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## CHAPTER 1    TWO DEFECTIVE ACCOUNTS

We make moral judgements not only about the rightness or wrongness of actions but also about the merit, the moral worth, of persons. In this thesis I will be examining the nature of moral worth and considering the kind of appraisals of moral worth which are made and their significance in the moral life.

Much of the thesis is devoted to attacking some widespread accounts of moral worth and of the moral appraisal of persons. A view of moral worth, however, does not occur in isolation, it is based on a particular conception of morality. Thus opposition to these accounts of moral worth will involve disputing particular ways of understanding morality.

The principal accounts of moral worth attacked in this thesis are (a) the view I dub the "legalist" position: this account is tied to a narrow, law-like conception of morality, and (b) the utilitarian account, of which a number of variants will be examined. Although at first sight they appear very different, it will be shown that these views share some central assumptions.

### Legalism

Kurt Baier in Moral Value and Moral Worth<sup>1</sup> is a clear exponent of the narrow conception of morality and the corresponding view of moral worth. I will expound his discussion and then isolate a number of its features. These features I take to be central to the overall view I oppose.

In passing moral judgement on a person, Professor Baier claims, "the chief criterion is the person's performance in satisfying

1. The Monist vol.54 1970 pp.17-30. Full references to all articles and books cited in the text may be found in the bibliography.

what, morally speaking, can be expected of him."(p.18) <sup>1</sup>. This criterion comprises two elements which on occasion may come apart. In the first place a person has the theoretical task of determining what on a given occasion can be, morally speaking, expected of him, in the second place he has the practical task of doing it. And failure in either or both is possible. Failure in the practical task Baier attributes to a "faulty will", a will which is evil, negligent or weak.

Baier then considers the question: who should get "better moral marks", the man who acts generously solely because he likes doing so, the man who acts generously both because he likes doing so and also because he believes it to be his duty or the man who acts in this way "solely because he thinks it his duty and although he does not like it" (p.20) ? Baier in answer supports Kant's view that the genuine moral worth of an action is due "solely to the good will of the agent and that its genuine moral worth is the greater the greater the effort needed to overcome opposing natural inclinations." (p.24). One of the reasons why Baier supports Kant here is that he is convinced that a person could not be so educated as to want to do all that it may be his duty to do (cf.pp.21-22). Further, he holds that Kant's view only appears absurd because of a failure to understand "what exactly we ascribe to a person to whom we ascribe moral worth and moral value" (p.24).

1. Baier continues: "He gets good marks if he does more than can be expected of him, bad marks if he does less, and no marks at all if he does exactly that." But this appears to be inconsistent with his general view (a) in that normally he puts forward dutifulness as the moral excellence (b) because if one's theoretical task is to work out what can be expected of you morally and your practical task is to do just that then there seems to be no place for doing more than can be expected. Also given Baier's approach it is not obvious why doing more than can be expected should be creditable for it might disrupt the system of mutual expectation. But it is precisely because it contributes to that system that Baier holds dutifulness to be important and meritorious.

What then is moral worth? Baier suggests that moral worth (in one natural sense) is the "market value of a person assessed primarily on the basis of his moral excellence". (p.27) That is, a person's moral worth is the degree to which his moral excellence makes him a social asset (and only if a quality were a social asset would Baier recognize it as a moral excellence). The community has good reason to take moral excellence into account in assessing a person's "market value" for the moral man is reliable, he does whatever others are entitled to count upon him doing. And such "dutifulness" is of immense importance not only to employers and the like but to the whole community. Indeed so important is it that the community may insist on everyone possessing this characteristic at least to a certain minimal degree and may seek to enforce this minimum by punishment and reward, commending and condemning and by the bestowal of contempt and esteem (p.27). In this way, Baier argues, there arises an "extended" sense of moral worth in which a person's moral worth is "the extent to which his moral excellence falls below or reaches above a given minimal requirement". (p.28)

From these comments it can be seen that, on Baier's account, appraisals of moral worth has a twofold practical significance. Firstly, they guide the community in assessing a person's "market value" and this modifies attitudes and behaviour towards that person. Secondly, they fit into a system of reward and punishment by which a minimum standard of dutifulness is maintained in the community.

If one thinks of moral worth as moral desert, continues Baier, it is clear why one should hold that action from duty has higher moral worth in proportion to the strength of the natural inclination which such behaviour has to overcome. For the minimum standard on which the community rightly insists imposes very unequal burdens on different individuals. "A person's moral desert is therefore rightly measured in terms of the magnitude of the burden he has to shoulder in doing

his duty." (p.28) Correspondingly, moral adequacy in a person is equated with readiness to shoulder heavy burdens in doing one's duty should circumstances require. (If, however, such circumstances never arise one "has never acquired moral desert, that is, has never acquired a positive or negative credit balance in the ledger of esteem, or its more tangible counterparts, reward and punishment". (p.28)

What now of actions done from motives of altruism, benevolence, family loyalty and the like? According to Baier such actions have no moral worth.<sup>1</sup> In so far as acting on such motives leads to action in accordance with duty then these motives should (perhaps) be encouraged - though one should keep such "inclinations" under surveillance and adjust or suppress them as duty requires. Baier concedes that we tend to think of such "inclinations" as inherently desirable, even beautiful, but such judgements are "judgements of taste" not moral judgements:

"What makes such inclinations morally acceptable or desirable is merely the fact (if it is a fact) that they tend to result in action in accordance with duty; and they are acceptable and desirable only to that extent." (p.29)

He concludes that Kant was also correct in thinking that the presence of inclinations contrary to duty gives action from duty additional moral worth. We may be repelled by a person whose inclinations are contrary to duty but "such repulsion must not be confused with moral judgement": if this person does his duty despite such contrary inclinations his action has more moral worth than the action of someone who was not so inclined - he has carried a heavier burden.

Baier concludes that it would be best for us if we were

1. Baier generally writes as if moral worth attached to persons (eg.p.30) but at times as if it were an attribute of actions (eg.p.29). I think one may assume that in the latter cases Baier is using a form of shorthand. Fully spelled out, for example, "such actions have no moral worth" means "the agent would acquire no moral worth in performing such actions".

never called upon to demonstrate moral excellence. And he suggests (perhaps somewhat surprisingly) that it is reasonable to hope for a position in life which offers few temptations to heroic virtue or spectacular vice and so to go through life acquiring only negligible amounts of positive or negative moral worth. (p.30)

There is much of interest in Baier's paper.<sup>1</sup> However, I wish to draw attention to what is typical rather than what is distinctive about Baier's approach. There are a number of features of Baier's account which are common to most expositions of the "narrow" conception of morality and the corresponding view of moral worth.<sup>2</sup> Many of these features are to be found in the work of contemporary moral philosophers (though, as subsequent chapters will show, many have classical antecedents).

(1) Firstly and centrally, Baier's account concentrates on actions, on performance: moral worth is acquired by (and only by) action, action in accordance with (or in excess of<sup>3</sup>) duty.

(2) "Dutifulness" is seen as the chief (perhaps the sole) moral excellence: to be a man of positive moral worth is to be trustworthy and reliable, to do "what can, morally speaking, be expected of you". The greater the burden borne by the agent in being dutiful, the greater his moral worth.

1. I do not, however, believe the support he offers for Kant's position is one to which Kant would have subscribed. Kant's tying of moral worth to the good will and his opposition to action in accordance with inclination was, I believe, inspired by a conviction that moral worth must be untainted with contingency - plus an unusual view of what constitutes free action - rather than by a consideration of a person's "market value", his usefulness to the community.

2. Baier distinguishes moral worth as a person's market value on the basis of his moral qualities and moral worth as moral desert. Henceforth I will treat "moral worth" as roughly equivalent to "moral desert" as Baier uses the term. Thus a man of positive moral worth is to at least some degree a morally admirable person. (In fact, given Baier's general view, moral worth as moral desert subsumes moral worth as market value.)

3. As I have pointed out I believe Baier is inconsistent in recognizing creditable acts in excess of duty. Others have explicitly tried to take a case for such a category. This is examined in Chapter 5.)

(3) The best, indeed the only genuinely moral motive is the sense of duty (respect for the moral law, as those influenced by Kant would put it). Motives other than a sense of duty are acceptable and desirable only to the extent that they result in action in accordance with duty; judgements to the effect that such motives or inclinations are inherently desirable are merely judgements of taste. Those who subscribe to the general view I am describing vary in the stringency with which they apply this, some holding that other motives have some moral worth, others that they are good but do not have moral worth. All agree, however, that a person's feelings occupy a very minor place in appraisals of moral worth.

(4) The will plays a major part in Baier's discussion, indeed it is the will which is in effect the bearer of moral worth. Failure to be dutiful is ascribed by Baier to one of a range of faults of the will. Kant's influence is important here, as it is throughout his account; where Baier stresses performance, action in accordance with duty, Kant would, however, stress choices, the will to do one's duty.

(5) Implicit in Baier's account is the assumption that there is a single model of moral excellence viz. the dutiful man, the man who does what can, morally speaking, be expected of him, however onerous it proves.

(6) People of moral worth are a social asset, the qualities they display are useful to the community and - it seems assumed, certainly by Baier - are to be admired on the grounds of their utility.

(7) Judgements of moral worth have a practical significance in maintaining observance of the moral code of the community.

(8) Accounting metaphors are prominent: one gets "moral marks" for performances, pluses for good performances, minuses for bad, the sum giving one's moral balance, one's overall moral worth. Any action, it is assumed, has a single "score" - many of course being morally neutral and so scoring zero.

Perhaps few philosophers subscribe to every element listed

here but considerable support could be found for each. Further, I believe these features interlock to form a coherent position and one which is worth combating. This position I have termed "legalism" because, as I will show, it presupposes an institutional/quasi-legal view of morality. I will sketch how the above elements do fit together within such a framework - much of the detail will be filled in in subsequent chapters.

Laws regulate actions; thoughts, feelings, etc. are not within the law's province, thus if morality is modelled on the law or on an institutional "code" moral worth will naturally be seen as centring on performance, on doing and being willing to do what the "moral law" commands, avoiding what it forbids. <sup>1</sup> Thoughts, impulses and feelings in this context will be seen as relevant only in as much as they may influence action. Talk of "duties" seems quite natural here: just as positive law imposes (legal) duties so the moral law imposes (moral) duties. What the positive law demands is observance, obedience. Similarly the central moral excellence is dutifulness, doing what can be expected of you morally - and of course, as with the law, this largely involves avoiding acting in forbidden ways. This trustworthiness and reliability make a man a social asset - as obedience to the law is of key importance to the community.

Each action a person performs is required by law or forbidden by law or legally neutral; analogously actions are required ie. moral duties, or forbidden ie. contrary to one's moral duty or morally neutral. Thus each action a person performs will allow of some single verdict or mark: neutral, guilty or not guilty as one has no duty, as one fails to perform one's duty or as one performs one's duty. Hence, by analogy with a legal (criminal) record and institutional records there is held

1. Kant being profoundly troubled by how ill luck or inability can prevent one acting successfully sees the moral law as an inner law whose ordinances the will fulfils. But a law for all that.

to be a moral record or moral account (and thus a single measure of excellence) on which dutiful and undutiful actions may be understood to score; the sum of these scores gives a man's moral worth. The legal record is, of course, overwhelmingly concerned with breaches of the code - though occasionally judges do publicly commend people. This balance is paralleled in the great emphasis legalists place on blame and censure, giving only a low place to credit and praise.

On the view being considered the best motive for action is taken to be the "sense of duty", how does this fit into a law-like framework? Laws are introduced and repealed, legal duties created, etc. As a result one may have a duty at one time or another to do almost anything, so it is not likely that a man could be naturally inclined to do everything that the law might command. Thus the most assuredly law-abiding man will be he who does what the law requires of him not because he is already inclined to do things of that sort but because it is now his duty, out of respect for the law. Similar considerations are seen to apply to the moral laws: when a man makes a promise, for instance, or undertakes a job, new moral duties are required of him. And only if he is disposed to act from a sense of duty, out of respect for the moral law, can the community be confident that he will do what the moral law requires of him, for such duties may be contrary to his present inclinations.

Willingness to discover and perform what the law commands is a central virtue of a citizen: the man who never considers what the law is but, by good fortune, never breaches it is not much of a citizen; still worse is he who does what is actually legal believing it to be illegal. The good will is no less central to the moral law. But the moral law is more stringent, less a matter of luck than positive law, for the willingness to do wrong is itself culpable before the moral law.

The law provides a framework within which one hopes to live comfortably without having to overcome great temptation or display

heroism. If one pictures morality on this model then the hope, voiced by Baier, that one should be in a position to acquire little positive or negative moral worth is quite understandable. A corollary is that morality is not what one might call aspirational, there is no place here for notions such as moral perfection as a never attainable goal towards which a life may be orientated.

Finally, the practical importance of moral appraisals, and their more tangible counterparts, closely parallels the role of legal sanctions: both are seen as essential to the maintenance of the code concerned.

As these brief remarks indicate, the features I isolated above as characteristic of legalism are part of a coherent theory. It is a well-fortified position whose different elements interlock and offer mutual support. In order to demolish this theory an attempt is needed to undermine the whole edifice. I will, especially in the early chapters, be undertaking such a task.

## Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism provides the second major "target" of this thesis. My remarks here will be schematic and will be developed in later chapters. I take it that, in any case, the utilitarian position, in essentials, is well known and so does not need extensive exposition.

There are a variety of utilitarian views current, some perhaps with more right to the title "utilitarian" than others. Firstly, there is trait-Utilitarianism. On this view moral worth or excellence consists in the possession and exercise of certain traits or characteristics, which traits and characteristics are admirable because they are useful to their possessors and/or to society as a whole: the traits are valued because of their consequences, their utility. An important classical exponent of such a view is Hume. Secondly, there is rule or code-Utilitarianism. Moral worth, to the rule-utilitarian, consists in obeying those rules or that code, the prevalence of which in a society may be justified on utilitarian grounds. Finally, there is what I think is the "mainstream" utilitarian view, act-Utilitarianism. This would see moral excellence as consisting in the choice and implementation of the most felicitous of the alternatives open to the agent on each occasion (which might, of course, involve the cultivation of certain traits, etc.).

The act-utilitarian theory differs from the other two views in that each act the morally excellent person performs is admired because it is the most felicitous of the alternatives, whereas the appeal to utility in the other two cases takes place at one remove: the admirable action expresses a trait or is an instance of obedience to a rule which trait or rule is justified by its utility.

These utilitarian accounts of moral worth share some major assumptions with the legalist view<sup>which</sup> I will now outline. For in as much as these assumptions can be undermined, support for both the legalist

and the utilitarian account will be weakened - though of course there remain a number of distinctive elements which have to be assessed separately.

The rule-utilitarian view is itself clearly legalist in essence in that it conceives of morality as a law-like code or system of rules and so most of what has been said about the legalist position earlier applies here too. However, the trait and act-utilitarian views also have important similarities to legalism. There is the key assumption - number (1) in the previously listed set of legalist features - that moral worth is acquired by choice and action, even trait-utilitarianism values traits only as the means to felicitous performance. A single model of moral worth is offered in each case and thus feature (5) is also shared. And even more explicitly than in the case of legalism moral worth is seen as a source of utility, a social asset - feature (6).

To a utilitarian, judgements of moral worth, like any other feature of morality, are seen as important because of their utility, their practical consequences and this parallels feature (7). Finally, the accounting metaphors noted as legalist feature (8) are very prominent, as indeed is the whole utilitarian calculative apparatus.

#### Some neglected elements

In the chapters which follow I aim to show that the types of account outlined above misrepresent the nature of moral worth, they distort and neglect much of what is morally admirable about people. Where these accounts stress will, dutifulness and consequences, I wish to show that moral worth is best approached through a consideration of character, the sort of person someone is, and that goodness of character cannot be reduced to dutifulness or any similar quality. Of course, action and choice are very important in judging a person's moral worth, but so also, I will argue, are thoughts, feelings, wishes, impulses and these are not aspects of a man's will nor are they valuable merely as

aids to choice and action. Iris Murdoch expresses well what legalist and utilitarian fail to perceive adequately:

"When we apprehend and assess other people we do not consider only their solution to specifiable practical problems, we consider something more elusive which may be called their total vision of life, as shown in their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words, their assessments of others, their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive or praiseworthy, what they think funny: in short the configuration of their thoughts which shows continually in their reactions and conversation." <sup>1</sup>.

The legalist dismisses all this as "merely aesthetic" or the proper object of "judgements of taste" - and so as relatively unimportant. The utilitarian, at best, finds a place for some of these aspects of individuals but sees them solely as aids to choice and action. Both views fail totally to do justice to the phenomena and it is against this reductivism that much of this thesis is directed.

### The argument

To dispute the legalist conception of moral worth it will be necessary to question the whole conception of morality as a law-like code, to undermine the institutional model. That duties, conscientiousness and other code-like features occupy an important and indeed peculiarly basic place in morality is not disputed. But it is maintained that there is more to morality than these elements alone can comprise.

A start towards realising this may be made by appreciating the complexity of many of our normal moral judgements. Of many actions, it will be argued in chapter 2, it is simply not true that as the legalist, and many versions of the utilitarian, model implies a single moral

1. Vision and Choice in Morality. ASSV. 1956 p.39.

"score" may be assigned to them: there is something to be said both for and against many actions, nor can these judgements be computed to deliver an overall moral "mark". A similar point will be made about judgements of overall worth. I will explain why this should be by contrasting our informal judgements with formalised, institutional judgements. The legalist and utilitarian accounts of the significance of appraisals of moral worth also, I will argue, belong to the institutional element and can not be applied overall. This discussion will be developed in the final chapter.

This examination of normal moral judgements may not of itself dispose of the legal-model for it is perhaps open to the legalist to argue that these judgements presuppose a non-legal conception of morality and so are suspect - and further that appeal to them involves circularity. (A legalist should not make this move lightly for given that my account can explain these judgements the onus would appear to be on one who disputes them to explain them away.) An attack on some of the presuppositions of the legalist is therefore required.

In chapter 3 an important step will be taken in disputing the code model by establishing that not all creditable acts are duties. As will be shown with respect to acts of mercy and forgiveness, many creditable actions are not owed, commanded or enjoined, one is accountable to no one for them, rather they are gifts, actions freely performed. To fully appreciate this fact is to be freed from the constraint of the code model, for gifts evade the law-and-duty framework.

This said, duties and dutifulness have indeed an important place in morality and moral worth. Chapters 4 and 5 contribute to defining that place as well as illuminating the errors of legalism. In chapter 4 I will distinguish and clarify the many - and often confused - conceptions of duty current in philosophical and everyday talk. The confounding of several of these notions of duty underlies and lends initial plausibility to legalism.

A number of modifications to the legalist account will be examined in chapter 5. The principal modification I will examine holds that to do one's duty is to be morally satisfactory but admits that duties do not comprise all meritorious actions. The theory seeks to remedy this defect by adding a further category of actions, those which are "above and beyond" duty. In the light of the findings of chapters 3 and 4 I will argue that this view is fundamentally mistaken: dutifulness is not only not sufficient for moral excellence, it cannot (even) be equated with moral adequacy. Further I will show that the view which holds that dutifulness and virtue are co-extensive and alternative modes of excellence is mistaken both about dutifulness and virtue. The examination of this theory will lead to the suggestion that the "sense of duty" is a motive which properly operates only within the institutional strand of morals.

Once it is accepted that duties do not exhaust morality, the way is open to appreciate the complexity and variety of our judgements of the moral worth of individuals. Dutifulness, the great "legal" virtue, can then be seen as only one of the possible excellences of a good man (albeit an important one), and other virtues, qualities which are not simply means to doing one's duty, may be acknowledged. Even the quite ultimate significance afforded to the good will and conscientiousness may be questioned. Thus it will be argued in chapter 6 that in some cases a person would be a morally better person were he less conscientious; not even the good will exhausts good moral character, a person's emotions, thoughts, impulses and vision are also vital elements.

A conception of moral worth is required more generous than that which sees it as tied solely to the will. In the second half of the thesis the case will be developed for the fruitfulness of an understanding of moral worth centred on virtues. In order to establish the value of this approach it is necessary to overcome some misconceptions

concerning the virtues and to bring our conception of them to a proper richness. Thus in chapter 7 it will be shown that the virtues are not mere trained responses or habits to help one out in times of practical crisis - indeed to see the moral life as broken up into a succession of practical problems to be solved is to misrepresent it: the moral life is far more continuous than that, a constant readjustment of vision and modification of emotion as well as moments of decision and action. And "virtue" provides an invaluable concept for the description and appraisal of this process. The further point will be established in this chapter that this pursuit of vision is not meritorious simply because it affects choice and action, it has a value in itself.

Chapter 8 is concerned with virtue and the emotions. Here it will be argued - against legalism and utilitarianism - that the moral value of emotions does not lie solely in the way in which they "prompt" an agent to right choices and actions. That a person feels aright is important even if those feelings are not embodied in action. Furthermore, it will be argued that with respect to certain virtues the actions and choices characteristic of those virtues derive their value from the value of the emotions of which they are the expression; the case will be argued with detailed reference to gratitude. This conclusion denies that all actions are duties, the merit of which lies in their requiredness or conformity to moral law; it runs counter to the view that the goodness of actions is always to be sought in their consequences and it lends support to the assertion that moral worth is not an attribute of the will alone, is not a matter only of choices and their implementation but involves a person's feelings as well as his actions.

