within the life of one person, but it is more difficult to justify when a number of

³⁸ Lack of self-respect: *MdS* 436. Hill, 'Servility'.

people are involved. That is why Price complains that utilitarianism treats distribution between different persons as though it were distribution within a single person. The utilitarian principle values the welfare of individuals simply as a means to the promotion of total welfare.³⁹

Kant's criticism of preference-based grounds for morality casts doubt on some of Hutcheson's and Hume's case for utilitarianism. In their view, the benevolent or sympathetic person approves of the principle of utility. But Kant argues that this point of view cannot be justified by reasons that apply to rational beings as such. Approval by a benevolent person does not justify a utilitarian principle.

210. Respect for Persons Underlies the Categorical Imperative

If the principle of treating persons as ends is a categorical imperative, it ought to apply to all rational beings as such. And so, Kant ought to show that, whatever our other ends and inclinations may be, we have overriding reason to regard both ourselves and other people as ends.

If we care about our own ends and purposes at all, it is reasonable to regard ourselves as ends. To regard ourselves as ends is to insist that we have some value in our own right, not simply as resources for our own preferences or other people's preferences. If we did not believe this about ourselves, we would lack self-respect and undervalue ourselves in self-destructive ways.

On what grounds can we reasonably believe we have non-instrumental value? Why should other people show consideration for us in our own right? If someone told us that we are not intelligent enough, or skilful enough, or handsome enough to deserve any respect or concern, we would justifiably accuse them of not understanding the point of respect for persons. It requires respect not for a certain sort of person, but simply for a person. But if I believe I am entitled to this respect simply because I am a person, I imply that any person is entitled to it; for there is no relevant difference between what entitles me to be treated as an end and what entitles other people to be treated in this way. Hence the treatment of persons as ends is reasonable for all rational beings as such. Hence it is a categorical imperative.

If we take respect for persons as ends to be the basis of the categorical imperative, we can answer some of the objections that arose about Kant's earlier examples. Respect for persons explains what is wrong with taking unfair advantage of people, as in the example of the false promise. Kant suggests that the unfairness consists in thinking of them simply from the point of view of our purposes; for, since our action affects their interests, they count in their own right. This principle explains why false promising (in some circumstances, for some reasons) is wrong.

Respect for persons, however, is not simply the rejection of unequal treatment. The lazy rejection of mutual aid violates the categorical imperative, because it violates the principle of respect for persons as ends. The lazy person (Solus) who does not want to bother helping other people, and is willing to forgo aid from other people, attaches

³⁹ Butler and Price on justice: §§185, 189. Utilitarianism and rights: §§243–4.

too little value to himself. He would rather not help other people than secure the help he needs from them.

According to the Formula of Humanity, therefore, the universal law that we will as rational agents is a principle of mutual respect for rational agents. When I realize that there is nothing special about myself as a rational agent, I see that other rational agents deserve the same respect.

Kant's claim to derive the content of morality from features of rational agency is not new. Aristotle and Aquinas also try to explain the human good and human virtues by reference to human nature. Kant's argument is different, because he does not take the basic feature of rational agents to be their pursuit of their own good. In his view, rational agency is impartial. When we take the rational point of view, we abstract from our own peculiarities and attend to what we have in common, simply as rational agents.⁴⁰

211. Autonomy and Freedom

The Formula of Humanity explains, in Kant's view, why Rousseau was right in one of his most paradoxical claims. We may often think of morality as restraining our freedom by imposing requirements and obligations on us that we are often reluctant to accept. In this respect, it is similar to a Hobbesian commonwealth, which restricts our freedom by requiring us to follow the laws that maintain peace. According to Rousseau, however, the right sort of political order does not restrict our freedom, because it embodies the right sort of moral order, which does not restrict our freedom, but expresses it.

Kant's arguments about the categorical imperative support Rousseau, by arguing that the morality of mutual respect is not imposed on rational agents against their will, but results from the choice of the rational will. Once we grasp the connexion between morality and reason, we do not need to be persuaded that the consequences of violating morality will be worse than the consequences of following it. We choose morality for its own sake, because we see that it is the outlook of the rational will.

To see that this outlook does not restrict freedom, we need to recall the connexion between being free and acting on our rational will. Even if we are not restricted by external conditions, we lack a type of freedom that we value, if we are always moved by our non-rational impulses, and do not express our rational choices in our actions. If we agree that addiction to drugs or alcohol forms desires that restrict our freedom, even though it does not prevent us from acting on our strongest desires, we imply that we are free in so far as we act on our rational will and choice. Even if we are not victims of addiction, we may be moved to act by hunger, or fear, or anxiety, that is so urgent that we find we have no choice but to follow it; this is another case of diminished freedom in which the ineffectiveness of our rational choice explains our lack of freedom.

These aspects of freedom help to explain why Kant believes that morality expresses freedom, as Rousseau supposed. He introduces a further formulation of the

⁴⁰ Kant agrees with Scotus and Butler rather than Aristotle. See §§108, 192.

categorical imperative, the Formula of Autonomy, in order to show that the will guided by morality is autonomous and free. The categorical imperative expresses the autonomy of the rational will, because the will gives itself the law. All other ways of expressing the principles of morality involve heteronomy, because the will receives its law from something external (e.g., from inclination). If we always acted on hypothetical imperatives only, our will would not be free and autonomous, but would be heteronomous.⁴¹

If we have rational wills, it does not follow that we have any specific set of inclinations or subjective ends. The fact that we have rational wills does not make us enthusiasts for football or music; these subjective ends depend on some other feature of this or that particular rational agent. If morality were determined by our subjective ends, we would also act heteronomously when we act on moral principles; we would receive the law from our preferences and hence from outside our rational wills. But morality does not depend on subjective ends. We have a reason to act on moral principles simply because we have rational wills.

Moral principles express a categorical imperative because they apply rational criticism to all subjective ends. In so far as we accept moral principles, therefore, our will is autonomous in relation to our subjective ends. In so far as we are autonomous, we respect rational agents as ends. Rousseau is right, therefore, to believe that rational criticism of subjective ends does not undermine morality, or create moral and political anarchy. On the contrary, it reveals to us the morality of mutual respect that is appropriate for free and rational agents.

212. The Importance of Freedom to Morality

So far, Kant has defended a conditional claim: if there are true moral principles, they express the categorical imperative. We believe there are true moral principles, if we trust our moral judgments. But ought we to trust them? Might we not be wrong to believe that there is a categorical imperative, and hence that there are good reasons for all rational agents, just in so far as they have rational wills? If there are no such reasons, our account of what true moral principles would have to be like is still correct, but there are no true moral principles.

Kant seeks to show, therefore, that a categorical imperative is possible, because there are reasons that apply to rational agents as such. The Formula of Autonomy claims that these reasons are those that an autonomous will recognizes, without any appeal to inclinations that do not necessarily belong to a rational agent. But these are genuine reasons for us only if we are capable of being autonomous. And so he argues that we have the sort of freedom that makes us capable of autonomy.

When Kant speaks of freedom, he has in mind two things: (1) The freedom of responsibility makes us responsible for our actions, and hence open to praise and blame. (2) The freedom of autonomy makes us act on a categorical imperative. The first type of freedom is necessary, but not sufficient, for the second. Sometimes Kant

⁴¹ Autonomy: G 433.

calls these two types of freedom ‘negative’ (responsible) and ‘positive’ (autonomous) freedom.

213. The Freedom of Responsibility

Responsibility requires practical freedom, which is the will’s independence of coercion by non-rational impulses and inclinations. To have practical freedom is to have a free will as opposed to an animal will. In the animal will, choice and action result from the comparative strength of desires, but in the free will rational reflexion is capable of determining my choice apart from the initial strength of my desires. When we reflect on our impulses, we do not look at possible actions simply as a series of events in which one causes another. We look at them in a normative order, because we express our view about how it would be reasonable for things to be.⁴²

This conception of practical freedom agrees with Butler’s conception of rational agency. Rational agents are not determined simply by the comparative strength of impulses, but are capable of acting on considerations of comparative value. This division between the free will and the animal will corresponds to Aquinas’ division between will and passion. In Kant’s view, this practical freedom is necessary for responsibility. This claim allows a compatibilist view about freedom and determinism.⁴³

In addition to this practical freedom, however, Kant believes that transcendental freedom is necessary for responsibility. Transcendental freedom is the ability to act spontaneously, on one’s own initiative, and not because one is determined by past events. Spontaneity is incompatible with determinism. Kant connects practical freedom with transcendental freedom by this argument:

1. If we are practically free, we are not coerced by sensuous impulses.
2. If we are not coerced, we are able to do otherwise than we do.
3. If determinism is true, then we are unable to do otherwise than we do.
4. Therefore, if determinism is true, we lack practical freedom.⁴⁴

Compatibilists may reject either the second or the third steps, so that they deny that practical freedom excludes determinism.

Kant believes that physical and mental reality, in so far as they are objects of empirical science, conform to deterministic natural laws. But he believes that the correct understanding of our knowledge of nature allows practical freedom. Our knowledge of physical and mental reality applies to things in so far as they are accessible to sensory observation and empirical inference; Kant describes things, in so far as they are objects of empirical knowledge, as ‘things as they appear’ or as ‘appearances’ (phenomena).⁴⁵ When he speaks of things apart from our empirical knowledge of them, he calls them ‘things in themselves’, or ‘objects of thought’ (noumena). If practical beliefs are about things in themselves, our actions may not be determined in so far as they are subject to practical judgment and evaluation, even

⁴² Free v. animal will: *KrV* A534. The character of ‘ought’: *KrV* A547.

⁴³ Practical freedom: Aquinas §92; Butler and Reid, §§174–6. Compatibilism: §§78–9, 95.

⁴⁴ Freedom and determinism: *KrV* A534, 550. ⁴⁵ Aspects: *KrV* A38/B55; B69; A190/B235; B307.

though the same actions, in so far as they are objects of empirical knowledge, are determined.

Our practical judgments, according to Kant, are true of things apart from how they appear to observation and empirical knowledge. We learn about freedom through our judgments about how things ought to be, not through observation and empirical inference. Practical judgments do not express empirical knowledge, because they are not predictions about how we will act. Our deliberation and intention guide us in the light of our evaluation of the situation, and they are not falsified by the non-occurrence of what we decide or intend to do. Similarly, the judgment that we are responsible for what we have done does not simply assert that we stood in a specific causal relation to a past event; it asserts that we also deserve praise or blame for it. Since practical judgments do not constitute empirical knowledge, they are not about appearances.

If this argument is sound, belief in the freedom of responsibility does not contradict our empirical knowledge of the deterministic world that is accessible to natural science. On this point Kant agrees with compatibilists.

214. The Freedom of Autonomy

The previous argument shows at most that we have negative freedom, which is the freedom of responsibility. It is a further question whether we have positive freedom, the freedom of autonomy. An autonomous will is moved by the categorical imperative without any need for further inclinations. Those who do not act on the categorical imperative are still negatively free, since they can be blamed for not following morality. They choose heteronomously, but their will is not compelled to act on inclinations.⁴⁶

In the heteronomous agent, then, the will goes outside itself to find some end that will give reasons through a hypothetical imperative. It remains capable, however, of finding its reasons within itself, and so has a permanent capacity for autonomy. As Kant says, we become evil not by being overcome by an evil principle, but by freely incorporating such a principle in our reasons for acting. We can appropriately hold people responsible, and praise or blame them, in so far as they are capable of acting on superior principles (as Butler puts it), not simply on the strength of desires that they do not control.⁴⁷

Agents who have the capacity to act on rational reflexion rather than on the strength of desire may exercise it to different degrees. If, according to Kant's definition of negative freedom, they are all equally free because they all equally have the relevant capacity, have they any reason to exercise the capacity rather than leaving it unexercised? Why not act as though we had purely animal wills?

Butler answers this question by insisting that action on rational self-love is natural, because it proceeds from myself, as a whole person rather than a series of episodes and impulses. If I act on rational reflexion I act as a person and a rational agent; and

⁴⁶ Negative and positive freedom: *KpV* §8, p. 33; *MdS* 213–14, 225.

⁴⁷ Autonomy v. heteronomy: *G* 441; *KpV* 33. Freedom and evil: *Rel.* 25, 35–6.

since that is what I essentially am, I thereby express myself. This is why we should actualize the capacity we have, as negatively free agents, to act on reason rather than simple strength of impulses. When we actualize this capacity, we achieve positive freedom.

Positive freedom and autonomy, therefore, have degrees. I have positive freedom to the extent that I decide (e.g.) not to act on anger or frustration, because I consider my other goals (if, for instance, my anger will damage my prospects with someone I want to impress or conciliate). Butler recognizes this feature of positive freedom; we are 'a law to ourselves' by having and acting on a superior rational principle that regulates our particular passions. Kant observes that this degree of autonomy is consistent with a high degree of heteronomy. Even though I adjust particular passions to the rest of my ends, I may still regard those particular ends as being beyond the scope of rational deliberation and reflexion.

We are more autonomous if we apply rational deliberation and reflexion to the choice of ends that we pursue. Butler argues that we have reason to pursue the public good for its own sake, following the rational principle of benevolence.⁴⁸ When I reflect on the rationally appropriate object for my benevolent passions, I will see that it is appropriate for cases in which I have no antecedent passion. I may see, for instance, that it is arbitrary to distinguish cases where I help someone I already know from cases where I refuse to help someone in equal need just because I do not already know them. I adopt new ends, and do not simply discover new means to ends I already had.

Kant believes that in such a case we exercise autonomy to a higher degree than if we simply take for granted those ends that appeal to us because of some inclination without rational examination. If we rationally examine our ultimate ends, the principles we act on are not hypothetical imperatives, dependent on some unquestioned inclination. They are categorical imperatives, determined by reason at the highest level.

215. Morality Reveals Personality

Morality embodies autonomy most fully, because it reveals 'personality' (as Kant puts it), as distinct from mere 'humanity'. Our conception of humanity regards us as having interests and as having practical reason as a means to achieving them. The conception of personality, however, 'is rooted in reason which is practical of itself', because its principles are not simply means to achieving our non-moral aims and interests. Personality makes rational agents ends in themselves, and the idea of personality awakens respect.⁴⁹

Kant relies on features of self-concern and self-respect. Concern for ourselves does not simply aim to satisfy our current desires, but it includes concern for future desires, and how we might form them. Self-concern includes respect for ourselves as rational agents who are capable of reflecting on our desires and of acting in

⁴⁸ Butler on self-love and benevolence: §175.

⁴⁹ Humanity v. personality: *Rel.* 26; *KpV* 86–7; Hegel on civil society: §229.

accordance with our judgment about what seems best and most reasonable. Hence self-concern includes respect for our practical freedom, as Kant understands it. If we simply thought of ourselves as collections of desires, and treated our practical reason simply as a means to get what we want, we would look at ourselves from the point of view of humanity. Since we show respect for ourselves as practically free, we attribute personality to ourselves.

Could I not take the point of view of personality towards myself, and the point of view of humanity towards other agents? I might regard myself as the only one who deserves respect as a rational agent, and I would regard other people simply as potential rivals or allies. I would combine a Kantian attitude to myself with a Hobbesian attitude to others.

We may question this combination of attitudes, if we consider the basis of respect for oneself. If I respect myself as a person, I do not refer to some property that distinguishes me from other people. Similarly, if I expect others to respect me as a person, I do not rely on anything distinctive about myself; I assume that a person deserves respect by being a person. Hence I imply that other people also deserve respect as practically free agents. Concern for myself as a rational agent makes it reasonable for me to expect respect for myself as a rational agent, and this expectation requires me to treat other people as objects of respect as well.

216. A Further Formulation of the Categorical Imperative: Universally Legislating Agents

The moral law, therefore, treats persons as equals and participants rather than rivals or as instruments. This view underlies Kant's two 'social' formulations of the categorical imperative. It expresses (1) the will of every rational being legislating universal law, and (2) a kingdom of ends.

These two social formulations follow from the Formula of Humanity and the Formula of Autonomy, as Kant explains them. The moral law expresses every person's reasonable expectation of being treated as a free and responsible agent, and hence of being respected as an end. Everyone can reasonably accept it, because we reach it from a point of view that legitimately appeals equally to everyone.⁵⁰ It could be reached through legislation by everyone who takes the point of view of personality.

Rousseau was right, then, to claim that the general will is the product of unanimous legislation and secures everyone's freedom. His claim would be false if it meant that unanimous legislation by every actual person would secure everyone's freedom. But his claim is true if it means that the categorical imperative, accepted by everyone who takes the point of view of personality, embodies everyone's autonomy and right to equal respect. Since the principles that rational agents accept from this point of view treat everyone as an end, the rational agents who accept these principles are a kingdom of ends—a society that respects each person as an end, and hence embodies the outlook of personality.

⁵⁰ Everyone's reasonable expectation: §§183, 192.

217. Morality and the Highest Good Are Necessarily Connected

If Kant has given a reason for accepting the outlook of morality, a question remains about the relation of morality to the other aims that we have reason to pursue. Since morality is not the only thing that matters to a rational agent, we may ask how far our commitment to morality affects the other things that might matter to us.

According to Aristotelian eudaemonism, morality is to be valued both for its own sake and because it promotes the other elements of the human good, for each person and for human communities.⁵¹ We have good reason, therefore, to choose morality both for its own sake and for the sake of the good. Butler partly disagrees and partly agrees with Aristotle. Unlike Aristotle, he argues that conscience is superior to self-love, but he maintains none the less, as Aristotle does, that conscience and self-love are both rational principles, and that the demands of conscience do not require a sacrifice of self-interest.

Kant appears to differ from Aristotle and from Butler. He takes Aristotle's eudaemonism to conflict with the motive required for morality. Morality requires us to do what is right simply because it is right, but if we do what is right for the sake of our own happiness, we treat a categorical imperative as a merely hypothetical imperative.⁵² He also rejects the view of Butler and Reid that practical reason presents us with principles both of self-interest and of morality.

None the less, Kant believes, as Aristotle and Butler do, that the demands of morality can be reconciled with the highest good, both for oneself and for others. Morality is not simply an instrumental means to a further good, but it contributes to a further good. If I face a particular moral decision, I need not, and should not, consider what good will be achieved by my action; if I insist on an answer to that question, I do not really act on the moral law. But I still ought to ask the more general question about what good will be achieved by my observance of the law.⁵³

This highest good has two elements: (1) Morality is the supreme condition of the highest good, because it is necessary for any highest good that deserves to be chosen. A morally good person does not compromise morality for any other elements of the good. (2) The 'residual' good (as we may call it) is added to morality, resulting in the perfect or complete good. Morality recognizes the value of non-moral goods, and so it should find some place for the pursuit of the residual good within the life guided by morality.⁵⁴

The highest good, therefore, is not the ground, but the consequence, of the maxims that the morally good person accepts. Without a conception of the highest good, we can know how we should act, but not 'whither'. Without the highest good we can achieve no 'satisfaction', and we cannot find anything to love; we can find only the moral law to arouse respect. If we cannot fulfil our natural need to conceive a final end, our moral decisions are impeded, though not prevented.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Aristotle on self-love and morality: §50. Butler: §194.

⁵² Happiness: *KpV* 25–6; *G* 418.

⁵³ The moral law and the highest good: *Rel.* 4–6.

⁵⁴ Morality and the complete good: *KpV* 110. The moral law and ends: *MdS* 381–4.

⁵⁵ Our need to conceive the highest end: *Rel.* 3–7.

Practical reason therefore regards the highest good as a reasonable goal. Morality seeks to achieve something, and if we can reasonably believe that what it seeks to achieve is achievable, we vindicate the claims of morality. But in the ordinary course of events it is not clear that we can achieve the ideal connexion between virtue and non-moral goods. We might ask, then: does morality require us to aim at something that we cannot hope to achieve?⁵⁶

218. Morality and Religion

Kant answers this question by appealing to God and the afterlife. We face an apparent contradiction between the demands of morality and the prospects of achieving the highest good, as long as we confine ourselves to the course of the world we know. The highest good can be achieved, not in this life but in an afterlife. The aims and aspirations of morality support belief in the existence of a God who secures the highest good.

Some of Kant's critics argue that this introduction of God into morality conflicts with Kant's insistence that we must do what is right simply because it is right, and not because of its good consequences. We appear to need a benevolent God to secure desirable consequences from morality; but ought we not to ignore such consequences? Schopenhauer argues that Kant, after professedly rejecting any egoistic basis for morality, finally introduces an egoistic basis by postulating future happiness as a reward for virtue. Kant prescribes virtuous action for the sake of post-mortem rewards, and hence (Schopenhauer infers) not simply for its own sake. The theological foundation that Kant has ostensibly rejected is indispensable after all.⁵⁷

Similarly, Hegel objects that if we really care about these rewards of morality, we are not really in earnest about morality, but only about the rewards. Since the fulfilment of the purpose that morality claims to pursue would be the abolition of morality, morality cannot seriously pursue this purpose. Morality requires a conflict between moral and non-moral motives, but if the highest good is achieved, this conflict is abolished. If morality requires nature to be opposed to it, it cannot achieve its own end without abolishing itself.⁵⁸

These objections may not affect Kant's attitude to morality. In his view, morality demands that we choose the right action for its own sake, simply because it is right, but it does not reject all other reasons for choosing the right action; nor does it require us to ignore consequences. In Kant's view, virtuous agents do not make their observance of morality depend on its results, but they take a legitimate interest in whether the moral law achieves its goal of promoting the legitimate ends of rational agents. This goal that morality imposes on us is a realistic goal only if a benevolent God exists.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ The antinomy of virtue and happiness: *KpV* 113.

⁵⁷ Schopenhauer on the highest good and egoism: *BM* 55; *WR* i 524. Rewards: *BM* 103.

⁵⁸ Hegel on Kant's attitude to the highest good: *PS* §§603, 620.

⁵⁹ The moral motive and other motives: §203. The moral law and the pursuit of the highest good: *KpV* 124–5, 130.

219. The Final Formulation of the Categorical Imperative: The Community of Ends

The belief in God and the afterlife also makes it reasonable to aim at the highest good, as far as we can, in this life. The last formulation of the categorical imperative involves a 'kingdom' or 'realm' of ends.⁶⁰ This is a social order in which rational beings systematically treat one another as ends and live according to principles that involve this attitude. Some of the conduct required by morality is the conduct that would be generally accepted if such an ideal community came into existence. But, since we do not live in this ideal community, one role of morality is to make this ideal an actual community. These two roles of morality may come into conflict, as they sometimes do in revolutionary movements that engage in war and repression in order to bring about an order of society that will abolish war and repression. Kant clearly rejects such strategies, if they involve the use of particular people simply as means to secure the ideal community in which people will all be treated as ends.

In Kant's view, morality aims at this ideal community.⁶¹ We make progress through the course of history—though not uniform or uninterrupted progress—towards the kingdom of ends in which people, both within a society and in the relations of one society to another, are treated with the respect due to them as ends. But we have not reached this point. One might argue that, given human history, it seems an uncertain prospect. But if we have reason to believe in a God who will eventually bring about the kingdom of God that is also the kingdom of ends, we can accept morality with reasonable hope and expectation. The pursuit of the highest good does not conflict with Kant's account of the moral motive; for it does not make fear or hope the virtuous person's reason for acting rightly. We still have a good reason for following the moral law even if we do not ask this further question about the final result. But anyone who denies that the highest good can be realized must abandon the characteristic purpose of the virtuous person.⁶²

Belief in God would be wishful thinking if it were simply based on inclination (i.e., on wanting to believe that something we would like to be true is indeed true). But, according to Kant, this is not how morality and the highest good are connected. Since we have reason to believe that the moral law is true, and that it requires us to believe that the highest good can be realized, we have good reason to believe that the highest good can be realized.⁶³

These connexions between the demands of morality, the achievement of the highest good, and the existence of God, support belief in God. Kant defends this 'right of pure reason to an extension in its practical use which is not possible to it in its speculative use'. The practical use of pure reason justifies claims—restricted, but still controversial—about objective reality.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ The realm of ends: *G* 433–4.

⁶¹ The ideal community: Kant, 'Theory and Practice' and 'Perpetual Peace' in Kant, *PP*.

⁶² Relevance of the highest good to morality: *Rel.* 4; *KU* §87.

⁶³ Practical reason and the highest good: *KpV* 144.

⁶⁴ The practical use of pure reason: *KpV* 51. Practical reason and objective reality: *KpV* 56–7.

17

Schopenhauer

Kant's Insights and Errors

220. Schopenhauer and Kant

In Schopenhauer's view, Kant is right to separate morality from self-interest. In his account of moral worth Kant insists that self-interested motives must be excluded from any action that manifests the morally good will. Kant is also right to look for the *a priori* aspect of morality, by reflexion on the nature of practical reason.

But Kant is wrong (according to Schopenhauer) about the relation between these basic insights. He claims that the *a priori* element in morality includes its non-egoistic outlook. Hence he infers that someone who is moved by practical reason, without any appeal to inclination, takes the moral point of view, and acts from a good will that respects other people as ends. Schopenhauer objects that practical reason alone, without inclination, cannot support the specific moral content that Kant attributes to the moral law.

If Kant is wrong on this point, we need to find some other source of non-egoistic morality, apart from practical reason. Schopenhauer maintains that the foundation of morality is compassion. In this appeal to emotion he agrees with Hutcheson and Hume against Kant. But, in contrast to the sentimentalists, he holds that compassion is possible only because morality requires a distinctive metaphysical view that undermines common-sense views about the distinctness of persons.

If Schopenhauer is right, Kant overlooks a basic conflict in his moral philosophy. We have already raised some questions about his interpretation of Kant. We need to consider the conclusions that he draws from his interpretation and criticism.

221. Self-Interest Conflicts with Morality

Schopenhauer believes that it is Kant's great merit to have 'purged ethics of all eudaemonism' by refusing to regard morality as a means to one's own happiness. Kant refuses to subordinate morality to any subjective end.¹

As Schopenhauer interprets Kant, an action has moral worth if and only if its sole motive is the moral motive, the intention to do the right action because it is right. No action that results from mixed motives—e.g., the moral motive plus a self-interested motive—has moral worth. Schopenhauer is not justified in attributing this view to

¹ Kant and eudaemonism: Schopenhauer, *BM* 49

Kant; for Kant insists only that the moral motive must be sufficient for an action that has moral worth, not that it must be the exclusive and unmixed motive.²

In defence of his view about moral worth, Schopenhauer assumes that actions that have moral worth must come from a purely moral motive, and that our motives are impure if the moral motive has been mixed with non-moral motives.³ This assumption rules out many actions and motives that we take to be typical of morality. Some aspects of morality, as we usually conceive it, rest on beliefs about mutual advantage. We make and keep promises because we think this practice benefits everyone. We would look at it differently if we thought we would always have to fulfil burdensome promises with no benefit in return.