The pressure on a utilitarian understanding of moral worth is continued in chapter 9. In this chapter Hume's claim that those moral qualities which we admire are prized in so far as they are pleasant or useful to their possessor or to others, will be challenged. Hume's theory will be shown to be lacking even in the case of courage, which

is one of the qualities with respect to which the theory seems most plausible. Courage, it will be argued, is admirable, an element of moral worth, not only because of its utility but also because it is a condition of freedom.

One of the assumptions of legalism - and most other views of moral worth - is that there is a single model of moral excellence. I do not accept such an assumption and in chapter 10 I will argue that such is the richness and diversity of admirable moral lives that no single model of excellent moral worth is satisfactory; people of incompatible moral character are quite properly admired. To substantiate this claim, and to illustrate the conclusions of previous chapters about the importance of overall vision, outlook and emotion, a detailed examination will be conducted of the characters and moral worth of a number of admirable individuals.

Finally, in chapter 11 the question of the significance of judgements of moral worth will be directly considered at length. Legalist and utilitarian alike see such appraisal as having practical importance as a sanction (and guide). The truth in this theory will be acknowledged and its limits defined. However, the further significance of judgements of moral worth in the life of an individual will be brought out: moral appraisal enriches that moral vision which is itself such an important aspect of moral worth.

#### A possible criticism

The positive approach to moral worth supported in this thesis is not without its difficulties and I will be considering many of these throughout. I should like, however, to anticipate one criticism: it is the claim that the approach advocated here is a "novel-reader's" approach, that it substitutes aesthetic values for genuinely moral ones, opts for the stylish and poetic over the more hum-drum but necessary qualities. In part this criticism simply reasserts that

morality is concerned with duties or utility, according to the objector's conviction. But in addition it invokes the feeling, which some philosophers have had since Plato, that literature is somehow morally suspect, that it offers the dross of "literary values" for the gold of moral ones. It is, I believe, important to defend the writer from such a charge, the more so since I make extensive use of literary examples and, in the final chapter, claim that the study of literature provides an occasion for important moral appraisals of human worth.

Those who make the accusation that aesthetic, "literary" judgements are being substituted for genuinely moral judgements are, in fact, normally less than ready to specify what they mean by "aesthetic" here or if, like Baier, they do indicate an area they are still less prepared to explain why aesthetic judgements as they understand them should take second place to moral judgements.

We do make aesthetic judgements about people, we admire this man's bearing, that woman's figure, and analogous judgements are made of aspects of personality. We admire this person's charm, his panache; his conversation and behaviour has "style", perhaps "dash". Here are recognisably aesthetic judgements, judgements which can be contrasted with moral judgements eg. a selfish, vain, callous man but what style and polish! There is nothing specifically "literary" about such judgements, they are of a kind many of us commonly make, writers and poets no less than the rest. It is not easy to find a formula to distinguish these aesthetic judgements and characteristics from moral ones. Very roughly one might say that these aesthetic characteristics are on the surface of personality: that a man has style and charm tells one little about his concerns and choices, his thoughts and feelings, how he stands up to danger or stress..... in short about his character. (Though the type of wit, the occasions on which and the purposes for which charm is exhibited may well be a moral matter.) Whereas what a person finds amusing or admirable, how he feels about and describes events etc. these things are, I think, of moral importance and these are far more a

writer's - or literary critic's - business than are the "aesthetic" qualities outlined above. (All of which is not to deny that writers no less than others may be "drawn" to immoral but aesthetically pleasing individuals and that their art may be distorted accordingly. To carefully distinguish the aesthetically and morally admirable is an achievement of moral perception. 1.)

As much as anyone, I believe, F.R. Leavis has throughout his writings - notably in Revaluation and The Great Tradition - brought out the centrality of moral concerns to the serious writer (and reader). The Great Tradition, for all its foibles, is an eloquent testimony to the moral perception of the writers discussed; in it Leavis fully justifies his admiration for these novelists on the grounds of "the moral awareness they promote, awareness of the possibilities of life".(p.10) But this deep moral concern underlies even his treatment of poetry, and a glance at his comments here brings out well the way in which what a person admires, the words he chooses and so forth can all be factors in the appraisal of his moral worth.

I take as my example Leavis' famous essay on Shelley in Revaluation (Pelican, 1972). Leavis criticises Shelley not so much for "bad poetry", in the sense that it is inept or technically weak, but for the following kinds of reason: because Shelley's "characteristic pathos is self-regarding, directed upon an idealized self" (p.206), because he offers us "sentimental commonplaces" (p.205) instead of genuine insight, and especially because he was:

"While on the one hand conscious of ardent altruism, on the other peculiarly weak in his hold on objects - peculiarly.

1. A classic example of this is Jane Austen's presentation of the Crawfords in Mansfield Park where the reader is permitted to feel the great "pull" they exert while being shown their moral limitations. (Unfortunately, I think she hammers the point home unnecessarily towards the end of the novel.)

unable to realize them as existing in their own natures and their own right." (p.208)

Shelley's ego intruded and distorted his view of reality.

If it is this type of response a critic has in mind in detecting a "novel-reader's" approach then I freely accept that the view of moral worth supported in this thesis is that of a novel-reader - but I will show that it is not less "moral" or important for being so. On the other hand, if the objection is that I am trying to pass off aesthetic judgements (as previously explained) for moral ones then I agree that if this were established it would show a major weakness - but I deny that it can be established.

CHAPTER 2    BLAME AND MORAL WORTH

Among moral philosophers the most discussed form of moral appraisal of persons is that of blame. It is with this and associated concepts that I will begin a detailed examination of judgements of moral worth. I will bring out the way which blame has for many philosophers become attached to a legalistic framework - which is one reason for its undue prominence - and I will show the distortions to which this has given rise, replacing the inadequate view with an approach that illuminates our moral appraisals.

Blame as sanction

"Appraising, praising and blaming are things that men do and can only be understood on the assumption that they do them for a purpose and use means adapted to that purpose."

Ethics p.263

Professor Nowell-Smith's view seems widely shared. At its simplest it is tied to the following doctrine: blame is a form of punishment or sanction, praise a form of reward or incentive. An action (or agent) is to be blamed if and only if blaming that action will be more felicitous than not blaming it; in calculating the utility of the blame its effects on the agent concerned must be taken into account as also the effects on other people. A parallel account holds for praise.

Such a utilitarian doctrine might be happily espoused by a legalist for it reinforces the parallel between morality and the law: praise and blame being the counterparts of reward and punishment. As in the case of the law, blame/punishment is seen as the more crucial.

As has been frequently noted such a doctrine justifies blaming people for actions which were in no way their fault, it tends to ignore the desert of the agent. It is probably true that, as defenders of the

theory would claim, blame is likely to have the best effects if it is generally confined to those who have done wrong. But there will certainly be cases when the effects of blaming the "blameless" are sufficient to justify it, according to this approach. For example, "blaming", even punishing, someone for an entirely accidental occurrence might increase his and others' heed and thus have felicitous consequences. It may be that in certain exceptional circumstances even this kind of treatment of an individual is justifiable - has not the law found it necessary to introduce strict liability in certain areas? However, the chief point here is that to fully understand the moral situation in question we must recognize that the person blamed is being treated unjustly for he is blameless. Where this utilitarian doctrine falls down is that it cannot acknowledge this injustice for it has no way of distinguishing "blame-worthiness" from "being blamed". It thus, in an important way, under-describes the moral situation.

We may make adverse judgements about individuals and their actions without even expressing our judgements let alone reprimanding the agents and these judgements seem to deserve the title "blame".<sup>1</sup> In fact it would greatly clarify discussion if instead of "blame" writers would use "dispraise", "censure" or "reprimand", as appropriate, for the various ways of expressing blame. It is these, not "blame", that are the true antonyms of "praise".

Less commonly noticed is the distorting relationship in which this doctrine places blamer and blamed. On this view the blamer faces the blamed as a judge the convicted, handing out punishment. But a judge is not acting in his private capacity but as one who has been given authority by the community; by what right do we assume such a position with regard to our fellows? To deliver reproofs and reprimands in this calculated way to those over whom one has no authority smacks

1. The case is well argued by Roger Squires in Blame P.Q.1968

of arrogance and self-righteousness. I do not deny that sometimes it may be right to reprove, to tell someone how dreadfully they have behaved. But such occasions are not frequent, nor is it normally the predictable good effects which justify one in doing so (though one may rightly be deterred by predictably bad effects). Often it is rather that some behaviour is so awful that no decent person could remain silent, these actions must be condemned. But this is far removed from deliberately undertaking a judicial role.

### Squires' analysis

Roger Squires, in the article cited, has argued convincingly that blame is not to be construed as a sanction or punishment and so would be in substantial agreement with the above criticisms. His positive suggestion on how we are to understand blame is, however, less satisfactory. Concluding the article he suggests that to blame someone is: "to be of the opinion that he is responsible for an undesirable upshot, that he has done what he ought not". A corollary of this view is that it is a mistake to ask for what purpose we blame (as Nowell-Smith and others do) for this would be to ask for what purpose we hold an opinion and opinions, where rational, are held not for purposes but for reasons.

Two objections arise to this account. Firstly, someone can be blamed for doing what he ought not without being held responsible for any undesirable upshot, indeed he may be blamed where his faulty action has had very desirable upshots, where, for instance, these upshots were the result of an extremely selfish act. Secondly, someone can be blamed for an undesirable upshot even when he has not done what he ought not. There is a (weak) sense of "blame" in which to blame X for Y is simply to be of the opinion that X is responsible for the undesirable upshot Y. And here X can range over men, machines, animals or natural phenomena. The flood is blamed for thousands of deaths, the cat for spilling the

milk, John for breaking the window. Here "blame" is simply a form of casual ascription. I think this may be the most common use of "blame" in everyday talk. There is also a sense of "blame" in which to blame a man for a certain action is just to be of the opinion that he did what he ought not; the action is judged faulty in some way.

The analysis Squires provides is of a form of blame which combines these two elements: it is judged that certain undesirable upshots are due to a faulty act. This form of blame is of particular importance in legal/institutional settings where questions of liability and compensation arise. A pedestrian has been injured by a motorist: who, if either, was to blame? The question here is whether either of the parties was "at fault". And this is relevant to the question of who should be held liable to pay compensation and who is to receive it. (Even in such contexts the question sometimes is whether, given that certain parties were at fault, they should be held to blame, held liable. And here many questions of legal policy, the parties' resources, etc. are relevant.)

It is possible to be of the opinion that a man is responsible for an undesirable upshot or that he has performed a faulty act or both and yet not blame him. Squires seems to suggest that in such cases we are using "blame" where we should use "censure". But this is incorrect. One may well blame a man (in a very strong sense of "blame") and yet refuse to censure him (it might, for instance, only harden him). That is different from the present case. I envisage admitting that someone is responsible for an undesirable upshot, has performed a faulty action, yet not blaming him. The action or upshot is not held against him. It is this strong form of blame that those who see a close link between blame and moral worth have had in mind. I turn now to the question of how this strong form of blame is to be understood.

Feinberg's theory

Joel Feinberg in Action and Responsibility<sup>1</sup> attempts to characterize a blame which is "above and beyond the mere untowardness or defectiveness of the ascribed action". Certain (unexcused) performances are performance for which the agent is "to blame".

"This in turn means that the doing of the untoward act can be charged to one, or registered for further notice, or "placed as an entry on one's account"." (p.124)

Feinberg stresses the importance of institutional records, police records, school records, job records, etc. Thus fumbling a catch goes on one's baseball record, reckless driving on one's driving record and so on. (Not all of these records, of course, are necessarily written ones.) Such records have numerous uses: in selecting teams, withdrawing licenses, admitting to universities, firing, hiring.... In fact, without these records, Feinberg suggests, there would be no point to talk of being to blame. (p.125)

But for many faults there are no official records and yet we still blame people for them. Feinberg recognizes this:

"Outside institutional contexts of course there are no formal records but only reputations. Perhaps that is what the notion of a "moral record" comes to." (p.125)

(Hume expresses a similar idea of actions redounding to a man's honour if good, infamy if evil. Treatise, Bk.11,111,11.)

In the light of these records, continues Feinberg, we can see the point of excuses, their force. For a strong excuse demonstrates "that an action's faultiness is not properly "registrable" on one of the agent's records, not chargeable to "his account"." (p.125)

1. Reprinted in Doing and Deserving. Feinberg develops his account by means of a distinction between "defeasible" and "non-defeasible" fault-ascriptions. As far as possible I have omitted using these notions which are cumbersome, often misleading, and not essential to the theory.

Thus, for instance, while it may be true that Jones drove dangerously on a particular occasion an excuse might show that "the circumstances were so special that his behaviour did nothing to reveal his pre-dominant tendencies, hence to register it as a fault would not promote the purpose of the record itself". (p.125) But cannot any "fault" be put on some record and if so can "registrability" be the characteristic of those faults for which the agent is to blame? Feinberg grants that any fault could be registered but, he claims, records of non-defeasible <sup>1.</sup> faults would have absolutely no point, they could be put to no use.<sup>2.</sup> For such records would do nothing to reveal the sort of person someone is, in some respect about which others have a practical interest (p.126). Thus, contrary to Squires, Feinberg maintains that we can ask the point of blame: and its point is that blaming involves recording a person's fault, these records give rise to knowledge of predominant tendencies, and knowledge of predominant tendencies has a wide range of practical uses.

Feinberg's account is far from perfect. It runs into difficulties with the blame due to lapses and "unique" crimes - crimes which, while unexcused, do little to reveal any predominant tendencies of the criminal in which we might have a practical interest. Some allowance for the distinction between excuses, justifications and pleas

1. "Non-defeasible" faults are supposed to be "faulty" actions for which, because of their nature, one can offer no excuse. Thus "murder" or "manslaughter" are defeasible faults for one can offer excuses to show that one's action was, say, in self-defence and if the excuse is established the ascription, eg. "murder", is withdrawn. But "killing a man" is a non-defeasible fault; if the causality is established so is the fault ascription. I think this is all very confused. In what sense are these "non-defeasible fault ascriptions" really ascriptions of fault? They show only, I would say, that an agent brought about some untoward event.
2. This does not seem strictly true. There might well be a point in, for instance, a record of accident-prone drivers, indeed one might even refuse licenses to "high-scorers".

of mitigation would also be in place. Nonetheless, I think Feinberg's account is helpful where institutional judgements are concerned: the blaming of people, and ultimately the assessing of their worth, as soldiers, cricketers, students, employees, even as citizens. It is illuminating where a man has some kind of role, office or position with its attendant duties, rules and institutional standards: legal standards, sporting, academic standards and so on. Here we also have a formalised "scoring" system, an institution of credits and debits, merits and demerits and so a procedure for establishing a person's worth as the holder of such an office or as the performer of this or that role.

#### Non-institutional blame

It is when this scheme is transferred to the non-institutional, to our informal moral judgements, that it becomes highly misleading. Yet it is in this area that Feinberg's suggestions appear to have won acceptance eg. both Jonathan Glover in his book Responsibility and L. Holborow in Praise, Blame and Credit (PAS 196<sup>7</sup>1-2) write of a person's "moral account", citing Feinberg.

When Feinberg writes of a "moral record" or "moral account" and identifies it with a person's reputation, things start to go wrong. In the first place, we may (informally) blame or disapprove of a person without expressing our blame, but a man's reputation is, of course, a matter of public knowledge. Indeed one might believe oneself justified in blaming someone but think it quite wrong to impugn his good name. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." Secondly, Feinberg lays far too much stress on our practical interest in assessing, blaming and so forth. Moral appraisals do have practical consequences, as will be discussed at length in the final chapter, but outside institutional contexts other people's characters interest us in themselves.

What has gone wrong with the theory? The answer is, I think, provided by an earlier essay of Professor Feinberg's. In Supererogation

and Rules <sup>1</sup>. he points out the danger of reinterpreting the non-institutional as the special institutional. And this is what Feinberg has done here.<sup>2</sup> Noting that judging a man to blame in institutional contexts involves registering his fault, putting it on his account, he transfers this to non-institutional contexts and postulates a "moral account" but since there is no formal record of this type he assumes there must be some informal record, and the only plausible candidate for this role is a person's reputation.

If we take Feinberg's suggestion seriously we seem forced to assume that in morally appraising our acquaintances we are running a kind of moral ledger on them, entering their good and bad performances and emerging eventually with a final balance giving the person's moral worth. The image we are offered of our moral responses is substantially that of an old-fashioned schoolmaster giving stars or black marks for good and bad conduct, by reference to which he may draw up end-of-term reports.

When its implications are spelt out in this way it is clear that Feinberg's view is unsatisfactory and distorting. Yet evidence of such a view is to be found not only in the work of many philosophers but embedded in our normal language ("At least credit him with that," etc.). My hunch, it is no more than that, is that this is due to the influence of Christianity, particularly Catholicism. The "recording angel" who fills in the heavenly record of human conduct is, or at least was until very recently, a familiar figure in Catholic mythology. Hence there really was believed to be a moral account, albeit an unearthly one, an account moreover with the most important of practical consequences: heaven or hell.

Interestingly a view of moral worth with important parallels

1. Also reprinted in Doing and Deserving. My subsequent discussion has greatly benefited from this paper.
2. For a similar move involving "liability to sanction" see L.C.Becker: On Justifying Moral Judgements.

to Feinberg's exists today among the Sherpas.

"The Sherpas' moral system is based on the belief that every act of virtue adds to an individual's store of merit, whereas every morally negative action or sin diminishes this valuable store. Addition or subtraction of merit are thought of in more or less mechanical terms and the Sherpas believe that throughout a person's life appropriate marks are given for good and bad deeds. After death the account is made and the balance of good or bad marks determines a man's fate. (It affects the level at which he is reborn.)" Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, Morals and Merit, pp.182-3.

Von Furer-Haimendorf acutely notes some of the moral consequences of this conception: there is no overwhelming incentive to avoid some of the more pleasurable sins, for these will simply be added to the sum of sins which can be outweighed by a somewhat larger sum of good works. Thus sins come to be seen as "entries on the debit side of a ledger, rather than as dramatic outrages against a divine moral order". (p.189)

#### A moral account

Just what is wrong with Feinberg's notion of a moral account, of blame as a form of moral accounting? The first thing it does is, as already suggested, to misrepresent the relationship in which we stand to those we morally appraise. We do not stand towards our friends and acquaintances as a schoolmaster towards his class, nor do we bring to our moral judgement an accountant's eye. Nor would it be right to do so; it would be arrogant, even unworthily cold-blooded to assume such a role. But much else is distorted by the accounting theory.

If we accept the idea of a moral account/record, then we are led to assume that we can sum a man's scores and come out with his overall worth at the close of the ledger. But the "merit" of different moral qualities and different aspects of performances cannot be summed

in the way that Feinberg's view would require; this is so both in judgements of single acts or omissions and in judgements of a person overall. For instance, a thief performs a daring robbery: we admire him for the courage he shows, we disapprove of, perhaps even despise him for, his dishonesty. But the disapproval of the dishonesty does not modify our admiration of him for his courage ("If only he would put such courage to proper ends."), nor does our admiration of his courage reduce our disapproval of him for his dishonesty. How does the overall act "score"? There is generally no reasonable way we can answer this. In so far as his action was courageous it is admirable, in so far as it was dishonest it was despicable. What more is there to say? <sup>1.</sup>

One impatient with this position might reply thus: "Given that we are interested in a man's moral worth there is much more to say: the thief's courage is irrelevant, in assessing his moral character only the dishonesty matters for what we are interested in is whether or not a person does right and the thief does not.". Though initially attractive this is not a position one should adopt for it implies that in judgements of moral worth only the vicious aspect of an action should be considered, only the wrongness of the deed. But this is surely incorrect. Consider the man who is generous to the point of imprudence: the deed is wrong insofar as it is imprudent but to have said only this is to leave unmentioned the man's generosity which is indeed relevant to one's judgement of the person's character and the nature of this deed.

This said, there are occasions on which this independence in the assessment of the virtuous and vicious aspects of an action neither occurs nor, it would seem, should occur. <sup>2.</sup> Even if terrorists display great courage in risking their own lives to massacre innocent civilians

1. This point is well made by Feinberg in On Being "Morally Speaking a Murderer" reprinted in Doing and Deserving.
2. The unique position of conscientiousness in this regard will be considered in chapter 6.

it seems improper to consider this "virtuous" element so heinous <sup>a</sup> is the evil committed. The moral account theory, however, gains no support from such instances; in fact it cannot cope with them. The good and evil are not here assessed with an accountant's eye, the evil being found to outweigh the good - "outweighing" is too feeble a notion. There is a strong emotional element in this judgement, the horror - an appropriate response to such evil - blotting out other aspects.

In our informal judgements, then, no single score can be assigned to actions as Feinberg's notion of a moral account requires. In an institutional context, however, something like Feinberg's theory obtains. In this context one may be both able, and indeed obliged, to go further than giving the virtuous and the vicious aspects of the action in question (which, of course, is not to say that every action will comprise both virtuous and vicious elements). If the person to be appraised is one's employee, or a soldier under one's command, or before one in the dock then an overall verdict on his deed may be required. But here it can be given. For there are often institutional standards to be appealed to, institutional rules of relevance to be applied, eg. ignore the courage, judge the dishonesty. There are formalised methods of assessment: outside institutional settings there are not. (These methods need not, of course, be written down or officially promulgated but may simply be understood by all the parties involved.)

Official accounts/records may be multi-standard - a fact Feinberg seems to overlook - but even so there may be formalised methods of getting an overall score, an accepted system of balancing the "accounts"! This system will be determined by the purpose of the records.

#### Judgements of overall worth

When one turns to judgements of overall worth a similar contrast between the informal and the institutional exists.

Frequently when we contemplate or speak of individuals we are

content to offer "moral profiles": John is kind and hardworking but liable to outbursts of temper, etc. And such profiles are obviously of more practical use than some overall moral "score", were such possible. For knowing a person's moral strengths and weaknesses greatly affects one's relationship with that person eg. there are some people one would choose to have with one in danger but perhaps quite different people to seek comfort from in distress. This central connection between moral appraisal and personal relationships will be explored at some length in the final chapter.

On occasions overall judgements of moral worth and comparative judgements of worth are made: on the whole A is a good man, overall B seems finer than C and so on. It does not follow from this, however, nor does it seem to be the case, that we can always make comparative judgements. Some individuals are so different in their circumstances that sensible comparison may be impossible. For example, is the person who displays great endurance and unselfishness in bearing an illness of greater or less moral worth than the person who devotes his life to striving for social justice? What sensible reply can be given? Only, I suggest, the answer that both are morally excellent but in very different ways.

Where judgements of overall and comparative worth are made accounting metaphors are inappropriate. We do not sum a person's virtues, deduct his flaws (still less subtract bad performances from good) and emerge with a final total like an accountant balancing the books: A has strength of will and integrity but is self-righteous and inflexible ergo he is a Y point man; B is weak, impetuous but compassionate and sensitive ergo he is an X point man. Not even a complicated accounting system involving giving qualities different weightings is adequate to explain our moral judgements - a point I will expand shortly.

Certain cases are, of course, clear-cut: where one man dis-

plays nothing but virtues and another little but vices comparison is easy. Little difficulty is posed in finding A, who is benevolent, compassionate but not very courageous, of greater moral worth than B, who is courageous, prudent, temperate but malevolent. Certain vices such as malevolence and selfishness have a crucial importance in making judgements of overall worth. Why should this be? Because these vices delineate a person's overall orientation, or rather lack of it, towards the good, they concern the whole direction of his actions, thoughts and feelings.

It follows from this that I must regard certain virtues - or at least the absence of certain vices - as more important than others. But having granted this is not the whole moral account theory reinstated, for if virtues and vices can (however roughly) be ranked, can they not also be summed? I think not. Although I do regard, for instance, benevolence as being of greater importance in moral appraisal than temperance, it does not follow that some numerical relationship could be posited between them - say 6 points for benevolence, 1 for temperance - such that a summing operation could be performed to bring out a man's moral worth. Matters are far more complex than this. To anticipate points to be made in the penultimate chapter certain individuals may mould their lives around a single virtue such as courage or repentance and yet be of considerable moral worth, but on the "numerical" theory they could score a maximum of, say, 3 points and so be judged inferior to the possessor of a few virtues - a trite conclusion. Where individuals do exhibit a variety of virtues and vices not an additive but an organic and indeed dynamic understanding of them is required in reaching an assessment of their merits overall.

Although, like much else in this chapter, it will involve anticipating points to be made later in the thesis, I think it helpful at this stage to consider a concrete case. This is a complex comparison to which a brief account cannot do full justice, but it will show the inadequacy of the "account theory" of judgement of moral worth.

### Tom and Maggie Tulliver

Much of George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss is devoted to an examination of a brother and sister, Tom and Maggie Tulliver. They grow up in a society dominated by middle-class respectability. Here Tom is entirely at ease, indeed he develops into a pillar of this society. Tom's morality is one of rights and duties, he neither expects more than he has a right to be given nor performs more than he feels he has a duty to perform. What he conceives to be his duty he performs perfectly. Thus after his father has gone bankrupt it is Tom who works himself to exhaustion to earn the money to buy back the mill. Tom has great integrity and the strength of will to do his duty, however arduous. His failure is not weakness in performing what he believes to be right but a failure to see beyond the narrow legalistic framework which confines his moral beliefs. He lacks moral imagination and sensitivity, instead he is self-righteous and inflexible; he gets things done and this "doing" is the source of his arrogance. By his actions he is justified and so feels entitled to stand in strict judgement on others.

In contrast to Tom, Maggie is often weak. She frequently fails to do what she believes to be right. But she is reflective and humble. She has a sense of her own imperfections. She pinpoints an important difference between herself and Tom in the following words:

"I know I've been wrong - often, continually. But yet sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for if you had them." (Book V, chapter V)

Maggie's dominant response to others is compassion. Her feelings, unlike Tom's, do not flow along the socially sanctioned channels, her compassion questions those very channels. When Tom discovers her forbidden liaison with Philip, the son of the man who ruined her father, Maggie pleads for some consideration for Philip:

"I feel something for Philip too. He is not happy," she urges.

"I don't wish to hear any <sup>thing</sup> of your feelings," replies Tom. It is sufficient for him that Maggie's duty was "clear enough". People's feelings are for Tom morally irrelevant; morality has to do only with rules, with kinship and tradition, with what is laid down and can be required. It thus loses touch with humanity.

Ultimately the reader judges that overall Maggie is a person of greater moral worth than Tom. On what grounds? It is not that Maggie has more good qualities than Tom, on the contrary, Tom would emerge the higher scorer on any "virtue count". Nor do Maggie's actions produce better consequences: her best endeavours are often frustrated by the narrowness of others and sometimes by her own weakness. "I know what I've aimed at in my conduct, and I've succeeded; pray what good has your conduct brought to you or anyone else?" jeers Tom as he rejects the penitent Maggie, and there is some truth in his taunt.

The reasons for one's judgement are less neat and clear than "accounting", but more adequate to the complexity of the phenomena. In apprehending an individual, certain qualities are seen to be more crucial and pervasive than others. In Tom's case arrogance and narrowness of vision are all pervasive and these seem to constitute a near fatal moral disease for they cut off the possibility of repentance and reform, they preclude reflectiveness and development and so they stunt moral growth. And it seems a very important element in assessing a person's moral worth to apprehend the "moral dynamism", to ask: in what direction morally is this person going?

Maggie clearly has many weaknesses but often these are the unfortunate (though still culpable) consequences of her virtues of compassion and imagination which have not been sufficiently refined. Thus she is often weak in doing what she believes to be right through a fear of hurting others, she allows her compassion to dominate.<sup>1</sup>

1. I am not arguing that vices which "flow from" virtues are automatically less vicious than those which "flow from" other vices - doubtless many terrorist atrocities have been prompted by intense (albeit distorted) altruism. All I suggest is that sometimes the fact that a person's weakness is closely allied to that person's virtues is a relevant and mitigating factor.

Furthermore, with Maggie there always seems the potential for improvement for she is self-critical, reflective and imaginative.

What I have said of appraisals of overall moral worth is still too simple, but at least it points in the right direction, away from notions such as a record of good and bad acts, accounting and totals, towards an organic view of overall moral worth which incorporates thought, feeling and imagination as well as actions. (Of course many institutional strands of behaviour will need to be taken into account in judging a person's overall moral worth. The point is not that these are negligible but that they are not exhaustive.)

In institutional settings things may be quite different. There may be set rules for judging a cricketer's overall worth or a soldier's, student's or employee's: in such a role a person may by various performances accrue good or bad points and his "balance" may determine questions of promotion, demotion, selection or command. And often it is better so. Formalised procedures of this sort are not only readily workable but also often can be seen to be more just than relying on some individual or group's overall impression and unformalised assessments. But why such formalised procedures, such "accounting", is possible here is that institutions deal with persons occupying a specific role or office and thus the records tend to have a clearly defined point. Knowing what soldiers, players, employees, etc. are for enables a ledger of good and bad marks or a checklist of corresponding excellences and defects to be drawn up. (Again I would point out that these need not be written down, a "mental list" may suffice.)

### Blame and vices

The institutional model of blame and other moral appraisals should not, then, be extended to our informal responses. Nonetheless outside institutional contexts we do, at least sometimes, go beyond "Squires'-blame", we disapprove not only of acts but of agents; we

think the worse of people for their faulty acts. And both the object of our disapproval and others may offer excuses for the faulty behaviour (or justifications or draw attention to mitigating factors).

On the theories I have considered the role of excuses is readily explained: in non-institutional no less than institutional contexts excuses are offered either in an attempt to avert sanctions, by, for instance, showing that sanctions would be ineffective or are unnecessary, or, on the second theory, excuses are offered to try to show that an act is not properly registrable since recording this behaviour would not serve the purposes of the "register". I hope that I have sufficiently demonstrated that outside institutional contexts we are not in the business of imposing sanctions nor are we making entries in a moral record.

Why then do we offer excuses? <sup>1</sup>. In offering excuses for our own behaviour we are trying to show others (sometimes also ourselves) that they should not think badly of us for having acted in the way we have. In effect, in trying to excuse ourselves we are saying: Do not judge me by this act, I am not as this act might, at first, suggest I am. (In justifying our actions we are trying to show that an apparently faulty act was not in fact faulty at all so that there is no reason why we should be disapproved of.)

Moral approval and disapproval focus on the sort of person someone is, on his character rather than his abilities or temperament. The force of an excuse is that it attempts to show that a faulty act, omission, intention, motive, thought or emotion is "consonant with good moral character". (L.C.Becker, The Neglect of Virtue Ethics 1975 p.116.)

In general, to reasonably disapprove of someone for an act, omission, etc. we must judge not only that the action was wrong but

1. This topic is again considered in the final chapter.

that its performance was in some way vicious. Further, even "doing the right thing" may be vicious if it is done in an inappropriate manner or from an evil motive. Excuses, then, very frequently attempt to show that an act, omission, etc. was not vicious in any way.<sup>1</sup> John's remark hurt Susan but he neither intended, knew nor could he reasonably have been expected to know, that his remark would be hurtful. Thus he was neither malicious nor inconsiderate; he is completely excused.

Why would we disapprove if John's action were malicious, approve if, say, James behaved generously? To answer this we need to examine why we prize generosity as a virtue, why malice is a vice. And in later chapters I will be arguing that our reasons for prizing certain qualities as virtues are more various than some philosophers have allowed.

In institutional contexts a successful excuse stops an action being registered and thus prevents it being used in evidence against us when questions of selection and so on arise. Now I have argued that outside these settings excuses prevent adverse judgement of the person's character. But a further question arises, parallel to that asked in institutional cases: what is the point or purpose of such disapproval? It has been argued that such a question misses the point:

"It looks rather as if "blaming" refers, at least often, to a complex state of mind or attitude rather than to an act. And, in so far, it need not have a purpose - and all the speculations about the purpose of blaming are irrelevant to it." (R.B.Brandt, Blameworthiness and Obligation, pp.6-7.)

1. James D. Wallace, Excellences and Merit, P.R., March 1974, is helpful on this topic, though, as I will explain, his approach involves some unnecessary difficulties. Also useful is R.B.Brandt: Character Traits: a conceptual analysis, A.P.Q., 1970. Brandt argues that to possess a trait is to be motivated in a certain way, to have a specific desire to do or abstain from doing certain things. I think this is perceptive about some qualities but untrue overall.

Now it may be true that in a particular case disapproving of a person is not something one really chooses to do and so in justifying disapproval one would not give the point or purpose but supply the grounds for one's disapproval. Nonetheless even if on most occasions we cannot ask the point or purpose of moral approval and disapproval in particular cases we can, and should, ask what significance these judgemental attitudes have within a moral "system" or outlook; why, for instance, do we educate our children (and ourselves) in judging and assessing moral character by eg. reading and discussing novels? <sup>1</sup>. That such approval and disapproval do have significance is further borne out by our eagerness to discover and offer excuses, by the importance we attach to them. This whole area will be examined in detail in the final chapter.

#### Excuses and vice

By seeing moral disapproval as focusing on the viciousness of an act it is possible to accommodate the traditional excuses of non-culpable ignorance and compulsion since both these excuses show that the action in question was in no way a vicious one. Moreover it moves us away from an exclusive concern with actions. Our disapproval of others and, perhaps especially, ourselves is often for our general "orientation" or "demeanor" <sup>2</sup>: for unfitting emotions, motives, impulses and intentions as well as for acts and omissions. And this approach to moral disapproval (and admiration) fully allows for this, for such feelings, impulses etc. may themselves be characteristic of a vice (or virtue). Vice and virtue are sufficiently comprehensive concepts to do justice to the range of our moral appraisals. (As the

1. That I have fully recognised this point is due to its being forcefully made to me on a number of occasions by Mr. John Hall.
2. These notions are suggested by a paper Evil and Good in Action by Professor R. Holland which will appear in a forthcoming book of his papers.

penultimate chapter will make clear they are not, however, the only concepts that can do this; a similar quality is possessed by related notions such as following an ideal.)

The complexity of our response to a person with regard to many of his acts is illuminated by this approach since a given act may, under different aspects, be both virtuous and vicious: a brave yet cruel action, a generous yet foolhardy one.....

In addition it can be seen how defending a person from disapproval for acting, say, maliciously may still lead us to disapprove of him in other ways (though now our disapproval may be less severe): John did not intend to hurt Susan, his remark was not malicious, but he should have realized that making such a remark would hurt her; the action was still characteristic of a vice, it was careless or inconsiderate.

What of excuses which point to illness, fatigue or emotional upset as excusing a man's outburst of bad-temper, inconsiderateness or selfishness? These excuses do tie in with judging the viciousness of an action, though in a more indirect way. They point to circumstances which weaken a person's resistance to certain specific forms of motivation or temptation. For example, when fatigued a person's resistance to irritation is decreased, when ill a person closes in on himself and thus it may be extremely difficult for him to be considerate. (These points are well made by R.B.Brandt op.cit..) In illness or fatigue a man is "not himself"; certain faulty actions are, under these circumstances, still consonant with a good moral character: even a very good-tempered, considerate, benevolent man could not reasonably be expected to exhibit these virtues under such conditions. (In contrast, as Brandt points out, any reasonably honest man even when very ill could be expected to refrain from forgery or fraud.)

The excuses I have so far considered are widely recognised. We should also, however, take note of more informal considerations,

ones which are rarely relevant in institutional contexts. A person's strengths and weaknesses may be so interconnected that we excuse the weaknesses for the sake of the strengths. In doing this we are not being lax or corrupt, we are simply taking seriously the fact that men are not just a collection of mutually independent traits: their virtues and vices are related in very complex ways. Thus the man who is deeply committed to obtaining social justice may in his striving for fairness and the recognition of desert be brusque, inconsiderate, even downright rude with the officials with whom he battles. Naturally we regret his rudeness but knowing him to be an essentially fine person we may not hold his rudeness against him; we excuse it knowing its source. Considerations of this type play an important, and I think neglected, part in our everyday judgements.

#### Moral wrongness and vices

James D. Wallace, in the article to which I have previously referred, suggests that it seems a reasonable hypothesis that "the faulty actions which philosophers lump under the heading of "morally wrong" are actions fully characteristic of vices". It might appear that this is a corollary of the approach I have adopted. I hope to show that it is not.

If we are to disapprove of a man for some act then, I have maintained, that act in some respect must be vicious. But an act may be judged morally wrong irrespective of which vice it is characteristic. To take an obvious case, murder is a morally wrong act whether its performance on a particular occasion is fully characteristic of malice, envy, greed or selfishness. Nor is this simply a quibble. Firstly, under certain circumstances a person's action may be morally wrong yet - under a certain aspect - characteristic of some virtue eg. I defraud my company in order to help a needy friend; my action is a compassionate one - yet it may be morally wrong for all that. Secondly, the justifica-

tion for regarding certain traits of character as vices is, in some measure, dependent on those who perform actions fully characteristic of these traits doing what is morally wrong. If this is so then we must be able to form judgements of the moral wrongness of some actions independently of judging that certain actions are fully characteristic of these vices and so are morally wrong. Otherwise we are faced with what is indeed a "vicious" circle.

The questions of the wrongness of actions and the viciousness of agents should be kept distinct. <sup>1</sup>.

### Conclusions

I have shown how a number of accounts of our moral appraisals are tied to a legal/institutional model of morality. I have demonstrated the distortions and oversimplifications which such a model imposes on our moral judgements and postures and I have proposed an alternative account in which the virtues and vices play a key, though not exclusive, role.

In this chapter attention has been concentrated on blame and moral disapproval, adverse judgements of moral worth. This aspect of moral appraisal has I believe received undue emphasis and I have devoted so much space to it only because it is in this area that the views which I seek to combat have been most clearly expressed. In later chapters the balance will be redressed as stress is laid on positive moral worth, on morally admirable features of human beings and the variety of human excellences.

The foregoing examination of moral judgements is, as it were, a first foray into enemy territory. It has, I trust, weakened the utilitarian and legalist positions but of itself it is perhaps not

1. There are, however, actions whose wrongness is closely connected with the viciousness of the agent eg. actions which are gestures conveying the agent's feelings and attitudes - on this see chapter 8.

enough to dispose of them. An attack on some of the further pre-suppositions of the legalist will therefore now be mounted.

The following chapter is devoted to establishing the inadequacy of the code-model by showing that certain admirable qualities and actions cannot satisfactorily be understood within the framework of duties and quasi-legal requirements; indeed the worth of such actions can only properly be appreciated by contrasting them with duties and other code-like features.

CHAPTER 3    MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

Mercy and forgiveness are qualities with important similarities. But these features have not always been correctly identified. The accounts of mercy and forgiveness I will be contesting show a significant parallelism. Underlying both there is, as I will try to show, a view of morality which threatens our understanding not only of mercy and forgiveness but of generosity, kindness and the other miscalled "duties of imperfect obligation". In place of these incorrect accounts I will propose a positive account which I hope will bring out the genuine parallels between mercy and forgiveness. My discussion of mercy is indebted to a discussion note by H.R.T.Roberts Mercy (Philosophy 1971).

The view of mercy I am concerned to contest is that of Alwyne Smart (Mercy Philosophy 1968) and of forgiveness that of the late Aurel Kolnai (Forgiveness P.A.S. 1973-4). The latter's position is rather more complex than my discussion may suggest. But the emphasis is certainly as I describe and, in this case, it is the emphasis which I think it is important to readjust.

Mercy

"A theory of punishment should give some account of mercy" is Mrs.Smart's opening contention and throughout her discussion she construes mercy as a quality the exercise of which is peculiar to a judge, one who has authority to punish. Thus the question she sets herself to answer is:

"What are the conditions for the appropriate exercising of mercy, how do we decide how much mercy is appropriate, and when is a judge morally obliged to be merciful, if ever?" (p.345)

In seeking the answer to this question Mrs. Smart concentrates exclusively on examples drawn from the criminal courts. The justice mercy is to temper is taken to be criminal justice.

In this first part of her paper Mrs. Smart correctly puts on one side such things as a jury's recommendation of mercy and pleas for mercy on the grounds of mitigating circumstances. She concludes that such cases of "mercy" are simply misnamed for here "mercy is nothing more than a way of ensuring that a just penalty is imposed and injustice avoided". (p.349) In these cases "mercy" simply collapses into justice.

In the second section Mrs. Smart discusses what she believes to be genuine but inappropriate exercises of mercy. What then is a genuine case of mercy? "When a man exercises mercy what he does is acknowledge that an offence has been committed, decides that a particular punishment would be appropriate or just, and then decides to exact a punishment of lesser severity than the appropriate or just one."(p.350) The main point of exercising mercy is to avoid suffering. Given this account it is scarcely surprising that the occasions on which mercy is justified are severely limited. Mercy is unjustified "if it causes the sufferings of an innocent party, is detrimental to the offender's welfare, harms the authority of the law, or where it is clear that the offender is not repentant or not likely to reform".(p.350) Further a judge may be rightly criticised for showing favouritism and committing an injustice if he shows mercy to one man but not to another whose offence and circumstances are identical in the relevant respects. Thus it seems that at one extreme mercy collapses into justice, at the other its exercise is unjust.

But Mrs. Smart does think that there are justified cases of mercy. The paradigm is where a judge shows mercy not because the offender deserves it but because it is necessary if he is to meet the claims that other duties have on him. Thus he may reduce an appropriate fine because it would impose an intolerable burden on the offender's wife and family. Mrs. Smart concludes:

"If we regard mercy as deciding, solely through benevolence, to impose less than the deserved punishment on an offender, then the

answer to the original question "when are we justified in being merciful?" must be: only when we are compelled by the claim that other obligations have on us." (pp.358-9)

It is a corollary of this (according to Mrs.Smart) that mercy is intelligible only within a multi-principle conception of morality.

I disagree strongly with this account. Mercy, properly understood, has no essential connection with punishment, it is not the prerogative of a judge, on the contrary a judge has no right to be merciful. In accepting his office a judge places himself under an obligation to impose just sentences and to treat like cases alike.

What Mrs.Smart has in fact discussed is best characterized as leniency. The question of leniency does arise with respect to punishment and Mrs.Smart has accurately located some of the difficulties to which it gives rise. In general, I think it is true to say that though a judge is under obligation to deal justly his office carries with it a degree of discretionary power to be lenient in cases of hardship such as Mrs.Smart describes. The reverse side of this coin is seen when a judge imposes a harsh sentence as a deterrent to would-be offenders.

#### An alternative approach

Mrs.Smart was not altogether mistaken in going to court to understand mercy but, I suggest, she has gone to the wrong court. Not the criminal court but the civil court is where we will find an adequate model for mercy. The model I propose takes as its centre-piece a plaintiff having a right over a defendant. The exercise of mercy consists in the plaintiff waiving his right over the defendant and thus releasing him from his "bond". I have classical authority for this model. The Merchant of Venice contains probably the most celebrated eulogy of mercy in the language, and in this it is Shylock, the plaintiff, (not the judge), whom Portia bids to temper justice with mercy. Shylock

is within his rights to demand his pound of flesh, it is his "in justice", Portia begs him to waive that right, to exercise mercy. Thus we see that the justice which mercy tempers is not criminal but what we might call "civil" justice.