This does not mean that we accept morality simply for self-interested reasons. For some areas of morality involve the sacrifice, or possible sacrifice, of one's own maximum advantage for the sake of some mutual advantage that does not maximize the advantage of any of the parties benefited. Readiness to accept this sort of sacrifice cannot be explained by appeal to purely self-interested motives.⁴ Justice, for instance, does not require renunciation of concern for one's own interest, but it requires impartiality between the interests of different people.

Some moral attitudes, therefore, are neither wholly altruistic nor wholly self-interested, but impartial. According to Schopenhauer, however, actions that result from an impartial outlook concerned with mutual advantage have no moral worth, because they are not entirely free from self-interested motives.

222. Pure Practical Reason Requires Consistency, but Nothing More

Schopenhauer believes that Kant has found the *a priori* element in morality, which is also the part of morality that belongs to reason. This *a priori* element is captured in the formulation of the categorical imperative as universal law. A universal law is whatever we can will without contradiction. The purely rational element in morality, therefore, is practical consistency.

In Schopenhauer's view, the fact that the categorical imperative tells us nothing about the content of morality is no objection to it. Kant sees that practical reason alone demands nothing more than practical consistency. It follows that practical reason alone cannot tell us which of the many sets of consistent principles we should accept, and it cannot distinguish the morally right from the morally wrong consistent sets.

Kant, however, does not see this implication of his view. He believes that the morally good will is the will that follows the categorical imperative. But he also believes that a good will cannot be moved entirely by self-interest. Since a consistent will might be moved entirely by self-interest, Kant contradicts himself.⁵

² Kant on mixed motives: §203.

³ Self-interest: *BM* 122. Disinterested action: *BM* 126.

⁴ See Gauthier, 'Advantage' and *MBA*.

⁵ Kant's confusion about reason and moral content: *BM* 83.

Schopenhauer resolves this contradiction. Kant is right to exclude self-interest from morality, and right to believe that the categorical imperative prescribes nothing beyond consistency. Therefore we should deny that a will is good simply in so far as it is moved by the categorical imperative.

Since we have found some reason to doubt Schopenhauer's claims about the categorical imperative, as Kant understands it, we may also doubt whether Kant's position is self-contradictory. But even if he is wrong about Kant's views, Schopenhauer might still be right to conclude that practical reason cannot be the basis of morality. Though his argument is different from Hume's he agrees with Hume on this conclusion.⁶

223. The Source of Egoism Is Failure to Recognize the Equal Reality of Others

If morality consists essentially in the opposition to egoism, we can find the basis of morality if we see how we can overcome egoism. In Schopenhauer's view, egoism results from failure to acknowledge the reality of other people. We know ourselves directly, but we know other people only through the way they appear to us. Hence we tend to treat them as less real than ourselves. If we do not recognize the equal reality of other people, we do not recognize that their suffering matters to them as much as my suffering matters to me. I know that my suffering is bad because I have direct experience of it, but I believe that other people's suffering is bad only because I infer it from similarity to my own suffering; and so I am not wholly convinced that it is as bad for them as my suffering is for me.⁷

This explanation of selfishness is open to question. Some selfish people manipulate others by appealing to their hopes or fears. If I want to induce you to cooperate in my selfish purposes, I will not find the best incentive for you if I simply think about what would please me. I have to think about what would please you, on the assumption that what pleases you matters as much to you as what pleases me matters to me.

The same applies to disinterested malice. Cruelty would be clumsy and unsuccessful if cruel people did not have a clear sense of what makes other people suffer and of how much they will suffer. Diabolical cruelty depends on an acute sense of what matters to other people and of how much it matters.⁸

Schopenhauer's one-sided account of the sources of egoism results in an equally one-sided solution to the problem of egoism. In his view, morality rests on the recognition of the equal reality of myself and other people.⁹

224. The Source of Compassion Is Recognition of the Unreality of the Distinction between Oneself and Others

Schopenhauer believes that in an action with moral worth 'the ultimate motive for doing or omitting to do a thing is precisely and exclusively centred in the *weal and*

⁶ Hume on practical reason: §151.

⁷ Egoism and denial of the reality of other people: *BM* 132.

⁸ Malice: *BM* 134–6.

⁹ Equal reality of other people: Nagel, *PA* ch. 11; Kant §215.

woe of someone else. If we take this attitude, we accept the basic principle of morality, which is 'Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can.' The ground for accepting this principle, according to Schopenhauer, is compassion.¹⁰

Morality is possible because the welfare and harm of another person can be my motive, just as directly as my own welfare and harm are my motive for acting on my own behalf. The other person's benefit and harm move me directly and immediately, 'that is to say, in exactly the same way in which it [sc. my will] is usually moved only by my own weal and woe'. This direct response to the other is compassion.¹¹

If I feel compassion for another person, I recognize no real distinction between the other person and myself. If I feel for the other what I feel for myself, I do not somehow pretend that I am the one who is feeling the pain. I recognize that the pain belongs to someone else. But I also believe that this 'someone else' is only apparently, and not really a distinct self from me. The genuinely moral outlook, therefore, assumes that different people do not constitute distinct realities. If I do not think the distinction between me and another person is real or important, I have no reason to respond to the other differently from how I respond to my own suffering.¹²

This view of compassion has some surprising consequences. If compassion is the source of morality, it should move me to help other people in response to my recognition of their sufferings. But if the distinction between me and others is unreal or unimportant, it does not seem to matter whether I respond to your suffering by benefiting you or by benefiting myself. This is a strange conception of the basis of morality.

If Schopenhauer's account of the basis of compassion has this strange result, we may doubt whether compassion should be indifferent to the distinction between persons. Kant argues that morality should treat each person as an end, but Schopenhauer's version of compassion does not agree.

225. Is Compassion a Sufficient Basis for Morality?

Even if Schopenhauer is wrong about the basis of compassion, is he right about the role of compassion? If compassion involves direct concern to relieve the suffering of another, it is relevant to morality. If we are to benefit others and to avoid harming them, we must know how they feel, since how they feel affects their welfare.

Compassion, however, does not seem to be the whole foundation of morality. Some moral obligations do not seem to respond to another person's suffering. In some cases we seem to be able to benefit another person who is not suffering any serious deprivation; if the benefit is significant and the cost to ourselves very slight, we seem to have a moral reason to benefit the other.

Schopenhauer agrees, since he recognizes positive obligations of aid, not simply negative obligations to refrain from harm. But he also insists on a strong asymmetry between pain and pleasure as a reason for action; only pain expresses a genuine need to which we cannot remain indifferent. On this view, the positive obligation to help

¹⁰ The moral motive: *BM* 143.

¹¹ Another's good and harm: *BM* 143; Lewis and Hare: §§282–3.

¹² Compassion and the unreality of distinctions between selves: *BM* 143–4, 147, 165–6; 209.

must be limited to the obligation to relieve perceived suffering; it does not extend to benefits that do not relieve any previous perceived suffering.¹³

But even if we concentrate on the prevention or removal of harm, Schopenhauer's identification of harm with pain raises difficulties. For sometimes people do not realize they are being harmed, or they even welcome some treatment that harms them, and so they suffer no pain that would evoke a compassionate response. Apparently, then, we have no moral reason, as far as compassion goes, to prevent or to remove this harm. Schopenhauer takes compassion to be the transference to another person's sufferings of an attitude I have to my own sufferings. But since I have no attitude to harms to myself if I am unaware of them, I have nothing to transfer to another.

Moreover, compassion does not always respond adequately to the sufferings of other people; for it may be restricted in morally irrelevant or misleading ways. We may feel more strongly about people we know better, or people whose sufferings affect us more strongly, or people whose sufferings are easy to imagine; and so our degree of compassion may be affected, in one direction or the other, by our own sufferings. These variations in our compassion apparently ought not to determine our degree of moral concern. If, for instance, we find it easier to feel compassion for someone with the same racial, or social, or educational background as ourselves, such a person does not necessarily deserve more concern than someone who does not share these features with us. Perhaps, indeed, we ought to be especially concerned about people for whom we do not so easily feel compassion.

Schopenhauer answers that the compassion he has in mind is not the degree of compassion that particular people actually feel. We can increase our insight by altering our sympathies in the light of further information. We may take account of the remoter consequences of our actions for other people, and so we may care about people's sufferings more than we originally did. We may come to feel more compassion for people when we know more about them, or their situation is presented more vividly to us.¹⁴

Perhaps, then, the basis of morality is not our actual compassionate feelings but our educated compassion. But what is the relevant sort of education? The effect of further information may vary, so that even if we all have our compassion extended, different people may have it extended in different ways. These differences do not seem to affect what is morally right or wrong. An appeal to a normal observer will not necessarily help; for we may find that, statistically speaking, normal people find it difficult to extend their compassion in morally desirable ways.¹⁵

Moreover, compassion sometimes seems to give the wrong answer. If A's sufferings happen to move me more than B's, but A and B are equally deserving of aid, I may be moved to help A and to neglect B, so that I treat B unfairly.¹⁶

Perhaps, then, we should rely on the compassionate reactions of an ideal observer.¹⁷ But what makes the observer ideal? Must we rely on our views about what is morally important in order to determine the appropriate occasions for compassion

¹³ Pain: *BM* 146.

¹⁴ Extension and correction of compassion: *BM* 192–4.

¹⁵ Normality: §181.

¹⁶ Compassion and justice: *BM* 172.

¹⁷ Ideal observer: §§160, 165, 168.

and the appropriate degree of compassion that an ideal observer feels? In that case, we do not rely on compassion to discover the basis of morality. Nor do we rely on people's actual compassion in order to explain why we have good reason to care about morality.

Schopenhauer, therefore, seems to face a dilemma. If he relies on actual or educated or normal compassion, he fails to provide an adequate basis for morality. But if he relies on idealized compassion, he does not really treat compassion as the basis of morality.

His view is open to criticism from a Kantian point of view. According to Kant, we can appeal to moral principles to criticize any empirical principles or motives that may be suggested as the basis for morality. Kant argues that morality cannot be subordinate to our desire for our own happiness, since this desire can lead us to act contrary to morality, and make us liable to legitimate moral criticism. This form of argument also applies to compassion. If compassion is open to moral criticism, it is not a sufficient basis for morality. This gives us some reason to agree with Kant that moral principles are not subordinate to some aim or motive that is taken to be prior to and independent of them. Schopenhauer's appeal to compassion offers an empirical motive that is relevant to morality. But it is a questionable basis for morality.

18

Hegel

Beyond Kantian Morality

226. Moral Philosophy Should Understand Social Actuality

Hegel agrees with Schopenhauer's judgment that Kant has grasped a formal aspect of morality and has confused this with the basis of morality. Kant is right to suppose that we ought not simply to take habitual social morality for granted, and that we ought to adopt our moral principles as laws for rational agents.¹ But he is wrong to suppose that there are universal moral principles that apply to rational agents as such. Moral philosophy cannot separate itself from a social and political context, and cannot criticize a society from a wholly external point of view.² We discover true moral principles only when the institutions and practices they require have already come into being. Philosophy can only understand the present and the actual.³

By 'actual', however, Hegel does not mean what currently exists; he refers to the fulfilment of something's capacities.⁴ When an acorn exists, it is at present the fruit of an oak tree, but its actuality is the full-grown oak tree that will grow from it in favourable circumstances. We need to understand the relation between acorns and oak trees if we are to understand acorns and saplings. Similarly, when we understand the actuality of a carpenter, we can see why some people who profess to be carpenters are too incompetent to be real carpenters, because they fall too far short of the actuality.

The moral philosopher, then, has to grasp the actuality that is partly present in presently existing societies and practices.⁵ But we cannot grasp this by a mere description of existing societies and practices. Where, then, should we begin?

¹ Habituation: Aristotle §42. A clear account of Hegel's ethics: Wood, *HET*.

² No external point of view: Hegel, *PR* Pref., end (p. 23 Nisbet).

³ Philosophy and the actual (*Wirklich*): *PR* Pref. pp. 20–1 Nisbet.

⁴ This is Aristotle's concept of actuality (*energeia*, *entelecheia*), which is closely related to his concept of function (*ergon*); see §39. See Hegel, *Logic* §142 = Wallace 202; *Hist. Phil.* ii 95–6 Haldane and Simson; Neuhouser, *FHST* 257.

⁵ The task of the philosopher: *PR* Pref., pp. 20–1 N.

227. The Free and Rational Will Is the Starting Point of Morality

Hegel's answer takes up a familiar theme from Aquinas, Butler, and Kant. In his view, social philosophy is primarily about the will and its freedom. A preliminary analysis of the will shows that true morality realizes the self that we implicitly grasp in our recognition of ourselves as agents.⁶

Rational desire and choice contain both a particular and a universal element. If we want to go for a walk, or take a nap, or get a new job, these particular objects of will give our willing a determinate content. But we are also aware of ourselves as willing this content; this awareness is the universal element in our willing. Awareness both of our desires and of ourselves allows us to criticize particular desires. Though I may recognize that I want something, I may not think it is worth wanting, and so I do not treat my desire as belonging to my will. This is how Butler explains the relation of rational self-love to particular passions. In a normal act of willing and choosing I am aware of myself as 'standing above' my impulses, and as having 'put myself' into them. If I make a desire my own, I take the relevant action to be appropriate for myself.⁷

In this respect, my will is free; it is up to my rational choice whether or not I endorse a particular desire and action as appropriate for me. I do not lose my freedom by endorsing a particular desire and acting on it. On the contrary, my freedom would be idle and ineffective if I never endorsed anything.

What sorts of desires and choices, then, are suitable for the self with a free and rational will? I ought not to endorse every particular desire; for some desires are bad for my future self, and if I endorsed them, I would ignore the fact that I persist through time. What I do now will affect the desires I will acquire in the future, and I sometimes need to decide what to do by thinking about how I want to be in the future. I need to evaluate my potential desires by some standard outside the satisfaction of desires.⁸

228. Kant's Insights and Errors About the Rational Will

The Kantian outlook of 'Morality' grasps one element of this free will, but it misunderstands the universal element and its relation to the particular element.⁹

Kantian Morality consists in purely formal principles that are separate from the particular content of a choice and an action. We might compare it with playing a game in the right spirit. A team game will not go as it should unless the players play in the right spirit, so that they cooperate with others on their team, do their best to win within the rules, and so on. A player who plays in the right spirit is the ideal

⁶ The basis of right and the freedom of the will: *PR* §4.

⁷ Particular and universal elements in the will: *PR* §§5–7. The will and the self: *PR* §§7, 12–14. Choice among desires: *PR* §17.

⁸ Rational desire, time, and happiness: *PR* §20.

⁹ Hegel's technical use of these terms is marked by initial capitals.

participant, and the game requires players who come fairly close to this ideal. Similarly, then, Morality is the outlook of an ideal participant in social life.

This comparison with a game suggests why Morality is both important and empty. We cannot derive the rules of baseball or cricket from a completely general description of the right spirit for playing a game; nor can we use such a description to show that baseball is better than cricket. We can discover what a player in a specific game ought to do only if we have some definite idea of how to play (e.g.) baseball or cricket.

Kantian Morality, however, does not notice that it is empty in this respect. Kant believes that we can infer from the formal principles of Morality that, e.g., we ought not to break promises whenever it suits us, that we ought to agree to help each other, that we ought to treat rational beings as ends, and so on. Kant supposes that a universal law for rational beings can determine which actions are right and wrong in specific circumstances. But this aim is as futile as the attempt to decide whether the ideal player ought to play baseball rather than cricket. Kantian arguments cannot tell us what we are to do, but only the spirit in which we are to do it. We might say it provides us with the adverbs, but not the verbs.¹⁰

We found some reasons to doubt Hegel's description of Kant.¹¹ But it is the basis for Hegel's alternative to Kantian Morality.

229. Ethical Life Corrects Kantian Morality

The way of life that Hegel calls 'Ethical' removes the dualism of Kant's approach to morality and practical reason.¹² In Kant's view, morality is separate from, and contrasted with, self-interest. Self-interested action aims simply at the satisfaction of inclinations, and the only role it allows to reason is instrumental, in finding the means to satisfy inclinations. Morality, however, is based on reason, not on inclination, and presents principles that restrict the scope of self-interest.¹³ In Hegel's view, this dualist approach persuades Kant that morality and practical reason must reject aims and goals that are based on self-interest. We can satisfy these Kantian conditions only at the price of making moral principles empty.

To go beyond the emptiness of Kantian Morality, we need to resolve the dualism of morality and self-interest. The wrong resolution subordinates morality to self-interest in the way that Kant criticizes. This wrong resolution is typical—according to Hegel and Kant—of Greek ethics.¹⁴ The right resolution describes the form of social life in which morality and self-interest agree. Hegel calls this form of social life the Ethical life of the State. The State is not an existing state, but the actuality that existing states achieve, or fail to achieve, to different degrees.

Conscious Ethical life is different from the outlook of the other two forms of social life that are found in a state: the Family and Civil Society. In Family life the members of a family do not even think of themselves as having distinct, and possibly conflicting, interests; parents, for instance, do not even think of their own interests as distinct

¹⁰ Morality is empty universality: PR §135. Adverbs: Taylor, *Sources*, ch. 8.

¹¹ Hegel on Kant: §§205–6.

¹² Why ethical life is needed: PR §141; Wood, *HET* 205–6, 217–18.

¹³ Reason and inclination: §§202–3.

¹⁴ Happiness: Aristotle §38; Aquinas §93. Dualism: Scotus §108; Butler §183; Sidgwick §259.

from the interests of their children.¹⁵ Civil Society is the form of social life in which people deal with each other from an economic and commercial point of view. They recognize themselves as having distinct interests, and they take a Hobbesian view of other people as possible competitors and rivals, but also as possible allies whenever their selfish interests coincide.¹⁶ Civil Society forces me to think of myself not just in one particular network of social relations—as a member of this particular family—but also as a ‘concrete person’, an individual with preferences, needs, and abilities, interacting with others whom I conceive in the same way.

Within these assumptions of Civil Society, one might easily think of one’s own interest as purely private, and separate from the interests of others. This is the conception of self-interest that Kantian Morality takes for granted. Kantian dualism treats morality as separate from self-interest (so conceived).

Conscious Ethical life, however, overcomes this narrow conception of self-interest, and avoids the dualism of morality and self-interest, because it recognizes one’s social role as both a requirement of morality and the fulfilment of one’s own interest. In Ethical life, institutions and practices are not alien to the individual. My social role assigns duties to me, but it does not assign duties that conflict with my interest. Ethical life, therefore, eliminates the dualism that is inevitable and insoluble within the Moral point of view. Equally, it eliminates the narrow view of self-interest that is characteristic of Civil Society. In conscious Ethical life I do not see myself as a self with interests that are separate from those of the community.¹⁷

Mature citizens who participate in the conscious Ethical life of the State are not like unselfconscious members of the Family, who have no conception of themselves and their interests apart from the expectations of others. On the contrary, citizens of the State attribute distinct needs and aims to each individual, and acknowledge the State as protector of individual rights, as members of Civil Society do. But they do not think of themselves, as the members of Civil Society do, simply as individuals with private needs and interests; nor do they evaluate the State simply by its contribution to these private ends. They identify their aims with those of the State not because they cannot conceive any alternative, but because they see that the State protects these needs and rights.¹⁸

230. Does Kantian Morality Correct Ethical Life?

Hegel contrasts his conception of the self and its relation to one’s social role with the outlook of a social contract. If we appeal, as Hobbes does, to a social contract, we assume that we can justify the state by showing how it results from a reasonable choice that people outside social life can make on the basis of the interests and needs

¹⁵ Family life: *PR* §§33, 158, 176, 181.

¹⁶ Civil Society: *PR* §§182–4. Hobbes on the state of nature: §129. Kant on humanity v. personality: §215.

¹⁷ Ethical life: *PR* §§145–52. Eliminates dualism: §33. Contrast with Civil Society: §182. The self: §§257–8.

¹⁸ Hegel on Ethical life: Taylor, *HMS* ch. 2; Neuhouser, *FHST* chs. 4–5.

that they recognize before they enter the state, But this attempt to explain and to justify a state relies on an inadequate conception of the self and its interests.¹⁹

Hegel agrees that the self-interest of individuals is a reasonable basis—as the social contract assumes—for judging the moral legitimacy of a state; but what I identify as my self-interest depends on how I conceive myself, and on what I value for its own sake. How I conceive myself depends on the forms of life in which I participate and in which I form my conception of what matters to me. If I conceive myself as the holder of a social role, I may care about my ends in that role; these ends are as much a part of my self-interest as any non-social ends would be. If, then, we refer to self-interest, we have no good reason to exclude the interests that a person forms through a social role.

This is a reasonable conception of self-interest. Some of the roles that we undertake for the good of others in a particular society may be part of our good. Parents and children are attached to each other in Family life, apart from the conscious Ethical life of the State. But in the State relations within a family also have a conscious Ethical aspect. Parents take their own good to consist partly in the good of their children, and one friend takes her good to consist partly in the good of the other friend. Similarly, doctors or teachers or firefighters may think of their social role as worthwhile for its own sake, and therefore may take the fulfilling of this role as part of their own well-being.²⁰

This social aspect of self-interest casts doubt on Kant's views. Kantian Morality is separate from, and opposed to, self-interest, because it takes self-interest to be purely selfish. If, however, social roles may determine self-interest, the Kantian view overlooks an important connexion between morality and self-interest. For the social roles that determine our conception of ourselves and our interest are determined by moral principles. Good teachers or firefighters recognize specific obligations and rights that define their social role. Their conception of the demands of morality helps to define their conception of their social role, and hence their conception of their own interest. Morality, therefore, is neither subordinate nor opposed to self-interest, but forms the correct conception of one's self-interest. Kant's narrow conception of self-interest distorts his conception of morality and of its relation to self-interest.

Hegel claims to find the same narrow conception of self-interest in Greek and mediaeval eudaemonism, as it is found in Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Aquinas. We might doubt whether Hegel describes Greek eudaemonism correctly. If the Greek and mediaeval eudaemonists (or some of them) accept the expanded conception of self-interest that Hegel defends, does his ethical theory differ fundamentally from theirs on this point?

Similarly, we might doubt whether he is fair to Kantian Morality. Though social attachments and concerns legitimately alter our conception of our self-interest, not everything we might come to identify with our interest is really in our interest. In some societies, people may be taught and accustomed to conceive their aims and interests in ways that are bad for them and contrary to their real interest. Moral

¹⁹ Social contract: *PR* §258. Hegel takes an over-simplified view of the role of a social contract. See Rousseau §196; Rawls §287.

²⁰ An expanded conception of one's good: Aquinas §102.

criticism may show that the social roles that are defined in a particular society are the wrong ones. Slavery would be an obvious example of such a role.

If we can discover this, morality cannot be wholly relative to a specific form of social life. Hegel recognizes that critical reflexion may discover moral failures in particular societies. This critical reflexion seems rather similar to Kantian Morality. We might wonder, then, whether Kantian Morality is as empty as Hegel suggests it is.

Still, Hegel's suggestions about morality and social life present elements of morality that Kant neglects and that deserve to be further explored. As we will see, they are further explored by the later idealists Green and Bradley.

19

Nietzsche

Against Kant and Morality

231. Objections to Morality

After he has described the different formulations of the categorical imperative, Kant recognizes that morality might be an illusion.¹ The moral outlook assumes that there are reasons that apply to every rational agent as such, and so it assumes that there is a categorical imperative. But if there are no such reasons, there is no categorical imperative.

Nietzsche believes that Kant is right about the universal claims of the moral point of view. Kant believes he has discovered genuine moral facts that underlie true moral principles. Nietzsche objects that there is nothing to discover, because there are no moral facts.²

If there are no moral facts, moral judgment rests on illusion, according to Nietzsche, and morality is a misinterpretation of certain phenomena. In that case, moral beliefs, inquiries, and arguments cannot discover objective moral truths apart from the preferences of the believers and inquirers. In this respect, moral beliefs are different from beliefs about the physical world (as we ordinarily understand them).

Hutcheson and Hume anticipate Nietzsche in arguing that morality has no rational foundation, and does not fit any objective facts about the world. But they do not infer that morality is an illusion, or that it is not to be taken seriously. Hume argues that once we discover that morality rests on sympathy, we approve of it; for we approve of sympathy, and so we welcome judgments and attitudes that result from it. Morally virtuous people can 'bear their own survey' when they reflect on the basis of their moral outlook. Schopenhauer agrees with Hume's emphasis on sympathy; he traces morality to feelings of compassion for the sufferings of others.³

Nietzsche agrees with the sentimentalists' aim of tracing morality to its origins in our sentiments and feelings. That is why he treats morality as 'a sign language of the affects'. In contrast to the sentimentalists, however, he argues that morality expresses unhealthy emotions that misrepresent reality. Reflexion on the attitudes that produce and sustain altruistic sentiments will lead us to reject them. Though the origins of an attitude do not necessarily determine its value or legitimacy, in this case they reveal

¹ Illusion: §212.

² No rational foundation for morality: *BGE* §186 = K97. Morality is not to be taken for granted: *BGE* §186. No moral facts: *TI* vii 1 = *PN* 501.

³ Hutcheson and Hume: §§153–5.

the unattractive aspects of morality.⁴ If we follow Hume's advice to examine the origins of moral attitudes, we will reject Hume's conclusion. Nietzsche argues that we should reject unhealthy moral emotions, and replace them with healthier emotions that fulfil human nature. He agrees with the ancient moralists in their pursuit of self-fulfilment, but he departs from them in his belief that self-fulfilment and morality are incompatible.