In contrast to this explicitly legal case my second example of mercy is taken from Joseph Conrad's magnificent story The Duel.<sup>1</sup> General Feraud and General D'Hubert have been at odds for years, duel has followed inconclusive duel. As Conrad writes: "For years General D'Hubert had been exasperated and humiliated by an atrocious absurdity imposed upon him by this man's savage caprice." It has been a blight on D'Hubert's life. In their final duel Feraud fires twice and misses, D'Hubert has his two shots remaining. By every rule of single combat Feraud's life belongs to him. But, despite all the injury done to him, D'Hubert waives his right, he leaves Feraud unharmed. The true nature of his act is brought out by the great delicacy of his behaviour: "In anger he could have killed that man, but in cold blood he recoiled from humiliating by a show of generosity this unreasonable being...." In this concern not to make a show of his mercy D'Hubert illustrates the gratuitous nature of mercy. His manner of acting, his whole attitude, is totally different to that of a judge in being lenient to an offender for his family's sake. And D'Hubert's action does not end there, he goes on to anonymously support Feraud, to keep him from penury. He observes to his wife: "I had the right to blow his brains out; but as I didn't, we can't let him starve."

To generalise: one man shows mercy to another when he waives his right over that person and thus releases him from his obligation, cancels the debt.

1. I am grateful to Professor R.Holland for drawing my attention to this story; he discusses it at length and with great sensitivity in an unpublished paper.

Keeping this model in mind we may see more clearly the following points:

- (i) There is no essential relationship between mercy and punishment: one who extracts a debt does not punish his debtor, even D'Hubert would not have punished Feraud had he killed him.
- (ii) Related to this is the fact that a man who is shown mercy may not have actively offended the person by whom he is shown mercy, it is enough that he owes him some form of debt, the merciful man has a right over him.
- (iii) There is no question of mercy being unjust nor, I would contend, is it ever unjust not to show mercy. It would only blur useful distinctions to say that Shylock was unjust in demanding his pound of flesh. He was hard, cruel, barbaric certainly, but he was also "within his rights".
- (iv) Similarly to talk of a man being under an obligation to be merciful is in most cases misleading. (An exception is where the "plaintiff" has made a promise to release the "defendant" from his bond.) Again it might show him to be a wicked, despicable, utterly immoral man if he does insist on his rights but talk of "obligation" tends only to obscure this. Talk of "obligation" seems most in place where performance or abstinence can be demanded by right.<sup>1</sup>
- (v) Mercy is not in tension with treating like cases alike, the merciful man is no more obliged to do so than is the generous man.
- (vi) All this, I hope, brings out a central feature of mercy: (in normal circumstances) mercy is freely given; it is not something to which a man is "compelled" by the claim of other obligations, as Mrs. Smart would have us understand (cf. pp. 358-9). Rather, as Shakespeare put it, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd".

1. This point will be developed at length in the next chapter.

It remains to clear away some apparent anomalies. It may be objected to this account that people ask for mercy from brigands, gunmen, assailants etc., people who have no rights over them. This is true and I think my account renders this practice intelligible for there is a close link between having rights over someone and having power over them. But - and this brings out the difference - supposing the gunman accedes to the plea, has he been merciful? Surely not, for he had no right to injure his proposed victim. If the gunman had ignored the plea we might well have called him "merciless" but "merciful" and "merciless" are not true opposites: one who is not given to the exercise of mercy may be harsh but need not be altogether merciless. I think Mrs. Smart is correct in suggesting that now "merciless" is virtually synonymous with "cruel".

The Merchant of Venice might seem to raise a more substantial difficulty. For after Shylock fails to show mercy to Antonio not only does Antonio show mercy to him by relinquishing his claim on Shylock's property but the Duke does also by sparing his life. Yet the Duke is a judge. It might be possible to construe this as an act of leniency but I am not sure that this would be correct. It is, I think, an act of clemency. But even as such it can be accommodated. For the Duke exercises mercy as the head of the Republic: by attempting the life of a member of the Republic Shylock's life is the state's by right. The Duke (and only he) has the right to waive that claim. But note: the Duke has power to do so not as a judge but as head of state. Similarly in Britain the Home Secretary has the power to grant a pardon, to exercise clemency, not as a private individual nor as a judge but in his (fictitious) office as right-holder. (To repeat: judges have no right to be merciful because it is not to them that any obligation is due. And they have an obligation to impose the sentence the law prescribes.)

In discussion Stewart McNeilly observed that ours is a "merciless society". By this he drew attention to the slight absurdity of

asking for mercy where (say) a small debt was in question. "Mercy" does seem a term more appropriate to weighty matters, matters of life and death. But though the term "mercy" is not in great use, the quality does seem to me worth distinguishing and setting forth in its own right.

#### The parallelism of the incorrect accounts

I suggested at the outset that there was a parallelism between both correct and incorrect accounts of mercy and forgiveness. I will now attempt to substantiate this with respect to the incorrect accounts.

Mrs. Smart's account of mercy and Dr. Kolnai's account of forgiveness both make the quality with which they deal appear paradoxical. On Mrs. Smart's account mercy at one end collapses into justice, at the other is in danger of becoming a piece of injustice. Dr. Kolnai in the section of his paper called The Paradox of Forgiveness (pp.95-99) sees forgiveness as at one extreme threatening to collapse into condonation and at the other becoming pointless, for the wrongdoer has by his change of heart and reparation "suitably annulled and eliminated his offence" (pp.98-99), so there is nothing to forgive. This paradox is in both cases (I suggest) a sign that something has gone amiss in the accounts.

What vitiates these accounts is their yearning to make mercy and forgiveness somehow earned or obligatory. They both insist that there must be good reason to be merciful or to forgive; for both the onus is on the merciful or forgiving man to account for, to justify his action. As Dr. Kolnai writes:

"Forgiveness is objectionable and ungentle inasmuch as there is no reason to forgive, the offender having undergone no metanoia ("Change of Heart") but persisting in his plain identity qua offender." (p.97) (emphasis in original).

Dr. Kolnai's forgiving man, no less than Mrs. Smart's merciful one, faces his fellow man in the guise of (criminal) judge.

I will now attempt to sketch a satisfactory account of forgiveness.

### Forgiveness

L.Holborow <sup>1</sup> writes "The respect in which forgiveness represents a refusal to hold the faulty action against the player brings into clearer focus what is involved in blaming him..." Here, I believe, Holborow mistakenly takes forgiveness to be the opposite of blame. In doing so he is confusing blame and resentment. Resentment, like blame, does involve holding an action against someone but one can only resent what one believes to be an offence done to oneself or persons near to one (family, close friends - people with whom one identifies, as we say). I can blame Nero for fiddling while Rome burned but no-one now living could resent Nero's action.

Forgiveness is opposed to resentment not blame (cf. Butler: Sermon IX section 2). To put things in a somewhat Kenny-an manner: one can only forgive what one could resent. It is this that most clearly distinguishes mercy and forgiveness, forgiveness is essentially a response to one who has offended you. (Thus I think Dr. Kolnai is confused when he says "I should see a meaning in, say, forgiving the misdeeds of Napoleon I's, but not those of Napoleon III" (p.104)). It is important to separate blame and resentment for one can forgive a person yet still blame him for what he has done. If this is so, it follows that there is not as great a danger of forgiveness collapsing into condonation as Dr. Kolnai suggests. The person you forgive may, perhaps rightly and inevitably, fall in your esteem but (in another sense) you do not hold the offence against him, you "bear him no grudge", his action is no longer such an impediment to your relationship. As Dr. Kolnai observes, in forgiving him you re-accept him.

1. Praise, Blame and Credit P.A.S. 1961-2.

The parallelism with mercy I see in this way: by offending you a man, as it were, incurs a debt (hence we talk of owing recompense, reparation and apology), you are within your rights to resent his action. In forgiving him you relinquish that right, you readjust your relationship to one of equality. This central feature is, I believe, distorted by Dr. Kolnai's judicial model.

The right to resentment may appear a highly suspect "right". And perhaps the use of this term does involve an extension of the notion. But not a totally alien one. We quite naturally stigmatize the presumption of one who offers to forgive a person who has not offended him by declaring that he has no right to forgive. We take strong exception to such behaviour because the man is assuming an unjustified superiority, an unfounded position of power. (It is perhaps in the light of such cases that we should consider the claim that "forgiveness is the one unpardonable crime.")

If this account is correct in broad outline at least, we see the mistaken emphasis of Dr. Kolnai's account. On his view metanoia is seen as the grounds for forgiveness, it is as though a change of heart earns forgiveness. It is true that he does note the gift-like quality of forgiveness but the burden of his account tells against it; he seems to incline to the view that forgiveness is in the central cases a (quasi-) duty:

"The fact remains that credible and perhaps "proven" change of heart constitutes the standard occasion to exercise and show forgiveness; it may be argued that genuine change of heart, and it alone, tends to make forgiveness a "duty"." (p.101)

(Substitute "stop blaming" for "show forgiveness" and this may well be correct.)

But is there not some link between forgiveness and change of heart? There is, but not as the grounds for forgiveness, forgiveness is not something to be earned. The link is far more oblique than Dr. Kolnai suggests. (i) Metanoia is a highly relevant factor in deciding

whether to tender forgiveness: if the offender does not think he has offended to tender forgiveness will be an insult to him, if he has not repented the wrong it may only harden him. (ii) Metanoia is a necessary condition for a sincere request for forgiveness; it is mere hypocrisy to ask for forgiveness while really unrepentant.

Forgiveness then is gratuitous but that does not (of course) make it merely arbitrary. One's reasons for forgiving someone may be far more diverse, however, than simply the recognising of repentance. One may forgive an offence for old time's sake or in the hope of future unity, or because of a deep awareness of one's own weakness and liability to offend.

### Conclusion

In conclusion I would diagnose the view of morality which distorts the qualities of mercy and forgiveness as an obsession with duty and obligation. These are essential moral notions but they are not the only ones. In their proper sphere they have (as I will show in the following chapter) valuable force and precision. But, as will again be demonstrated, there is a tendency to allow them to monopolise (a tendency enshrined in the classification of generous, merciful, forgiving and kind acts as "duties of imperfect obligation"). It is, I would claim, an impoverishment of moral life to always harp on about duty and obligation. Many highly moral actions are not demanded of one, they are not earned by their recipients, nor are they acts to which one is bound. Rather they are gifts, actions freely performed, sacrifices freely made. Eminent among these are the gifts of mercy and forgiveness.

## CHAPTER 4    DUTIES

As the account of mercy and forgiveness has shown, not all morally creditable actions fit into the law-like, institutional framework. Indeed what is distinctive about merciful, forgiving and kind acts can only be brought out by specifying the ways in which they differ from and are to be contrasted with duties. But, of course, many creditable actions do exhibit law-like features. These are duties and obligations, and no account of morality is adequate that does not recognize their importance. Unfortunately, as I have noted, there is a tendency to allow this institutional strand to monopolise, a tendency which is reinforced by the prevalence of another conception of "duty" which is both a symptom of and an aid to this monopoly. An attempt will be made in this chapter to characterize this properly institutional strand of morality, that of duties and obligations. This part of morality will be contrasted with the non-institutional elements, and the duties belonging to it will be distinguished from "duties" in the broader sense. Some of the dangers of sliding from one notion of "duty" to another will be demonstrated and a remedy proposed. (Throughout "duty" and "obligation" will be treated as synonymous; there is some difference in normal usage but I do not think it is philosophically important.)

### Duties and non-duties

In this discussion I have drawn heavily on Joel Feinberg's Duties, Rights and Claims (A.P.Q.1966), though I have departed from him on some important points.<sup>1</sup> C.H.Whiteley's On Duties covers some of the same ground and has a number of important insights, it too I have plundered.

1. See, for instance, the discussion of gratitude in chapter 8.

Duties and obligations comprise an important segment of morality - but not all of it. They are to be contrasted with such "non-duties", such gifts, as generous acts and kindnesses as well as with the merely "permissible". I will describe certain types of duties. The list is not exhaustive but it will serve to bring out certain key features of duty, features which fit into a law-like model.

(1) Debts. Smith owes Jones five pounds. Smith has a duty to repay Jones and Jones has a claim on Smith for repayment, he has a right to it. Thus the money can be required of Smith by Jones. Alternatively, Jones may release Smith from his obligation. We have here the model for the requiredness of duty.

(ii) Compensation. If Smith steals or destroys Jones' record-player he has a duty to replace it or to make equivalent compensation. Jones has a claim to compensation. The parallel with duties of indebtedness is clear: Smith owes Jones reparation - it can be extracted as a debt. Again Jones may, if he so pleases, waive his right to compensation, release Smith from his obligation.

(iii) Promises. If Smith promises Jones to give money to White he thereby puts himself under an obligation, he creates a duty. In at least some cases both Jones and White have a claim against him, they can require or demand that he fulfills his obligation eg. if Smith is an insurance broker/company representative, Jones the person who has taken out insurance and White the named beneficiary, then White has a right to the insurance money - one recognized in law. (There are a number of complications and difficulties which it would not be appropriate to go into in detail here. For instance, although White has a claim against Smith it would appear - at least if White was not a party to the contract - that Jones has a perfect right to change his mind and thus to release Smith from his obligation to White, possibly putting him under an obligation to someone else. If White was party to the contract yet further complications arise.....)

(iv) Duties of respect. A land-owner has a right that people stay off

his land and everyone (not specially authorized) has a corresponding duty to do so. This is a particular instance of a general duty of non-interference where one's interference is not wanted, or where one has been given no right to interfere. The case for this duty is well argued by H.L.A.Hart Are There any Natural Rights? (P.R. 1955). This duty is not created but it retains its links with the above types of duty in that observance of it may be required or demanded by a claimant.

(v) Duties of status. Most jobs, positions and social roles carry with them certain positive duties eg. lecturers have a duty to give a certain number of classes, mark so many essays etc. Such duties may be seen as voluntarily undertaken in so far as the job or post to which they attach is voluntarily undertaken. Of some duties of status, however, this does not seem to be true. (For this, and a number of other reasons, Whiteley's view that "committing oneself" is central to having a duty seems to be mistaken as a general account - though clearly it is true of some duties.)

Thus parents have certain parental duties towards their children yet in some cases the duties - together with the children - may have been accidentally acquired! Similarly, one may inherit certain duties without having chosen to do so eg. in inheriting property one may also inherit duties towards the tenants occupying that property. However, in many cases these duties may be transferred to or voluntarily undertaken by others. Here too there are often (though not always) corresponding claimants - the children, tenants, etc. In those cases where there are no corresponding claimants there may nonetheless be individuals or groups to whom one is answerable, to whom one must account for the performance of one's duties. In this respect some duties of status are similar to duties of obedience. (One may, of course, owe a duty to one person yet be accountable for one's performance of it to another - as one owes duties to one's children and is accountable to the state.)

(vi) Duties of obedience. One has duties to obey one's lawful superiors, policemen, judges etc. Often duty is not owed to them in the way that

performance of one's duty is owed to a promisee but one is nevertheless answerable to them for performing their commands.

In the light of these instances the feature of duties which has impressed almost all theorists, their requiredness, may be better understood. Many duties then are required in that they can be claimed, demanded of you, by a claimant, one to whom they are owed. Thus many duties may indeed be "exacted as a debt". In the case of other duties while they are not owed to some person or group nonetheless there is some authority to whom one is answerable, to whom one must account for the performance (or neglect) of one's duties.

The legal and institutional links of duties and obligations should now be apparent.

- (i) Fulfilment of duties like obedience to laws may be required, one has to answer to others for failure.
- (ii) Many duties attach to posts, roles, institutions of various sorts; indeed to some extent duties may define certain roles or posts.
- (iii) One could draw up an unproblematic list of one's duties and obligations - as one may of laws: what one's duties are is a question of fact.
- (iv) Duties are not morally absolute, duties - like laws - may be overridden, and overridden by non-duties.
- (v) Duties may conflict: one may undertake conflicting obligations, one's duties as a parent may conflict with one's duties as an employee etc. As any bankruptcy hearing would demonstrate, legal duties may similarly conflict, as even laws may - though obviously it is an important aim of legislators to minimise legal conflict. As David Mallock Moral Dilemmas and Moral Failures (Australasian Journal 1967) points out it is misleading to talk in this context of prima-facie duties since the duties being considered are perfectly genuine duties even if one cannot

fulfil them, they do not disappear and may give rise to substitute duties (even if only the duty to apologise) since the claimant's right to performance remains.

(vi) It follows from this that one can have a duty to do what one is unable to do. Having a duty to do a certain thing does not imply that one can do that thing - and the same of course applies to obedience to the law (though again a sensible legislator will try to make laws which are within people's power to obey).

(vii) One may have a duty to do something immoral - and an evil law may be a law for all that.

(viii) One can have no duties to oneself - one cannot be a claimant against oneself nor answerable to oneself in the requisite sense.

Of course these similarities between duties and law often amount to identity since many of the duties mentioned are also legal duties, duties for which one is answerable to the State.

There are, as was shown clearly in the last chapter, many creditable actions which are not duties: acts of generosity, kindness, mercy, forgiveness. These non-duties cannot be claimed or demanded, they are owed to no-one, and one is answerable to no-one for their performance. They have a major place in any adequate conception of moral worth.

Limiting oneself to the conception of duty which I have expounded reveals what is at issue when the notion is legitimately extended. Thus when it is asked: "Do we have a duty to assist the extremely needy?" if the central cases are kept in mind we can see what is in question. The question of importance is not "Are some acts of generosity duties?" - that is to import confusion (on this confusion and a further conception of duty which aids it much more will be said in the following chapter). The question is rather: "Can one's assist-

ance here be rightfully claimed or demanded?" If it can then rendering assistance would not be an act of generosity but the fulfilment of a duty. ("Not therefore what we might wish, but what we could demand from others we are obliged to grant." Johnson, Rambler 81.). And, as I will try to bring out later, consequently different attitudes on the part of agent and recipient are appropriate.

### Duties and "ought"

There is a quite different conception of duty in which to say that a particular action is someone's duty is to say that he ought to do it. In this sense duties may conflict since it is often the case that a person ought to do each of two (or more) incompatible things (cf. B.A.O. Williams: Ethical Consistency). This use of "duty" can be misleading since it tends to obscure the distinctive sources of these "ought"s. It may be the case that one ought to do X because it is your duty but that one also ought to do Y because Y is a generous action which would greatly benefit another. To describe this as a "conflict of duties" is really to misdescribe the dilemma for the conflict facing one is between doing a favour and fulfilling a duty (cf. E. Lemmon: Moral Dilemmas). Furthermore, one might be misled into looking for a solution by seeking a higher order duty. Certain jobs not only carry with them duties but also higher order duties to prefer one sort of duty to another eg. one may be employed to attend to the comfort and security of a group of people, with the second-order duty to prefer security to comfort where these two conflict. No such duties exist to solve conflict between a duty and a non-duty.

Matters are further confused by another conception of "duty", one which is very common among philosophers. This conception of duty corresponds to a further use of "ought", the "ought" of decisive (moral) reason. In this sense of "duty" one's duty is the right thing or the

best thing to do - and in this sense there can be no such thing as a conflict of duties (which is what led Ross to adopt his highly misleading "prima-facie duty" terminology). The potential for confusion between this sense of "duty" and duties proper is evident; what is true of duties in one sense being quite untrue of duties in the other - as Whiteley (op.cit.) very clearly brings out. I will try to show briefly that this potential for confusion has indeed been realized. This use of "duty" for "what one ultimately ought to do" is both a symptom of the assimilation of all morality to the law-like, institutional strand of it and has lent itself to the perpetuation of this mistake.

#### Confusions (1) Baier

In the first chapter I presented Kurt Baier's view that dutifulness is the chief moral excellence. It is natural to take dutifulness to be the quality of doing one's duties in the normal (narrow) sense. The dutiful man would thus be one who performs his duties and fulfils his obligations: he obeys the law, does his job satisfactorily, provides for his family, pays his debts and so on. To be conscientious in this way generally requires some degree of courage, prudence and self-control (on occasions it may require much more as the following chapter makes clear). But to be dutiful a man does not generally require a great deal of insight, sensitivity or intelligence for, as has been noted, one could draw up a list of a person's duties and obligations. (This is one reason why moralities centred on duty tend to undervalue sensitivity and perception and concentrate on strength of will.)

The dutiful man as here described might nevertheless be morally odious for he might be ungenerous, harsh, unfeeling, unforgiving and the like. Conversely, a man might be rather slack when it came to fulfilling his duties and yet be of considerable moral worth;

rather unreliable and unconscientious, but warm, generous and humane.

Would Baier deny this? When he writes about being dutiful does he not have in mind "doing one's duty" in the sense of doing the right or best thing? The answer to this is doubtful. If Baier used "dutifulness" to refer to doing the right thing then his theory appears more plausible but it would be inconsistent with much else that he says. Firstly, he equates dutifulness with "all the various virtues of trustworthiness and reliability". If Baier is referring to doing one's duty in the first (the narrow) sense then this equation is correct. But then dutifulness cannot be the moral excellence for one can be highly trustworthy and reliable yet thoroughly evil. If, however, dutifulness is doing the right or best thing then Baier is simply wrong to equate this with reliability and trustworthiness. Secondly, the usefulness, the market value, of moral worth, according to Baier, lies in the dutiful man doing what others are entitled to expect of him. Again this fits doing one's duty, fulfilling one's obligations (in the narrow sense) but it scarcely exhausts the significance and value of doing the right thing. What the value of doing the right thing might be when this is not doing one's duty remains mysterious on Baier's account: if the value of moral excellence resides in fulfilling others' expectations there can be no merit in many generous, kind and merciful actions for these actions may fulfil no-one's expectations, they may indeed take others by surprise.

I conclude that Baier is confused, he has not sorted out these different conceptions of duty (either that or he has such a narrow conception of morality that moral worth becomes a very questionable commodity). Nor is Baier alone in this, many philosophers, I believe, transfer to what one ought to do, to one's "duty" in this broad sense, considerations which legitimately apply only to duties and obligations proper. Thus again and again the non-institutional is reinterpreted as the special institutional, as Feinberg neatly puts it.

The best thing to do becomes "required by conscience" <sup>1</sup>, one is regarded as answerable for one's conduct "in foro interno" and so on. These may simply be inappropriate legal metaphors but they may be more misleading. Which brings me to Kant.

### Confusions (2) Kant

Kant is the most influential of all those philosophers to whose work duty is central. I believe his work is constantly marred by a false assimilation of the right thing to do with duties proper. His was a most misleading legalism.

I may be accused of equivocation in attributing to Kant a legalist conception of morality. Whereas Baier and others operate, some more consciously and explicitly than others, with a conception of morality modelled on positive law, Kant, it may be claimed, did not. Kantian moral "laws" are modelled not so much on positive law but rather on laws of nature (cf. "Will is a kind of causality.... the idea of causality carries with it that of laws" etc. The Moral Law, p.107). Certainly Kant had totally different reasons for adopting a law-model to Baier. Baier is explicitly concerned with actual societies, with what holds a society together, with the usefulness of moral qualities. Kant, on the other hand, is centrally concerned with freedom and rationality, with the close connection between moral worth and freedom... And it may be the case that many of Kant's insights have no essential link with the legalism I detect. Nonetheless the fact remains that within his work is to be found a whole nexus of legal concepts. Writing of duties, the moral law, commands, principles, self-legislation, the formulation of the categorical imperative in terms of willing one's maxim to become universal law, all betray a legalist conception

1. Ironically, see Feinberg Social Philosophy p.63 for a bad example of just this.

of morality. Kant explicitly writes: "A rational being must always regard himself as making laws in a kingdom of ends which is possible through freedom of the will" (The Moral Law p.95). And "Thus morality consists in the relation of all action to the making of laws whereby alone a kingdom of ends is possible" (op.cit.p.96).

It may be objected that Kant was a legalist with a difference: the laws and duties of which he speaks are of a very special sort, the kingdom of ends no ordinary state but an ideal. For the moral laws which prescribe what one ought to do are at the same time laws which "describe" what a fully rational person would do. There is something in this. Kant is a legalist with a difference. But this "difference" makes his work not less but more confusing for when pressure is put on the legal analogies they give way. As this is not an essay on Kant a few points must suffice here.

(i) A normal legislator has a difficult task, he must take into account many practical considerations: whether a law is needed at all, whether it is enforceable, how it would tie in with other legal and social policies etc. But the kind of legislation Kant suggests each moral agent ought to practise is supposed to be easy:

"Inexperienced in the course of world affairs and incapable of being prepared for all the chances that happen in it, I ask myself only "can you also will that your maxim should become a universal law?" (op.cit.p.68)

An "earthly" legislator would not be convinced!

(ii) More fundamentally, the whole analogy with law is misconceived. It is quite unthinkable that even a perfect body of laws would prescribe all the good things one might do or proscribe all the bad.... And once one shakes off the illusion one is legislating - surely an overly self-important view? - the importance of principles and universalisability diminishes. If, on the other hand, as Kant sometimes suggests, the laws we are supposed to be formulating are not akin to

positive laws but are like laws of nature, his suggestion is even more untenable. To picture oneself as supreme legislator is bad enough but to see oneself in the role of creator is meglomaniac!

(iii) Kant writes often of duties to oneself, self legislation and so on. He is sufficiently impressed by the analogy of morality to positive law to seek a legislator, yet, in contrast to action in accordance with positive law, obedience to the moral law is supposed to be the paradigm of free action, of autonomy. But Kant's proposed solution, self-legislation, simply destroys the analogy altogether, for a man cannot have legal obligations to himself - as Kant himself recognized in the early Lectures (p.117). I will have more to say about Kant's legalism in subsequent chapters.

I wish to suggest that because of confusions of the kind I have illustrated it would be best if we limited our usage to "duty" in the narrow, law-like sense, talking in other cases where this term is now used of "what ought to be done" and "the right or the best thing to do" as is appropriate.

### Conclusion

Duties, then, do not comprise the whole of what one ought to do, nor is dutifulness the sole meritorious trait: moral worth cannot be reduced to the possession of that single characteristic. Nonetheless it could reasonably be argued that dutifulness has a specially basic place. A society with no dutiful men is scarcely conceivable, whereas a society without generosity and kindness, though most unappealing, is certainly possible.

Without dutifulness a state of nature is perilously close; but with only dutifulness society might not seem such a great gain.

CHAPTER 5    MODIFICATIONS AND ALTERNATIVES

Attempts have been made to extend or modify the legal model of morality so as to accommodate creditable acts which are not duties. Lon Fuller in The Morality of Law, chapter 1, distinguishes the two moralities: the basic, law-like, morality of duty and the "higher" morality of aspiration which has links with aesthetics. Somewhat similarly P.F. Strawson in Social Morality and Individual Ideal writes of, on the one hand, duties, social morality, on the other, personal ideals (this article will be briefly considered in chapter 10). J.O. Urmson in Saints and Heroes argues that duties must be supplemented by another category of creditable acts, acts "above and beyond duty". Though they differ in other respects each of these writers rejects "duty" as being the sole category of creditable acts and correspondingly dutifulness as the sole meritorious trait. However, by each of them doing one's duty is equated with moral adequacy: on their view dutifulness supplies a sort of moral baseline, those who fall below do wrong, they sin, above lies the "supererogatory". Urmson's presentation of this distinction and modification of the legal model is the most fully argued and has been the most influential so it is his paper I will consider in detail.

On all the above theories a law-like element is seen as basic to morality but in need of being supplemented by additional elements. The final part of this chapter will be devoted to the different theory that a law-like morality, a morality of duty, and a non-law-like morality, a morality of virtue, are alternatives. The conscientious man and the virtuous man are held to be alternative models of excellent moral worth.

"Duties" and "actions above and beyond duty"

In Saints and Heroes J.O. Urmson is concerned to point out the inadequacy of the classification, commonly employed by moral philosophers, of actions into three categories: duties, morally indifferent acts and wrongdoings. This trichotomy, Urmson argues, ignores the important set of saintly and heroic acts. Often the saint or hero is a person who performs actions which are neither duties nor morally indifferent - still less are they wrongdoings - but are "far beyond the limits of his duty" (p.62). For example, a doctor from a neighbouring province, a man with no special ties to the city, volunteers to assist in a plague-stricken city. His is the act of a hero: it is not his duty to serve, his service is above and beyond duty.

To accommodate such creditable acts, Urmson argues, we must enlarge the traditional trichotomy and observe a fourfold division of actions into wrongdoings, indifferent acts, duties and actions which are above and beyond duty. On this view, then, a man may gain merit, enhance his moral worth, by doing his duty, especially when this proves onerous, or by actions above and beyond duty.

Urmson is surely right in claiming that there are saintly and heroic acts but his classification of them is questionable. He holds that all saintly and heroic acts are either very difficult duties or "above and beyond duty". As Feinberg has pointed out in his valuable article Supererogation and Rules, this classification is symptomatic of Urmson's tendency to assimilate the whole of morality to the law-like and institutional which is in fact only one strand of it. Thus while the above view of how a man may gain merit is true of a certain strand of morality it is not true of other important strands. The strand of which it is true is that of duties, in the quasi-legal sense explained in the last chapter. For example, an employee may gain merit by doing his job, his duty, efficiently - especially if it proves unexpectedly difficult, he may gain further merit by a stretch of unpaid overtime, his duty plus more, and may lose merit by derelictions of duty. But

this model does not apply to a large variety of creditable actions such as the favours and kindnesses which I contrasted with duties. Of course, some favours are bigger than others, some kindnesses it takes a saint or hero to perform. But such actions are neither duties nor are they above and beyond duty, they are meritorious non-duties. Thus, for example, Urmson is misleading in describing the doctor who volunteers to serve in the plague-stricken city as acting above and beyond his duty. The doctor had no duty at all towards those in the city and so could not be performing his duty plus more. The doctor's action was heroic certainly, but not above and beyond duty because it had nothing to do with duty. Nor is this a mere verbal quibble: a failure to recognise this is a failure to understand the character of his action: it was the act of a volunteer, its merit did not lie in its requiredness. To accommodate such actions we need to do more than extend the traditional trichotomy by an additional category. It is not a further linear extension but the recognition of a distinct, non-duty strand of moral evaluation that is needed.

#### Urmson's confusion

Urmson's fourfold classification, and corresponding account of the acquisition of merit, rests on a confusion, one which I will now attempt to expose.

Urmson claims that a line must be drawn "between what we can expect and demand from others and what we can merely hope for and receive with gratitude when we get it; duty falls on one side of this line and other acts with moral value on the other" (p.71). Clearly I am in agreement with this distinction since it corresponds to the distinction I drew in the previous chapter between duties and non-duties. But Urmson identifies this distinction and that which he draws between "duties" and the "higher flights of morality of which saintliness and

heroism are outstanding examples" (p.70). In this way I believe Urmson gets two distinct conceptions of duty confused: duties as opposed to favours and other non-duties and duty opposed to the supererogatory, a distinction I will consider below. This has significant results. Thus certain non-duties are not only miscategorised as being "above and beyond duty" - belonging as they do to another sphere of morality altogether - they also receive an undeserved promotion. For example, giving someone who has run out of cigarettes a cigarette is viewed as an act which is over and above duty (p.71). Such an act is not a duty but a favour: the sort of favour it is surely misleading to assimilate to saintly and heroic acts! The opposite movement, a demotion, may be seen in Urmson's reference to the doctor whose practice is in the plague-ridden city. He is described by Urmson as "only doing his duty". Despite Urmson's earlier acknowledgement that doing one's duty may be heroic, that "only" here tends to minimise a considerable moral achievement: the doctor was doing his duty and doing his duty in these circumstances was the act of a hero.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the class of saintly and heroic acts cuts right across the division of creditable acts into duties and non-duties. Some duties, no less than some non-duties, it takes a saint or hero to perform.

One reason why this fact tends to be obscured is that in the majority of cases the duties of an employment, profession and so on are well within the capacities of most of those who undertake that employment or profession. Indeed it would be foolish to assign to an office such duties as likely office-holders would be unable to fulfil. However, on rare occasions, it may happen that the fulfilment of one's duties requires great effort, even heroism. The doctor had a duty to attend his patients, normally this was well within his powers, but the city in which his practice lay was struck by plague and fulfilling that duty then required heroism. The policeman whose duty is to maintain the law may

find that unexpectedly that duty requires him to face an armed and desperate criminal. The world is not so predictable that no-one will need to be a saint or hero to fulfil his duties.

### The supererogatory

I believe that the title of Urmson's paper is somewhat misleading for his central concern would (in fact) appear not to be with saints and heroes but with a class of actions of which some saintly and heroic acts are only a small sample. Urmson's chief purpose, then, appears to be to draw attention to and attempt to support a distinction which he claims to detect in common-sense morality. The distinction is between duties, in the sense of those actions enjoined by a "basic moral code", and the creditable acts which go beyond this basic code, "supererogatory" acts as they have traditionally been called. I will consider his characterization of this distinction and the arguments he offers to support its continued recognition.

Urmson claims that on the one side we have "basic rules, summarily set forth in simple rules and binding on all" (p.70), actions enjoined by these rules are duties, on the other side we have the "higher flights" of morality, the area of the supererogatory. Urmson supports this distinction on five counts (pp.70-72).

- (1) The observance of basic duties is vital to the survival of society, therefore they should be given a "special status of urgency" and "exceptional pressure" ought to be exerted to ensure compliance with them.
- (2) Since these basic duties are to be "exacted like debts" and failure in them is to be censured, such duties must be within the capacity of the ordinary man. For if the basic moral code is too far beyond ordinary capacities: "a general breakdown of compliance with the moral code would be an inevitable consequence; duty would seem to be something high

and unattainable and not for "the likes of us". Urmson offers as a parallel the lowering of respect for the law in America as a result of the unduly demanding prohibition laws.

(3) "A moral code, if it is to be a code, must be formulable in rules of manageable complexity." But for many types of creditable action no such rule can be formulated - as when to excuse legitimate debts or to nurse sick neighbours. And where "no definite rule of manageable complexity can be justified we cannot work on that moral plane on which types of action can be enjoined or condemned as duty or crime".

(4) "It is part of the notion of duty that we have a right to demand compliance from others even when we are interested parties." But there are many actions, such as being tended in sickness by a stranger, which we are not entitled to demand.

(5) In the case of the basic moral duties it is quite in order to apply pressure to ensure others' compliance. But there is something horrifying in the thought of bringing pressure to bear on a man to perform an act of heroism or self-sacrifice.

I think Urmson here does make out a case for a moral code but I believe he misunderstands its significance and mistakes what it is to be contrasted with. The code for which Urmson has made out a case is quite explicitly law-like, many of the grounds he enumerates are appropriate to the question of whether or not one should legislate to require certain conduct. Indeed, I believe that Urmson's discussion is most illuminating when it is seen as addressing the question: What classes of action should a reasonable legislator require? And this is properly answered by listing duties, duties as opposed to non-duties. (I am here using "legislator" in a broad sense for not all these rules and corresponding duties may require, or even be best served by, formal sanctions. Community tradition and pressure may suffice both for their promulgation and their enforcement.)

Urmson does not, however, seem to see the moral code he is

defending in just this way. He thinks of this code as laying down rules of obedience to which would show a man to be morally adequate, a person of reasonable moral worth (see, for instance, point 3 p.71). Beyond the code are the higher reaches of morality. But it simply does not follow that because one could not reasonably have a code or law requiring certain behaviour that such behaviour is any more difficult or morally "higher" than those actions which can be required. Nor is it the case that performing all a reasonable law or code might enjoin is sufficient to show one a decent man. Consider point (3). It may well not be possible to formulate rules for non-duties but this does not mean that performing non-duties is somehow on a higher plane, not for "the likes of us". The person who fails ever to do anyone a favour or kindness, who is never merciful or forgiving, even though he does all that the moral "code" prescribes, may be a much worse man than one who neglects some of his duties but is kind, generous and merciful. A moral code is not the whole of morality, and not even of moral adequacy.

This fact was, I think, recognized in a way by the traditional category of "duties of imperfect obligation" - duties here being contrasted with the supererogatory. Realizing, perhaps, that generosity, kindness and the like were not dispositions to perform duties proper, users of this category nonetheless sought to indicate the need to perform some generous and kind actions. Thus instead of claiming that it is a duty to perform generous acts whenever the occasion might arise they talked of a duty to be generous "in general" and spoke of a degree of discretion being allowed to an agent: he has some choice as to the objects on which to discharge his imperfect duty of obligation. This use of "duty" is still in evidence. Thus Feinberg, in Social Philosophy p.63, having granted that charitable contributions are like gifts and favours, nevertheless continues to write of one's duty to be charitable.

Such terminology is very confusing and I believe that we can

say all that need be said without employing it. Thus instead of talking of "duties of imperfect obligation" we can simply say that the man who does not perform at least some generous and kind actions when he has had plenty of opportunity to do so is a pretty rotten moral specimen: he is mean, cold, etc. The advantages of this quite natural way of talking are, firstly, it avoids confusion with straightforward duties: it thus avoids a false assimilation to a law-like model. Secondly, we can thus see that while such non-duties as generous acts and kindnesses are not required or enjoined as duties are, nonetheless failure to perform kind and generous acts may be grounds for (severe) moral disapprobation.

### Catholicism

I have suggested that Urmsen's "basic moral code" may best be understood as a code which a reasonable legislator might impose (I repeat, "legislator" is to be understood broadly here - the traditions of a community might be a legislator in this sense. The genesis of the code is not important). I have claimed further that compliance with such a code is no guarantee that one is a decent man. The category of "duties of imperfect obligation" was I believe an attempt to supplement a code (such as Urmsen suggests) so that compliance with the code and the imperfect "duties" was seen as morally obligatory: to comply with both was to be a man of decent moral worth.

This classification and indeed the whole attempt to draw up a basic code on one side and supererogatory acts on the other seems linked to Catholicism. Catholicism, at certain periods at least, conceived of morality on a law-like, institutional model. There were basic injunctions - duties and duties of imperfect obligation. Obedience to these injunctions was an entrance-requirement to heaven, failure in them meant incurring divine wrath and imposed the need to make amends.

There were also actions over and above these injunctions. These actions were not required, were not strictly obligatory, but they speeded up one's entrance into heaven - rather as unpaid overtime might hasten one's promotion. To put it in the more dignified language of moral theology: there are praecepta or commandments of God, to disobey which is to sin, and consilia evangelica, these are advised rather than commanded; they are not necessary for salvation but, according to St. Thomas, they are aids to attaining that end "better and more quickly" (quoted in Moral Concepts ed. Feinberg, p.10).

I have acknowledged that talk of duties and actions above and beyond duty makes sense in institutional settings; an employee, for instance, can distinguish his duty.(what he has to do to be "safe") and what is over and above it (an optional extra, one that will, however, stand him in good stead with his employer). It should be plain, I think, how easily, given Catholic theological beliefs, the whole of morality might be construed on this institutional model with God as law-giver and/or managing-director. In the absence of such a theological backing, however, there seems no basis for any overall duty/supererogatory distinction. The question: What must I do to be morally safe? not only has a rather grotesque ring to it, it is also one that is difficult to understand outside of a religious/institutional context; safe from what?

### Supererogation and blame

It may be suggested that I am making very heavy weather of the dutiful/supererogatory distinction. This distinction, it may be urged, is a straightforward and important one: "dutiful actions" are those which it is blameworthy not to perform, "supererogatory actions" are those acts of which performance is creditable but non-performance is not blameworthy.

It is, of course, true that there are actions which we think well of people for performing but which we would not think badly of

them for not doing - this is evidently true of actions which reveal unexpected opportunities for goodness. And in general, we tend to think worse of people for doing positive harm than for not taking some opportunity to do good - this is admittedly only a rough-and-ready distinction. But what is proposed here is an inadequate gloss of the traditional duty/supererogatory distinction. To mention only one point: failure to perform what were traditionally classified as dutiful acts may, under certain circumstances, be excusable and so not blameworthy: hence the traditional area of the dutiful cannot be coextensive with the class of actions of which failure to perform is blameworthy.

Anything closely corresponding to the duty/supererogatory distinction must show more than the above gloss: to substantiate this division it must be possible to distinguish prospectively two classes of actions, a class of "dutiful"/"obligatory" actions and a class of "optional" but commendable actions. And this is precisely what in the absence of the necessary (theological) backing for a thorough-going law-view of morals I believe one cannot do. Nor, I must stress, is this because no morally desirable acts are optional, all being obligatory. It is the whole application of the categories of optional/obligatory that I am calling into question.

None of this is to deny that there are certain actions which one would be a saint or hero to perform, nor that there are certain actions which only the morally odious would fail to perform. What I have tried to show is the inadequacy of the alleged duty/supererogation distinction and some of the confusions which may be attendant on it.

#### Conscientiousness and virtues

A number of moral philosophers are satisfied that a law-like approach, an ethics of duty, can cover all that one ought to do and yet

believe that such an ethics is not the only possibility, it is complete but not exclusive. So too while the conscientious man is a model of moral worth there are other types of excellent men. The exact status of these other forms of excellence varies with the theorist. Pritchard<sup>1</sup> maintains a "sharp" distinction between morality and virtue as "co-ordinate and independent forms of goodness", but the higher in his view is morality (which comprises conscientiousness). Nowell-Smith, on the other hand, while remaining close to Pritchard in the form of the distinction, clearly prefers virtuous men. Nowell-Smith's presentation of the distinction is interesting and representative of those who propose "duty" and "virtue" as alternatives<sup>2</sup>:

"Conscientiousness is a substitute for all other virtues and its unique value lies in this fact. The so-called "natural virtues" are dispositions to do certain sorts of things towards which we have, in general, a pro-attitude, and moral rules are rules enjoining these same things. Hence the conscientious man will do exactly the same things that a man who has all the natural virtues will do. He does not do them for the same reason; and he is not brave or honest or kindly since he acts for the sake of doing his duty, not for the sake of doing the brave, honest or kindly thing. But he will do what the brave, honest or kindly man does." (Ethics p.258.)

There is a fascinating mixture of genuine insight and confusion here and the whole passage repays careful examination, particularly as I take it that what is at the back of Nowell-Smith's mind is a contrast between a (roughly) Aristotelian approach to morality and a (roughly) Kantian approach. I will argue that neither of these approaches, on the

1. H.A.Pritchard: Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake? in Moral Obligation p.11 seq. The ideal for him though is someone who combines virtue and duty.
2. W.K.Frankena: Pritchard and the Ethics of Virtue, Monist 54, 1970 covers a similar area starting from Pritchard's article cited above.

interpretation implicit here, is satisfactory: both fail to do justice to important elements in morality and neither is totally coherent. Underlying the contrast is an inadequate view of the virtues and a confused conception of acting for the sake of duty.