When Hume looks for the origins of our sentiments, he relies on speculative psychology about the mental and moral development of the individual. Nietzsche objects that such speculation assumes a fixed human nature and fixed human desires, apart from specific historical and cultural circumstances. If we inquire into the historical development of moral outlooks in different societies, we can avoid the tendency of moral philosophers to treat their own moral outlook, or their historically-conditioned conception of human nature, as the unquestioned starting point for theory. Nietzsche's 'genealogy of morals' does not rest on speculative individual psychology, but on a survey of historical development. He agrees with Hegel that moral philosophy should not ignore historical and social changes. But he does not draw Hegel's conclusions from the study of history.⁵

232. We Can Learn About Morality by Examining Its Origins

This genealogy of morals attends mainly to ancient Greece, Judaism, and Christianity. It shows that morality, as we find it in Hume, Kant, and Schopenhauer, reflects only one pattern of evaluation of actions and people. In different societies we find the values of masters and slaves, or, more generally, of the talented, successful, admired, and dominant classes, on the one side, and of the unsuccessful and despised classes, on the other side. Slave morality is secondary; it results from the appropriation by inferior people of the evaluative terms used by superior people, with the same sense, but a different reference.⁶

The values of superior people are expressed in the earliest use of evaluative terms such as 'good', 'noble', 'admirable'. Originally these terms refer to the 'nobility' displayed by the ruling class. They reflect the desire of the ruling class to distinguish their characteristics from those of the subject class. Aristocrats use these terms to praise their own aristocratic traits. In Homer, for instance, 'good' and 'bad' (*agathos* and *kakos*) often refer to people of higher and lower birth and social class. The good person conforms to these standards of the superior people, and the bad person is the unfortunate creature who cannot approach these standards.

Slave morality begins from the perception of these phenomena by their victims. Inferior people resent their inferior status and the success of the superior people.

⁴ Morality as sign language: *BGE* §187; *WP* 254. Origins of altruistic sentiments: *GM* ii 6, p. 65. Inquiry into the origin of morality v. critique of morality: *WP* §254. The nature and aims of genealogy: Geuss, *MCH*.

⁵ Philosophers' lack of historical sense: *GM* i §§1–2; *TI*, "Reason" in Philosophy' §1 = *PN* 479. History: Hegel §226.

⁶ Master morality and slave morality: *BGE* §260. Evaluative expressions: *GM* i 4.

They use the terms that superior people use to praise themselves, but they use them to praise the characteristics of inferior people. Similarly, they use terms with the opposite sense to condemn the features of superior people. From the point of view of slave morality, the self-styled superior person is evil, and the good person is the one who lacks the features of the evil person. Slave morality, then, lives as a parasite on master morality by expressing envy and resentment against the superior person. Since slave morality deplores and prohibits the aggressiveness of superior people, it expresses the preferences of inferior people, and pretends that their preferences are objectively justified.⁷

This expression of hatred and desire for revenge against superior people is especially characteristic (Nietzsche supposes) of the Jews. The Jewish outlook asserts that the achievements of superior people have no value. Inferior people persuade themselves that they are justly praised for being the way they are, and that the superior people are justly blamed for being what they are. Inferior people construct an inverted conception of human excellence through their 'manufactured ideals'.⁸

The modern moral outlook emerges from the slave morality of Judaism and Christianity. Slave morality would be reasonable if it were really commanded by the God who redeems sinners, is pleased by meekness, pity, and self-sacrificing love, and rewards them with eternal happiness. This mythical vindication of the slavish outlook still affects modern society, in moral principles that advocate unselfishness, pity, democracy, equality, and the rights of women. The egalitarian and universal outlook of modern morality manifests the Christian outlook that arose from the resentment of the inferior people. Egalitarian morality propagates itself, because societies that accept it tend to produce more and more of the inferior, unhealthy people who are dominated by the emotions that underlie slave morality.⁹

Modern morality, therefore, is 'sign language' and 'symptomatology'. It reveals facts to us, but these are not the facts it purports to reveal. Moral judgments are signs and symptoms of facts about inferiority and resentment. We accept morality not because we have grasped the truth about right and wrong, but because the moral outlook once appealed to inferior people who expressed their resentment against superior people. Morality constrains even those who do not share the resentment of inferior people, because the attitudes of inferior people have now become widespread and tenacious.

233. Why We Should Reject Morality

We might ask whether Nietzsche's historical account of the growth of morality is plausible. But if we accept it, what conclusions should we draw? His genealogy suggests not only that the origins of morality raise suspicions about its claim to truth, but also that its current influence is undesirable. The costs of morality include the activities and traits of character that have to be sacrificed to moral requirements.

⁷ The outlook of inferiors: *GM* i 10–11.

⁸ Morality and the Jewish attitude: *GM* i 7. Manufactured ideals: *GM* i 13–14.

⁹ Modern morality: *BGE* 202, 239. The egalitarian outlook: *GM* i 16.

Morality discourages the development and growth of traits and personalities that ought to be encouraged.

Nietzsche objects especially to democratic and egalitarian tendencies in modern morality. Morality, especially as Kant explains it, asserts the equal moral value of everyone, and therefore regards everyone as a holder of equal moral rights. This outlook turns us against grading people by achievement or merit. Since the moral outlook attaches supreme value to the morally good will, and takes moral success to be equally open to everyone, it ignores forms of success that are not open equally to everyone. Those who grow up in the stifling atmosphere of morality care most about avoiding suffering, their own and other people's. They envy anyone who excels them in any other human achievement.

If everyone is subject to these pressures, the level of achievement in valuable non-moral activities will decline. If, for instance, a Michelangelo were brought up in the democratic atmosphere of modern morality, he would not want to excel as a painter or sculptor. He would be a conformist who would want to avoid any sort of painful exertion. Any striking achievement would expose him to the envy and suspicion of those who are brought up in modern morality.

Recognition of these bad effects of morality refutes Hume's view that we will find morality appealing once we see where it comes from. Once we see the cost of moral attitudes, we will want to reduce their influence.

234. Should We Reject Morality?

If this is Nietzsche's view about morality, he describes a possible side-effect of a one-sided outlook that is exclusively attached to the values of morality. A moral fanatic might form this outlook, and moral fanaticism might result from the tendencies that Nietzsche takes to underlie slave morality.

But does morality require fanatical and one-sided attachment to itself? To show that it does, we might refer to the view of Butler and Kant that moral reasons are supreme over other reasons. We might infer that moral values are so much more important than anything else that we always ought to prefer moral value over any other value. Whenever Michelangelo had a choice between painting the Sistine ceiling and helping in a soup kitchen, he ought always to have made the second choice. If moral values are supreme in this sense, we must always evaluate people by moral standards rather than any other standards, and the expectations of morality always crowd out everything else.

We need not, however, take the supremacy of morality to require this fanatical attachment. Kant maintains that a rational being is an end in itself, and therefore the supreme limiting condition on the pursuit of other ends. Moral principles specify limits within which it is reasonable to pursue other ends. They prohibit the pursuit of ends that interfere with the appropriate sort of respect for human beings as rational agents. This conception of morality does not imply that we must always care about morality to the exclusion of any other end.¹⁰

¹⁰ Kant on the end in itself: §§207–8.

Morality imposes some demands that limit the pursuit of other ends, but we still legitimately care about other things, and sometimes we legitimately pursue them instead of moral pursuits. The view that morality imposes limits does not imply that it is infinitely demanding or that it always crowds out all other values. Morality allows us to give first prize to the winning athlete rather than to the loser, even if the loser is morally better than the winner. But it prohibits us from giving a prize to the winner and shooting the losers.

Moreover, Nietzsche's praise of different human excellences and achievements helps to explain why we might need morality, as Kant conceives it, to mark an appropriate limit on other pursuits. Desirable human traits vary, and the same person is unlikely to cultivate them all. If we value artistic creativity and adventurous, innovative, thinking, we cannot expect even all forms of intellectual and emotional growth and development to be found in the same person.

If we recognize these different types of achievement, which ones should take priority in our treatment of people? If any one dimension of non-moral excellence takes absolute priority, the cultivation of that dimension of excellence in a particular society threatens all the under-achievers in that dimension. Different dimensions of value have to struggle against one another for supremacy. How can they all be encouraged so that none of them dominates?

Impartial and egalitarian morality tries to answer this question. If the development of human talents requires liberty, it needs some moral basis for the protection of liberty. The egalitarian aspects of Kantian morality are not antagonistic to human achievements, but are necessary for their free development.¹¹ The cultivation of 'superior' human traits and accomplishments (as Nietzsche understands them) not only allows, but even requires, the acceptance of morality. The egalitarian attitudes required for morality do not prohibit the desire to excel in non-moral areas, and do not exclude admiration for people who excel in these areas. Someone who thought that morality excludes these other attitudes would misunderstand the place of equality in Kantian morality.

235. Subjectivism and Self-Refutation

This defence of Kantian morality concedes the truth of Nietzsche's genealogy and argues that morality is worth while, whatever its historical origins. But does this defence grasp the point of his genealogy? The historical study of moral outlooks shows (one might argue) that each of these outlooks is the product of particular historical and social conditions and of the desires, impulses, and ideals of a particular social group. An attempt to show that a moral system is rational and justified tries to detach it from the particular aims and impulses that give it its life, and so it is bound to fail.

Nietzsche wants to replace the study of morality with the study of moralities, because there are many moral outlooks, but there is no one true outlook that captures the real demands of morality. Each of the various moralities is a projection of certain

¹¹ Free development: Mill §251; Rawls §§288–9.

desires on to objective reality. Slave morality, for instance, reflects the emotions of inferior people and has no claim to capture the moral truth. The same can be said of the other moral outlooks that might arise in different societies among different types of people.¹²

Nietzsche argues, therefore, from the variety of moral systems to the conclusion that none of them is true.¹³ This form of argument is open to doubt. The mere fact of variation does not show that no moral system could be true. If the argument from variation to no truth were sound, it would apply to a wide range of beliefs, not only to moral beliefs, since (as the ancient Sceptics point out) people's beliefs differ on many subjects. If one wants to argue from variety to falsity in the case of morality but not in other cases, one needs to show that the falsity of moral beliefs is the most plausible explanation of variety. But this is difficult to show.

In particular, if Nietzsche's argument from the variety of moral outlooks is cogent, his preference for the excellences and achievements of (supposedly) superior people is simply a symptom of his emotions, desires, and circumstances. In that case, he has no ground for attacking slave morality for its objectively bad effects; he can attack it only because it does not fit his preferences. Nihilism about moralities and evaluative outlooks may undermine some of his other arguments.

¹² Morality as a projection of desires: *WP* 560. Variation: §§55–6. Subjectivism: §277.

¹³ Or perhaps he intends the sceptical conclusion that we cannot know, or justifiably believe, that any one of them is true.

Utilitarianism

Mill and Sidgwick

236. Earlier and Later Utilitarians

Sentimentalists and rationalists in the eighteenth century argue about utilitarianism. Hutcheson and Hume affirm, against Butler and Price, that actions or rules are right because of their consequences for the total pleasure and pain of those whom they affect. Utilitarianism is a maximizing doctrine, since it aims at realizing the highest total good, irrespective of how it is distributed among different individuals. It is a hedonist doctrine, since the good to be maximized is pleasure. In the nineteenth century the most powerful philosophical defenders of utilitarianism are Mill and Sidgwick. They claim to articulate and to correct the statement and defence of utilitarianism by Bentham. Just as the successors of Socrates have different views about how to defend Socrates' main doctrines, Mill and Sidgwick disagree about how far Bentham's views need to be modified if they are to be defensible.¹

Bentham treats utilitarian ethics as the basis of a programme of legal and social reform. Many of his utilitarian predecessors are conservative utilitarians who treat the principle of utility as the ultimate principle that justifies the different rules of common-sense morality. Bentham, however, uses it as a test to expose the flaws in social practices, rules, and laws. He applies the utilitarian criterion of right and wrong to specific laws, and asks whether they actually promote the overall welfare of those whom they affect. He argues that many of the laws of early nineteenth-century England do not pass this test; they result from custom that may once have been useful but is no longer useful, and from the entrenched privileges of particular classes and interests, but not from rational reflexion on the policies that would produce the best consequences.²

Bentham is not the first modern moral philosopher to aim at the reform of social institutions and practices.³ But he is the first to connect specific reforms with the goals prescribed by his moral theory. His outlook responds to some of questions that arose for social policy in Britain and in other industrial societies. The growth of industry and the demand for labour produced a large migration from rural areas to expanding urban areas. Unregulated expansion of industry resulted in low wages, cyclical unemployment, child labour, poor housing, ill health, and the spread of

¹ Successors of Socrates: §23. Not all later forms of utilitarianism are hedonistic: §252.

² Bentham's ethics: see *PML*. Mill on Bentham and his predecessors: 'Bentham' 87.

³ Price on social and financial policy: Thomas, *HM* chs. 7, 11, 12.

infectious diseases. The cumulative effects of the actions of individuals and groups who did what seemed best to them were unintended bad consequences. No one intended the growth of industries and cities to depress wages, shorten life expectancy, and spread diseases. But when these consequences affected everyone, collective action was needed to deal with them. Utilitarians believed that society should be consciously organized to maximize utility. Both Bentham and Mill offered advice on legislation, organization, and social policy. Their proposals had some influence on the Radical group in Parliament.⁴

Bentham's utilitarianism expresses the critical attitude that resulted in the American and French revolutions. We have seen how Price, Rousseau, and Kant defend these revolutions by appeal to their different philosophical theories of rights, freedom, morality, and practical reason. Bentham, however, rejects these philosophical theories, and agrees with conservative critics of the outlook that Kant calls 'enlightenment'. Burke attacks the rationalism of Price and Rousseau as the pernicious view of 'French philosophers' who advocate revolution. Similarly, Bentham rejects the rationalist doctrine of natural rights that belong to human beings simply because they are human beings. Burke speaks scornfully of Price's 'metaphysic rights'. Similarly, Bentham, in his discussion of the declaration of rights issued by the revolutionaries in France, dismisses the doctrine of natural rights as 'nonsense on stilts' and as 'terrorist language'.⁵

According to Bentham, we can justify moral and political reform without resort to any 'nonsense on stilts'. He connects the utilitarianism of Hutcheson and Hume with the psychological and political outlook of Helvétius, an eighteenth-century critic of the French monarchy who seemed to Bentham to have avoided Rousseau's philosophical extravagances. Helvétius reverted to the psychological hedonism of Hobbes (ignoring the refutations by Hutcheson, Hume, and Butler), and combined it with a doctrine of association.⁶ According to this doctrine, we form our moral outlook because we are trained to associate our own greater pleasure with the pleasure of others. This association begins with rewards or punishments, but continues without any external reinforcement; we simply take pleasure as a result of other people's pleasures because we have been trained to do this. The reform of society, therefore, simply requires us to train everyone to associate their own greatest pleasure with the greatest pleasure of the greatest number.⁷

Bentham, therefore, takes over the reforming outlook of Price, but he claims to derive his proposals for reform from an account of right and wrong that an empiricist can accept. The criterion of right and wrong is not an abstract principle that is allegedly accessible to moral reason, but the empirical fact that human beings pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Since pleasure is good and pain is bad, the right action is the

⁴ Influence of utilitarianism: Halévy, *GPR* esp. Part 2, ch. 6; Part 3, ch. 3; Sabine, *HPT* chs. 31–2. A cautious view: Thomas, *PR*.

⁵ Revolutions: §196. Burke on Price's 'metaphysic rights': *RRF* 61. 'Nonsense on stilts': Bentham, *AF* 501.

⁶ Association: Hartley, *OM* = R §§646–54.

⁷ Greatest number: Helvétius, *Essays on the Mind*, Essay iii ch. 16 = S 427–9.

one that maximizes the balance of pleasure over pain. This criterion allows us to decide whether particular actions, rules, and institutions are right.

Bentham's position raises some questions: (1) How do facts about pleasure and pain tell us what actions are right or wrong? (2) In particular, have we any reason to believe that the right action is the one that maximizes overall pleasure? (3) Does the test of maximizing pleasure give us a useful criterion for deciding whether actions or institutions are right?

237. Varieties of Utilitarianism: Conservative, Progressive, and Radical

Bentham and Mill enter a debate about the implications of utilitarianism for morality and social policy. To understand their contribution, we can contrast their version of utilitarianism with the conservative and radical versions that they reject.

Many eighteenth-century philosophers draw conservative conclusions from utilitarian arguments.⁸ Hume argues that existing social institutions, such as property, are right because they promote utility. Adam Smith argues, in similar terms, that individual self-interested behaviour, without any explicit social regulation, promotes utility. Burke maintains, against Price, that attempts to justify revolution by appeal to rights, without regard to good and bad consequences, are destructive to society and the common good. These utilitarian arguments defend conventional morality and the existing social order.

According to radical utilitarians, however, utilitarian morality departs sharply from common sense, so that utilitarians must regularly act in ways that common sense would regard as wrong, and even shocking. Godwin's *Inquiry concerning Political Justice* argues that the principle of utility requires the strictest attention to one's estimate of the overall effect of one's actions on the general happiness. All virtues are subordinate to the principle of utility, and virtuous people are direct utilitarians, moved by explicit and exclusive reference to utility in every action. Justice, therefore, cannot impose morally legitimate restrictions on utility, and just laws cannot impede the pursuit of utility. Every moral obligation is derived from utility.⁹

On the basis of this direct utilitarianism, Godwin argues that one ought to save the life of a great benefactor of humanity over one's own life, or the life of one's parent or child. No obligation depends on what one owes to others because of what they have done in the past. For this purpose a great benefactor is someone who can be expected to confer great benefits on humanity in the future; great benefits in the past are relevant only if they provide evidence of probable future benefits. The unwelcome implications that Price presents as objections to utilitarianism simply have to be accepted, if they follow from the principle of utility.¹⁰ Godwin takes utilitarianism to

⁸ Conservative utilitarians include Hume (§168); Paley *MPP* ch. 6 (see R §854).

⁹ Morality requires direct utilitarianism: Godwin, *EPJ* ii 5, 159. Direct v. indirect utilitarianism: §168. Utility is the only criterion of justice: Godwin, *EPJ* ii 2, 129; vii 8, 403–4.

¹⁰ Implications of utilitarianism: Price §189.

have radical, and indeed revolutionary, consequences both in morality and in politics.

In opposition to both conservative and radical utilitarians, Bentham and Mill defend utilitarianism as a progressive doctrine in morals and politics.¹¹ They believe that utilitarian principles support, for instance, social and political reforms that reduce inherited power and privilege, extend individual rights, and protect the welfare and interests of the worse-off members of society.

Different utilitarians, therefore, argue for conservative, radical, and progressive versions of utilitarianism. Their disagreement might suggest to us that utilitarianism does not help us to reach definite conclusions in morals or politics. Perhaps the idea of maximizing utility is so vague or unspecific that it can be turned in any direction you like.

Mill and Sidgwick reject this conclusion. In their view, utilitarian moral theory is the foundation for a progressive outlook in morality, politics, and social theory, and it definitely rules out both the conservative and the radical response. They try to show why Bentham is right. Neither morality nor society needs to be destroyed and reconstructed from the ground up, as the radicals assume. But things are not all right as they stand, as the conservatives assume. Utilitarianism shows us the right way to reform them.

238. Moral Theory and Empirical Argument

We might object that it is futile to try to enlist a moral theory in any specific programme of social and political reform. Moral principles are general and abstract, we might say, and they cannot guide us through all the historical and social complexities that determine whether a specific political or social reform is necessary.

Mill and Sidgwick agree that moral theory is not enough by itself. In their view, we need both the correct moral theory and empirical knowledge of social, economic, historical, and political reality. But utilitarianism shows us the empirical questions we need to ask. When we have answered them correctly, we will see—according to these utilitarians—that utilitarianism supports progressive, but neither conservative nor radical, conclusions.

For this reason these utilitarians treat moral philosophy as a foundation of a larger social theory that includes political economy (economics), social psychology, and sociology. Claims about the social and political implications of utilitarianism can be tested only when these social sciences provide us with reliable information about how to maximize utility. Mill's aims are clear from the title of his major work on economics, *Principles of Political Economy, with Some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*. He emphasizes the utilitarian effects of different economic policies, so that a convinced utilitarian will recognize the sorts of economic reforms that are needed. This larger social theory helps to explain why Mill and Sidgwick believe utilitarianism is both the true moral theory and the theory that we need to make genuine social and political progress.

¹¹ Utilitarianism as a progressive doctrine: Brink, *MPP*, esp. ch. 1.

A discussion of the arguments for utilitarianism should help us to decide whether Mill and Sidgwick's progressive and reforming version of utilitarianism is a plausible and stable third option between the conservative and the radical versions. On some points, Sidgwick clarifies Mill. On other points Sidgwick sticks closer to Bentham than Mill does, and sometimes we can appreciate the merits of Mill's more qualified version of utilitarianism after we see the difficulties that arise for Sidgwick's more Benthamite position.¹²

239. Different Strategies of Argument for Utilitarianism

Mill and Sidgwick defend Bentham's utilitarian account of morality with two types of argument: dialectical and axiomatic.

A dialectical argument begins from our intuitive moral judgments. The utilitarian argues that some of these intuitive judgments reflect a utilitarian outlook. Even if we do not consciously think about the principle of utility, we implicitly accept it in so far as we attend to utilitarian considerations. As Sidgwick puts it, common sense is 'unconsciously utilitarian'. Normally we can use ordinary moral principles to discover the implications of the principle of utility.

Other intuitive judgments seem to reject utilitarian conclusions, but on closer inspection they do not create serious difficulties for utilitarianism. Some are based on less obvious consequences for utility. Some rest on false assumptions about utility, and so they do not conflict with utilitarianism in principle. Some are not based on utility at all, but we can confidently reject them once we think about their destructive implications for our more fundamental moral beliefs.

These different approaches to intuitive moral judgments suggest a dialectical defence of utilitarianism. Even though a superficial description of intuitive judgments might suggest that they conflict with utilitarian theory, the appearance of conflict may prove to be misleading, once we consider the strategies that are available to a utilitarian. Once we see that the principle of utility can be justified by appeal to common moral beliefs, we can use it to correct some of our initial beliefs. In Sidgwick's view, utilitarianism 'systematizes' common sense (according to Sidgwick).¹³

Mill and Sidgwick present this dialectical argument in order to overcome the objections to utilitarianism that we have found in eighteenth-century rationalists, especially Butler, Reid, and Price. They believe that rationalist appeals to intuitive objections will appear less decisive once we examine them in the light of the utilitarian strategies that we have just described. The critics of utilitarianism have contented themselves (according to Mill and Sidgwick) with arguing that we often do not think about utility. They have not shown that utility does not explain our intuitive judgments.

Utilitarians do not restrict themselves, however, to dialectical arguments. Price suggests that utilitarians have to rely on rational intuitions (i.e., on knowledge of

¹² Political economy: Mill, *PPE*, Book v, chs. 8–11 on the bad and good effects of intervention and non-intervention by governments. A short account of *PPE*: Thomas, *Mill* ch. 4; Satz, 'Political economy', esp. 688–90. Sidgwick's conception of ethics and its relation to politics: Crisp, *CD* ch. 1.

¹³ Dialectical argument: Aristotle §37; Rawls §286. Systematizing: Sidgwick, *ME* 77.

basic principles that have no further inferential justification) no less than he does, and he has just as good a reason for recognizing non-utilitarian intuitions as they have for recognizing utilitarian intuitions.¹⁴ Mill and Sidgwick argue, against Price, that the utilitarian principle is vindicated by Kantian arguments from ‘axioms’—fundamental rational principles that are necessary for any rational agency. This axiomatic argument exploits Kantian principles in order to draw conclusions that Kant rejects. It does not rely on common-sense morality, and does not necessarily agree with it. If this sort of argument is cogent, utilitarians need not confine themselves to moral reforms that can be justified dialectically from common sense.

To see how strong a defence of utilitarianism we can find, we need to consider both dialectical and axiomatic strategies.

240. Utilitarianism Needs Secondary Principles

Mill begins his dialectical argument by observing that utilitarianism gets a bad name because people misinterpret it. Some critics notice that Bentham asks how different practices and institutions promote the general happiness. They infer that a utilitarian faces every practical question by asking about the best consequences of acting one way or another. Godwin accepts this radical utilitarian view, and therefore rejects common-sense morality.¹⁵

Mill believes that utilitarians have something better to offer. They do not try to work out the best consequences before they do anything, but they rely on ‘secondary principles’, which are secondary to the principle of utility. These include familiar rules about, for instance, keeping promises, helping a neighbour in distress, and treating strangers with consideration. Since secondary principles are easier to apply than the principle of utility, they show us how to maximize utility in specific cases. We need them because it would be foolish to approach each situation by trying to calculate maximum utility. Often we have no time to calculate consequences in detail, and we do not know what the consequences of an action will be, or how they will affect utility. We need secondary principles to guide us.¹⁶

Many secondary principles come from common-sense morality, which embodies the experience of past generations. Ordinary moral rules and principles serve as secondary principles because they pick out actions with good consequences. We normally assume that a morally right action does some good to someone; an allegedly right action that did no good to anyone and did harm to everyone would be difficult to defend. This familiar thought that right actions should have some good effects supports the utilitarian claim that common-sense morality provides secondary principles for the promotion of utility.

¹⁴ Intuitive judgments v. intuitions: Price §190.

¹⁵ Misrepresentations of utilitarianism: Mill, *U* 1.6 (cited by chapter and paragraph). Godwin: §237.

¹⁶ Secondary principles: *U* 2.24.

241. The Principle of Utility Systematizes Secondary Principles

If secondary principles are guides for action, what is the use of the principle of utility? Mill answers that we need a first principle because secondary principles may conflict. We need a 'common umpire' to resolve these conflicts, and the principle of utility is the best umpire.¹⁷

We resolve a conflict between fairness and kindness, for instance, by considering the consequences of each choice. Unless we consider the consequences, we cannot resolve such conflicts.¹⁸ If we appeal to one principle against another, we need to say why (e.g.) kindness should override fairness in this type of case. To answer this question, we need a principle that is more general than kindness and fairness. We need the principle of utility.

We appeal to utility if we recognize that, for instance, it is right to break a promise in order to help someone, if the promise is about a relatively trivial matter and the benefit is great (e.g., I break a promise to meet A for lunch, in order to save B's life). We implicitly recognize that the balance of good consequences determines what we ought to do. Utilitarians think in the same way, but more explicitly and systematically.