This is the way I think the contrast is intended. Aristotelian virtuous man wants to do the virtuous thing, it is in accordance with his desires and impulses; he has a number of (first order) desires to perform actions which coincide with what he ought to do for he has well-educated emotions and desires. The spirit of Aristotelian man, on this interpretation (cf. Frankena op.cit.), is captured by Augustine's remark: Love, and then do what you like. Kantian moral man does what he believes he should, despite contrary inclination, because he believes it is his duty to do so. Paton, in The Categorical Imperative, expands the point:

"If a good action is one which is done for the sake of law as such, this must mean that the moral motive, the motive of duty, must be law-abidingness, and this must serve as the principle of our will unless duty is a purely chimerical concept....The morally good man (Paton glosses Kant) seeks to obey the moral law as such whatever it may enjoin. If he obeys it only so far as he happens to desire some of the actions it enjoins he is not a morally good man" (p.71 emphasis in the original).

Whereas Aristotelian virtuous man has many virtuous feelings and desires Kantian moral man has a single (second-order) determination to do whatever the moral law, his duty, may demand.

Even if these positions were perfectly clear and coherent, it is not obvious that all the virtues would fall exclusively on the Aristotelian side of the divide for Kantian devotion to duty may only be possible if one possesses some measure of courage, endurance, foresight and so on. Nowell-Smith does not recognize this because he holds a view of the virtues which may perhaps have been inferred from

Aristotle viz. that a man who possesses a particular virtue desires to act and enjoys acting in a way characteristic of that virtue:

"if a man does not enjoy performing noble actions he is not a good man at all. Nobody would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly, nor liberal if he did not enjoy acting liberally, and similarly with the other virtues." (Nicomachean Ethics)

Such a view may be plausible with respect to liberality but when it is extended to virtues which principally involve self-control, such as temperance and courage, it becomes implausible.

"A man who abstains from bodily pleasures and who enjoys abstaining is self-controlled." (Nicomachean Ethics 1104b.)

Far from seeming virtuous such a man seems perverse! Similarly, such a view is untenable with respect to most courageous acts for it makes it seem as if the courageous man is like one who gets a "thrill" out of performing a "dare". Normally, in fact, the courageous man where he faces danger voluntarily does so in order to achieve a valued objective; he would rather have the objective without the risk - facing danger is not part of what he desires.<sup>1</sup> So there is no special desire-to-face-dangers which Aristotelian man has but Kantian man is without.

These contrasted models: moral man and virtuous man are, however, neither totally clear nor totally coherent as the following considerations indicate.

(i) On the conception presented here, the virtues cannot find an adequate place for the performance of perfectly ordinary duties, the recognition of rights and obligations. (I think this is one of the things Hume realized when he classified justice as an artificial virtue.<sup>2</sup>)

Firstly, because, as Baier recognized (op.cit), it is in principle

1. Aristotle, of course, fully recognized this in his central account of courage (III,IX): indeed it is because of this that he qualified his view that pleasure accompanies the exercise of every virtue.

2. Treatise Book III, part II, section I.

impossible to so educate emotions and desires that one naturally wishes to do all one's duties, recognize all the rights of others and so on. This is not due to some moral or psychological limitation in mankind, rather it stems from a satisfactory conception of duties and rights. For duties can be created by various transactions, edicts etc. as, correspondingly, can correlative rights. By making a promise or undertaking a job one may become committed to doing X, yet before the promise or undertaking, doing X may be completely morally neutral. And X here may range pretty well indefinitely. Hence what turns out to be the moral thing to do is often arbitrary, and, I contend, that not even in principle could one be educated so as to have a desire or inclination to do X. In fact one of the points of duties and obligations lies precisely in the fact that the creation of a duty limits a man, it prevents him from doing what he is (perhaps quite rightly) naturally inclined to do. For doing X may involve giving up perfectly innocent and desirable activities. Secondly, there is a very important difference between performing an action because it is a "product" of one's educated desires and performing that action because someone has a right, a claim to its performance. The manner and attitude of the agent ought to be quite different. Those who regard the fulfilment of promises, refraining from interfering with another's liberty, giving blacks the vote and the like as flowing from the goodness of their hearts, as acts of benevolence, are grossly paternalistic. Not to recognise someone's claim to one's services - even if one willingly serves them - is an insult to their dignity, an attack on their self-respect. (These remarks are not intended to deny that, as Pritchard noted (op.cit.p.12): one may perform an action both because someone has a claim to it and also because a worthy desire inclines one, as a doctor may assist a patient both because the patient has a claim to his services and because he wishes to help people.)

None of these comments are designed to show that virtue is

inapplicable to duties. They are intended to show that this conception of virtue is inadequate. A satisfactory conception will recognize such virtues as dutifulness and justice and will adapt the account of virtues accordingly.

(ii) As "natural virtue" fails to accommodate duties and rights so the contrasting conception of conscientiousness is inadequate with respect to such non-duties as kindness, generosity and mercy. Nowell-Smith partly recognizes this in noting that the conscientious man is not kindly etc., but he suggests that the difference between the conscientious man and the kindly man is (solely) one of motive. That, I think, is too simple.

The difficulty in discussing conscientiousness is to know just what it means to act for the sake of doing one's duty. The meaning of this is relatively clear when applied to the performance of normal duties and obligations: one performs one's duty not because one wants to nor even because one thinks it particularly useful to do so but because another has a claim to your performance; the usefulness of the claimed performance, I am inclined to say, is, in the majority of cases, the claimant's business not the agent's. This is the proper context in which "acting for the sake of duty" is intelligible and creditable. When the notion is extended beyond this normal context it is not at all clear what is to be understood by it, for the contrasts which give it a precise meaning have disappeared.

What sense can be given to performing meritorious non-duties "for the sake of duty"? Nowell-Smith suggests a common reply when he talks of moral rules as enjoining the same things as the man with the natural virtues would do. And this seems to be the heart of the problem: institutional, law-like notions such as rules enjoining certain behaviour are totally out of place and distorting when applied to creditable non-duties. For it is of the essence of generous, merciful and forgiving acts that they are simply not enjoined, their merit does

not lie in their requiredness. Indeed, a person cannot be required to, for instance, forgive another; the most he could do would be to go through the motions. <sup>1.</sup>

But why have people wanted to talk about, say, being kind from a sense of duty? What is it that has persuaded them to adopt this confusing terminology? One worthy incitement has been Kant's account of the unfeeling man, the man whose sympathy for others has been extinguished by his own great sorrows and who despite his lack of emotion continues to help those in distress (Moral Law p.64). Some account of such a man is required and will indeed be offered in chapter 8. The point, however, which must be stressed now is that recourse to the quasi-legal terminology of duty will not further our understanding of this man's moral predicament and achievement. <sup>2.</sup>

My tentative conclusion is that it is incoherent to talk of forgiving or being merciful or generous from a sense of duty. It might be possible to give sense to this notion but, so far as I know, this has not been satisfactorily done and might in any case only confuse issues still further. A more careful and accurate way must be sought of describing the puzzling situations which lead people to use the "duty" terminology outside its proper context.

To briefly summarise the findings of the last three chapters:  
 (1) Duties are not the only creditable actions nor are other fine actions to be understood on the model of duties. (2) The performance of duties is not sufficient to show a person morally adequate nor can a "code" of moral adequacy be drawn up. (3) Dutifulness is not the only meritorious

1. This does not, of course, mean either that one can do nothing towards putting oneself into a forgiving state of mind or that one cannot be blamed for being unforgiving.
2. Mary Midgley The Objection to Systematic Humbug Philosophy 1978 has a most interesting discussion of this case and argues eloquently for a more sympathetic reading of Kant.

trait, it is not sufficient to show a man to be of decent moral worth but it is necessary, "natural virtue" cannot substitute for it. (4) The proposition that there are two alternative and co-extensive models of excellent moral worth, virtue and dutifulness, is false.

I conclude that the legalist conception of morality and the corresponding view of moral worth is inadequate. Nor can it be saved by simply adding a further category or by treating it as just one possible conception. The whole approach is misconceived and must be rejected.

CHAPTER 6    CONSCIENTIOUSNESS, THE WILL, AND MORAL WORTH

The case against legalism might now rest. I wish, however, to examine one further important assumption in Kurt Baier's account of moral worth for it is one which is not restricted to legalists but is common among utilitarians and many other philosophers who may not easily be categorized.<sup>1</sup> The assumption is that the will is the real bearer of moral worth (see feature 4 of the legalist account in chapter 1). I will begin by briefly considering the classic exponent of the view, Kant.

Kant did not write extensively about the merit of agents - the Groundwork is avowedly devoted solely to the derivation of the supreme principle of morality. However, his way of understanding morality has clear implications for a conception of moral worth. Thus morality is conceived as a system of laws "for the will of man"<sup>2</sup>, again Kant seeks to elucidate the "concept of a will estimable in itself"<sup>3</sup>, which leads him to a consideration of "duty". The trend throughout is clear: for moral purposes a person is identified with his will. The man of excellent moral worth is one who possesses a completely good will.

By the "good will" Kant meant more than conscientiousness, the good will is one which wills in accordance with the categorical imperative; the man of good will is not only conscientious he is also right. However, as I do not wish to become embroiled in a discussion of the categorical imperative or in Kantian exegesis I will restrict my attention to conscientiousness. I think it is fair to say that Kant - and certainly those influenced by him - would maintain that conscientious-

1. Eg. Stuart Hampshire: "I identify myself with my will" - cited and interestingly discussed in I. Murdoch: The Sovereignty of the Good.
2. The Moral Law p.53. Later of course expanded into a search for laws for the will of any rational being.
3. Op.cit.p.62.

ness is a necessary condition of moral worth. In this chapter I will argue against that view and, in doing so, I will question the adequacy of treating the will as the sole bearer of moral worth. A more generous conception of moral worth is required.

### Conscientiousness

The conscientious man is a person who consults and follows his conscience, one who acts on his moral convictions. One may be conscientious and yet wicked for one may lack a wide variety of excellences being bigoted, imperceptive, insensitive and one's moral views may be misguided or thoroughly corrupt. Thus conscientiousness by no means exhausts our judgements of worth, it is not the sole meritorious trait. All this is generally recognised. Of more interest and difficulty is the question of whether conscientiousness is a necessary condition of moral worth. The issues come into sharp focus when we ask the question: could one reasonably conclude that someone would be a better person were he less conscientious? It is evident that the world would be a better and happier place were a number less conscientious than they are for misguided, conscientious persecutors and terrorists abound. That is not disputed. What is in question is whether it is true of any of these people that they would show themselves better men, of greater moral worth, were they less conscientious. And the answer to this question will help to clarify the nature of moral worth. For if the answer is that some men would be better, then, in considering his moral worth, one cannot identify a man simply with his will for, ex hypothesi, the will of such a man would be weaker.

### Rejecting morality

Perhaps the most extreme form of unconscientiousness is where

a person determines not to consult his conscience at all, indeed to give up the whole moral business, as he understands it. In most cases such a person might rightly be dismissed as wicked, as amoral. But there are more problematic cases in which unconscientiousness is adopted not in a gesture of selfishness and indifference to others but as a serious, if probably confused, reaction to events. The classic case of this is to be found in Mark Twain's novel Huckleberry Finn.

Huck is faced with the terrible decision of whether or not to help the runaway slave, Jim, to escape from slavery. He sincerely believes that he ought not to help Jim to escape yet in the end, despite the suffering which it causes him, Huck does assist Jim. Afterwards he bitterly reproaches himself, but then he reflects:

"Then I thought a minute and says to myself, hold on - s'pose you'd a done right and give Jim up, would you feel better than what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad - I'd feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right, when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time."

(Chapter 16)

Knowing what is likely to "come handiest" to Huck and knowing the morality he is rejecting <sup>1</sup>, there is no doubt that this rejection will be a good thing for others. But can we honestly regard Huck as a better person, someone of greater moral worth after this rejection? He will be nicer, more likeable, but better? I am going to defer trying to answer this until after discussing another type of conscientiousness - for

1. A rejection in this form is, I think, only open to the very unsophisticated, to those unable to distinguish "the morality I have been taught" and "morality".

reasons which I hope will become clear.<sup>1</sup>

### Nowell-Smith's view

Professor Nowell-Smith in his book Ethics writes: "I should myself have no hesitation in saying that Robespierre would have been a better man (quite apart from the question of the harm he did) if he had given his conscience a thorough rest and indulged his taste for roses and sentimental verse" (p.247). As it stands this may appear milder than it is, for it is somewhat ambiguous. It could mean: Robespierre would have been a better man if he had realized he had an over-active conscience and had done something about it - which is the sort of reasonable comment one might make about a man who suffered from scruples. In fact what Nowell-Smith does mean is that Robespierre would have been a better man if he had acted against his convictions; deliberately suppressed his conscience, and done what he felt like instead. The claim is that a man who has done what he believed to be right would have shown himself to be a better man if he had done things which he believed to be wrong - believing at the time of acting that they were wrong. This seems a tough proposition and Nowell-Smith's presentation of it as almost obvious consequently appears rather glib.

As I understand him, Nowell-Smith suggests that any difficulty we have with his claim must be due to confusing a first-person with a third-person view. He concludes that "I think that I ought to do A but that I would be a better man if I did B" is "logically odd", an agent cannot consistently decide that he would be a better man if he acted unconscientiously. But he maintains that a spectator can make the following judgement: "You think that you ought to do A, but you

1. Huck's action is discussed in Jonathan Bennett's careful and sensitive paper The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn, Philosophy 1974. This paper suggested a number of the questions I explicitly consider.

would be a better man if you did B" (p.253). Indeed Nowell-Smith regards this as the "natural" way for one man to express his moral disagreement with another (p.254). This seems plausible at first but only because it (also) is ambiguous. On the one hand, it could be taken as asserting that since B is a better course of action than A then the agent would be a better man if he realized this and did B, and this does seem a natural way of expressing moral disagreement. On the other hand, the proposition could mean - and if it is to fit in with Nowell-Smith's argument it must mean this - "You think you ought to do A but you would be a better man if you acted against your conscience and did B". This seems far less natural; indeed it seems to me that such a judgement would only be justified in a very serious situation indeed - but this is to anticipate.

#### Campbell Garnett's reply

In Conscience and Conscientiousness (in Moral Concepts, op.cit.)

Professor Campbell Garnett disagrees strongly with Nowell-Smith.

Having dismissed the idea that an agent could reasonably conclude that he should act unconscientiously, he considers our (spectator) judgement of the moral worth of an agent. Could we ever reasonably judge a man to be better for acting unconscientiously?

"The choice with which we are concerned is not that of his decision as to whether A or B is the right thing to do but his decision as to whether he would do what he believed to be the right thing or follow his personal wishes to do something that he found much more agreeable to himself. The latter act....is a decision to set aside the results of his thoughtful examination of the possible consequences of his conduct and to do the thing he personally wants to do and would have done if he had never given the matter any ethical thought at all." (p.89)

When the issue is "thus clearly stated", Professor Garnett suggests that it is difficult to understand how anyone could judge "the unconscientious following of inclination to be the act of a better man or an act that tends to make a better man, than the careful thinking and active self-determination involved in conscientiousness".

If Nowell-Smith's presentation of the problem is glib, Campbell Garnett's is one-sided. Opposed to conscientiousness is the following of "personal wishes", doing something "he found more agreeable to himself", doing the thing "he personally wants to do" and "following inclination". The implication is that if one acts unconscientiously one must act on whim or inclination - and selfish inclination at that. <sup>1</sup> (Notice how the otherwise superfluous words "personal", "personally", and "...to himself" reinforce the impression of the selfishness of unconscientious action.) With such morally flimsy opposition it is no wonder that Professor Garnett feels confident about conscientiousness; reinforce the opposition and matters are not nearly so clear.

Unconscientious actions may, in fact, be far more altruistic than the <sup>corresponding</sup> conscientious actions would be, they may be performed not out of selfish inclination but from entrenched compassion, loyalty or love, they may involve pain or great sacrifice.... The case of Huck already outlined illustrates many of these points. Another instance is Milton's Adam (Paradise Lost Books IX and X) who sacrifices paradise to stay with Eve. <sup>2</sup> Troubling cases arise most obviously where the conscientious act would be something deplorable, the unconscientious action the one we applaud. Campbell Garnett, although he recognizes that some

1. In fairness to Campbell Garnett, one should note that this may be partly due to the way Nowell-Smith has formulated the problem.
2. Our sympathy for Adam's behaviour here gets Milton into theological difficulties so he tries at a later stage to cheapen Adam's action by reinterpreting it as lust. The reader, however, knows better.

unconscientious actions may be acts of sympathy and generosity, does not seem to fully appreciate the difficulties this raises. He seems untroubled by these cases and so I think he misses what really matters in this question. The reason for this I believe lies in the initial move in his argument.

Campbell Garnett sharply separates the question of the rightness of someone's decision as to what he should do from that person's decision as to whether he will do what he believes to be the right thing to do. Only the latter, he implies, is relevant to the issue Nowell-Smith has raised. If Professor Garnett is right to make this sharp division then the place of conscientiousness seems assured: faced with the bald choice between a conscientious and an unconscientious man, and no further information, one would surely opt for the conscientious man: there is at least something to be said in his favour, he sticks to his guns. But Professor Garnett is not right to thus sharply separate these questions: the direction in which the guns are facing is highly relevant in judging whether or not a man is a better man for sticking to them. <sup>1.</sup>

1. I am suggesting, then, that conscientiousness tied to certain wicked moral views can make a man worse than he would be if he were less conscientious. But does this not contradict what was argued in chapter 2 about the independence of our admiration for particular virtues even where they are displayed in wrongdoing eg. courage in a courageous robbery? At first sight it does but - and the rest of the chapter will bear this out - conscientiousness is a unique quality in this respect since of its very essence it is linked to a particular set of moral beliefs, to a particular moral outlook (and cannot legitimately be viewed in isolation from that outlook). In assessing a man's conscientiousness, therefore, we are dealing not with one particular and separable element of character but with something far more general, the whole orientation of that character. The courageous robber has had to conquer his own fears, he has had to learn to face danger calmly, the conscientious Nazi has had to destroy his capacity for compassion and his sense of justice, he has diminished his humanity; in order to act conscientiously he has had to acquire or strengthen certain vices - though of course he will not recognise them as such. This is what distinguishes conscientiousness from other virtues such as courage. (Though, as I pointed out in chapter 2, if an action is sufficiently heinous we will rightly ignore any virtuous aspects of it.)

There are less extreme cases where a moral outlook is mistaken but not pernicious and in such cases there may be room for

In judging a person's worth it is of the utmost importance that the unconscientious, "personal wishes" he acts on are of one sort rather than another, that the feelings which move the agent are directed to certain objects rather than others. Professor Garnett's presentation of the matter obscures this: he seems satisfied that classing emotions, wants and inclinations as merely "personal" and so unconscientious, is all the sorting out that needs to be done. If this were so, one would get the facile assimilation of love of comfort and revulsion at killing the helpless, for, given the appropriate moral beliefs, both may be unconscientious, merely "personal".

It may be objected that I am being very unfair to Campbell Garnett for he would of course accept that some unconscientious actions show an agent to be far better than others do; all he is denying, it may be said, is that acting unconscientiously could ever show a person to be better than would his acting conscientiously. I accept all this but feel that nonetheless I am not being unfair. For though Campbell-Garnett may distinguish degrees of unworthiness within unconscientious acts, my objection remains that he considers the alternatives only under the descriptions "acting conscientiously" and "acting unconscientiously", and, in remaining at this level of a description, he misses the whole issue. The difficulties arise when we consider what it is that the person being appraised must do in acting conscientiously and what the unconscientious alternative he chooses in fact is. I will sketch an example; it is an extreme one but it is precisely in the extreme cases that the issue arises.

#### An example

An S.S. officer sees a Jewish child escaping. He sincerely

(Continued from previous page) admiration for the person who conscientiously adheres to this outlook - one thinks, for instance, of St. Paul's admiration for the zeal of certain non-Christians.

believes that he ought to shoot the child; his moral conviction is that this child, a member of a polluting race, should be killed. But he cannot do it, he cannot shoot the child, he pretends that he has not seen and the child escapes.

Anyone considering this example will of course be delighted with the result of the officer's conduct. But what is to be said in appraisal of the man himself? Viewed in one way either he is a person who has not got the strength of his convictions, the guts to do the right thing as he sees it: he is a weak-willed man who has found morality too tough; or he is positively bad-willed, he has shown his willingness to do what he believes he ought not. In effect, this is the perspective offered by Professor Garnett. But it is not the only way in which the officer's conduct can be viewed, nor is it the only way it should be viewed.

Consider the way the officer conducted himself in a different light. Here is a man who, despite his position, associates and so on, still has sufficient humanity left in him that he cannot bring himself to commit an atrocity, to kill the helpless, even when he believes it right to do so. His moral beliefs are all wrong but his feelings and impulses are still morally healthy - he responds to that common humanity which his moral beliefs deny. Viewed in this way I think he appears much better than he would were he to behave conscientiously, for he, unlike a similarly placed conscientious man, still has a spark of sympathy, humanity and decency left.

But, it may be countered, you would not admire this man's unconscientiousness if he held satisfactory moral views so are you not being inconsistent in thinking better of the officer for being unconscientious when, as it happens, he subscribes to a bad morality? This objection involves exactly the move I am trying to counter: it treats unconscientiousness as a weakness which can be transferred from one set of moral beliefs to another, perhaps totally opposed, set of moral

beliefs without altering its character or the worth of its possessor. But the root of unconscientious behaviour may be vastly different in men whose moral views differ. (One cannot simply assume that they all lack "moral fibre" - whatever that dreadful substance might be. The officer under discussion, for instance, might submit to being tortured to death rather than betray a comrade.) It is not a mere accident that the officer acts unconscientiously when his compassion is touched and it is for his action as it is compassionate (not qua unconscientious) that he is to be approved. Conversely, had he acted conscientiously, it is not for his conscientiousness per se that I would have him condemned but for the lack of compassion and humanity which permitted him to follow his conscience here.