Utilitarianism vindicates some familiar rules, because we can explain the point of rules about promises, respect for property, etc., by appeal to their good consequences. Whenever we limit the scope of rules, or defend breaches of them, by appeal to consequences, we show that we care about utility. Common sense appears at first sight to accept a number of general rules that have no exceptions, but in fact we limit the application of these rules (e.g., about lying and about breaking promises) by their consequences.

Even if common-sense maxims do not always identify the action that maximizes utility, a utilitarian may defend them. It may be best to follow common-sense maxims without making exceptions, because the process of making exceptions (even when each one is clearly for the best) may have results that would be worse than the results of following the maxims. We might be able to work out how often we can walk across a lawn before the grass is damaged, but it would be difficult and pointless to try to work this out, and it is better to follow the simple rule of keeping off the grass. It might often be quite safe to drive through a red light, but it is dangerous to allow people to decide for themselves; hence it is better to have the rule of stopping at a red light. The utilitarian may defend common-sense moral rules on utilitarian grounds.

In some cases, however, common-sense rules let us down, because they offer no definite answers in specific situations. In these cases the principle of utility has a further role. Our rules about telling the truth and keeping promises (e.g.) have exceptions, but it is difficult to spell out all the exceptions. The utilitarian tells us that we need to make exceptions in cases where breaking the rules will maximize utility.

¹⁷ Utility as umpire: *U* 2.25. Contrast Ross §285.

¹⁸ Conflicts: Price §190.

If, therefore, we think carefully and reflectively about the basis of ordinary moral convictions, we apparently ought to accept the utilitarian principle.

242. Some Secondary Principles Seem to Oppose Utilitarianism

Parts of this dialectical argument for utilitarianism are plausible. Some moral rules need to be qualified, and appropriate qualifications sometimes refer to good and bad consequences. Some rules are more important than others, and if we follow one rule, we may have to violate another; hence we sometimes need to look for the best consequences.

But the next steps in the argument for utilitarianism are open to question. An appeal to consequences is not necessarily utilitarian. Utilitarianism is about the maximization of pleasure over pain, but not all consequences are about the balance of pleasure and pain. Though we consider the relative importance of different moral rules and principles, we may doubt whether pleasure and pain are all that we consider.

We may also doubt whether the maximizing of good consequences is our first principle (i.e., the basic principle from which the secondary principles are all derived). If it were the first principle, it would override all other considerations on all occasions. But sometimes common-sense morality seems to rely on non-consequentialist reasoning. Certain kinds of distribution, for instance, and certain types and degrees of punishment, appear to be just or unjust for reasons apart from utility.

If utility is all that matters, it is not obvious that, for instance, more serious crimes should receive more severe punishments than less serious crimes. Suppose that shoplifting happens very often, and that murder happens very rarely. Someone might propose the death penalty for shoplifting, on the ground that this very severe penalty will deter a crime that usually offers only a comparatively small benefit to the shoplifter. Since murder is very rare, someone might propose a fine as the penalty for murder. But even if we were convinced that these penalties for shoplifting and murder would have the best consequences, we might reject them, on the ground that murder is worse than shoplifting. If this is our reason, we do not care only about the best consequences. If we insist on this sort of proportion between crime and punishment, we seem to reject utilitarian calculation.¹⁹

243. Justice and Other Secondary Principles Can Be Defended on Utilitarian Grounds

To answer these doubts about utilitarianism, Mill discusses one case in detail. Since he sees that justice appears to conflict with utilitarian reasoning, he argues that there is no conflict.

¹⁹ Butler on utilitarianism and justice: §185.

Some radical utilitarians simply assert, as Godwin does, that justice requires us to maximize utility. Mill sees that this counter-intuitive answer is too simple. He admits, as Hume does, that justice seems to rule out some appeals to utility, and even to violate utility.²⁰ Principles of justice do not seem to be utilitarian secondary principles. Mill replies that a correct account of the moral value of justice confirms the utilitarian conception of morality.

We believe it is just to treat equal cases equally, to give people what they deserve, and to be impartial. According to Mill, we take the observance of these rules to be essential to morality, and so we want to punish violators of the rules. Our desire to punish rests on a moral sentiment that assumes that violations of justice harm the general interest. Hence the basis of our sentiments about justice, fairness, and so on is utilitarian.²¹

Mill's defence of justice clarifies his conception of secondary principles. We might have taken him to mean that the secondary principles are useful guides for finding the particular action that maximizes utility. In that case he would offer a direct utilitarian defence, since he would be applying the principle of utility directly to each individual action. But he defends justice on indirect utilitarian grounds. He appeals to the utility of accepting general rules, whether or not our acceptance of them results in our maximizing utility in each particular action.²²

These arguments support Mill's account of rights. Our belief that people have rights seems to conflict with utilitarianism, because, as Mill agrees, a right involves some protection against interference. If someone has a right, society ought to assure them of this protection. But we undermine the assurance if we make it depend on utility in each particular case. If I am supposed to have a right to privacy, but my privacy can be infringed whenever an infringement would maximize utility, it is only weakly protected. Mill argues that we ought to be assured in the possession of certain liberties, even though direct utilitarian calculation would often violate them.²³

This is an indirect utilitarian reason to ignore utility in particular actions. Utility is maximized in a society where people do not always maximize utility on particular occasions. The benefits of security, freedom of thought and action, and so on, show that rules of justice promote utility. Disagreements about rules of justice should be resolved by reference to their effects on utility.²⁴

244. Doubts About the Utilitarian Account of Justice

Against Mill's argument we may object that some of our rights belong to us simply as persons, irrespective of whether they promote utility. When Kant claims that persons are ends in themselves, he implies that because they are persons they deserve respect in their own right, apart from any consequences. Since persons are all equally ends in themselves, they deserve equal respect, and therefore have equal rights. Equal respect

²⁰ Hume on justice: §166.

²¹ Utility and morality in justice: *U* 5.17.

²² Direct and indirect utilitarianism: §§132, 168; Darwall, *PE* 127–38. The test of utility applied to rules: *U* 5.22 (Mill on Kant); Urmson, 'Mill'; Brandt, *MUR* ch. 7.

²³ Rights: *U* 5.25. See Dworkin, *TRS* chs. 6–7. Liberty: Mill *OL*. Cf. §290.

²⁴ Utility is the test of justice: *U* 5.26–7.

and equal rights do not seem to depend on any proof that equal respect and equal rights promote utility, directly or indirectly.²⁵

Mill answers that utilitarianism supports equal rights, without any appeal to a non-utilitarian principle. The principle of utility incorporates equal consideration, in accordance with Bentham's maxim that everyone is to count for one, and no one for more than one. Since everyone counts equally, everyone has equal rights and receives equal respect.²⁶

Utilitarian calculation assumes some equal consideration. In the calculation of overall happiness, a given quantity of your happiness counts for as much as the same quantity of mine. If we leave anyone's pleasures and pains out of account in this calculation, we do not really calculate maximum overall happiness. To decide what is best, we need to add and subtract the happiness and unhappiness of the different people affected, in order to find the highest total. This equal consideration of everyone's pleasures and pains in the calculation of total pleasure and pain proves, according to Mill, that Bentham's first principle embodies an equal right to happiness.

We may question this conclusion, however. According to the principle of utility, we ought to deprive one person or many persons of happiness, if we thereby promote greater total happiness, summed over all those who are affected. This limit on the right to happiness violates a plausible conception of a right. If people have equal rights, one person has a right to (for instance) freedom that is consistent with a similar degree of freedom for everyone. According to Mill, however, I am not entitled to whatever degree of happiness is consistent with a similar degree of happiness for someone else, but only to the degree of happiness or unhappiness that maximizes the total happiness. I may have to suffer extreme unhappiness for the sake of other people's happiness, if that maximizes the total happiness.

If, therefore, equal rights imply that we are protected against a policy that would sacrifice us for the sake of total happiness, utilitarianism rejects equal rights. Mill does not seem to take account of all the objections to a utilitarian explanation of justice that arise from the arguments of Butler, Reid, and Price. These objections may lead us to doubt whether utilitarianism is the correct account of morality.²⁷

This doubt leads to a further question about the claim of both Bentham and Mill that utilitarianism is a basis for progressive and enlightened social policy. Bentham maintains that if we judge policies, practices, and institutions by their consequences for total happiness, we will reject special privileges for the well-born and well-off, try to improve the position of the worst-off, and protect individual rights and liberties. Mill shares these convictions with Bentham, and hence he seeks to vindicate individual rights without any 'nonsense on stilts'—any rationalist doctrine of natural rights.²⁸ But if Mill's defence of justice undermines individual rights, we may be uncertain about utilitarian social policy.

²⁵ Rights and persons: Price, *RPQM* 159, discussed in §189; Kant §§207–8; Rawls §291. Equal respect: Dworkin, *TRS* 179–81.

²⁶ Everyone counts equally: *U* 5.36.

²⁷ Butler, Price, Reid on utility and justice: §§185–90. Cf. Ross §§284–5.

²⁸ Nonsense on stilts: §236.

245. Defences of Hedonism

These arguments suggest that utilitarianism does not fit common-sense morality, because some basic moral convictions seem to conflict with utilitarianism. But such arguments do not refute utilitarianism. Since the utilitarian goal is maximum happiness and maximum pleasure, we need to discuss the relevant type of pleasure, and the relation of pleasure to happiness.

Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick accept the hedonist conception of the good, maintained by Epicurus and Hobbes, and prefer it to the eudaemonist conception.²⁹ Both hedonism and Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* are accounts of the ultimate good. We may dispute about whether Aristotle discusses happiness in the modern sense of the English term.³⁰ But he certainly discusses the ultimate good, and he claims that the good is not identical to pleasure. Mill and Sidgwick defend a version of the hedonism that Aristotle rejects. Sidgwick does not believe that pleasure is the ultimate end that everyone in fact seeks; hence he rejects psychological hedonism, as Butler does.³¹ But he affirms that one's good consists in one's own pleasure, not in the objective conditions that Aristotle, among others, takes to constitute happiness (*eudaimonia*).

This account of the good allows a more precise description of the utilitarian conception of the right. Utilitarianism defines the right as what maximizes the good, and defines the good as pleasure and the absence of pain. The right action, therefore, maximizes the balance of pleasure over pain, summed over all the sentient beings affected by that action.³²

In the light of this more precise conception of the good, we may doubt whether common-sense morality is a collection of secondary principles for achieving the good, as hedonistic utilitarians understand it. Some good consequences are relevant to whether an action is right; but are pleasures and pains are the only consequences that matter?

Mill and Sidgwick rely on different versions of hedonism to answer this question. Sidgwick agrees with Bentham's view that one pleasure is to be chosen over another only in so far as it is a larger quantity of pleasure. Since we should choose between different actions only by reference to their net yield of pleasure, we need only consider relative quantities of pleasure. Mill agrees with Sidgwick's view that pleasure is the good, but he denies that quantitative differences between pleasures are the only ones that matter.

246. Sidgwick: Hedonism Offers the Only Plausible Account of the Good

In Sidgwick's view, the morally right promotes some end that allows the resolution of practical questions by empirical inquiry. If the end is maximum pleasure, we can satisfy this condition, for we know which actions are right once we have answered the empirical questions about which actions maximize pleasure. But if we take the end to

²⁹ Hedonism: Epicurus §61; Hobbes §128.

³⁰ Happiness and *eudaimonia*: Aristotle §38.

³¹ Butler on pleasure and desire: §193

³² Pleasure and absence of pain: *U* 2.2.

be happiness, and we take happiness to consist in (say) the activities appropriate to the nature of a rational agent, we still have to resolve a dispute about which activities these are. This dispute is not purely empirical, because it relies on further judgments of value (including judgments about good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate). Sidgwick concludes that an Aristotelian conception of the good is not suitable for ethical theory.³³

This assumption about ethical theory supports hedonism. Sidgwick maintains that goodness consists in pleasantness, so that good things are good to the extent that they contain or promote pleasure. Pleasure is evidently one ultimate good. But when we consider other apparently ultimate goods that are apparently distinct from pleasure, we find that they are not really distinct from it. Pleasure is the only ultimate good that can (as Sidgwick puts it) 'systematize human activity' in the way that ethical method requires.³⁴

From an Aristotelian point of view, pleasure is not the whole of happiness, because we might maximize our pleasure on the basis of false beliefs (a fool's paradise), or by taking pleasure in childish, trivial, or harmful activities. In these cases, an increase in our pleasure may make us worse off.³⁵ Sidgwick replies that foolish or deluded pleasures do not contain so much pleasure that a rational and informed hedonist would choose them. When we consider the pleasure of the moment, foolish or deluded pleasures may seem extremely pleasant, but they are less appealing if we consider their consequences for the pleasure and pain in our life as a whole. If we get used to foolish pleasures, we make it more difficult for ourselves to gain other pleasures in the future.

247. Objection to Sidgwick: The Relation between Pleasure and Belief

Sidgwick's hedonism requires him to hold not only that every good is a pleasure or a source of pleasure, but also that it is good because it is a pleasure or a source of it. This latter claim is open to question.³⁶ We saw that, in Butler's view, every pleasure essentially has an object that relies on some belief; I take pleasure in playing music, for instance, in the belief that it is good to play music. If Butler is right, the belief that something is good (or has some other valuable property) is the basis for our taking pleasure in it. Hence we believe that, contrary to Sidgwick, pleasures are not the only goods.

Sidgwick concedes that some pleasures are belief-dependent, and that therefore our beliefs affect our pleasures and pains.³⁷ But he maintains that not all pleasures are belief-dependent, and that all belief-dependent pleasures arise from pleasures that are not belief-dependent. Hence belief-dependent pleasures present no difficulties for hedonism.

³³ Non-hedonist egoism is empty: Sidgwick, *ME* 91–2.

³⁴ Hedonism systematizes: *ME* 406.

³⁵ Pleasure and good: Aristotle §45.

³⁶ Sidgwick on Butler: *ME* 45.

³⁷ Pleasure and belief: *ME* 40.

His claims may be questioned. If we take pleasure in some action because we believe it is right or kind or generous, it seems that we care about these features of the action for their own sakes, and not only about pleasure. If we are right to care about these features for their own sakes, pleasure is not the only thing we have reason to care about for its own sake.

248. Sidgwick: Foundationalist Epistemology Supports Hedonism

Sidgwick argues for hedonism not only because he thinks it is plausible in its own right, but also because he thinks a systematic ethical theory needs it, in order to answer two questions: (1) How are we to compare the value of different non-hedonic goods? (2) How are we to compare their value with the value of happiness (understood as pleasure)? Hedonism answers these questions by 'a common standard for comparing these values with that of happiness'. Pleasure is Mill's 'common umpire'.³⁸

It is better, in Sidgwick's view, to apply this common standard than to try to compare non-hedonic goods directly. If we are in doubt about whether pushpin or poetry is better on the whole, we will not settle our doubt by asserting more generally that the exercise of a wider range of intellectual and aesthetic capacities is better; for our doubt about pushpin and poetry may have arisen from a doubt about this more general assertion.

We do not need to answer such questions about comparative value if we ask whether one course of action yields more pleasure than another. Our only questions are empirical. Even if they are difficult to answer, they do not raise difficulties of principle. Non-hedonist conceptions of the good raise difficulties of principle if they rely on moral or other evaluative judgments that cannot be explained by reference to some non-evaluative foundation.

Sidgwick regards pleasure as a common standard because it is a foundation that can be known (in his view) with greater certainty than other evaluative principles. According to his foundationalist and intuitionist conception, knowledge that relies on inference ultimately depends on some foundation that is known non-inferentially, without reference to any further justification. The basic facts about pleasure and good are known non-inferentially, and other moral facts are inferred from these facts.³⁹

This argument may be questioned on two grounds: (1) Even if a hedonist theory of the good has greater systematizing power, is that a good enough reason to accept hedonism? (2) Should we accept Sidgwick's foundationalist conception of moral knowledge? If we find that moral knowledge seems to lack the structure that he demands, that may be a reason to doubt whether Sidgwick applies the right standards.

³⁸ A common standard: *ME* 405.

³⁹ Foundationalism and intuitionism: §190.

249. Mill's Qualitative Hedonism: Higher Pleasures Differ in Quality from Lower Pleasures

Mill's convictions about welfare seem to create difficulties for hedonism. He believes that normal human beings are better off if they do not devote themselves exclusively to trivial or foolish pleasures, however great the pleasure they may find in them. In Mill's view, it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than to be a fool satisfied. Does he imply that well-being is more than pleasure?⁴⁰

Mill argues that these facts about well-being do not count against hedonism, because pleasures differ in quality as well as quantity. Everything good is pleasant in so far as it is good, and good in so far as it is pleasant, but some goods are better than others because they produce higher pleasures, not because they produce larger quantities of pleasure. Sometimes we choose between two goods by asking which good gives us more pleasure; that is how we might decide to spend an afternoon sitting on the beach rather than sitting in the park. But sometimes we decide by considering the quality of the pleasures we can expect; hence we might decide to spend an afternoon playing the violin rather than sitting on the beach. Since pleasures differ in quality, some are higher pleasures because of their higher quality.⁴¹

We might defend Mill's claim that we do not always choose between pleasures by considering their quantity. I might not expect to gain any greater pleasure from playing the violin than from sitting on the beach. I might even think it will give me less overall pleasure, because it involves painful concentration, and the tedious and frustrating task of correcting errors. The question 'How much pleasure will I get?' may be irrelevant, if I do not decide between the two pursuits on this basis. According to Mill, I prefer the pleasure of playing the violin because of the difference in kind and quality.

250. Can Qualitative Hedonism Explain Why Higher Pleasures Are Higher?

Hedonism maintains that the goodness of good things consists wholly in, and is explained by, their pleasantness. But higher pleasures cast doubt on this view. If we think the pleasure of playing the violin is a higher pleasure than the pleasure of sitting on a beach, we may think so because we think it is better to play the violin than to sit on a beach. The higher pleasure, then, is higher because its object (e.g., playing the violin) is better. The goodness of the pleasure, therefore, seems to result from the goodness of something other than pleasure, contrary to hedonism.⁴²

Mill might give either of two answers to this objection: (1) A pleasure is higher and better in its own right, not because its object is better. (2) The pleasure is higher and better because the object is better, but the object is better in so far as it is a source of further pleasure, so that all goodness consists wholly in pleasantness.

⁴⁰ Socrates and the fool: *U* 2.6.

⁴¹ Higher value of some pleasures, and qualitative difference among pleasures: *U* 2.4–5.

⁴² The object of pleasure: §§45, 65, 193.

The first answer leaves Mill unable to explain what makes higher pleasures higher. Moreover, if the goodness of the pleasure does not depend on the goodness of its object, we may wonder why the quality of a pleasure matters. The quality of a pleasure seemed to explain why we have a reason to prefer some activities that seem better over others that seem to offer greater pleasure. Mill told us that we have a reason to prefer them in so far as they offer higher, not greater, pleasure. But why is that a good reason, if quality of pleasure does not depend on goodness?

The second answer presents Mill with a dilemma. What sort of pleasure results from the goodness of the good object? If it is a greater pleasure, Mill eventually explains goodness by quantity of pleasure, and it is not clear why he introduced quality as well as quantity. If, however, an object of pleasure is good because it produces a pleasure of higher quality, Mill still has not explained what higher quality consists in.

These objections do not refute Mill's belief that pleasures differ in quality and value as well as in quantity. But they suggest that recognition of these differences may conflict with hedonism. To avoid such a conflict, a hedonist may prefer Sidgwick's quantitative hedonism. But the quantitative doctrine is open to the Aristotelian objections that Mill's doctrine is meant to answer.

251. Mill's Holism: Happiness Has Parts That Are Chosen for Their Own Sakes

Mill sees that we may doubt hedonism if we believe that other things besides happiness, as hedonism conceives it, are worth choosing for their own sakes, and not merely as a means to happiness. He replies that this belief is consistent with hedonism, because hedonism does not imply that happiness is the only good that deserves to be chosen for its own sake. For instance, Kant's view that moral virtue is to be chosen for its own sake is consistent with hedonism.⁴³

According to Mill's holist conception, happiness includes parts that are worth choosing for their own sake. If we desire things other than happiness for their own sakes, we thereby desire them as parts of happiness.⁴⁴ Since these parts include virtue, the utilitarian can agree with non-utilitarians who insist that virtue is to be chosen for its own sake. The parts of happiness are not merely means to happiness, because mere means are causally and instrumentally related to their end, but parts of an end are constituents of the end as a whole.

This division difference between merely instrumental means to an end and parts of an end is the division that Aristotle and Aquinas mark between different ways that things can be 'for the sake of' an end.⁴⁵ Just as Mill's doctrine of quality of pleasure defends hedonism against an Aristotelian argument from foolish pleasures, his doctrine of parts of happiness defends hedonism against an Aristotelian argument from non-instrumental goods apart from happiness.

⁴³ Utilitarians desire virtue as an end: *U* 4.4.

⁴⁴ Ingredients of happiness: *U* 4.5. Human dignity is a part of happiness: *U* 2.6.

⁴⁵ The Aristotelian conception of happiness: §§39–41, 94, 100.

If happiness is a whole composed of non-instrumentally valuable states and activities that are its parts, it is the good for a person whose capacities are fulfilled by the appropriate range of activities. In *On Liberty* Mill argues from claims about the human good 'in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being'.⁴⁶ This good is 'human development in its richest diversity'. When Mill argues for freedom of thought and for experimentation in ways of living, he assumes that the human good consists in the development and realization of distinctively human capacities. His Aristotelian conception of the good for a human being fits the doctrine of parts of happiness. When Mill speaks of the realization of human capacities, he supports Aristotle's view of happiness as the fulfilment of the human function in the distinctive activities of rational agents.⁴⁷

252. Is Holism Consistent with Hedonism?

This holist conception of happiness casts doubt on Mill's identification of happiness with pleasure, for it is difficult to see how virtue or human development could be a part of pleasure, as Mill conceives it.⁴⁸ A virtue is a state of character that disposes us to virtuous actions; but pleasure is a subjective feeling. Virtue might be a source of pleasure, but it is not a part of pleasure. Mill's holism about happiness supports eudaemonism rather than hedonism.

In this case, then, as in the case of quality of pleasure, utilitarianism does not evidently fit common sense. Either intuitive convictions about pleasure and goodness refute utilitarianism or utilitarianism rejects more intuitive convictions than Mill acknowledges. Moreover, in these cases 'intuitive convictions' include more than the views of Mill's contemporaries. The views that he tries to reconcile with utilitarianism are also Aristotelian. If he cannot reconcile them with hedonism, he may have exposed a weakness in hedonism.

Mill faces these difficulties because he recognizes some plausible objections to the view that pleasure is the only non-instrumental good. His doctrine of the parts of happiness rejects this view. But if the doctrine is inconsistent with hedonism, hedonists have to treat pleasure as the only non-instrumental good. For this reason, Sidgwick affirms quantitative hedonism, and so faces the sorts of objections that Mill tries to answer by appeal to qualitative hedonism and to holism. In order to defend hedonism, we have to choose between these two versions. Each of them raises difficulties that may incline us towards the other version.

We might, however, draw a different conclusion from these difficulties for hedonism. Perhaps we should abandon this account of the good altogether, and prefer a more Aristotelian account that treats non-hedonic conditions (actions, states of character) as goods to be maximized. This theory would treat the right as what maximizes good consequences, not only hedonic consequences. This non-utilitarian consequentialism avoids some, but not all, the objections that arise for a utilitarian conception of the good and the right, and may be open to further objections.

⁴⁶ Progressive being: Mill, *OL* 1.11.

⁴⁷ Development and expression of human capacities: §§102, 123, 262; Hurka, *Perfectionism*.

⁴⁸ Happiness as a whole: *U* 4.5. Happiness = pleasure: *U* 2.2, Criticism of Mill: Moore, *PE* ch. 3.

Sidgwick regards it as insufficiently precise to serve as a satisfactory method of ethics.⁴⁹

253. Social and Political Consequences of Quantitative Hedonism

Acceptance of Mill's doctrine of higher pleasures would make it easier to see how we might defend the sorts of freedoms that Mill defends in *On Liberty*. But this defence is ruled out, if the only plausible form of hedonism is quantitative hedonism.

Sidgwick believes that quantitative hedonism is the only sound basis for any doctrine of what is morally right, but it is not the best guide to action.⁵⁰ General acceptance of the utilitarian doctrine might lead to doubts about common-sense morality, and to misguided attempts to put quantitative hedonism into practice. Since it is difficult to know what course of action would maximize the net balance of pleasure over pain, this utilitarian doctrine of the right might not tell us much about what to do. It might be better to follow intuitive moral convictions, and to encourage other people to do the same. A well-informed utilitarian, therefore, might treat utilitarianism as an esoteric doctrine, not to be broadcast to anyone who might try to put it into practice. We saw that Hobbes's indirect consequentialist arguments seemed to lead him to the conclusion that his theory of self-interest and morality has to be esoteric, because it has to be concealed from the people whose moral outlook is formed by the rules that are justified by Hobbes's theory. Similarly, Sidgwick recognizes that it may be better, from the utilitarian point of view, to treat utilitarianism as an esoteric doctrine, because the good consequences that utilitarians aim at will not be achieved if those who follow the rules of the system are utilitarians.⁵¹

The conclusion that utilitarianism ought to be an esoteric doctrine does not refute Sidgwick. It might still be the true doctrine of the morally right, even if it is not a good guide to action. But an esoteric view takes Sidgwick away from the social role that Bentham and Mill attribute to utilitarianism. In their view, the wider knowledge of its truth will lead to progressive and enlightened social policies when we put it into practice. Sidgwick warns that it may be rash to draw these conclusions from the correct version of utilitarianism.

254. An Axiomatic Argument Offers an Alternative to Common-Sense Morality

So far we have considered dialectical arguments for utilitarianism that try to explain and to vindicate the moral convictions of reflective people who are not yet convinced utilitarians.⁵² Apart from these dialectical arguments, Sidgwick and Mill defend utilitarianism by axiomatic argument that does not appeal to common moral beliefs.

⁴⁹ Non-utilitarian consequentialism: Rashdall, *TGE* (who calls it 'ideal utilitarianism'); Brink, 'Forms and limits'; Pettit, 'Consequentialism'; Shafer-Landau, *FE* chs. 9–10.

⁵⁰ Account of rightness v. guide to action: Crisp, *MU* 95–125.

⁵¹ Esoteric utilitarianism: Sidgwick, *ME* 489; Hobbes §134.

⁵² Dialectical argument: §239.

If we compare hedonist maximization with our moral convictions, we may find it difficult to accept. But once we recognize some axioms of practical reason, we are rationally required to accept the principle of utility.

These axioms are basic principles that we grasp by rational intuition. They cannot be inferred from anything more basic, because they are basic principles of practical reason in general. In the area of theoretical reason, the principle of non-contradiction is an axiom that defines us as rational thinkers and speakers. Mill and Sidgwick look for analogous principles that define us as rational agents.⁵³ An axiom is a basic principle that we accept, explicitly or implicitly, if we are rational agents at all. Even if we do not yet accept any recognizably ethical principles, we are rational agents, and so we accept the axioms of practical reason. Sidgwick agrees with Hegel's and Schopenhauer's judgment that Kant's rationalism captures an important element of morality, and also agrees that something needs to be added to Kant. He believes that the element that needs to be added is utilitarianism.

In Sidgwick's view, Kant is wrong about the normative implications of his account of morality. Kant appeals to necessary conditions for rational agency, in order to show that rational agents are ends in themselves and therefore should be treated in accordance with the principles of morality. In Kant's view, the principles that respect people as ends oppose utilitarianism. According to Sidgwick, however, Kant provides us with one element in a sound version of utilitarianism. Once we see that prudent agents try to maximize their own pleasure over their lives, and that Kantian universality demands that we apply this maximizing principle impartially across different people, we reach the utilitarian conclusion that pleasure should be maximized across different people.

255. Mill's Proof of Utilitarianism

Though Mill does not speak of axioms, he implicitly appeals to them in order to prove the principle of utility. He observes that each person's happiness is desirable for that person. He infers that the general happiness is desirable for the aggregate of persons. To support his inference, he relies on a principle of impartiality: if my happiness is desirable for me, and other people's happiness is happiness no less than mine is, I have just as much reason to pursue happiness in general as I have to pursue my happiness. Since everyone else has the same reason as I have to pursue happiness in general, the general happiness is desirable for the aggregate of persons.

Is this principle of impartiality true? Have I as much reason to pursue the general happiness as I have to pursue mine? My happiness belongs to me, but the general happiness does not belong to me. That difference seems to give me a reason to pursue my own happiness rather than the general happiness. Later we will consider Sidgwick's answer to this objection.

Mill faces a further objection. When he speaks of 'the general happiness', he refers to the greatest total happiness. This is the maximum total surplus of pleasure over pain, summed over all the sentient beings who are affected by an action. Suppose that

⁵³ Principles of rational agency: Aquinas \$100; Kant \$207.

we could achieve a higher total pleasure by making some happy and others unhappy than we would achieve by making everyone happy. In that case we ought—in Mill's view—to choose the higher total. But if we understand the general happiness in this way, then, even if each person's happiness is good, and everyone's happiness is good, it does not follow that the maximum total happiness is good.

Mill claims that the maximum surplus of pleasure is the good in relation to the persons whose pleasures are aggregated; he does not maintain that it is good for all these people. He assumes that pleasure—no matter how it is distributed among persons—is the only good.

This equation of happiness with pleasure conflicts with the holistic conception of happiness that we have discussed. According to that holistic conception, happiness is a whole that includes all the states and activities that make up a good life for a person. Mill needs this conception in order to argue that happiness includes all objects of rational desire. This argument supports his conclusion that all we desire is happiness, and he needs this conclusion for his proof of utilitarianism.

The proof, therefore, relies on both the hedonistic conception of happiness, and on the holistic conception. These two conceptions, however, are incompatible.

256. Sidgwick's Axiomatic Argument for Utilitarianism

Sidgwick sees that Mill's argument for the principle of utility is open to objections. He tries to avoid these objections. He relies on four basic principles about practical reason:

1. A Kantian Principle of Equal Treatment requires us to treat people equally unless they differ in some morally relevant respect.
2. A Principle of Benevolence says that the ultimate end that it is rational to pursue is everyone's good.
3. A Principle of Prudence says that it is rational for me to pursue my own good without drawing distinctions between different stages or parts of my life as such.
4. A Principle of Parts and Wholes says that when items are parts of a logical whole (a genus) or a quantitative whole, different treatment of different items must be justified by some relevant difference.

Clarke, Price, Reid, and Kant accept one or more of the first three principles. Sidgwick argues that the fourth principle underlies the third, and that the four together prove utilitarianism. Since a prudent person tries to maximize his own pleasure over his life, and since Kantian universality demands that we apply this maximizing principle impartially across different people, it follows that pleasure should be maximized across different people.⁵⁴

Parts and Wholes is more basic than prudence, because it explains why a prudent person is impartial between different times.⁵⁵ It is no more rational to be concerned

⁵⁴ Equal treatment: *ME* 380, 390. Benevolence: *ME* 382, 420. Prudence, Parts and Wholes: *ME* 380–2. Sidgwick's principles in Clarke, Price, Reid, Kant: §§146, 187–90; 204.

⁵⁵ Impartiality between times: *ME* 381.

about the short-term over the long-term, as such, than it is to care more about Tuesdays than about Wednesdays, as such. We accept this temporal impartiality because we accept (according to Sidgwick) Parts and Wholes, and we take it to require maximization. My conscious states form a whole and so we need some relevant difference to justify unequal treatment of them. Since the only relevant difference is the quantity of satisfaction they offer, we should aim to maximize the total satisfaction in any whole of conscious states. Since we accept this principle, we endorse temporal impartiality.

Sidgwick argues that the same principle that applies to the different times in one person's life also applies to different people. Their interests form a whole that has parts; therefore Parts and Wholes applies, and I have reason to take the same impartial view of them as I take of the times in my life. Impartiality requires maximization of the good that is spread over different persons, just as it requires maximization of my own good over different times in my life. Therefore the rational attitude to the interests of everyone is the utilitarian attitude.

257. The Relation between Impartiality and Maximization

Sidgwick's belief that Parts and Wholes underlies prudence is controversial. He combines two claims:

1. Temporal neutrality. The mere fact that satisfactions happen at different times is no reason to prefer one time over the other, since it is rational to aim at my good on the whole.
2. Maximization. This temporal neutrality is reasonable because it is rational for me to aim at the maximum total good in my life.

Maximization presupposes that the only relevant difference between my conscious states is in the quantity of satisfaction they produce.

Sometimes Maximization seems plausible. If we are collecting sand or oil, we may want to gather as much as possible, and the best arrangement may be simply the one that allows us to store as much as possible. This accumulation is indifferent to structure. But accumulation does not always seem to be indifferent to structure. We might care, for instance, about whether our life begins well and ends very badly, or is mostly miserable, but has episodes of ecstatic happiness that are soon forgotten in the prevailing misery. These structural features of our lives are different from the total pleasure and pain that they include.⁵⁶

We might doubt, therefore, whether it is rational to aim at pure maximization in one's life. Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* offers an alternative to pure maximization, because he considers the structure of a good human life. Since Sidgwick ignores structure, his purely maximizing account of prudence is questionable.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Distribution of well-being in a life: Shakespeare, *Leary*; Balzac, *WAS*.

⁵⁷ Structural features of a good life: §262.

258. The Argument from Prudence to Utilitarianism

In Sidgwick's view, the principle of utility is the interpersonal parallel to prudence, because interpersonal impartiality is parallel to inter-temporal prudential impartiality. Prudent people try to maximize their own good, and so treat different times impartially. Similarly, morally good people try to maximize the total good, irrespective of whose good it is. They care no more about the difference between people than a prudent person cares about the difference between times.

In this case, as in the case of prudence, part of Sidgwick's argument is plausible.⁵⁸ We might agree, for Butler's and Kant's reasons, that prudence is impartial between different times, and that morality is impartial between different people. But we have seen why prudence does not evidently require us to maximize. Similarly, impartiality between individual people does not evidently require us to maximize the total good summed over them. Distribution between people seems to matter for its own sake in morality no less than distribution between times matters in prudence. Sidgwick's maximizing argument opens utilitarianism to Price's objection that utilitarianism treats questions about the welfare of many people as though they were questions about the welfare of one person. According to Price, utilitarians suppose that the maximizing attitude to one's own welfare over time can be transferred directly to the welfare of different people. If we suppose that persons are ends in themselves, we will not endorse a maximizing attitude that attributes non-instrumental value only to the experiences of persons, however they are distributed among persons, and not to persons themselves.⁵⁹ Even if we accept maximization as a principle of prudence, we have some reason to doubt it as a principle of morality.

It is doubtful, therefore, whether utilitarianism follows from basic principles of practical reason. Sidgwick's axioms about impartiality may be basic principles of practical reason in prudence and in morality, but they do not evidently show that maximizing pleasure is the ultimate end of a rational agent who is guided by practical reason. Hence they do not seem to support utilitarianism.

If this argument for utilitarianism fails, utilitarians have to revert to dialectical arguments that claim to systematize ordinary moral beliefs by vindicating most of them. The argument from basic principles sought to escape the piecemeal dialectical arguments and objections that explore agreement and disagreement between utilitarianism and common-sense morality. Neither the dialectical nor the axiomatic argument for utilitarianism is free from difficulty.⁶⁰

259. Sidgwick: The Dualism of Practical Reason

Though Sidgwick believes that utilitarianism gives the true theory of morality, he is less confident that the utilitarian outlook is the most reasonable outlook on one's life. The principle of utility takes 'the point of view of the universe', the impartial perspective that seeks to maximize the total good. But this may not be the only

⁵⁸ Sidgwick's maximizing argument; *ME* 382. Prudence and morality: §282.

⁵⁹ Kant on persons as ends: §209. Criticism of Sidgwick's argument: Rawls, *TJ* §30.

⁶⁰ Further attempts at a defence of utilitarianism independently of common sense: §§282–3.

reasonable point of view. To show this, Sidgwick introduces agent-relative reasons. If Ann is Bill's child, Bill has a reason to buy a birthday present for Ann. This reason is relative to Bill as Ann's father; it is not a reason for everyone to buy Ann a birthday present, nor a reason for Bill to buy a present for everyone's child. By contrast, we have an impartial reason (say) to relieve distress, no matter who we are and no matter whose distress it is. The utilitarian principle is a source of impartial reasons.

On the basis of this distinction between types of reasons, Sidgwick suggest that an egoist might avoid the argument from prudence to utilitarianism. An egoist might stick to the purely agent-relative claim that his own happiness is the most reasonable end for him, whether or not it is the most reasonable end from some impartial point of view. Arguments for utilitarianism are irrelevant, because they tell him what is impartially reasonable, not what is reasonable for him.⁶¹ Egoism tells me to pursue my own happiness above all, and utilitarianism tells me to pursue the general happiness above all. These instructions may require incompatible actions.

Sidgwick calls this a 'dualism of practical reason'. If two principles create a dualism, both appear reasonable, neither appears to be superior to the other, and they appear to conflict. Each principle appears to embody an axiom, but the apparent conflict gives us reason to doubt whether either one is an axiom. The doubt arises because we are justified in treating a given principle as an axiom only if we believe it is consistent with other apparent axioms.⁶²

Since Sidgwick's argument is puzzling. It is worth while to distinguish some of the main puzzles.

(1) *Why does the argument for utilitarianism leaves room for this defence of egoism?* Sidgwick supposes that what is most reasonable for someone may not be most reasonable from the impartial point of view, because what is most reasonable for me depends on a purely agent-relative reason. But agent-relative reasons do not seem to be opposed to impartial reasons in this way. I have a reason to give 100 euros to A because I borrowed them from A, but you, not having borrowed from A, do not have the same reason to give the money to A. But these agent-relative reasons depend on the impartial reason that one ought to pay back what one has borrowed to the lender.

If, then, pursuing my own interest is most reasonable for me, it must also be impartially most reasonable. If Sidgwick's had proved that utilitarianism is most reasonable, he would have proved that egoism is not most reasonable. He has left no room for the defence of agent-relative egoism that he endorses.

(2) *Why are egoism and utilitarianism supposed to appear inconsistent?* If we deny that agent-relative reasons depend on impartial reasons, we avoid the argument that has just been given. But we raise a new objection to Sidgwick's argument for a dualism. If what is reasonable for me is not what is impartially reasonable, the conclusion that utilitarianism is most reasonable impartially does not seem to contradict the principle that egoism is most reasonable for me. Sidgwick has not shown that there is any dualism.

⁶¹ The impartial perspective: ME 420. An egoist reply: ME 420, 498.

⁶² Sidgwick's dualism: Schneewind, *SEVMP* ch. 13; Crisp, *CD* ch. 7.

(3) *How does Sidgwick's proposed answer to the dualism really answer it?* According to Sidgwick, we must admit that utilitarianism and egoism (as he explains them) are both apparent axioms, and that they are apparently inconsistent, unless we can show that they require all and only the same action. We would achieve this result if, following Butler and Kant, we believed in a moral order in the universe that would ensure that duty and interest coincide.⁶³ But how does this coincidence remove the apparent contradiction between the two principles? They appear to contradict each other because utilitarianism tells me that if my own happiness conflicts with the total happiness, I ought to choose the total happiness, and egoism tells me that in that situation I ought to choose my own happiness. If the two principles give contradictory advice in this situation, the advice is no less contradictory if (on the hypothesis of cosmic order) the situation does not arise. It is difficult to see how we could both believe that Sidgwick has found a genuine apparent contradiction and believe that he has removed the appearance of contradiction by his hypothesis of cosmic order.

260. Questions About Morality and Self-Interest

Even if Sidgwick has not found a dualism of practical reason, as he describes it, he may be right to suppose that we face the question about prudence and morality that Butler suggests we ask in a 'cool hour'.⁶⁴ He is dissatisfied with the answers that other moralists give to Butler's question.

Sidgwick recognizes that we can be trained to put morality above self-interest. According to Mill, our experience of cooperation accustoms us to thinking about other people's interests. When we get used to cooperation and its associated feelings, we acquire further feelings of equality with others and identification with their interests. These experiences make it second nature to think of what will benefit others, and to think of that in the way we think of our own benefit. In Sidgwick's view, this is psychologically possible, but it does not answer clear-minded egoists who ask why it is reasonable, from the self-interested point of view, to develop moral feelings that move us to act against our self-interest.⁶⁵

Sidgwick agrees with Butler's claim that that rational self-love and conscience are both superior principles. Butler argues for the supremacy of conscience, but Sidgwick claims that neither principle can be shown to be superior to the other. Butler believes that the two principles can be reconciled, but Sidgwick argues that they give us conflicting practical directions. Sidgwick departs from Aristotelian eudaeemonism on this point where Butler agrees with it.⁶⁶

Sidgwick believes in this conflict partly because he separates prudence from morality. Prudence requires me to maximize my own pleasure, but morality requires me to maximize total pleasure. Actions that maximize the balance of pleasure within

⁶³ 'The moral government of the universe': *ME* 508. Should we believe in it on the strength of our moral beliefs alone? See *ME* 509.

⁶⁴ Butler on conscience and self-love: §183.

⁶⁵ Identification with the interests of others: Mill, *U* 3.9. Second nature: Aristotle, *EN* 1152a29–32. Sidgwick's judgment on Mill's argument: *ME* 499n.

⁶⁶ Dualism: Scotus §108; Butler §193; Hegel §229; Green and Bradley §265.

my own life are not likely to maximize the balance of pleasure summed over all the lives of all sentient creatures. This sharp separation depends on Sidgwick's hedonist conception of prudence and his utilitarian conception of morality.

A non-hedonist account of a person's good, however, leaves open the possibility of showing that morality promotes one's own good. Similarly, a non-utilitarian account of morality does not require the degree of self-sacrifice that harms one person simply to increase the total balance of good. Butler insists that morality includes the obligation to pursue one's own good. Kant argues that morality requires treatment of persons as ends, not merely as means. Neither Butler nor Kant accepts the utilitarian conception of morality.

If we concede Sidgwick's claim that morality and self-interest conflict, has he shown that egoism and morality are reasonable to the same degree? Why is it reasonable to pursue my own interest at severe cost to others? My practical reason, according to Butler, Kant, and Sidgwick, recognizes me as a temporally-extended being whose interests deserve impartial concern. But it also recognizes other people whose interests deserve impartial concern. An egoist who treats self-interested prudence as the supreme principle has to explain why the interests of other people similar to oneself do not matter as much as one's own interests matter. In support of the egoist, Sidgwick emphasizes that different people are separate, and that one's concern for oneself is fundamentally different from one's concern for others.⁶⁷ But why should this sort of difference prevent us from seeing that the interests of other people also have a legitimate claim on our concern?

⁶⁷ Concern for self v. concern for others: *ME* 497.

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Beyond Kantian and Utilitarian Morality: An Idealist Alternative Green and Bradley

261. The Idealist Reply to Utilitarianism

Mill and Sidgwick offer an elaborate and powerful defence of Bentham and of the utilitarian tradition that begins with Hutcheson. The most vigorous and effective critics among their contemporaries are the idealists Green and Bradley. Sidgwick and the idealists engage in an extended controversy that helps us to explore some questions about utilitarianism and idealism in moral philosophy.¹

Green and Bradley are both idealists because they draw on Hegel.² But they also respond to their British predecessors in moral philosophy. Moreover, Green departs from Hegel's negative view of Kant's moral philosophy. According to Green, a synthesis of Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel is a better moral theory than utilitarianism.

Sidgwick's attempt to incorporate Kant into utilitarianism is worth comparing with the attitude of the British Idealists, especially Green and Bradley. Green, in contrast to Hegel, takes himself to be a Kantian, and he believes that if we combine Kant with the eudaemonism of Aristotle, we reach a conclusion quite similar to Hegel's. Rational agents aim basically at self-realization, the fulfilment of their rational capacities. Since they fulfil these capacities in social relations and institutions, the view that individual fulfilment and social obligation conflict rests on a misunderstanding. It is worth asking whether these views capture an insight of the Aristotelian tradition.

These arguments about Kant in nineteenth-century moral philosophy reveal the continued presence of the Greek moralists in the debates that arise from some of the characteristic innovations of modern moral theory. The sharp contrast (from some points of view) between Kant and Greek eudaemonism provokes the reasonable question whether Greek efforts to connect the human good with morality offer a reasonable defence of morality, and whether some modern moralists are too quick to reject such a justification.

Discussion of Green and Bradley inevitably repeats some points from the discussion of Hegel. To avoid too much repetition, we can take for granted our earlier

¹ Mutual criticism by Sidgwick, Green, and Bradley: Sidgwick, *EGSM*; 'Bradley'; Bradley, 'Sidgwick'; Green, *PE* §§364–82. Green and idealism: Brink, Intro. in Green, *PE*.

² 'Idealism' refers to Hegel's metaphysical views, which I have not tried to explain.

description of Hegel's view of the will, and his criticism of Kantian Morality, as he conceives it.³ The later idealists take Hegel's conception of the will as a starting point for their argument against the moral psychology that underlies hedonistic utilitarianism.⁴

262. Self-Realization

Green and Bradley argue that a person's good consists not in maximum pleasure, but in 'self-satisfaction' or 'self-realization'. Sidgwick maintains that this conception of the good is too vague for any practical use. The idealists answer that it is clear enough to provide a basis for morality.⁵

A simple idea of self-satisfaction is fairly easy to grasp. When we aim to cook a meal, or climb a mountain, or write a book, we aim at some future result (the cooked meal, etc.). But we also aim at a future state of ourselves; we seek to realize ourselves as having achieved these results. If I am trying to get a degree in dentistry, but I also want to be a carpenter rather than a dentist, I have some reason to change my plans; they do not make a plausible conception of the future self I want to bring into existence. The end I aim at includes a conception of a whole self whose aims are coherently and systematically satisfied.

Self-realization, however, consists in more than the coherent satisfaction of our desires. If we reduced our desires to a minimal level, we could satisfy them harmoniously and coherently, but we would not have realized our whole selves. The life of an oyster is not a reasonable ideal for human beings, even if we could modify our desires to match those of the oyster. If we planned to lead such a life, we would be irrational, because we would ignore many aspects of ourselves that we have good reason to try to realize. If we were giving someone else advice about what to do, we would not simply ask what would satisfy them, but we would also want to give them an opportunity to develop and fulfil aspects of themselves that might be ignored if satisfaction were the only goal. Correct desires aim at self-realization.⁶

Does this conception of self-realization tell us anything about morality? A saint, an entrepreneur, and a gangster may all have coherent plans for their lives. If they all carry out these plans, do they all realize themselves, and do they all achieve their good? Does morality realize the self more than immoral or amoral plans of life realize it?

The idealists believe that we could not connect self-realization and morality if either the utilitarians or Kant were right about morality. But once we see the errors in these rival views of morality, we can also see how morality achieves self-realization.

³ Hegel on the will: §227.

⁴ This chapter ignores differences between Green and Bradley. In particular: (1) Green's view of Kant is more favourable than Bradley's view (which is closer to Hegel's). (2) Green's interest in the application of idealist moral philosophy to social and political questions is absent from Bradley. The idealist view sketched in this chapter, therefore, is closer to Green than to Bradley.

⁵ Self-realization: Green, *PE* §§118–29; Sidgwick, *ME* ii 7.

⁶ Conceptions of self-realization: Bradley, *ES* ch. 2. Bradley's term 'self-realization' is less misleading than Green's usual term 'self-satisfaction'. See Mill on the development of human capacities, §251. Well-being and the satisfaction of desire: Aristotle §§38–40; Aquinas §102; Suarez §123.

263. What Is Wrong with Utilitarian Morality?

The idealist conception of the self suggests that utilitarianism is both attractive and mistaken. It is attractive because it appeals to one genuine aspect of the self. It is mistaken because it appeals to only one aspect, and ignores the self as a whole. A hedonistic utilitarian treats the self as a mere collection of desires for different particular objects, and develops a strategy for the satisfaction of these desires. This attitude to the self does not recognize that the satisfaction of the self is more than the satisfaction of impulses. The self endorses the different impulses to different degrees, and finds its satisfaction partly in a specific way of satisfying one's various impulses. Since we care about living lives that express the different aspects of ourselves, we do not care simply about how much pleasure we gain. We also care about the structure of our lives in relation to the structure of our selves. This is why Aristotle takes happiness to include the exercise of practical reason in forming one's way of life.⁷

Sidgwick ignores this structural aspect of the good, because he identifies the good with accumulation of pleasures. He treats practical reason and its role in planning one's life as simply an instrumental means to the maximization of pleasure. Mill is not satisfied with this purely instrumental conception of the use of reason. In his view, we gain higher pleasures in the use of reason, and the aim of liberty is the development of human rational capacities. Sidgwick and the idealists agree that Mill's emphasis on rational activity cannot be reconciled with a hedonist account of the good.⁸

Just as hedonists identify one's own good with maximum pleasure, however it is distributed in one's life, hedonist utilitarians rely on a similar maximizing assumption in order to show that the good to be achieved by morality is the maximization of pleasure across different agents, no matter how it is distributed among them. Sidgwick argues for this maximizing principle of morality by appealing to the rationality of maximizing prudence and to interpersonal fairness.

The idealist critics argue that utilitarians make the same mistake about morality as about prudence. Rational concern for other people does not require us to maximize total pleasure, since maximum total pleasure does not necessarily achieve the good of any of these agents.

264. The False and the True Elements in Kantian Morality

According to the idealists, utilitarians and Kantians make opposite mistakes. The utilitarians treat the self as simply a collection of particular impulses, and they neglect the rational agency that we value for its own sake. Kantian morality, however, considers rational agency alone, without reference to the desires and goals that belong to rational agents. Each conception of morality ignores essential elements of self-realization.

⁷ The self as a whole: Bradley, *ES* 95. The hedonist error: 98. The role of pleasure: 131–2. Aristotle on practical reason in happiness: §39.

⁸ Sidgwick on maximizing: §257. Mill on higher pleasures: §§249–50.

In Kant's view, we misunderstand morality if we try to subordinate it to happiness and try to reduce moral principles to hypothetical imperatives.⁹ This is why Kant rejects all teleological conceptions of morality, whether they are the eudaemonist conceptions of the ancients or the utilitarian conceptions of modern moralists. Idealists argue that Kant separates reason and inclination because he agrees with his opponents about the character of self-interest and happiness. Though he recognizes the distinctive features of rational agency, he does not see that they determine rational agents' conception of their good. In their view, Kant's position involves the repression of the non-rational by the rational self, and the suppression of self-interest by duty. This conflict between the moral and the non-moral distorts the character of morality.

Green, however, combines Kant with the eudaemonism of Aristotle. Rational agents aim basically at self-realization, the fulfilment of their rational capacities. Since they fulfil these capacities in social relations and institutions, the view that individual fulfilment and social obligation conflict rests on a misunderstanding. If Kant had seen that we aim at the realization of the self as a whole, he would have avoided his mistake about morality.

If, then, we form a true conception of the whole self that is to be realized, we include a rational and critical approach that tries to reconcile our various desires and aims. The aims to be reconciled include those that belong to us as rational agents who recognize that we share a common good with other rational agents. These aims include the moral outlook. Hence morality and self-interest do not conflict, and a sound moral theory should not separate them.

265. Self-Realization Requires Social Morality

Concern for self-realization does not imply self-absorbed concentration on one's self-development. The idealists argue that social morality is essential to self-realization. We realize ourselves only by recognizing our good as non-competitive, as a common good. It is common because it involves non-instrumental relations to other people.¹⁰

Our normal development leads us to form non-instrumental concern for other people. Just as we develop our conception of our own good as something more than the gratification of our immediate desires, we develop a conception of a common good for ourselves and others. We cannot realize ourselves without social attachments and concerns; everyone forms such attachments in growing up, and no plausible conception of self can leave out our attachments to parents, family, and friends. These elementary attachments to others help us to see that morality presents the social aspects of self-realization. The development of morality consists in 'the extension of the area of common good'. The extension of the area of common good to social and political institutions results in the outlook of Ethical life (as Hegel describes it).¹¹

⁹ Kant on hypothetical imperatives: §§200–2. Cf. Hegel §229.