#### Squeamishness <sup>1.</sup>

I wish to deflect here a move which is often made: that is to denigrate compassionate unconscientious actions of this type by attributing them to a kind of squeamishness. The injustice of this is that it suggests that the agent's failure to do the right thing as he sees it is somehow selfish, self-regarding; as though what the agent really wished and acted to avoid were the painful feelings involved in compassion. But this is an unworthy distortion. Many emotions are directed to objects; if, for instance, one is upset at the prospect of another's suffering, it is the object of one's emotion, the other person's suffering, that one acts to relieve - not (except in those cases when compassion has been debased to sentimentality) one's own distress. And this is shown by the suffering individuals are willing to undergo to relieve the distress of others, suffering far greater than the pain to themselves attendant on compassion - and after all a bottle of whisky

1. B.A.O. Williams has some telling comments to make about accusations of moral squeamishness in Utilitarianism: For and Against.

would probably have negated that.

This obvious point needs to be insisted on because persistently those who deny that emotional motivation can be moral, treat "emotional actions" as more or less selfish. Thus Kant writes of those who "...find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work" (The Moral Law pp.63-64). There is very subtle distortion here. Firstly, the suggestion seems to be that these sympathetic souls act in order to find inner pleasure or at least only because they do find inner pleasure. This may be true of some but it is certainly not true of others, to some of whom sympathy is a constant source of pain. Secondly, there are many who take delight in the contentment of others whether it is "their own work" or not; theirs is an impersonal passion.

#### An evasion

In consistency Professor Garnett should, I think, accept that there is more to be said morally for the S.S. officer if he is conscientious than if he is humanely unconscientious. He may prefer an officer who is unconscientious but I do not think that he can consistently judge him to be of greater moral worth. But, in fact, uncompromising though Campbell Garnett's view sounds, there is reason to believe that he is not prepared to face the consequences of it. Thus he cites a story by Mark Twain "of two ladies who lied to protect a runaway slave even though believing it wrong to do so and fearing that they might suffer in hell for their sins" (op.cit.p.90). This appears to be an excellent example of unconscientious conduct leading one to think better of people than one would have done had they behaved conscientiously. Not so, according to Professor Garnett. His view is that because they were incapable of "philosophical thinking" they were unable to support their own deepest insights and so:

"they remained superficially of the traditional opinion that their action was wrong. But their choice was actually a conscientious one, true to the deeper levels of conscience, and we tend to endorse their decision because it is endorsed by our own consciences too" (pp.90-91).

This is an ingenious argument but it does look very much like an attempt to have things both ways - to make conscientiousness amiable as well as authoritative.

I have been unable to locate the story Professor Garnett mentions (he gives no title or reference) but from the outline he offers and from what I know of the rest of Mark Twain's work I am sure Professor Garnett's interpretation is an evasion of the issue which the story poses. The fact that the old ladies were in fear that "they might suffer in hell for their sins" suggests that they were far from being only "superficially" of the traditional opinion that their action was wrong, it suggests genuine conviction. And it testifies all the more to the admirable depth of compassion of these ladies which led them to opt for the slave, wrongdoing and the risk of hell. I am sure (in so far as I can be in the absence of the text) that their predicament must be very similar to that of Huckleberry Finn. And the precise nature of that predicament is very carefully brought out by Lionel Trilling in his essay on Huckleberry Finn in The Liberal Imagination:

"He (Huck) has only to consult his conscience, the conscience of a Southern boy in the middle of the last century, to know that he ought to return Jim to slavery. And as soon as he makes the decision according to conscience and decides to inform on Jim, he has all the warmly gratifying emotions of conscious virtue..... And when at last he finds he cannot endure his decision but must sacrifice the comforts of the pure heart and help Jim in his escape, it is not because he has acquired any new ideas about slavery.....he is as consciously wicked as any illicit lover of

romance and he consents to be damned for a personal devotion, never questioning the justice of the punishment he has incurred" (pp. 120-121).

This, rather than Professor Garnett's ingenuities about deeper levels of conscience, is an accurate and illuminating description of the moral situation involved.

I conclude that Huck, by his rejection of a bad morality, shows himself of greater moral worth than if he had adhered to that morality. For the morality he rejected was a narrow and in some ways inhuman morality which he was led to reject by his own widening sympathies and loyalty. And the life he led after rejecting it was one exhibiting moral traits, generosity and concern for others.

Contrary to Kant then I maintain that a person may be of reasonable moral worth even though he is not consciously "moral" (does not act "from duty"), even if he is consciously amoral and even if on occasion he regards his own conduct as immoral.

#### Unearned moral worth

Against this conclusion the objection which is likely to be most strongly urged is that it leaves moral worth unearned. Thus, for instance, the officer if he tries really hard to do what he believes to be right and succeeds is to be morally condemned, if he is weak he is to be thought better of.<sup>1</sup> Because the unconscientious officer has the luck to be compassionate he is to be judged better than a similarly placed conscientious officer who, however wicked his views, at least

1. Indeed the complaint might be made that on my account vice/bad morality plus incontinence equals virtue! I have in fact covered the points need to rebut this parody of my position. (a) I am not writing in praise of general incontinence; the root of the officer's unconscientious action, that he acts not from some general "lack of moral fibre" but from compassion, is the key point. (b) I am not arguing that he is to be held up as a virtuous ideal but only that he is better than a similarly placed person who combines bad morality and conscientiousness, for to be conscientious such a man must exercise various vices.

exhibited strength of will, an explicitly moral determination. Thus, the objection continues, on this account goodness is reduced to luck, moral worth to a fortuitously distributed talent - as though a person were to be admired for, say, being a certain height, something towards which he has done nothing. Surely in moral worth there should be equality of opportunity; here, at least, effort should be acknowledged.

In the first place I do not deny that luck and arbitrariness do enter into the distribution of compassion, benevolence and other traits of character. But neither is "strength of will" insulated against these chance influences: some people are naturally greater "triers" than are others. Secondly, in the objection it is too readily assumed that the officer's compassion is a mere matter of luck so that any merit gained by this trait is unearned. But it does not follow that because one has not consciously chosen to try to inculcate a certain trait that one has not contributed to its growth - a fact we have no difficulty recognizing with regard to vices. Habits of thought and reading, one's companions and conversations - all to some degree matters of choice, subject to control - are among the numerous factors which help to form character no less than one's solutions to practical problems or one's direct strivings of will; the officer's compassion may be something with which he has "mixed his labour". (The officer may, of course, have consciously cultivated compassion-for-gentiles, only to discover it spilt over to Jews.) Thirdly, it is not for this action alone but for the trait which it manifests that esteem is given. And a trait such as <sup>S</sup>compassion has sufficient bearing on human well-being to satisfy most people as to its moral relevance: to be moved by another's suffering, to be revolted at the prospect of killing a helpless human being, if any reactions deserve the title intrinsically desirable these do.

To this it may be replied that however agreeable and amiable these reactions and their associated traits may be, unless they are

joined with conscientiousness they are natural rather than moral: we may like their possessors but it is not to them that esteem is due, they are not to be rated highly in terms of moral worth. I have tried to anticipate part of his challenge by pointing out that we do contribute to our "unconscientious character". If this is regarded as unsatisfactory and the natural/moral division here proposed is accepted, then a corollary, I believe, is that sometimes the natural is more important than the moral, that we should have plenty of natural as well as moral goodness and that "naturally" good men are to be cherished and admired sometimes above moral men. For from the restriction of moral worth in this way it follows that one man might have greater moral worth than another yet be the less decent man. If, then, we wish to maintain the great importance of moral worth this narrow conception should be rejected.

### Conclusion

To briefly summarise: I have shown (a) that conscientiousness is not always absolutely necessary to moral worth, its absence on an occasion is not decisive grounds for disapprobation (b) Kant was wrong to see moral worth as an attribute of the will; in arriving at an adequate conception of human moral worth we need to look beyond the concept of "a will estimable in itself" to a more generous conception.

What is needed is a view of moral worth which can take account of the richness and complexity of the moral judgements which we do, which indeed we feel impelled to, make. I have shown that an approach centred on the virtues fulfils this requirement, it illuminates our moral judgements. I do not claim that this is the only tenable approach to moral worth; as later chapters will make clear, other ways of understanding moral worth seem to me fruitful. Thus, for instance, Professor Hepburn in Vision and Choice in Morality (A.S.S.V. 1956) has

made a good case for evaluating certain individuals by considering the "fable" of their lives and - an approach with wider application - other people may best be appraised by the quality of the ideal they have set themselves and their faithfulness to it. This approach is very effectively illustrated by Professor R. Holland in his discussion of Conrad's The Duel (in the paper already cited). My argument, then, is for the fruitfulness rather than the exclusiveness of the approach I advocate. In the following chapters I will develop further the advantages of this way of understanding moral worth. Particularly, I will stress the way in which it provides an adequate appreciation of the moral significance of thoughts, wishes and emotions. Before this can be clearly seen, however, a satisfactory understanding of virtues and their place in morality must be established.

CHAPTER 7    VIRTUES AND THE MORAL LIFE

There is widespread misunderstanding of the nature of the virtues which has contributed to their regrettable neglect by recent moral philosophers. This misunderstanding emerges in a number of ways, two of which I will consider here. The first concerns how the virtues are said to be acquired; the second, and obviously related way, is the place in the moral life attributed to the virtues.

Virtue and training

"The qualities that are accounted virtues are such as can be imparted to people by training and this is by and large how they are acquired." (J. Jackson: Virtues with Reason, Philosophy 1978, p.245.) Almost any discussion of the virtues and character contains a similar observation, for all who are convinced of the importance of virtues seem agreed on their source and place in child-rearing. Yet no evidence is ever offered in support of the thesis that the virtues can be/acquired by training. Presumably then it is taken to be not only true but obviously true. When one considers the diversity of qualities recognized as virtues this assumption appears questionable. While it may seem plausible that a person may be trained in courage or self-control, it is less plausible that one may be trained in kindness, generosity or gratitude, virtues which involve characteristic concerns and emotions.

Given that no evidence for the thesis is offered, rather than asking what training does achieve I will consider the question: what can training achieve? Two elements essential to training are repetition and correction and these suggest the limits to what can be achieved by training. The obvious places where training is essential are in the formation and development of skills and drills both of which are devel-

oped by supervised repetition: thus one can be trained as a plumber or trained in obedience. When we turn to the virtues what can training achieve here? It can (help to) form those aspects of the virtues which are analogous to skills and drills. Thus training has an important place in fostering self-control (though the natural consequences of lack of control also play a part): in breaking down habits of indulgence, in habituating people to fearful situations, in resisting tantrums, etc. In this way the basis for virtues of self-control may be laid, though how far short of virtue this falls the discussion of courage in chapter 9 will show.

Kindness, generosity and other virtues of this type present a different case. Children can be trained to go through the motions of virtuous acts, to offer their seats to old ladies, to share their sweets with others, to express thanks for kindnesses done to them. Further, they can be trained not only to react in the appropriate ways but also to be sensitive to occasions of virtue: to notice standing old ladies and the helpfulness of friends. (Moreover, training may produce discomfort and "guilt" feelings when the trainee fails to produce the "correct" response. The inducement of these feelings is often an important instrument of training.) But to stop here is to stop far short of the virtues; the essentials concerns, emotions and thoughts of (say) the generous man cannot be imparted by training. Training may be an essential precondition and even a vital occasion for the acquisition of virtues but it cannot of itself impart virtue.

Those who maintain that virtues are imparted by training are, I believe, often guided, more or less consciously:

"by the idea of taking advantage of the temporary weakness of an embryonic personality to see to it that it contracts certain virtuous "leanings" or certain good habits, which will become so well anchored as to be impossible ever to erase" (Servais Pinckaers: Virtue is not a Habit p.79).

(And Pinckaers correctly concludes that if an educator did achieve this "he would still not have helped generate true virtue in that personality, but only automatism, strict habits".) Many would indignantly deny that they mean any such thing. But it is only on such an assumption that some of their remarks become intelligible. Thus, for instance, the "difficulty", even impossibility of a truly just man acting unjustly is spoken of as though he were under some sort of psychological compulsion - as if virtue were a habit he could not break. Similarly, when the binding force of morality is located in an agent's concerns and leanings the authority of morals is in danger of being reduced to a psychological mechanism built into the personality - I believe Miss Jackson falls into just this error at a crucial stage in the paper just cited. Does it ever become impossible for the just man to act inequitably in the sense suggested here? Surely not. When a Luther claims that he can do no other it is crass to invite him to try harder. The "impossibility" of vicious acts to the virtuous does not lie in the strength of a habit so much as in the nature of the good man's vision, in his way of understanding viciousness.

#### Education in vice

Thinking about the vices helps to clear the head here. Supposing one set out to rear a child in some vice, what would need to be done? Training to react viciously and to notice opportunities for vice would of course be important: one would try to get the child's fingers to itch at the sight of a protruding wallet. But this would not be enough. If the child is to become truly vicious much more needs to be done. Not only must his fingers itch, but his eyes must glow. It is essential that he comes to see (and feel) the world aright, and here there is an evidently educational <sup>1.</sup> task: the child must be introduced

1. As sketched here, perhaps more an indoctrinational task.

to key insights and concepts. He should be given the opportunity to see that those who leave their wallets and purses in conspicuous places are "mugs", "asking for it" and so "fair game". In developing the child's descriptive and discriminatory abilities in these ways one is also helping to educate his emotions: he will learn to be amused at the downfall of the trusting ("the gullible"), to envy the goods of others, to admire the efficient, soundless burglar, to take pride in a "job" well done. As his education proceeded one would hope that he had dishonesty on his mind, that he daydreamed of it, that his wishes surrounded it and that he had begun to employ those internal strategies which constitute moral turpitude: that, for instance, he misrepresented his desires and whims as needs, as essentials to his well-being.<sup>1</sup>

The advantages of this vicious education over training are numerous. One may hope for initiative, even creativity, from one's charge; not content with responding in the ways in which he was trained, he will seek out new modes of viciousness by the light of his corrupted vision, he will discern fresh instances of gullibility and folly, discover new and pressing needs - necessitating the "use" of others' goods. Further, his life will not be broken up into disconnected reactions or decisions. Vicious action will flow quite naturally out of his customary mode of thought and feeling (provided he has developed sufficient patience and courage) and will, in its turn, feed his emotional and inner life. Consequently, if things go well for him, he will emerge a well-integrated person taking satisfaction in the vicious life.

### Virtues and choice

The virtues are often described as dispositions of choice, but with the illumination provided by considering vices it can be seen

1. On this, see the excellent remarks concluding Richard Wolheim's Needs, Desires and Moral Turpitude, R.I. of Phil. Lectures, vol.8, 1973-74, Nature and Conduct ed. R.S.Peters

that, while choice has a certain centrality, the possession of a virtue goes much beyond the disposition to choose. The fully generous man, for instance, is generous in his thoughts and wishes as well as his choices and deeds; his generosity is revealed in what he notices, it is expressed in his feelings, in what amazes or amuses him. (This seems to be the truth in Aristotle's contrast between continence and virtue: the man who possesses a non-duty virtue - ie. one which does not involve the satisfaction of duties and commitments - fully, is completely at one with his choices, he does not even wish to do otherwise. Cf. Nicomachian Ethics Book 7, chapter 9.)

It is a corollary of this, I believe, that the full possession of a virtue is not wholly within our voluntary control. Certainly the virtues cannot be acquired simply by effort of will, by striving for them. Often an obliqueness and degree of passivity is required:

"It is hoped that they will come but although obstacles to their coming may be voluntarily diminished, they cannot be obtained by direct willing" (John Laird: An Enquiry into Moral Notions, p.123). This seems clearly true with regard to our reactions to and evaluations of other people. Often, despite our strivings, we are unjust and unsympathetic to others. Trying harder ("I must make myself be sympathetic") may only make matters worse. To put oneself in the way of a more charitable vision and to hope may be the best one can do here. (On trying to form a just picture of others, the last section of this chapter has much to say. See also an interesting discussion of this in Mary Midgley's article, op.cit.)

What I hope this chapter has so far brought out is that the many who think that a person can be trained in virtue have a very "thin" conception of what it is to possess a virtue. I have briefly indicated those aspects of the virtues which elude training and it is just these

aspects upon which many of the following pages will concentrate. In particular, I would stress that in assuming we can train people in virtue we ignore that growth in vision, understanding and feeling which is so important to developing into a person of high moral worth.

### Sidgwick's conception of the place of the virtues

A common view of the place of the virtues in the moral life is expounded by Sidgwick. In the light of the more adequate conception of the virtues arrived at in the first part of this chapter, I will examine and criticise this view.

According to Sidgwick, in so far as actions are "perfectly deliberate" we do not need any "special virtuous habits", all that is needed is knowledge of "what is right and best to be done" together with a sufficiently strong desire to do it.

"But in order to fulfil our duties thoroughly, we are obliged to act during part of our lives suddenly and without deliberation: on such occasions there is no room for moral reasoning, and sometimes not even for explicit moral judgement, so that in order to act virtuously we require such particular habits and dispositions as are denoted by the names of the special virtues: and it is a duty to foster and develop these in whatever way experience shows this to be possible." (Methods of Ethics Book III, chapter 2 "Virtue and Duty".)

The virtues then are a kind of moral "fail-safe" device.

The picture of good moral choice and agency implicit in Sidgwick's discussion appears to be as follows: the morally good man has a good will, he seeks to do whatever he has overriding reason to do; he has no tendencies or dispositions to perform certain sorts of action except as practical reason dictates from circumstance to circumstance; apparently either he has no projects or long-term commitments or these are not regarded as morally relevant. The good moral agent is, under

normal circumstances, a calculator,<sup>1</sup> he works out which action of the available alternatives has the best consequences and performs it ("the right action"). Unfortunately, there is not always time to calculate, sometimes immediate action is required. Realizing this, the morally good man cultivates dispositions to respond in the right way in such circumstances. These dispositions to respond in the right way are the virtues.

This model of good moral agency appears to enjoy widespread support among moral philosophers although - perhaps because - it is rarely made explicit.

Sidgwick presents this account not as a "rational reconstruction" nor as a schema for the justification of moral choice, but as a model to be adhered to in practice. Yet the most striking fact about it is how alien it is to the moral lives of most good people. Put against any good novelist's description of the moral life it appears strangely remote and distorted. In the first place, on this account the moral life is extraordinarily staccato, broken up into many discrete moral situations each of which, when time allows, requires calculation and judgement. And this falsifies the normal moral life which has far greater continuity and flow, is far more long-term in nature than this model allows. Normally in our lives actions flow out of our feelings and customary ways of seeing and thinking - but not in the stimulus - response pattern to which Sidgwick's view seems to restrict uncalculated action. We act in the world we see, most often without calculation but nonetheless thoughtfully and intelligently. Which brings me to the second major defect of Sidgwick's account. Central to Sidgwick's model are mathematical and mechanical metaphors, images of balance and

1. I infer that Sidgwick sees the good moral agent as a calculator not from the above passage but from his overall approach and his support for Utilitarianism in the final section of Methods.

calculation.<sup>1</sup> But these are highly misleading metaphors suggesting as they do unproblematic values, scores (or "weights") which have simply to be summed and balanced. Calculation, in so far as it plays a part in the moral life, is normally subsidiary to insight and understanding. As Iris Murdoch has eloquently argued<sup>2</sup> the metaphors which most intensify our understanding of the moral life are those of vision and attention. We do what we see to be right; once we are satisfied with the description, the vision of the situation, then normally the action just follows. (Of course I recognize that vision alone is not enough, there are still problems of weakness of will and so on, but as these apply equally to "calculation" I shall ignore them here.)

I am not, of course, suggesting that the moral life is unproblematic. Far from it. The account I am offering brings out the constant struggle to see things truthfully whereas the calculative approach suggests a far more sporadic business. When we are confronted by a serious moral problem then generally this too is best understood by employing metaphors of attention and vision. To illustrate this I have chosen part of a justly celebrated description of a crisis in the moral life, George Eliot's description of Dorothea's crisis in Middlemarch. Dorothea has gone to her husband, Mr. Casaubon, full of love and sympathy and has been repulsed by his "unresponsive hardness". As George Eliot observes: "In such a crisis as this, some women begin to hate". Dorothea shows her considerable moral worth in this crisis.

"Dorothea sat almost motionless in her meditative struggle while the evening slowly deepened into night. But the struggle changed continually, as that of a man who begins with a movement towards striking and ends with conquering his desire to strike. The

1. This is an overall impression and not easy to "prove" by quoting short passages (though see p.382). Utilitarians are explicit about this (and it is not restricted to them).
2. In the essays in The Sovereignty of the Good and in the paper Vision and Choice in Morality op.cit.

energy that would animate a crime is not more than is wanted to inspire a resolved submission, when the noble habit of the soul reasserts itself. That thought with which Dorothea had gone out to meet her husband - her conviction that he had been asking about the possible arrest of all his work, and that the answer must have wrung his heart, could not be long without rising beside the image of him, like a shadowy monitor looking at her anger with sad remonstrance. It cost her a litany of pictured sorrows and of silent cries that she might be the mercy for those sorrows - but the resolved submission did come....." And she goes to meet her husband. (Chapter 42. Penguin Edition p.464.)