¹⁰ Self-realization and individuality: Thomas, *EL* ch.1. Non-competitive good: Green, *PE* §§199–217. Relations to other people: Green, *PE* §199.

¹¹ Extension of the good: Green, §§206–17. Ethical life: Hegel §229. Cf. Aquinas §102.

According to Bradley, we realize a non-competitive common good in the social roles of Ethical life (which he calls 'my station and its duties') that form one's conception of the self to be realized. Since one's social role includes moral demands, rights, and expectations, morality forms the self to be realized. We cannot, therefore, realize the socially formed self without accepting the moral outlook that defines our stations and their duties.¹² Equally, the moral aspect of different social roles determines how occupants of those roles conceive themselves. People who have certain roles characteristically take pleasure and feel shame in certain situations apart from any instrumental benefits; they conceive themselves as soldiers, police officers, teachers, parents, members of clubs, and so on. If one conceives oneself as an occupant of a certain role, one wants to carry out the obligations that go with it. In these ways morality involves stations and duties.

Contrary to Kant, therefore, we should not suppose that morality necessarily conflicts with self-interest. For the 'interest' we aim at is not just the satisfaction of this or that non-moral desire. On the contrary, we aim at self-realization, and that involves the realization of our capacities in some organized system. Moral relations reveal new capacities, and new possibilities of fulfilment. Morality allows us to realize ourselves in ways that would not be open to us if we conceived our ends in non-moral terms. The ends that are open to us if we think in moral terms of our relations to other people go far beyond any ends that we could conceive otherwise.¹³

Obvious examples of these ends are those that involve a team or an orchestra or a family. If we form the aims that express our social role, we can realize ourselves in new ways. Similarly, if we care about other people non-instrumentally, many activities that would not otherwise matter to us for their own sake come to matter to us. Some doctors, for instance, may care about the welfare of their patients, while others may care about their income or status in their profession. In the first case they can be concerned about the patients' being well, irrespective of their further concern; they have something they recognize as realizing themselves, and not simply as a means to something that realizes them.

266. Self-Realization Requires Kantian Morality

Social morality, as we have described it so far, involves duties and rights attached to particular relations and social roles. It therefore achieves our self-realization as occupants of these roles (parents, children, firefighters, teachers, etc.). In Kant's view, however, morality includes more than the rights and obligations that go with these specific roles. From the moral point of view, we recognize ourselves as ends, and as equal members of a kingdom of ends. Morality, as Kant conceives it, does not simply involve relations of concern with restricted groups of other people—friends, patients, colleagues, and so on. It involves respect for other people in general.

¹² My station and its duties: Bradley, *ES* ch. 5. Limitations of this conception of morality: *ES* 202–6.

¹³ Morality and self-interest: Bradley, *ES* ch. 7.

To realize ourselves as rational agents, we have to think of ourselves as deserving certain kinds of treatment from others who equally deserve it from us. If we have the right conception of ourselves, we think of ourselves as deserving something from others, not because we are especially useful to them or they especially admire us or enjoy our company, but because we are persons. If this is why we think we deserve something from them, we acknowledge that persons equally deserve something from one another. We accept the Kantian principle of treating persons as ends in themselves, and not simply as means.

Hence a Kantian conception of morality, embodied in principles that prescribe respect for persons as ends, is part of the correct conception of the good as self-realization. We achieve our good in the good will, which aims (according to Green's version of Kant) at the common, non-competitive good. Our extended concern causes us to regard the ends of some community as our own ends, so that we are realized in the activities of the community. I regard an activity of the community as an activity of mine, so that I realize far more capacities in the activities of the community than I could realize if I were just concerned with what I could do as an isolated individual.¹⁴

According to Green, Kant's claim that, as a rational agent, I regard myself as an end is a claim about self-realization. When I aim at a particular end, I care not simply about achieving that result, but about achieving it for myself, as a part of a life that realizes my capacities as a whole. I care about myself as something distinct from the satisfaction of my desires, since the satisfaction of my desires might be insufficient for my welfare. The moral point of view treats rational agents as ends. I regard myself as an end, in so far as I give myself priority over the achievement of some particular aim or desire. Similarly, I regard other people as ends, in so far as I give them priority over the achievement of anyone's particular aims or desires. If I treat persons as ends, I do not allow them to be sacrificed for anyone else's purposes.

In these ways idealist ethical theory combines a Kantian conception of persons as ends in themselves with a teleological conception of morality as both a means to and a part of a common good.¹⁵ Idealist arguments cast doubt on Sidgwick's dualism of practical reason, because they challenge both his account of egoism and his account of morality. On the one hand, prudent agents aim not at the accumulation of their own pleasure, but at their self-realization, and so they pursue an end that does not in principle exclude the good of others. On the other hand, morality does not prescribe the sacrifice of one person's good to secure a higher total quantity of good, and so it does not demand the extreme self-sacrifice that utilitarianism demands. Prudence and morality, therefore, do not conflict. On the contrary, each requires the other. Belief in a conflict results from an incomplete grasp of prudence and morality. This conclusion brings the idealists closer to the eudaemonism of Aristotle and Aquinas than to the division of practical reason that Scotus, Butler, and Sidgwick all assert.¹⁶

¹⁴ Common good: Green, *PE* §§218–45

¹⁵ Means v. parts: Aristotle §47.

¹⁶ In *EGSM* Sidgwick argues that Green does not entirely escape the dualism.

267. Practical Implications?

Even if idealism offers a plausible theoretical alternative to utilitarian and Kantian morality, is it of any practical use? Sidgwick argues that the concept of self-realization is hopelessly vague, and cannot support any specific course of action.¹⁷ He believes that on this point idealism is inferior to utilitarianism. A quantitative hedonist begins with an identifiable experience of pleasure and argues empirically about what courses of action maximize pleasure. But one cannot begin with a similarly identifiable condition of self-realization.

Not all idealists agree with Sidgwick on this point. Green and his followers argue that idealist ethical theory is a basis for social and political reforms that will help to realize the common and non-competitive good. In their view, enlightened reforms will promote the self-realization of everyone without treating anyone as a mere means to the self-realization of others. Self-realization provides a firmer basis for enlightened political action than we can find in the utilitarian demand for maximum pleasure.¹⁸

We can illustrate this idealist claim by considering how it may affect questions about education. We might argue that children should be educated so that it will be easier for them to satisfy the desires they will form when they grow up, and by satisfying them to maximize their pleasure. Alternatively, we may argue that, whether or not education helps to maximize an adult individual's pleasure, it will maximize total pleasure. These are utilitarian justifications. They are open to question, however. The desires of adults are partly formed by the aims and outlook they acquire through education; if they were not educated, they might acquire different aims and desires. Do we know they would not gain more pleasure through satisfying these alternative desires without education than they would have gained through education? The same question can be raised about maximizing total pleasure, summed over everyone.¹⁹

Apparently, then, we may form someone's desires so that they are easy to satisfy (if we want to minimize the number or unsatisfied desires), or so that they result in the greatest pleasure. But we may not have done our best to promote their welfare. If children growing into adults, or adults modifying their desires, never acquire anything beyond childish desires, they are missing something that would make them better off. What they are missing depends on what they are capable of, and what they are capable of reflects their nature and capacities. That is why we promote the welfare of children and of the adults they will become by helping them to develop their abilities, and not by simply assuring the satisfaction of their desires.²⁰

We discussed this conception of a person's good when we considered the appeal to nature and especially to rational nature. The idealists' claims about self-realization refer to the same conception of a person's good as the realization of one's capacities as a rational agent. Some traits, such as rationality, seem to be basic and common to human beings. Other relevant traits might be distinctive capacities of one person as

¹⁷ Sidgwick on Green on the good and the good will: *EGSM* 94.

¹⁸ Idealism and politics: Richter, *PC* ch. 10. Green, in contrast to Bradley, argues that his ethical outlook supports specific social reforms. See *PE* §§291–307; *LPO*; 'Contract'; Nicholson, *PPBI* ch. 3.

¹⁹ Green's views about the importance of education led him to favour compulsory education. See Nicholson, *PPBI* ch. 5.

²⁰ Pleasures of children: Aristotle, *EN* 1174a1.

opposed to another. We sometimes, and in some circumstances, believe that people have been wronged if the development of their distinctive capacities has been stunted or impeded. But we are also selective in our view of which distinctive capacities really matter for this purpose; and we seem to rely on some conception of how different capacities fit together in a human being. According to this view, we achieve the good for ourselves only in so far as we achieve the good for the kind of thing we are. Our nature is the basis for a true conception of our good.

Some similar questions arise from a dispute about slavery between Sidgwick and John Grote, a critic of utilitarianism. They agree that slavery is wrong, but they disagree about why it is wrong. In Grote's view, utilitarianism gives us the wrong account of what is wrong with slavery. What matters in deciding about the rightness of slavery is the human nature of slaves.²¹ We ought to see that slaves have human powers and capacities that they and others have good reason to develop, and that slavery is open to objection because it prevents this development. Even if we have no agreed and exhaustive list of elements of self-realization, we understand some of them well enough to reach some practical conclusions. If a plausible conception of self-realization can be used to support Grote's anti-utilitarian conclusion, Sidgwick can hardly be right to say that it is completely empty and practically useless.

Sidgwick might observe that it is hard to find a conclusive argument to show that slavery is bad because it interferes with the self-realization of slaves. To show that, for instance, control over one's life is an aspect of self-realization for a rational being, one has to rely on premisses that are not wholly uncontroversial, and one may need to decide some points of ethical difficulty.²² This may not be a devastating objection, however. Rather than object to idealists for their appeal to self-realization, perhaps we should question Sidgwick's demand for clarity and determinacy.

Sidgwick suggests that if we can remove uncertainty in moral principles, and leave only empirical uncertainty, our theory will be more useful for guiding action. But this may not be so. For if moral uncertainty is easier to resolve than empirical uncertainty, it may be easier to act on less precise principles. If, for instance, the utilitarian case against slavery relies on some doubtful claims about pleasure, whereas we are confident that slavery is wrong because slaves are human beings, the less precise non-utilitarian theory gives us more definite answers than we can find from the more precise utilitarian theory, and therefore the less precise theory may be more useful in practice. If Sidgwick's criterion is open to objection, idealists need not be worried if their theory violates his criterion.

This case suggests how appeals to self-realization might be justified. Sometimes we can see that someone can be treated in ways that undermine the full expression of their capacities, and hence prevent the realization of their complete selves. Such views lack the empirical basis of judgments about pleasure and pain. But they are not practically useless. They may both express and guide our practical judgments, and so they may help us not only to understand our existing social and political roles, but also to change them. The morality of 'my station and its duties' may reveal better stations and duties.

²¹ Utilitarianism and slavery: Grote, *EUP* 319–26. Cf. Rawls §291.

²² Sidgwick on self-realization: *ME* iii 1, 11; Sidgwick §246.

Meta-Ethics

Objectivity and Its Critics

268 Positivism and Meta-Ethics

Meta-ethical questions, about the metaphysics, epistemology, and semantics of morality, are discussed by, among others, Suarez, Cudworth, Hutcheson, Hume, Reid, and (especially) Sidgwick, but they do not dominate these philosophers' approach to morality. In the twentieth century, however, some philosophers assert that meta-ethics, and especially questions about the meaning of moral judgments, are the only philosophical questions about morality. Their assertion results partly from views about the nature and task of philosophy, and partly from specific doubts about the possibility of normative ethical theory.

The rise of logical empiricism, also called 'logical positivism', in twentieth-century philosophy limits the role of moral theory.¹ Positivists argue that any acceptable claim to knowledge must be verifiable by experience.² Indeed, they claim that sentences have meaning only in so far as they assert something that is empirically verifiable. The sentences—true or false—of a genuine scientific theory have their meaning determined by the empirical tests that could be performed to verify them. A theory is non-scientific if its sentences allow no empirical verification or falsification. These sentences are meaningless.³

Hume's analysis of causation and external existence leads him to doubts about whether either ordinary or scientific claims about the external world satisfy empiricist criteria. His doubts influence positivism, since they underlie debates about the nature of causal laws and the verification of statements about them. Positivists find it difficult to show how scientific laws satisfy empiricist criteria for meaning and verifiability.⁴ Nonetheless, most positivists in the twentieth century assume that logical empiricist criteria show how scientific theories are significant and verifiable.

Positivists not only seek to justify empirical science on empiricist grounds, but also seek to distinguish genuine science from pretenders to knowledge.⁵ Three pretenders to knowledge need to be exposed: dogmatic religion and theology, political and historical ideologies, and metaphysical theories. The empiricist criterion of meaning

¹ A brief statement of logical positivism: Ayer, *LTL*. On the history of the movement see Skorupski, *ELP* ch. 5, esp. 216–17; Passmore, *HYP* ch. 16.

² Empiricism: cf. §148.

³ Some positivists distinguish cognitive meaning, which requires verifiability, from emotive or prescriptive meaning.

⁴ Meaning and verifiability: Hempel, *ASE* ch. 4.

⁵ Pretenders to knowledge: Hume, *IHU* xii, end.

is supposed to demolish Christianity, Marxism, and idealism (Kantian and Hegelian) all at once. Since these bodies of pseudo-knowledge include sentences that cannot be empirically verified, their crucial claims are meaningless.

If ethics belongs to empirical science, we need to give definitions of ethical terms that will allow us to verify ethical claims in experience. Hutcheson and Hume seem to offer the appropriate sorts of definitions, and so they suggest how ethics might be an empirical science. We might interpret Bentham and Mill in the same way.

Most twentieth-century positivists, however, reject this attitude to ethics. In their view, ethics is neither an empirical science nor a pseudo-science. They reach this conclusion because they are convinced by Moore's arguments against ethical naturalism, which we should now discuss.

269. Moore: Not All Ethical Concepts Have Naturalistic Definitions

Since Sidgwick died in 1900, and Moore's *Principia Ethica* appeared in 1903, it is easy to suppose that the twentieth century marks a sharp division in the history of ethics. But the appearance of a sharp division is misleading. Moore's great influence on later moral philosophy results mainly from his meta-ethical inquiries, which are continuous with those of Sidgwick and the eighteenth-century British moralists. He argues for the conclusion of (e.g.) Price and Sidgwick, that goodness cannot be a definable natural property. Though *Principia Ethica* preceded the growth of logical positivism, it shares a positivist concern about the relation of ethics to empirical science. A 'naturalistic' definition would define ethical concepts in terms suitable for empirical verification. Moore believes that if such definitions of ethical concepts were possible, ethical properties would be natural properties, and ethics would be simply a natural science.⁶

Moore concludes that ethics is about non-natural facts and properties, and hence he accepts objective moral facts. Positivists, however, denied the possibility of these non-natural facts, and hence they took Moore to have implicitly presented crushing arguments against any belief in moral facts, and, more broadly, against any view that treats moral judgments as statements at all. We need to ask whether Moore or his successors draw the right conclusion from his arguments.

Moore argues that naturalistic definitions of ethical concepts are impossible, because one central ethical concept, the concept of good, has no definition, so that there are no analytic truths about it.⁷ Hence he rejects conceptual hedonism, according to which 'good is pleasure' is true by definition. Those who take 'good' to be definable commit the 'naturalistic fallacy';⁸ from 'All Fs are G' they infer that 'F' is to be defined as 'G'. Those who define 'good' as 'pleasure', confuse the property of goodness with the things that have it; from the (presumed) fact that 'good' and

⁶ Naturalistic definition: Moore, *PE* 62. Ethics and natural science: 91–2.

⁷ Good is indefinable: Moore, *PE* 59.

⁸ The naturalistic fallacy: *PE* 62.

'pleasant' apply to all and only the same things, they infer that 'good' is to be defined as 'pleasant'.⁹

To show that 'good' is indefinable, Moore argues: (1) If 'F is G' is a correct definition of F, it is self-contradictory to deny that G is F. (2) There is an 'open question' about whether G is F if and only if we can significantly say that G is not F (i.e., 'G is F' is not meaningless). (3) If we can significantly say that G is not F, it is not self-contradictory to deny that G is F. (4) Therefore, no definition of F as G leaves an open question about whether G is F. (5) But all attempts to define 'good' create an open question. (6) Therefore, 'good' cannot be defined.¹⁰

The first premiss is plausible if we are considering definitions of concepts, and these definitions provide analytic truths that specify the meanings of terms. The second premiss gives the meaning of 'open question'. If we grasp the meaning of 'bachelor', we recognize that the question 'Is an unmarried adult male a bachelor?' is not an open question, because it is simply the question 'Is an unmarried adult male an unmarried adult male?' Anyone who understood this latter question would see that it is meaningless to say that an unmarried adult male is not an unmarried adult male.

The third premiss also seems plausible in the case we have just given. If it had not been meaningless to deny that an unmarried adult male is a bachelor, we would apparently not have found the correct definition of 'bachelor'. Once we have found that 'F is G' is the correct definition of F, we do not seem to have left any open question about whether Gs are Fs.

Moore asserts that all proposed definitions of 'good' create open questions. For instance, 'good' cannot be defined as what we desire to desire, because the question 'Is it good to desire to desire this?' is as intelligible as 'Is this good?' We might well understand 'good' and 'desire', but still not suppose that 'What we desire to desire is not good' is meaningless. Application of the same tests to all proposed definitions of 'good' shows that they all create open questions. Hence 'good' is indefinable.¹¹

Moore's third premiss might be questioned, because some self-contradictory statements may not be obviously so. If truths of logic and mathematics are analytic truths, it is self-contradictory to deny them, but this may not be initially obvious, and so they may still create open questions. If we do not know that it is self-contradictory to deny that Gs are Fs, the question 'Are all Gs Fs?' can be significantly asked, and therefore remains open.

Similarly, then, if 'good' is correctly defined as 'pleasant', it is self-contradictory to deny that all pleasant things are good, but it may not be obviously self-contradictory. Hence the question 'Are pleasant things good?' may be open even if the definition of 'good' as 'pleasant' is correct. Moore's appeal to open questions is

⁹ Confusion of truths about F with the definition of 'F': *PE* 66. Though naturalists—those who define goodness as some natural property, such as pleasure—commit this fallacy, they are not the only ones. In Moore's view, any attempt to define 'good' makes the same error of confusing truths about Fs with the definition of 'F'.

¹⁰ Open question: *PE* 72, 67. Price \$179. There is no evidence that Moore knew of Price's argument.

¹¹ See Lewy, 'Moore', 143–6.

not a good test for correct definitions. And so it does not show that 'good' is indefinable.¹²

270. How Non-Naturalism Allows Moral Knowledge

Suppose, however, that 'good' is indefinable. In that case, one route to moral knowledge is closed to us. If we know the definition of F, we can begin with our knowledge of that definition, and use it to seek further knowledge about F. If, for instance, we know that bachelors are unmarried adult males, and we want to know whether bachelors have a higher average income than married men, we know that we ought to look for evidence about the income of unmarried adult males. But if we did not know the definition, we could not begin our inquiry. Similarly, if we knew that goodness is to be defined as pleasure, we could inquire into how to make things better by asking how to make things pleasanter. But, if Moore is right, we lack this initial definitional knowledge about goodness.

How, then, can we know anything about goodness? Moore assumes that if we have any knowledge that is based on other knowledge, we must have some knowledge that is not based on other knowledge, and therefore we have to begin with a basic intuition. A hedonist might maintain that, though goodness cannot be defined as pleasure, we have a basic intuition that goodness is pleasure. This is Sidgwick's view. Moore does not accept this hedonist claim, but he defends different intuitions about good.¹³

Moore, therefore, is an intuitionist because, though he denies that goodness is definable, he maintains that we can know truths about it. He is a cognitivist and an objectivist, even though he rejects all proposed definitions of goodness. Some of Moore's successors accept this non-naturalist and intuitionist form of objectivism about ethics. It is worked out most fully by Ross.¹⁴

271. A Positivist Response to Moore: Non-Cognitivism

Positivists, however, deny that we can achieve non-empirical knowledge of objective ethical facts by appeal to intuitions. If ethical terms cannot be defined in empirical terms, ethical statements cannot be verified; hence they have no meaning. We have no reason to believe in simple, non-natural properties that are grasped by intuition.

Positivists, therefore reject Moore's belief in moral facts. They accept Hume's arguments to show that the apparently factual character of moral judgments misleads us about their real character. Following Hume, they rely on two features that separate moral judgments from statements of fact:¹⁵ (1) Moral judgments necessarily influence action, and therefore include passions. (2) We cannot derive 'ought' from 'is'.

The first claim expresses the internalist view that it is logically impossible to make a moral judgment and not to be inclined to act in accordance with it. Since it is logically possible to state an objective fact and to be unmoved by it. Hume infers that

¹² Definitions: Broad, *FTET* 173–4; Frankena, 'Naturalistic fallacy'; Moore, 'Reply' 665.

¹³ Sidgwick's foundationalism: see §248.

¹⁴ Ross's intuitionism: §284.

¹⁵ Hume and non-cognitivism: §158; Stevenson, *EL* 273–6. Moore and Hume: Hare, *LM* 29–30.

moral judgments cannot be statements about objective facts ('matters of fact' or facts 'in the object'). Similarly, Hume denies that we can derive 'ought' from 'is', because he believes that judgments about how things ought to be are simply a means of expressing approval.

This appeal to the essentially practical character of moral judgments returns to Suarez's distinction between an indicative and an imperative law. If internalists are right, Suarez should not have denied that moral judgments are essentially prescriptive, and should not have accepted objective moral facts.¹⁶

Critics of Moore rely on these arguments to show that a moral judgment does not describe facts, because its meaning is not descriptive. It looks like a statement that describes a purported moral fact, and so it appears to be true or false. But it is not really a statement; it has some other character that fits its internal relation to motivation and action. This is a non-cognitivist (or non-descriptivist) account of moral judgments.

According to non-cognitivists, Moore proves—whatever he intends to prove—that 'good' cannot be defined in purely natural terms, because no naturalistic definition could capture the internal connexion between moral judgments and motivation. Even though Moore does not see that his argument tacitly relies on internalism, he really vindicates a non-cognitivist and anti-objectivist position.¹⁷

This judgment about Moore underlies different versions of non-cognitivism, from Stevenson's emotivism to Hare's prescriptivism and Gibbard's and Blackburn's expressivism. Emotivists argue that a moral judgment conveys an expression of emotion. Prescriptivists argue that it is an imperative or prescription. Expressivists take it to be an attitude of acceptance of a norm. According to these views, a moral judgment cannot be true or false, because emotional reactions, imperatives, and acceptances can be appropriate or inappropriate, but not true or false.¹⁸

Positivist reactions to Moore—especially marked in Stevenson, Ayer, and Hare—help to explain why so much moral philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century consists in meta-ethics, and more specifically, in arguments for non-cognitivism. These arguments aim to show that moral judgments are, despite their grammatical form, really expressions of emotion, or action-guiding prescriptions, and are not statements of fact. If they are not statements of fact at all, the question whether they are statements about the world (as earlier rationalists suppose) or statements about one's own emotions (as sentimentalists suppose), does not arise.

272. The Significance of the Division between Facts and Values

Non-cognitivism underlies a widespread and influential twentieth-century belief in the separation of facts from values. Hume's view that 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is' might be taken to affirm this separation. If naturalistic definitions of the sort that Moore rejects were possible, we could argue from (say) facts about pleasure and pain

¹⁶ Prescriptive law: Suarez §§118–19.

¹⁷ Hume and Moore: Hare, *LM* 171.

¹⁸ Expressivism: Gibbard, *WCAF*; Blackburn, *RP*.

to conclusions about right and wrong. But if there are no such definitions, we cannot draw ethical conclusions from statements of fact alone; we have to insert some ethical premiss before we can draw any ethical conclusion.

From a positivist point of view, therefore, all genuine empirical science relies on the separation of facts from values. If economics, psychology, and other social sciences are genuinely scientific, they must confine themselves to empirically verifiable facts, and therefore they must avoid judgments of value. If social scientists argue that some institution or policy is just or unjust, or that it ought to be encouraged or discouraged, we can be sure (according to a non-cognitivist) that they have abandoned their professional role as social scientists, that they are engaged in judgments of value, and therefore have gone beyond the facts.

This view about the relation between ethics and social science is quite different from the view of Sidgwick and Mill. In their view, ethics and empirical social science form a single line of argument from utilitarian principles to conclusions about the policies that maximize utility. Twentieth-century positivists reject this unitary conception of ethics and social science. One relevant historical development is the establishment of governments and societies that claimed to embody the unity of scientific theory and social practice. The Soviet Union was officially Marxist and Leninist. Italy and Germany were governed by regimes that claimed to rest on a different theory of society. These antagonistic regimes of the right and the left had one thing in common: they claimed to derive conclusions about practice from general facts about society and history.

One might conclude that these social theories reveal a dangerous aspect of the moral and political outlook of nineteenth-century theorists—Mill and Sidgwick on the one side, and their idealist rivals on the other side. However much they might have deplored Soviet and Fascist claims to put moral and social theory into practice, Mill and Sidgwick might be accused of endorsing the unitary attitude to ethics and social science that produced these results.

Whatever we think about this argument to show that nineteenth-century moral and political theory opens the way for opponents of liberal and democratic social orders, it has influenced twentieth-century positivism, and has encouraged belief in the separation of facts and values. This influence is most evident in Weber and Popper, who take the separation of facts and values to be a fundamental support for a liberal social order, and a vital defence against domination by a totalitarian state that threatens the freedom of every institution and form of thought within it.¹⁹ From this point of view, we can trace a straight line from the belief in moral facts to Hegel's conception of Ethical life, to Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. To cut out these errors at their root, we must (according to Weber and Popper) deny that judgments of value state facts. Popper's critique of Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx is one strong expression of the fairly widespread belief that believers in objective moral facts are authoritarians who want to compel everyone else to conform to their moral and political doctrines.

¹⁹ Facts and values: Weber, *MSS* 2. Popper, *OSE* i 64–5 (a dualism of 'facts and decisions', or of 'facts and norms'); 67 (the 'autonomy of ethics, first advocated by Protagoras and Socrates'); ii 392 ('facts and standards'; 'one of the bases of the liberal tradition'). On Weber see Olafson, *ETCT* 54–64. The grounds for believing in a separation of facts from values are examined by Putnam, *CFD* chs. 1–2.

The corollary to this belief is the belief that anyone who wants to resist these authoritarian attitudes should reject moral facts.²⁰

In these historical circumstances, a positivist has a good reason to welcome the argument for non-cognitivism that relies on Hume and Moore. The non-cognitivist conclusion explains why there are no moral facts and why it is futile to look for any science of ethics.

273. Do Emotivists Misunderstand the Meaning of Moral Judgments?

According to emotivists, my judgment that *x* is good expresses my favourable emotion towards *x*, as a means to persuading you to have the same favourable emotion. This 'contagion' of moral judgments primarily affects the tendency of other people, rather than of oneself, to favour an action.²¹

Emotivists rely on the obvious fact that moral judgments can be used for this purpose in many contexts. We regularly assume that when people say an action is right or wrong, they are expressing a favourable emotion towards it, and trying to persuade us to share it. If we found out either that they did not really favour the action, or did not want us to favour it, we would suspect them of insincerity. On the basis of such cases, emotivists conclude that the meaning of moral judgments is the emotive character that they bear.

Critics of emotivism argue the emotive and persuasive use of moral judgments does not determine their meaning.²² We can see this if we consider commands and commendations. Though we often use them to influence people, we sometimes prescribe and commend without the ulterior aim of persuading. Military officers, for instance, may order their troops not to run away, even if they know they have no hope of influencing anyone not to run away, and even if they want them to run away. What they believe or hope about the prospects of success does not determine whether they actually give an order. Commanding is telling someone to do something, whether or not anyone tries to get them to do it.²³

This difference between the meaning and the common use of imperatives shows how emotivists misinterpret moral judgments. Just as we can issue a command without attempting to influence someone, we can tell someone that they ought not to join a friend in a dishonest scheme, even if we realize we have no hope of influencing them.²⁴

This argument suggests how we might reject emotivism in favour of prescriptivism, while still endorsing non-cognitivist claims about the practical character of moral judgments and the division between facts and values. According to a prescriptivist, a judgment about what someone ought to do is essentially practical, because its essential function is to commend or prescribe an action. Its meaning is prescriptive,

²⁰ Popper's critique of Plato and others is expounded at length in *OSE*.

²¹ Emotivism: Ayer, *LTL* ch. 6. Moral judgments and motivation: Stevenson, *FV* 13. 'Contagion': *EL* 22.

²² Objections to emotivism: Hare, *LM* 13–15.

²³ Imperatives v. attempts to persuade: Hare, *SOE* 109–10.

²⁴ Hare and criticisms of non-cognitivism: Ross, *FE* 32–40; Hare, *SOE* 113.

but we need not use it to influence anyone's behaviour, just as we need not use a command to influence behaviour. Moral judgments, then, are essentially prescriptive.

274. Do Prescriptivists Also Misunderstand the Meaning of Moral Judgments?

Does prescriptivism offer a defensible version of non-cognitivism that avoids the mistakes of emotivism? Its objection to emotivism might be used to cast doubt on prescriptivism as well. Moral judgments can be used, as prescriptivists claim, to command, or recommend, or advise, but many factual judgments can also be used in these ways. If I ask you whether you advise me to take a short cut through the next field, you might tell me that it is full of mines, and that I am likely to be killed. You have advised me by making a purely factual statement.

Why should we not say the same about moral judgments? You may use 'You ought to keep out of that field', or 'You ought to pay your taxes' to give me advice, or to tell me what to do. But it does not follow that commanding or advising is part of the meaning of a judgment that includes 'ought'. I might believe you ought to keep a promise, even if I also believe that you are not going to keep it, and that it is pointless for me to advise or order you to keep it. I do not want to prescribe that you keep the promise, but none the less I agree that you ought to keep it and that it would wrong for you to break it. This is a purely descriptive analysis of 'ought' and other moral terms.

Prescriptivism, therefore, does not seem to be a plausible alternative to emotivism. If we accepted the argument that was offered against emotivism, we should apparently accept the present argument against prescriptivism.

Prescriptivists reject this argument for a descriptive analysis of 'ought'. They agree that we might say 'You ought to keep your promise, but I'm not telling you to keep it and I don't care whether you keep it or not'. In such cases 'ought' means 'it is conventionally supposed that you ought'. But this sense is different from the sense of 'ought' when we use it in a genuine prescription.²⁵ The purely conventional sense attached to 'ought' explains why it lacks its usual action-guiding character.

This reply to a descriptive analysis of 'ought' casts doubt on the argument to show that prescriptivism is to be preferred to emotivism. For if 'ought' has a different meaning in non-advisory contexts, an emotivist may argue that it has a different meaning in non-emotive contexts. On this point, prescriptivism seems no better off than emotivism.

But in either case the non-cognitivist suggestion about the meaning of 'ought' is open to question. Suppose I say 'You really ought to do it, whatever is conventionally supposed, but I don't believe you will listen to me, and I don't advise you to do it'. That seems perfectly intelligible, and it seems to make a moral judgment with its normal meaning. But I have explicitly cancelled (in 'but . . .') the prescriptive force it has in other contexts.

²⁵ Non-prescriptive sense of 'ought': Hare, *LM* 171.

The non-cognitivist may answer that this judgment is not intelligible, but self-contradictory, because it rests on a misunderstanding of the meaning of 'ought'. Though we may think it makes sense, it really makes no sense. The arguments for an internal relation between moral judgments and motivation (in its emotivist or its prescriptivist version) are so powerful that we ought to reject allegedly descriptive moral judgments as non-obviously self-contradictory.

275. An Inconsistency in Non-Cognitivism?

This answer, however, seems to conflict with the non-cognitivist's agreement with Moore. According to Moore, if there is an open question about whether G is F, it is not self-contradictory to deny that G is F. Moore asserts that all attempted naturalist definitions of 'good' fail, because they all introduce open questions. Non-cognitivists agree with him. But a prescriptive analysis of moral judgments seems to raise an open question, because 'You ought to, but I don't advise you to' seems to make sense. Non-cognitivists reply that it does not make sense, because it is non-obviously self-contradictory. To admit non-obvious self-contradictions is to reject Moore's appeal to open questions.

How should non-cognitivists resolve this inconsistency in their position? Moore's use of open questions is open to objection because it does not take account of non-obvious self-contradictions. If non-cognitivists agree with this objection to Moore's argument, they can no longer appeal to Moore's argument from open questions in support of non-cognitivism. If, however, they stick to Moore's questionable argument from open questions, they cannot show that there are no consistent non-prescriptive moral judgments.

Non-cognitivists, therefore, cannot both rely on Moore's argument and reject purely descriptive moral judgments. But if they restore consistency either by giving up Moore's argument or by allowing purely descriptive moral judgments, they make it difficult to see why we should believe non-cognitivism.

276. An Argument for Nihilism: Moral Properties Do Not Fit into a Scientific World-View

If we have no good reason to accept non-cognitivism, we have reason to regard moral judgments as statements of fact. Judgments about rightness, wrongness, goodness, badness, and so on, seem to be about actions, people, practices, and so on, and not simply about the speaker or the judge. Moral judgments seem to be true or false because they describe or fail to describe the objective moral facts.²⁶

But even if moral judgments seem to be objectively true or false, we might still doubt whether they really could be. How do these alleged moral facts fit into the world of facts that is described by empirical science? If they do not fit into it, they do

²⁶ Subjectivism: §§157, 181.

not seem to be genuine facts. If we reach this conclusion, we believe moral judgments are all false, and we are moral nihilists.²⁷

This question about whether moral facts and properties fit into a scientific view of the world has already arisen in Pufendorf.²⁸ If a scientific view is the outlook of the physical sciences, it does not include any explicit discussion of moral facts. It is difficult to see how good, bad, right, wrong, and other moral properties could be made part of the scientific theories that tell us about the nature of reality. In this respect, moral facts and properties are, as Mackie puts it, 'queer'. If the physical sciences have no place for moral facts, we cannot explain our belief in moral facts by appealing to the truth of the belief. We need to explain why we have formed this belief despite its falsity. We might resort to hypotheses about evolution to explain why belief in moral facts was useful to our ancestors, and has therefore persisted despite its falsity.²⁹

These arguments against the reality of moral properties are open to question. The fact that physical sciences do not mention moral properties does not make moral properties unreal; for physical sciences do not mention all the properties and concepts that we need for theory and practice. They do not mention, for instance, the facts of history, psychology, society, and economics, but these are all objective facts, and we would not understand the world if we did not recognize them. Physics and chemistry do not discuss medical facts, but facts about health and disease are none the less determined by physical and chemical facts. Similarly, though the facts mentioned by physical science do not include, e.g., historical facts, they determine the historical facts, and the historical facts are constituted by physical facts. If moral facts are queer in the way in which these facts of history are also queer (i.e., they are not discussed by physical science, but they are constituted by physical facts), there may be objective moral facts, just as there are facts about history, society, and so on.³⁰

Moreover, some historical and social facts may be moral facts. It may be a fact of history, for instance, that the injustice of some regimes makes them less stable than they would have been if they were less unjust. If facts of this sort explain some historical events and processes, there are moral facts.

277. Do Disagreement and Relativity Rule Out Objectivity?

A more specific argument against objective moral facts appeals to the variation in moral beliefs across different societies and cultures. Just as tastes and manners vary from one society to another, moral judgments vary too. We do not think it is objectively wrong to use both a knife and fork to eat dinner, and objectively right

²⁷ Difficulties of moral facts: Mackie, *E* 41. We might avoid simple nihilism by saying that moral judgments lack truth, rather than that they are false, and that they are similar to judgments about fictional characters. See Hussain, 'Error theory'.

²⁸ Pufendorf and the scientific view: §137.

²⁹ Mackie's argument from queerness: *E* 38–42. Arguments from evolution: Singer, *EC*; Prinz, *ECM* ch. 7.

³⁰ Constitution: Boyd, 'Materialism'. Fodor 'Special sciences'.

to use only a fork, because different practices are acceptable in different places. Moral judgments seem to show a similar variation. Scientific judgments, however, display gradual convergence and growing consensus. This scientific consensus results from the fact that there is some objective world that scientific judgments describe. Lack of consensus in morality suggests that there are no objective moral facts.³¹

This contrast between scientific consensus and moral variation is too simple. There have been stubborn disagreements on questions of scientific fact. Some people believe that the earth is flat, or that astrology can predict the future, or that smoking does not cause lung cancer, or that human action has no significant causal role in climate change. In Germany, the Soviet Union, and South Africa for some part of the twentieth century, specific biological theories (about race and heredity) supported specific moral and political views.

Are these genuine scientific disagreements? They seem to rest on an ideology that reflects the interest of a dominant race or class. Genuine experts in these areas no longer take them seriously. Someone who looks at the evidence without any distorting bias will reject these deviant views. If that is so, they create no difficulty for the view that the scientific outlook reaches consensus because there are objective facts it describes.

Similarly, however, many moral disagreements may result from distorting influences of the sort that underlie scientific disagreements. If so, they do not cast doubt on the existence of objective moral facts. Moreover, we sometimes find increasing consensus in moral judgments. In the eighteenth century and later, more people have come to agree that slavery is morally impermissible, and that members of different racial groups do not deserve different legal rights simply because of racial differences.

If we think that moral disagreement is more intractable than scientific disagreement, we may be influenced by an over-simple view of scientific inquiry and progress. We do not reach scientific knowledge through naïve observation and generalization. We also need to set out from true or plausible theories and assumptions (for instance, those that tell us how our instruments work and when we can rely on them). Similarly, in ethics we need to set out from reasonable judgments that make us reliable inquirers. Reliance on appropriate background assumptions for inquiry and interpretation of evidence does not compromise the objectivity of scientific inquiry. Nor, similarly, does it show that moral inquiry cannot discover objective moral facts.³²

An attempt to estimate the degree of convergence and progress to be found in the history of ethics should consider the history of moral institutions and practices in different societies. Variation in moral practice does not necessarily prove variation in moral beliefs. For different external conditions justify different practices, and different kinds of moral character and moral training.

The history of moral theory can also help us to identify the extent of convergence or disagreement. We have found, for instance, that the reasons for supposing that the concerns of ancient and mediaeval moralists are alien to those of modern moralists

³¹ Arguments from variation: §§55–6 182, 235. Arguments for relativism: Sturgeon, 'Relativism'.

³² Moral disagreement: Mackie, *E* 36; Gewirth, 'Positive ethics'. Reliable inquirers: §286.

are largely mistaken. Examination of the arguments and assumptions underlying different moral theories shows that the area of disagreement is narrower than it might initially appear. If, for instance, we compare the most defensible statements of Aristotle's, Kant's, and Hegel's positions with their own statements of them, we find that they disagree much less than they think they do. From this point of view, intelligent interpretation, sympathetic understanding, and rational criticism mutually influence each other, and an accurate critical history may support a particular view of the nature of morality and moral judgment. The study of ethics may reveal to us an extent of agreement that we would not otherwise have expected.

278. Why Does Moral Objectivity Matter?

The combination of positivism and non-naturalism supports, as we have seen, belief in a sharp division between facts and values. Acceptance of this division is incompatible with the belief in moral objectivity—the existence of moral facts that do not depend on anyone's beliefs, desires, or agreements. We have seen that the nihilist, sceptical, and relativist objections to objectivity are open to some doubts. If we have good reason to believe in moral facts, we have good reason to reject the division between facts and values.

One reason to emphasize the weakness of arguments against moral objectivity is the fact that moral judgments and arguments create a presumption in favour of objectivity. If we recognize objective facts about the world, we have some reason, as Price argues, to recognize moral facts among them.³³ We take our moral judgments to be corrigible, and we do not assume that if everyone favours a particular moral judgment, that makes it true. We expect our moral judgments to fit the facts, and we try to find out whether they actually fit the facts. Since we do not treat our moral judgments as we would treat them if we believed there were no moral facts to be discovered, we need some strong argument to show that our treatment of them rests on a mistake.

To see why objectivity in morality matters, we may compare it with objectivity in the physical world. Our belief in external objects purports to explain why we have the experiences we have. We understand our experiences and their causes in ways we would not understand them if we did not believe in external objects. That is why we believe, for instance, that if we walk round the back of a door we will probably see the back of the doorknob that we saw from the front. Our expectation about what we will see is supported by the objective features that belong to the door whether or not anyone sees it. Similarly, if there are objective moral properties, our subjective concerns may be correct.³⁴ In that case, the actual wrongness of theft warrants my belief that one should not steal.

These are reasons to believe that it matters whether we take moral properties and facts to be objective or not. We have a different reason for taking an action seriously if the action itself—not the way we react to it—is the basis for warranted moral

³³ Price on moral facts: §§181–2. Moral facts: Boyd, 'Realist'; Sturgeon, 'Explanations'; Brink, *MRFE*.

³⁴ Objective support: Mackie, *E* 22; Hare, 'Ontology'.

judgments about it. As Price remarks, we assume that the features of an action itself make it right or wrong, and that it would cease to be right or wrong only if the properties of the action were different. What we think about it does not decide its rightness or wrongness.³⁵

The apparent difficulty of settling moral disputes may appear to cast doubt on objectivism, but it may actually support it. We do not take moral disputes to reflect mere disagreements in attitude. We assume that we can change our moral views for the better, not simply by reflecting on our current preferences, but by changing our preferences in the light of what we take to be morally correct. Moreover, we suppose that we ought to be ready to examine our moral views and to change them in the light of reflexion, just as we try to do in any other area of rational inquiry. If moral inquiry is a search for objective facts, it is reasonable to take this attitude to morality.

Belief in objectivity may influence not only our views about the basis of our concerns, but also the concerns that we form. If we think we are guided by objective facts, we might expect our attitudes to develop and change in ways in which they would not develop if our concerns were purely subjective. We might try, for instance, to find out the relevant facts, and to modify our later concerns in the light of what we think we have discovered.

If, however, there are no objective facts to be discovered, why should the attitude we would take to a factual inquiry fit a moral inquiry? Why, for instance, should we compare different moral views or theories to see what can be said for each of them? Why should we not instead try to confirm our previous moral beliefs by persuading ourselves of the error of every other view? It is difficult for an anti-objectivist view to explain what is wrong with this self-confirming attitude to morality.³⁶

279. Back to Moore: Can Moral Concepts Be Defined?

We have considered different ways to understand the place of moral judgments, facts, and properties in relation to the objective world described by physical science. Naturalist definitions would make ethical statements straightforwardly verifiable, and empirically acceptable to positivists. But many positivists believe that Moore proves that ethical properties could not be defined in naturalistic terms. Non-cognitivism maintains that moral judgments are not candidates for empirical verification, because they are not statements at all. Nihilists argue that since moral judgments do not fit into the world described by physical science they do not describe objective facts.

If each of these treatments of moral judgments is open to question, we should perhaps try a different approach to Moore's questions. His arguments raise a difficulty about definitions and definability. Sometimes we define concepts, and our answers give us the sense of the relevant terms, in so-called 'nominal definitions'. But we also define properties, by saying what the relevant terms refer to, in 'real definitions'.³⁷ The property that makes something water is being H²O, but the

³⁵ Price on objectivity: §§178–9. Questions about objectivity: Railton, 'Realism'.

³⁶ Implications of objectivism: Sturgeon, 'What difference?' ³⁷ Definitions: §§15, 27, 179.

expression 'H²O' does not give us the sense of the word 'water'. Someone could grasp the sense of the word, and recognize examples of water, without knowing anything about hydrogen and oxygen, but they could not grasp what water really is without this chemical knowledge.

Some questions about definition in ethics are about real definitions. When Socrates asks 'What is bravery?' and Aristotle asks 'What is happiness?', they are not asking what the words mean. They are asking about the relevant property. Similarly, utilitarians ask the Socratic question 'What makes right actions right?' The answer gives the explanation or ground of an action's being right, not the meaning of 'right'. Moore's appeal to open questions is irrelevant to this type of definition.³⁸

This distinction clarifies some of Moore's questions. First, can 'good' and related terms be given correct nominal definitions? 'Related' terms introduce the properties that are the essential subject matter of evaluative judgments. Non-evaluative concepts are those that can be explained without reference to the properties introduced by 'good', 'right', 'ought', 'admirable', 'appropriate' and other evaluative concepts.³⁹ Attempts at reductive nominal definitions (i.e., definitions that do not contain evaluative terms) of evaluative terms fail—not, however, because they raise open questions, but because they are open to counter-examples. As Plato remarks, paying debts, keeping promises, telling the truth, and so on can be just in some circumstances and unjust in others, and so justice cannot be wholly defined by reference to these non-evaluative concepts.⁴⁰

It does not follow, however, that moral concepts are indefinable. We may be able to explain goodness or rightness, for instance, by understanding the connexions between 'good', 'ought', 'right', 'obligation', and 'reason'. Moore's claim looks plausible—if it is restricted to reductive definitions—but also implausible—if it is taken to rule out every sort of definition. If we grasp the connexions between evaluative concepts, we have not defined any one of them in non-evaluative terms, but we have defined them, in so far as we have an account that allows us to understand their role in moral judgment and moral argument.

280. Can Moral Properties Be Defined?

Just as it is difficult to see how moral concepts could be reductively defined by reference to non-moral concepts, it is difficult to see how we could reduce evaluative properties completely to non-evaluative properties. We can reduce the property of being water to the property of being H²O because all the counterfactual and explanatory properties of water are also properties of H²O (e.g., someone who dies from drinking poisoned water dies from drinking poisoned H²O). But not all identifications of particular events allow the reduction of one property belonging to the event

³⁸ Concepts and properties: Ross §284; Putnam, 'Properties'. A reply to Moore? Brink, *MRFE* ch. 6; Darwall, *PE* 34–8. Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill are not clear on this point.

³⁹ Ross speaks of 'definitions which claim to define an ethical term without using other ethical terms' (*FE* 6), or without using 'distinctively' ethical terms (42).

⁴⁰ Plato on definition: §27.

to another property. My signing a cheque now to pay the rent is (let us suppose) my making an L-shaped scrawl on a piece of paper, but I do not pay the rent because I make a L-shaped scrawl on a piece of paper; I pay the rent because I sign a cheque in the right place with my legal signature. For this reason, signing a cheque is not reducible to making a scrawl on a piece of paper, though that is how we sign a cheque.⁴¹

Similarly, an attempted reduction of evaluative to non-evaluative properties seems to face counter-examples. A simple hedonist theory defines good as pleasure, and a simple utilitarian theory defines the right as what maximizes the good (according to a simple hedonist account of the good). We can find counter-examples.

Counter-examples, however, are not decisive. To decide about a proposed real definition (such as the hedonist and utilitarian definitions just mentioned) of a moral property, we need to consider the moral theory to which the definitions belong. To examine a moral theory, we compare the implications of the theory with our initial judgments about what we ought to do, what we have reason to do, and so on. The initial judgments are 'intuitive' in the sense that they are not based on an explicit theory. We have to compare different proposed definitions with our intuitive judgments about (e.g.) what is good or right, or what ought to be done. We look for a general account that fits our intuitive judgments as a whole (even if it does not fit every single one of them).

A utilitarian and a Kantian may agree on the concept of the right, but still disagree on the property that makes things right. They agree on the essential connexions between 'right', 'good', and 'ought', but they disagree about the properties that explain these essential connexions. If we consider Moore's claims about definition in the case of real definitions, our answer is less clear-cut than the answer about nominal definitions. A reductive or a non-reductive account of a moral property cannot reasonably be accepted or rejected on the basis of apparent open questions or on the basis of particular counter-examples. Contrary to the view of most twentieth-century moral philosophers who were influenced by Moore or by positivism, the methods and arguments of earlier moral philosophers have not been shown to be unsound.

The task of finding accounts of moral properties is a task for constructive moral inquiry. This constructive inquiry is pursued by Ross and Rawls, whom we will consider in the next chapter. Both of them pursue the lines of argument that were developed by Sidgwick and his predecessors. Though they have learnt from twentieth-century meta-ethics, they do not draw the negative conclusions that philosophers influenced by positivism have drawn about moral inquiry.

⁴¹ Reduction and explanation: Price §178; Fodor, 'Special sciences'.

Utilitarianism and Its Critics

Some Further Questions

281. Meta-Ethics and Normative Ethics

Normative ethics is less prominent than meta-ethics in twentieth-century philosophy until the last third of the century. Widespread sympathy for non-cognitivism, and widespread positivist doubts about the possibility of constructive philosophical argument for moral conclusions, cast doubt on normative ethics. If we believe that empirical science is the only area in which there are any facts to be explained by a theory, we will be disinclined to believe that there are moral facts to be explained by moral theory. But if moral philosophers claim to explain moral beliefs rather than moral facts, what have they to add to the theories of psychologists or anthropologists? From the non-cognitivist point of view, normative ethics cannot be an inquiry into what rightness really consists in, but it must be an inquiry into the sorts of properties that tend to provoke our moral reactions and attitudes.

Many of the philosophers who pursue inquiries in normative ethics in the early twentieth century reject the positivism that underlies non-cognitivism. But some non-cognitivists and sceptics in meta-ethics also defend specific normative theories of morality.¹ They try to explain how their normative doctrines are to be reconciled with their meta-ethical doctrines. When doubts about the positivist outlook become more widespread, interest in systematic moral theory also revives. The most elaborate recent defence of utilitarianism, in Parfit's *On What Matters*, rests on an objectivist meta-ethical doctrine.

282. Lewis: Utilitarianism Can Be Defended from an Impartial Point of View

According to Sidgwick, utilitarianism is the interpersonal parallel to intra-personal prudence. Both prudence and utilitarian benevolence accept a maximizing outlook, because this is the outlook of practical reason. Some of Sidgwick's twentieth-century successors defend his view, but do not rely on the alleged axioms of practical reason from which he argues. Instead they appeal to the role of sympathy in the formation of moral attitudes.²

¹ Lewis and Hare, for instance, argue both for non-cognitivism and for utilitarianism.

² Sympathy: §§154–5.

Lewis argues that the prudent person recognizes that the future is just as real as the present and the past. Similarly, the moral person recognizes that other people and their mental states are just as real as oneself and one's own mental states. Since we act on the intensity of our experiences, and since we recognize others are as real as ourselves, we ought also to act on the intensity of their experiences. In order to do that, we have to act as though we were undergoing their experience with the same degree of intensity.³

How are we to imagine ourselves undergoing other people's experience with the intensity with which they undergo it? Lewis sees that it would be misleading if I imagined myself leading all these other people's lives in sequence, or if I regarded all their experiences as part of my present life. For in both these cases I change the relational properties of their experiences (by relating them to other experiences of mine), and so I may change their intensity and their value. To avoid this distorting effect of imagination, Lewis supposes that I need to imagine myself living several unconnected lives at once, each of which is my life.

If we follow this advice, we accept the utilitarian principle of maximizing total pleasure. Lewis agrees with Sidgwick's view that the Kantian principle of treating persons as ends in themselves requires acceptance of the utilitarian principle. We treat persons as ends by imagining the intensity of their experiences. If this imagination shows me that the results of my theft would be an increase in pleasure for me that is larger than the resulting pain for any other individual, but smaller than the total resulting pain for other people, my representation of the pain of all these other people gives me reason not to steal.

If we follow Lewis's advice, and we imagine A's and B's desires accurately, we have to conclude that A's aims and interests can be overridden by B's desires, however foolish they may be, provided only that B's desires are stronger, or that B would suffer more from having them frustrated. If we doubt whether this is a plausible result, we may reasonably doubt whether Lewis's principle expresses respect for other rational agents.

283. Hare: Utilitarianism Can Be Derived from Preferences

Hare also argues for utilitarianism by introducing sympathetic imagination that grasps the pleasures and pains of other people. Ordinary people are guided by a normal degree of prudence in considering how much they care about any one of their aims.⁴ They also agree that whatever is right for them to do is right for someone else to do in the same circumstances (universalizability). Hence, when they realize that they would not like it if they were the victims of the course of action that they advocate, they will no longer believe that they ought to do it; as Hare puts it, they will no longer prescribe their doing the action. Reflexion on their imagined preferences in

³ Imagining the feelings of other people: Lewis, *GNR* 91; *AKV* 545. Equal reality of others: Schopenhauer §224.

⁴ Hare discusses interests and ideals in *FR* and *MT*. He discusses prudence in *MT* 99–106.

imagined situations alters their actual preferences about what to do now, and hence alters their prescriptions.

We can extend the simple question 'How would you like it if someone else did it to you?' to more complex cases. Suppose that I am considering whether to steal Mary's wallet, which contains the money she needs to buy food for her three children during the week. If I imagine myself gaining the pleasure I would gain from spending the money in her wallet, and then I imagine myself suffering the pain I would suffer if I were Mary and each of her three children, the result of imagining all these situations in turn is that I recognize (let us suppose) that the pain suffered by these four other people is greater than the pleasure that I gain. If I imagine these pleasures and pains, I prefer the less painful (on the whole) situation in which I do not steal the wallet.⁵ I conclude that I ought not to steal the wallet, and (in Hare's terms) prescribe my not stealing the wallet.

Let us concede to Hare that the result of my imagining myself in all these situations is that I form some sort of preference—i.e., some inclination—not to steal the wallet. But this sort of preference is not necessarily a prescription. I may think it would be irrational to act on this inclination, because I have better reasons to steal the wallet. The mere fact that I feel some inclination not to steal does not show that I have a decisive reason not to steal.

We might try to support Hare by adding the principle that I ought not to take my pleasures and pains to be more important than anyone else's. This principle leads us back to Lewis's argument from impartiality to utilitarianism. But if Hare's argument needs help from Lewis's argument, it is subject to any doubts that might arise about Lewis's argument.

Sidgwick, Lewis, and Hare believe that Kant's categorical imperative, correctly understood, supports the principle of utility. This view underlies Parfit's defence of Sidgwick's attempt to reconcile Kantian and utilitarian arguments. These approaches to Kant agree on one point with Hegel and Schopenhauer; for they treat the categorical imperative as a principle of universal law, which is purely formal and empty until we add some content that Kant does not supply. According to some utilitarian Kantians, the content we need to add is pleasure and pain. When we consider pleasure and pain impartially, on Kantian principles, we find that the principle of utility is the supreme moral principle.⁶

Our conclusion about Lewis and Hare is relevant to the broader assessment of utilitarianism. We have seen that Mill and Sidgwick try to prove the principle of utility from arguments that rely on axioms, and therefore do not rely on common-sense moral beliefs.⁷ Lewis and Hare also try to avoid reliance on common-sense morality. If this strategy succeeds, utilitarians may justifiably override common sense in favour of a principle that has independent rational support. But if the relevant principle is not found, utilitarians have to rely on Sidgwick's dialectical strategy, and argue from intuitive moral judgments. To review these arguments, we can turn to Ross's discussion of the case for utilitarianism.

⁵ Representing preferences: Hare, *MT* 109. Full representation: *MT* 99.

⁶ Kant and utilitarianism: §292. Sidgwick's Kantian argument: §256.

⁷ Axioms: §254.

284. Ross: Utility Is Not the Ground of Rightness

Moore is a utilitarian in normative ethics, and in this area he begins a further dispute about the truth of utilitarianism that revives some of the arguments of the eighteenth century. Ross defends an intuitionist and pluralist position about ultimate moral principles. He develops a view that is similar to Price's and Reid's.

In Ross's view, Moore's arguments refute a utilitarian account of the concept of rightness, but they do not refute a utilitarian account of the property of rightness, which Ross calls 'the right-making property', or the 'ground of rightness'.⁸ To explain what is wrong with the utilitarian view of the ground of rightness, Ross revives some of the arguments of Butler and Price. Like Price, he accepts a pluralist intuitionist doctrine that rejects a single supreme principle in favour of a plurality of 'heads of virtue' (as Price calls them).⁹

Ross considers two cases that raise questions about rightness: (1) I ought (e.g.) to keep a promise, and I have no conflicting obligation. (2) I face a 'case of conscience', in which it seems that I ought to keep a promise, but it also seems that I ought to do something that prevents me from keeping my promise.¹⁰

To understand the questions that arise in these two cases, Ross introduces two aspects of duty: (a) I have a *prima facie* duty in cases where there is something morally to be said for (e.g.) keeping my promise. (b) I have a duty 'sans phrase' or a 'duty proper' to do whatever there is most to be said for. This is the action that I have the overriding duty to do.¹¹

Ross believes that we assume we have *prima facie* duties that do not depend on utility. According to Mill and Sidgwick, we assume unreflectively that keeping our promise promotes utility. According to Ross, however, we do not necessarily assume anything about utility. We assume that our having made a promise gives us a reason to keep it, because we have made the promise to a particular person, and we owe things to people because of past relations to them.

This non-utilitarian character of *prima facie* duties explains why, if we violate a *prima facie* duty, we sometimes do something seriously wrong in some respects, even if it was the right thing all things considered (i.e., our overriding duty). Even if we were right to break a promise, we may owe an apology, or compensation. *Prima facie* duty would not have this feature if it were simply an estimate of what would maximize utility. Since some *prima facie* duties are independent of utility, utility is not the only thing that is relevant to the overall rightness of an action. Suppose that John has promised his dying friend Sarah that he will look after Sarah's child Sam after Sarah's death. But John's wife Joan becomes seriously ill and needs John's full-time attention. John arranges for someone else to look after Sam. Perhaps John does the right thing overall. Still, the fact that he breaks his promise to Sarah counts

⁸ Ross, therefore, partially (though not completely) recognizes the difference between concept and property, as set out in §279 (though he does not express it in these terms).

⁹ Price on heads of virtue: §190. Introduction to Ross: Shafer-Landau, *FE* ch. 16. Earlier and later intuitionism: Stratton-Lake 'Rational intuitionism'.

¹⁰ Promises: Ross, *RG* 17–18.

¹¹ *Prima facie* duty (a possibly misleading expression, as Ross notices): Ross, *RG* 19–20; *FE* 84–5.

against his treatment of Sam, even if he is right to decide that there is more to be said for taking care of Joan.

We might still defend a utilitarian account of overriding duties. It is not always our overriding duty to fulfil a *prima facie* duty such as keeping a promise; we have to recognize exceptions that arise from other *prima facie* duties.¹² According to the utilitarian, the course of action that maximizes utility is our overriding duty.

Ross replies that utility alone does not justify the breaking of a promise.¹³ If utility were all that mattered, we would accept promise-breaking in some cases where we reject it. Suppose, e.g., I have promised to pay your bills out of your account, but I secretly steal from your account in order to give it to charity. If my theft increases utility, that does not make it my duty. Anyone who thinks utility determines our overriding duty 'may be suspected of not having reflected on what a promise is'.¹⁴

Common sense, therefore, in Ross's view, is not 'unconsciously utilitarian', as Mill and Sidgwick suppose. Mill describes common-sense rules as 'secondary maxims' that need the principle of utility as a 'common umpire'. Similarly, Sidgwick's dialectical defence of utilitarianism relies on possible conflicts in the application of common-sense rules.¹⁵ Ross agrees that common-sense rules do not always give clear practical guidance. But he denies that the principle of utility is always the right common umpire. Sometimes non-utilitarian considerations matter more than utility.

Indirect utilitarians might try to take Ross's arguments in their stride. They might reply that if we generally take Ross's non-utilitarian view of our obligations, the consequences will be better than they would be if we took a direct utilitarian view. Sidgwick considers this possibility when he suggests that a utilitarian might not want most people to be utilitarians.¹⁶ But this indirect utilitarian answer is itself open to doubt. It may not seem plausible that the consequences of observing non-utilitarian morality will be best, from the utilitarian point of view. The assumption of convergence between morality, as Ross conceives it, and maximization of utility may appear arbitrary.

285. Ross: Pluralist Intuitionism

Ross rejects utilitarianism because he believes that our intuitive convictions tell us not only that certain actions are right, but also why they are right. Promises illustrate two non-utilitarian features of some moral principles and requirements: (1) They involve relations to particular people, and thereby reflect the 'highly personal character of duty'. (2) They are retrospective; what we are required to do depends on what has happened, not on what we expect will happen.¹⁷

Ross agrees with Butler's objections to utilitarianism, which rely on these same two features of non-utilitarian obligations. Like Butler, he opposes the utilitarian view that no obligations are grounded in relations to particular people. From a utilitarian point of view, my obligations to my friends, my family, people who have helped me,

¹² Exceptions: *FE* 113.

¹³ Rightness without utility is conceivable: *RG* 34–5.

¹⁴ Utility and promises: *RG* 38–40.

¹⁵ Secondary maxims (or principles) in Mill: §§240–1.

¹⁶ Esoteric utilitarianism: §253.

¹⁷ Ross on utilitarian explanations: *FE* 69. Cf §242. Duties are personal: *RG* 22.

or people I have harmed, are only means towards maximizing the welfare of persons in general.¹⁸

If utility is not the only thing that makes actions right all things considered, how can we decide what to do when *prima facie* duties conflict? Ross reaffirms Price's pluralism about ultimate moral principles; he denies that any one principle is prior to the others. Sidgwick calls this view 'intuitionism'. To decide whether to follow one principle rather than the other here and now, we rely on intuition, understood as 'intuitive conviction' (as we saw above), which Ross sometimes calls 'perception'. His pluralism rejects Sidgwick's ambition to 'systematize' our moral convictions. In Ross's view, utilitarians ignore the moral weight of considerations that do not fit into their over-simplifying system.¹⁹

Ross's pluralism is not wholly unsystematic. We have seen that he emphasizes the personal and retrospective character of some duties. If we understand this character better, might we find a more systematic account that would unify the different grounds of rightness that Ross recognizes? This question will help us to understand Rawls's search for a systematic alternative to utilitarianism.

286. Rawls: Considered Judgments Are a Suitable Starting Point for Moral Theory

Ross's reply to utilitarianism has also stimulated a further version of a Kantian reply. Rawls's *Theory of Justice* marks the revival of Kantian normative ethics in the twentieth century. It puts forward an elaborate argument against Sidgwick's view—revived by Parfit—that Kantian principles can plausibly be used in the defence of utilitarianism. Rawls argues that Kant is right to suppose that his approach to morality supports distinctively non-utilitarian basic principles. Unlike Kant, Rawls tries to work out the sorts of social and political principles that can be defended on a Kantian basis.

Rawls is sympathetic to the objection that Ross's pluralism appears unsatisfying and even irrational. It seems inadequate to assert that sometimes justice overrides utility, but sometimes utility overrides justice. Do we not need some more general principle to support our different answers? Rawls believes we can find a systematic alternative to Ross's pluralism without accepting utilitarianism.

The dialectical method that Rawls articulates is familiar to us from Aristotle and his successors. Moral philosophy tries to capture and to explain our considered moral judgments. These are the rules, general features of morality, and judgments about particular cases, that seem to us, on reflexion and comparison, to be most plausible at the beginning of our inquiry. Reflexion and comparison try to rest our judgments on adequate experience of the appropriate situations, consideration of alternatives, and freedom from bias, prejudice, or self-interest. We expect the same qualities that we expect in any reliable observer of external reality.²⁰

¹⁸ Ross on Butler: *FE* 78–9. Ross revives some of Reid's and Price's objections to a utilitarian account of justice; see §§185–8.

¹⁹ Sidgwick on intuitionism: §239. Perception: Ross, *RG* 42, cites Aristotle.

²⁰ Dialectical argument: §§37, 239. The competent moral judge: Rawls, *CP* 3–5. Cf. §§277–8.

The aims of a moral theory may be explained by a comparison with linguistics. Linguists begin with the native speaker's intuitive sense that one sentence is grammatical and another is deviant, and they try to formulate the rules that underlie intuitive discriminations. Sometimes they reject a proposed rule if it implies some result that conflicts with our grammatical sense about particular examples. But sometimes they may decide that the rule is so well confirmed, fits so well with other rules, and so on, that it is better to conclude that, say, a particular utterance is really ungrammatical though it did not seem deviant. When this two-way comparison between our initial judgments and our tentative principles has reached a conclusion, we have reached reflective equilibrium.²¹

Similarly, moral theorists try to describe our moral capacity. They begin with our considered judgments about moral questions, in search of a theory that leads us to reflective equilibrium. Rawls's theory of justice, and in particular his formulation of the principles of justice, is meant to be a theory that results, after suitable reflexion and comparison, in reflective equilibrium.

287. The Original Position Underlies a Social Contract

Rawls's pursuit of reflective equilibrium explains why he emphasizes both the systematic character of utilitarianism and the need for a systematic alternative to it. His alternative account of justice is systematic because the moral arguments about justice are not confined to intuitive objections to utilitarianism. They are the starting point for a description of the basic structure of a society that conforms to the requirements of justice. Once we understand the implications of justice for the basic structure of society, we see that Rawls's theory 'constitutes the most appropriate moral basis for a democratic society'. His views about justice support plausible constraints on the structure and institutions of society.²²

Rawls does not compare the principle of utility immediately with considered judgments about justice. He begins from 'justice as fairness', which 'conveys the idea that the principles of justice are agreed to in an initial situation that is fair'.²³ This appeal to agreement describes a social contract that underlies the basic principles that govern society and the powers of the state.

Different theorists appeal to different sorts of social contract, because they conceive the initial conditions for agreement differently. Hobbes appeals to the agreement made in the state of nature, in order to show that the commonwealth is beneficial to a rational self-interested individual. Rousseau, however, maintains that a state is legitimate when it would be accepted unanimously by rational individuals who set aside their merely private interests and agree on the laws that make each of them as free as he was before. Rawls tries to state the conditions in which agents make the sort of choice that Rousseau has in mind. Justice as fairness gives us a practically useful account of justice only if we can identify fair conditions for the choice of

²¹ Moral theory and linguistics: *TJ* 41. Reflective equilibrium: *TJ* 42.

²² Utilitarianism and Rawls's systematic aims: *TJ* xvii–xviii. ²³ Justice as fairness: *TJ* 11.

principles of justice. These conditions correspond to the state of nature in earlier versions of a social contract.²⁴

To identify fair conditions, Rawls looks for possible sources of unfairness in a situation where we have to agree on principles of justice. If you and I make some agreement in which I know more about the relevant facts than you know, or I take advantage of the fact that you are too tired to think clearly about what you are agreeing to, you could legitimately complain about the resulting agreement. But if none of these conditions holds, you cannot legitimately complain, and you have no excuse not to abide by it.²⁵

The 'Original Position' that Rawls describes is the set of fair conditions in which we agree on principles of justice. Our task is to agree on the basic structure of society, including the institutions that assign roles, responsibilities, benefits, and burdens to different people. The principles we choose will be just if and only if they would be agreed to in an Original Position that excludes all sources of unfairness. To identify the appropriate Original Position, we ask what sorts of information and what sorts of desires are relevant to moral decisions about the basic structure of society. We then design an artificial situation in which people have the information and the desires that will ensure that they take account of the right things.

The description of the parties to the social contract is not meant to be realistic. These imagined people embody the demands of fairness. They lack the sort of knowledge and the sorts of motives that move people to act unfairly for their own advantage. In real life, we should not try to become like the people in the Original Position, but we should try to ignore the considerations that are excluded from it, so that we can reach the conclusions that they reach. The argument from the Original Position does not require any contract between a number of people. One person who reasons correctly from the Original Position will reach the principles of justice.²⁶

288. The Features of the Original Position

The Original Position requires a veil of ignorance that imposes complete ignorance of particular facts about oneself and one's position in society. It also requires partial ignorance about the good. No one knows their own conception of the good, but everyone can identify the primary goods—those that it is rational to want no matter what else one wants. The primary goods include freedom to pursue my good, the material resources needed for it, and the self-respect that I need to think it is worthwhile to bother pursuing my conception of my good. I need to know that different people have different conceptions of the good, and that many of these conceptions require material resources.²⁷

This veil of ignorance causes agents to be averse to risk. They do not know the relative probability of different patterns of distribution and their effect on the welfare

²⁴ The contract tradition: *TJ* xviii; 10, 14; *PL* 285–8. See §§130, 145, 196, 230.

²⁵ Avoiding unfairness: *TJ* 17. Legitimate complaint: cf. Scanlon, *WWO* ch. 5.

²⁶ Conditions defining the Original Position: *TJ* 22–3.

²⁷ Thin theory of the good: *TJ* 348. Primary social goods: *TJ* 54, 79, 123–4. What Rawls calls 'self-respect' might be better described as self-esteem.

of different people. Nor do they know their individual conceptions of the good. Hence they are relatively indifferent to the extra goods that they might gain by taking more risks (since they do not know whether their individual conceptions of the good would attach a high value to these extra goods). They would rather be guaranteed the primary goods than have the chance of greater gains combined with the risk of greater losses.²⁸

The agents are self-confined egoists who take no interest in the interests of other people for the other people's own sake. Benevolence has no place, because the proper place of benevolence in morality needs to be understood through the Original Position.²⁹

289. In the Original Position Two Principles of Justice Are Chosen

In the Original Position, so described, people choose Two Principles:

1. Maximum equal liberty: Even if I do not like the tastes and pursuits of other people, at least I will not have to conform to them. I am guaranteed the opportunity to pursue my own good, as I conceive it, as long as I allow others the same opportunity.
2. The difference principle: Inequalities must be arranged so as to be in everyone's interest, including the interest of those who will be the worst off.³⁰ Even those who are not the immediate beneficiaries of economic incentives benefit from them indirectly, since they know that it leaves them better off than they would have been in a condition of equality (if, e.g., doctors will be well paid only if everyone benefits from better medical care).³¹ They are not required to accept harm to themselves simply in order to benefit other people.

Since these are two basic principles, and since neither aims at maximizing utility, the people in the Original Position do not choose utilitarian principles of justice. But since the Original Position embodies the requirements of fairness, which are the correct starting point for choosing principles of justice, the argument from the Original Position has shown that the true principles of justice are not utilitarian.

290. Utilitarians May Endorse the Two Principles

Does Rawls's argument underestimate utilitarianism? Indirect utilitarians might accept the whole of Rawls's argument for the Two Principles, and agree that these

²⁸ The connexion between the veil of ignorance and aversion to risk is disputed. See Rawls, *CP* 226. Aversion to risk: Epicurus §66; Hobbes §134.

²⁹ Exclusion of benevolence: *TJ* 121–2; 128–9.

³⁰ Fuller formulations of the Two Principles: *TJ* §§11–13.

³¹ Suppose a society in which 90% of the people are better off than they are under the two principles, but the other 10% are slaves, and in a very poor condition. If I were not averse to risk, I might argue: 'As far as I know I have a 90% chance of coming out better off in that society than under the Two Principles, and so I should prefer that system.'

are non-utilitarian principles; but they might still argue that the principle of utility explains and justifies them. Acceptance of utilitarianism as an account of the right does not require us to think about how to maximize utility all the time, and in fact it may often require us to avoid thinking about utility. As Mill points out, we may promote utility better if we rely on non-utilitarian secondary principles.³²

Rawls's Two Principles might appear to be suitable secondary principles. They guarantee that individuals will not have their liberty infringed beyond the demands of equal liberty, and they will be protected against forms of inequality that would harm them simply to benefit others. These guarantees promote confidence, security, and stability in a society, and so they promote utility. Therefore utilitarianism supports these principles.

This indirect utilitarian defence of the Two Principles points out that acceptance of these non-utilitarian principles has good consequences, and that these good consequences promote utility. But it does not follow that the good consequences are those that maximize utility. This is clear if we define utility according to Sidgwick's universalistic hedonism. Even if we define it as satisfaction of desires, or some list of objective goods, it is still difficult to see how acceptance of the Two Principles maximizes utility.³³

291. Justice, Morality, and Utility

Suppose, then, that utilitarians concede that Rawls's principles of justice cannot be explained by indirect utilitarian argument. In Ross's terms, they concede that there are *prima facie* duties not grounded on utility. These concessions still allow a defence of utilitarianism, if utility overrides justice. In that case we may still maintain that the principle of utility is the primary principle.³⁴

Rawls rejects this utilitarian view on the ground that his Two Principles take precedence over other considerations about practices and policies. Their precedence rests on the Original Position, which embodies justice as fairness. The arguments from justice as fairness and from the Original Position show that we have a systematic reason, derived from the primacy of justice as fairness, for rejecting a utilitarian explanation of our considered judgments.

This case against utilitarianism is clarified in Rawls's discussion of the 'utilitarian nightmares' that Price uses to argue against utilitarianism.³⁵ We imagine these nightmares by observing that utilitarians are committed to acceptance of every morally repellent situation that seems to maximize utility. If slavery turned out to maximize utility, a utilitarian would have to endorse slavery. If cutting up four healthy but ordinary people to provide organs for one brilliant scientist or one wildly popular entertainer maximized utility, a utilitarian would have to endorse this means of providing spare parts.

Utilitarians observe that these counterfactual nightmares are pointless if they simply describe logical possibilities that we have no reason to regard as realistic.

³² Mill on secondary principles: §§240–1. Justice: §243.

³⁴ Utilitarian objections: Feinberg, 'Intuitionism'.

³³ Utility: Brandt, *FVM* ch. 2.

³⁵ Implications of utilitarianism: Price §189.

But Rawls does not intend to rely on a mere logical possibility. He remarks that for a utilitarian the decisive question about the rightness or wrongness of slavery is the question whether it maximizes utility. We do not regard this as the decisive question, however, because we do not need to ask it in order to decide that slavery is wrong.³⁶

This argument repeats Ross's basic objection to the view that the principle of utility is morally supreme. Ross protests that utilitarians take the wrong things to be relevant or decisive considerations. If they were right, we ought not to defend any specific moral rule until we are satisfied that the acceptance of this rule maximizes utility. But we can see that the calculations that are decisive for a utilitarian are not morally decisive. Ross draws on Butler's distinction between the effects of our moral outlook and the aspects of it that matter to us. Butler rejects utilitarianism on the basis of that distinction.³⁷

On this point, Rawls relies on Ross's pluralist intuitionist case against utilitarianism. Ross's argument is intuitionist, since it relies on our intuitive judgments, those that Rawls describes as considered judgments. The main argument against the primacy of the principle of utility relies on considered judgments about the sorts of reasons that are relevant and irrelevant to whether a specific action or policy is morally right. Rawls relies especially on the judgment that in some cases utilitarian reasons are not relevant.

The objections of Ross and Rawls are relevant, therefore, because they argue that considered judgments count against utilitarianism, and in favour of personal and retrospective views not only about the just, but also about the right as a whole.

292. The Kantian Interpretation of Justice as Fairness

If Rawls relies on Ross's intuitionist objections to utilitarianism, we might be dissatisfied. Utilitarianism offers a clear principle that has some rational appeal. If it conflicts with justice as fairness, and if our considered judgments give priority to fairness over utility, we might still ask why we should attribute such weight to fairness.

In Rawls's view, the attitudes that underlie the weight we attach to fairness are not merely intuitive, but express one of Kant's basic insights. In contrast to Kantian utilitarians,³⁸ anti-utilitarian Kantians argue that the categorical imperative prescribes the treatment of rational agents as ends in themselves, and that such treatment excludes the maximizing attitude of utilitarianism. In the nineteenth century, Green defends this anti-utilitarian interpretation of Kant.³⁹ Twentieth-century moralists who develop Kantian principles in this anti-utilitarian direction include Rawls, Scanlon, and Korsgaard.⁴⁰

Justice as fairness embodies Kantian principles because the principles accepted in the Original Position are universal laws for all rational beings. The veil of ignorance

³⁶ Comparison with utilitarianism: *TJ* §26. Slavery: §267.

³⁷ Butler on what matters in morality: §185.

³⁸ Kantian utilitarians: §§256, 283. A recent attempt at reconciliation: Parfit, *OWM* i, ch. 16. See Scheffler, 'Introduction'. Objections from a Kantian point of view: Herman, 'Mismatch'.

³⁹ Green on Kant: §264.

⁴⁰ Non-utilitarian views of Kant: Korsgaard, *CKE*; Scanlon, *WWO*.

illustrates the connexion between the Original Position and the categorical imperative.⁴¹ Everyone has all and only the relevant information and motivation; the equal veil of ignorance ensures that I will not accept any principle that will not also be acceptable to you on just the same grounds.⁴² If we were not all under the same veil of ignorance, I could take advantage of your ignorance, and advance my interests against yours. If we reject this sort of unfairness, we assume that people have equal rights, and that therefore their needs and interests deserve equal concern and equal treatment apart from any further social aims or goals that may be pursued.⁴³

Similarly, justice as fairness captures the Kantian Formula of Humanity. The principles accepted in the Original Position protect individual interests. We will accept these principles if we believe we count for something in our own right, independently of the goals and aims of other people. This attitude is expressed in the Kantian view of persons as ends in themselves. The initial conditions underlying the Original Position include the assumption that people have equal rights that protect them against being harmed simply in order to advance other people's interest or the total interest.⁴⁴

293. What Does the Kantian Interpretation Show?

These connexions between Rawls and Kant suggest that each supports and explains the other.

Kant's arguments to show that there must be categorical imperatives, and that they must be formulated in the ways he describes, may support Rawls's construction of the Original Position. The construction proceeds from judgments about fairness that do not explicitly rely on any distinctively Kantian claims. But its provisions specify the conditions for a maxim that can be a universal law for all rational agents, and for the treatment of rational agents as ends in themselves. If Rawls is right, Kant's position is plausible partly because it relies on some basic considered judgments about fairness.

If we accept the Formula of Humanity, we think of ourselves and of other people as ends who are not to be treated simply as means to advance the interests of other people. If the Original Position conforms to this formula, Rawls helps to give it practical content. It requires respect for self and others, and it protects the rights of distinct persons.

These arguments show why it is difficult to reconcile Kant and utilitarianism. Sidgwick and his followers believe that the principle of utility provides the moral content that Kantian principles alone cannot supply. According to Rawls, examination of Kantian principles shows that Sidgwick provides the wrong moral content. We can attribute the right content to Kantian principles if we connect them with considered judgments about justice and fairness. A Kantian position, therefore, offers a reasonable alternative to utilitarianism.

⁴¹ Universal law: §204. Kant and the veil of ignorance: *TJ* 118n.

⁴² This argument also depends on the assumption of rationality.

⁴³ Rawls's reliance on some right of this sort is explained by Dworkin, 'Original Position'. See Rawls, *CP* 400n. Rights: Price §189; Kant §209; Mill §§243–4. Rawls on separateness of persons: *TJ* §30.

⁴⁴ Treating persons as ends: *TJ* 156–7. Utilitarianism v. Kant's Formula of Humanity: §§207–9, 258.

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