As George Eliot shows so well, the metaphors which best capture Dorothea's struggle are those of vision: she is attempting to see her husband truthfully and lovingly. When her vision finally clears and steadies, the resolved submission comes and the action follows. The "noble habit of the soul" reasserts itself in this struggle for vision, it is here that the virtues have a central place. In arriving at a just view of her husband, Dorothea had to eschew self-pity and self-indulgence, overcome resentment, subdue hurt pride and spurned affection. Courage, patience, humility, generosity and compassion were all demanded by and exercised in this pursuit. Focusing on the exercise of virtues in the pursuit of vision, and consequent resolution, rather than seeing them as simply the source of habitual responses, may enable us to accord virtues their proper place in the moral life and thereby achieve a deeper understanding of moral worth.

#### The pursuit of "vision"

In concluding this chapter, I wish to argue that the pursuit of vision can be morally valuable even if such vision is never acted on; "internal" activity can be morally fine even in the absence of good

consequences. The argument is based on an example offered by Iris Murdoch in her essay Sovereignty of the Good, the whole of which is relevant here.

M is D's mother-in-law, she regards D as lacking in dignity and refinement, as pert and familiar, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. However, she behaves perfectly to D not allowing her views to emerge. D and her husband go far away. Time passes and M reconsiders her view of D. She realizes that she is old-fashioned and conventional, perhaps narrow-minded and snobbish. And in an act of attention she reflects deliberately about D until gradually her vision changes. She now realizes that D was not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful. And it is to be assumed that her final judgement is correct. But of course it never emerges in action for D is far away and in any case how could it when she had already behaved perfectly?

I do not suggest that such attention should be directed at everyone one has met, clearly this would be unrealistic and unnecessary. But D is M's daughter-in-law. Nor am I claiming that pursuit of vision is normally isolated from conduct: clearly it is not (witness Dorothea), indeed one would convict of daydreaming and sentimentalising a person whose reflection was systematically insulated from expression. Nor am I claiming that this pursuit of vision is good whatever the consequences - there is an evident danger that such directed reflection may degenerate into fantasy. I do contend, however, that this pursuit is fine even in the absence of good consequences - as I will argue in the following chapter that having certain feelings is creditable even where one is unable to give them expression.

A consequentialist may object that such attention is not commendable. For not only does it lack utility ("The recollection of the past is only useful by way of provision for the future" - Johnson) but it is a source of pain and fruitless self-reproach; as such it may

even be blameworthy.

Most people, however, are impressed by this example and it is open to them to answer the objection in its own terms. Firstly, this act of attention may make M realize how fallible her judgement is and so help her to judge better in future. Secondly, M's action has a kind of parasitic value in that it contributes to building up a desirable trait, one which is an aid to future useful action.

I think both these points are correct but there is a danger in invoking them, the danger that we will distort this action in our eagerness to secure its consequentialist credentials. M's act of attention is creditable for what it is, not just for its possible remote consequences. M misjudged her daughter-in-law, she wronged her, and had the courage and open-mindedness to reflect and correct her view and thus to do D justice. That is what is admirable. The recollection of the past may only be useful by way of provision for the future but the value of reflection directed to the past is not exhausted by its utility. There is a value in doing justice to the past.

Often we wrong people in our thoughts - and feelings - no less than in our actions. Time and again we make hasty judgements about others, we assume that their actions are selfish, inconsiderate or malicious when further thought and attention would show us the error of our views: we regularly misconstrue an individual's motives and intentions, our pride, prejudice or carelessness preventing us from doing the person justice, giving him his due. Certainly such thoughts do not of themselves injure those we misjudge. But even if we never act on these thoughts, there is a clear sense in which we wrong the persons we judge by failing to give them their due.<sup>1</sup> On realizing our error we may quite properly feel considerable remorse.

Misjudgement of this kind is a failure to take other people

1. For an interesting discussion of related topics, see Joel Feinberg's Non-comparative Justice, P.R.1974.

seriously, it ignores their claim to proper attention. Care in judging and a willingness to review our judgements of others is a way of acknowledging the respect that is due to them. <sup>1</sup>.

In discussion it has been claimed that the force of the example depends entirely on M's reflection resulting in a better, more pleasing picture of D and that we would feel differently about it if the judgements before and after reflection were reversed. And the suggestion appeared to be that this difference of reaction would be due to the original example being "nicer". I think we would feel differently about this example if it were so transformed, but this difference is not due simply to a loss of "niceness". For in the transformed example M has no longer wronged D. She has still misrepresented her but not in such a way as to give her less than her due. Hence the example no longer exhibits both a righting of injustice and respect for the truth but only the latter. The asymmetry between the great concern we have not to give people less than their due and our more relaxed attitude to giving them more than their due is rightly exhibited throughout life; in the former case we commit an injustice, in the latter someone is simply lucky. This said, it might still be the case that reflection resulting in a less favourable view of someone was an instance of moral progress: to "see through" attractive wickedness may be an important moral breakthrough (eg. Edmund's reappraisal of the Crawfords in Mansfield Park).

Alteration in our vision of others which does not find some expression in action is rare - although an important parallel exists in the study of literature, as will be brought out in the final chapter. Normally, adjusting our vision of others is part of our continuing relationship with them and of course a shift in vision will frequently

1. A number of these ideas will be taken up again in the final chapter.

carry with it an alteration in our attitude and our feelings. The moral quality of feelings, especially those directed towards other people, is central to a person's moral worth, as the next chapter will be devoted to showing.

CHAPTER 8    VIRTUES AND EMOTIONS

"For each specific excellence of character there will be some specific emotion whose field it is," argues J.O. Urmson in Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean (A.P.Q. 1973 p.223). The position is defended with ingenuity but ultimately I find the contention unconvincing: the virtues are far less homogeneous than this theory requires. Certain virtues such as gratitude and courage are essentially bound up with specific emotions, but many other virtues have no "corresponding" emotion, they are identified in a different way: thus in being merciful, for instance, a person may be influenced by any of a range of feelings.

Recognizing that there is no very general correspondence between specific virtues and specific emotions, many have wrongly ignored the emotional elements comprised in many virtues and vices. This neglect is regrettable: what a man delights in, what he is amused or distressed by, these things reveal and are a part of his virtues and vices; they are an important element of moral worth.

The neglected aspects of emotions

The neglect by moral philosophers of the place of the emotions in the possession of virtues and vices is due in some measure to the fact that they:

"have of late years considered chiefly the tendency of affections, and have given little attention to the relation in which they stand to the cause which excites them. In common life, however, when we judge of any person's conduct and the sentiments which directed it, we constantly consider them under both these aspects. When we blame in another man the excess of love, of grief, of resentment, we not only consider the ruinous effects which they tend to produce, but the little occasion which was given for them.

The merit of his favourite, we say is not so great, his misfortune is not so dreadful, his provocation is not so extraordinary as to justify so violent a passion" (Adam Smith Theory of the Moral Sentiments 1.1.3,8.).

To this we should add that not only the violence but also the object of an emotion is noted in our evaluations. No less than the violence, the object of an emotion may reveal and be part of a vice or virtue: the joy of a man in his rival's downfall expresses his envy and malice, his amusement when he detects his own pretensions shows his growing humility, his lack of feeling marks his present moral limits and so on.

Adam Smith's remarks remain substantially true: philosophers "of late years" have neglected most of these aspects of the emotions. Reading many moral philosophers would suggest that the only possible criticisms of emotions are that they may "overcome" a man and prevent him performing a worthy action or that they may "impel" a person to do evil. Similarly, the value of emotions is seen in their tendency to promote good actions; they are seen as useful "prods" to action. In this way a man's emotions can come to be regarded as almost external to him: man becomes divorced from his emotions <sup>1</sup>. which are seen as (mere) mechanisms to be altered to produce better actions - and to be altered primarily by training.

### Correcting the errors

A full rejoinder would involve a discussion of far flung issues. I will try to make the essential points briefly. At the back of the inadequate range of evaluations of emotions lies an erroneous account of the emotions themselves. This account may be summarised thus: an emotion is a thought (has a "cognitive core") plus a painful or

1. Relevant here are B.A.O. Williams' comments in the section on integrity in Utilitarianism: For and Against.

pleasant sensation plus impulses towards or away from its object. Thus the emotion, the feeling of compassion, for instance, is conceived as a kind of painful sensation accompanying attention to suffering. Hence it can come to seem as if nothing substantial is lost if a person recognizes distress and seeks to alleviate it yet does not "feel" anything.

In fact compassion is far more like a painful thought; the way of seeing and what is "felt" are not distinct, separable items. The emotions are themselves a form of understanding,<sup>1</sup> a mode of engagement with the world.

Once it is recognized that the emotions are a form of understanding then progress towards their adequate moral evaluation can be made. To be amused by an accident, even if one goes to help, is to understand that event in a different way to being distressed by it; we do not here have a shared understanding linked, fortuitously as it were, to different sensations. Hence a man might reasonably reproach himself for being amused, for example, even though he did whatever was required. Likewise a man might reproach himself - whether others would be right to reproach him is, of course, a different matter - for feeling jealous on some occasion, even though he dismisses action as ridiculous, for the emotion betrays a distorted vision, for example, a proprietorial view of his wife. (One may, of course, disagree about this particular example, a more acceptable construction may be put on the significance of jealousy. The point is that the emotion should not be dismissed as irrelevant.)

Because emotions are ways of being aware of the world to alter them generally requires education, not training; not drill and exercise, but insight, a growth in vision, is needed. In daily life we recognise this need. A good deal of the work that goes on in English lessons in

1. Jenny Teichman's valuable remarks on remorse have been of great help here cf. Punishment and Remorse Philosophy 1973.

schools is devoted, with however little success, precisely to the education of the emotions, to learning to discriminate amongst and in our feelings, to recognize the shallow and shoddy, to distinguish sentiment from sentimentality, etc. By sharing our feelings with others, by attempting to articulate what we feel and by responding to the articulation of others' feelings; by coming to share the vision of those objects of emotion presented by our literary classics, our own emotions may become refined and moralised. For the precise nature of our feelings is bound up with the forms of expression. The poet or novelist in presenting us with a new form of expression may open up new possibilities of feeling.

The emotions are not only modes of awareness, they can also reveal not simply recognize something about the world and ourselves. "One's jitters may be more revelatory than one's cooler arguments",<sup>1</sup> one's distress more than one's explicit judgement. And the way one's emotions may be morally more advanced than one's explicit judgement has been brought out in chapter 6, in the case of Huckleberry Finn.

### Ethology and emotions

There is a new threat to our recognition of these truths which stems from the recent strong interest in ethology. In their concern to stress the continuity between man and the animals some of those influenced by ethology have operated, implicitly or explicitly, with the following view of man: in man there is a basis of (animal) feeling, instinct and impulse on top of which is formed a super-structure of culture which "tames" or "directs" these "animal" impulses and inclinations.<sup>2</sup> This view appears to be spreading as more attempts

1. On this whole area see Bantock: Education, Culture and the Emotions.
2. About two years ago in discussion Mary Midgley seemed happy to accept this view when I attributed it to her. Her recent article, cited elsewhere, suggests she may no longer hold this position.

are made to discover those feelings and instincts which man and the animals "share"; among those commonly suggested are family and protective instincts, aggression, grief and mourning. However, what this view does is to totally underrate the role of culture and education. Culture and education do much more than offer refined or controlled ways of expressing such feelings as are shared with animals; they do more than provide new, symbolic channels for pre-existing impulses. What they do - at least when successful - is to totally transform these feelings and impulses so that animal feeling is transmuted to moral sentiment. And this transformation is possible only through education, through initiation into language and culture which opens up new ways of understanding and feeling. Only when this is appreciated can the part played by the emotions in the possession of virtues be properly understood: acquiring virtues involves being initiated into certain modes of feeling.

With these basic points established, one is in a position to acknowledge that the importance of the emotional aspects of the moral life are not exhausted by their contribution (positive or negative) to choices and their consequences. Thus, for instance, it is because an unfeeling man lacks the form of understanding constituted by compassion, because he is not aware in this way, that he is less than ideal and not simply because he lacks a useful "booster" to good action. We can in the same way approach the evaluation of perverse, immature and even wicked emotions.

#### Actions "expressive" of emotions

I will now proceed to establish a further point: the moral importance of some choices and actions is best understood by seeing them as expressions of certain emotions and feelings rather than by trying to account for the value of the feelings by citing the value of the actions to which they give rise; these actions are morally significant in that

they express certain emotions - emotions which do not derive their moral value (primarily) from the actions they "produce".

Stated thus baldly the idea of actions being virtuous (or vicious) in so far as they are expressive of emotions may seem somewhat mysterious. A careful examination of "expressive" as it is here being used should dispel any puzzlement.

I will deal briefly with two types of case, these are examples of actions expressive of emotions but they are only peripheral to my argument.

(1) Fidgetting, nail-biting, etc. may be expressive of worry and related emotions. These are not generally actions we consciously perform and are perhaps best regarded as symptoms of an emotion rather than expressions of it. Such actions may impinge on moral appraisal in that they direct our attention to an emotion which may be inappropriate or excessive - should I be so concerned about winning this game ? etc.

(2) A child, or even adult, who has had his wishes frustrated goes to his room and kicks and hammers at the wall. Assuming that the house is empty and so the action is not intended as a communication and that the wall is unmarred, one might still wish to criticise the action: it is an index of excessive and uncontrolled emotion (though naturally we may be relieved that the feeling has been "taken out" on the inanimate rather than the animate!).

#### Gestures of emotions

Centrally I am concerned with those actions which are intended by the agent as expressions of emotion, as gestures carrying the message that the agent feels certain emotions. (A number of the gestures I am about to examine may have become in certain circumstances mere conventions, forms of etiquette. I propose to leave aside this complication for ease of presentation.)

A kiss is an action the value of which - leaving aside the

question of sexual pleasure - normally resides in the emotion it expresses. Exactly what depth of emotion it is used to express will depend, of course, on context and convention - endearments and embraces flow more freely in some circles than others. There is nothing problematic about what it means for a kiss to express emotion: it expresses an emotion in much the same way as speaking does. Kissing and saying "I love you" are often interchangeable: from giver to receiver they convey the same "message". And the moral importance of talk and the centrality to it of conveying emotion are indisputable.

Love is not valued because it produces such words or kisses, the words and kisses are significant and valuable because they show the person to whom they are directed what the agent feels towards him/her. And, again omitting sexual considerations, the actions are valued only in so far as they are sincere expressions of that emotion. If it is suspected that they are insincere, that the emotion they purport to express is feigned, then these actions become worthless, even odious. That Judas chose to betray Jesus with a kiss magnified his crime for he abused the gesture expressive of the deepest friendship.

An action then may be expressive of an emotion in that it is a communication to another person of one's feelings towards him/her. Such cases are perfectly unmysterious. They are also of enormous importance in our lives and are quite properly the object of moral appraisal. A hateful glance may be every bit as vicious as a kick, an encouraging smile or word as virtuous as an expensive gift. All this once stated seems glaringly obvious, but in ethics it is stated rarely and so very often ignored.

#### Emotions valued for their consequences?

There may be an attempt to dispute the argument at one remove. It may be conceded that the actions I have mentioned may be valued as

expressions of emotions but contended that the emotions of which they are expressions are themselves valued because of the actions - and hence consequences - they promote. This suggestion has been comprehensively demolished by Adam Smith who is worth quoting at length here:

"For as to be the object of hatred and indignation gives more pain than all the evil which a brave man can fear from his enemies, so there is a satisfaction in the consciousness of being beloved, which, to a person of delicacy and sensibility, is of more importance to happiness, than all the advantage which he can expect to derive from it. What character is so detestable as that of one who takes pleasure to sow dissension among friends and to turn their most tender love into mortal hatred? Yet wherein does the atrocity of this so much abhorred injury consist? Is it in depriving them of the frivolous good offices, which had their friendship continued, they might have expected from one another? It is in depriving them of that friendship itself, in robbing them of each other's affections from which both derived so much satisfaction; it is in disturbing the harmony of their hearts and putting an end to that happy commerce which had before subsisted between them. These affections, that harmony, this commerce, are felt, not only by the tender and delicate, but by the rudest vulgar of mankind, to be of more importance to happiness than all the little services which could be expected to flow from them." (Theory of the Moral Sentiments section 1.ii.4.1. p.39.)

Even in the light of these remarks a certain dissatisfaction may be expressed: "Love is not a feeling, love can be put to the test". And certainly gestures are frequently not enough to show love for another; often unless certain substantial actions are performed we will refuse to believe that one person loves another no matter what quantities of kisses, endearments or protestations he offloads. (A similar point will be made about gratitude later in this chapter.) But it does not

follow from this that we value love only in so far as it is "productive" of these actions. We may be glad of a wage rise but rejoice still more in a lesser gift which is intended to show that someone cares for us and wishes us well. Indeed we would often choose the impotent good will of one person rather than the good done to us by another who is acting only because he believes he ought to. (I vividly recall the indignation of a girl who was told by a Christian friend that she cared for her for Christ's sake. The girl insisted that she wished to be loved for herself or not at all - though clearly no difference in "benefit" would accrue from this; in fact given the mutability of friendships the benefit might be less dependable.) We care what others feel towards us, not just about what they do.

#### Emotions and temptation

We admire many emotional gestures the more because of the impulse most people would experience to act and feel in a contrary way. For instance, a defeated man sincerely congratulates his rival who has ousted him in some important way. In offering his congratulations, he is acknowledging the qualities of the "victor" and expressing his desire that the person should flourish. In such circumstances, many of us would experience great temptation to contrary emotions: to envy, even malice. By contrast, the defeated man gives evidence of his generosity of spirit. (Naturally we would prefer that a defeated man muttered conventional congratulations rather than issue the snarl that would be the natural expression <sup>1.</sup> of his current emotion towards his rival; but the man whose congratulations to his victor are heartfelt seems the more admirable.

1. There is no space to explore it here but there does appear to be an interesting distinction between natural expressions of emotion, such as smiles and embraces, and taught expressions which are tied to the conventions of a society eg. the sending of cards and flowers.

### Avowals of emotion

The examples I have so far considered of actions which gain their moral significance from the emotions they express have all involved the transmission of a "message" from one person to another who is the object of the emotion in question. In addition, a gesture can convey an emotion felt about one person to someone else: a knowing glance, a contemptuous look can very effectively destroy a reputation - "Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer".....

There are, however, important emotional gestures which do not fit into this pattern in that they do not seem to be a communication with a specific person or persons. Erecting memorials, placing flowers on graves, holding commemorative services are instances. Here the actions gain our respect, when they do, as avowals or declarations of emotion: they are a declaration to the world at large that the dead person is still remembered and loved, that the sacrifice of soldiers is not forgotten, etc. The emotions these gestures express are important: many wish to be remembered after they are dead, it would reduce their happiness now if they felt their death would result in them being soon forgotten. Similarly it is right for a country to honour those who have fought worthily for it.

Such gestures also have valuable side effects: they remind us of the qualities we admire and wish to cultivate; they may have a cathartic effect, being a valuable "airing" of emotions that would otherwise fester; they may reinforce our sense of community. These side-effects are of considerable importance but they should not blind us to the moral value which such gestures have as avowals, as expressions of morally creditable emotions.

Having explained what it is for actions to be expressive of emotions, I now turn to an examination of an important moral quality, gratitude. I will show that many grateful actions are properly admired

because they are expressions of an admirable sentiment. This examination will, I hope, reinforce the points made in the preceding sections as well as illuminating the virtue of gratitude.

### Gratitude <sup>1.</sup>

Hobbes made gratitude his fourth law of nature, it was central to Adam Smith's account of praise and praiseworthiness, but now it seems that little interest is taken in this quality. I believe this to be just one instance in a regrettable neglect of the moral sentiments. Part of the difficulty, I will suggest, is that with gratitude, as with other qualities, the quality has been so interpreted as to disguise the importance of the sentiment which is in fact central to it.

### Sidgwick' account

Gratitude, according to Sidgwick, is the "duty of requiting benefits", of repaying services rendered to you. <sup>2.</sup> His view seems to be widely shared, as is perhaps indicated by the phrase "a debt of gratitude".

Sidgwick states that this "duty": "seems to be recognized wherever morality extends". He goes on to consider:

"whether we are only bound to repay service or whether we owe the special affection called Gratitude; which seems generally to combine kindly feelings and eagerness to requite with some sort of emotional recognition of superiority, as the giver of benefits is in a position of superiority to the receiver" (Methods p.260).

1. Many of the ideas contained in this section are expressed in Gratitude Fred.R.Berger Ethics vol.85 1974-5. I have learnt much from this article although many of the ideas I express were arrived at independently, approached from a different angle. At this distance in time I find it impossible to distinguish which ideas are which.
2. Methods of Ethics p.259.

His answer is somewhat inconclusive but it is, I hope to show, instructive that he should cast the question in this form. Sidgwick concedes that we do not like "too exact a measure of duty" here:

"In so far, however, as conflict of claims makes it needful to be exact, we think perhaps that an equal return is what the duty of gratitude requires, or rather willingness to make such a return if it be required, and if it is in our power to make it without neglecting prior claims" (op.cit. p.260).

Sidgwick's discussion is a striking example of the way in which concentrating on "duty" can warp our understanding of admirable qualities. In this instance it does so in a number of ways.

(1) Immediately it focuses attention on performance, on the doing and this effects a double distortion. Firstly, it does not sufficiently specify the proper objects of gratitude. Supposing that in an attempt to stimulate the economy the government cuts taxes or to attract customers to his new shop an owner gives articles away free. In each case I may be glad of the benefit bestowed on me yet in neither case does gratitude appear appropriate. Conversely, we may be very grateful for efforts made by a friend on our behalf even though they prove ineffective and do us no good. As Hazlitt Observes: "We are thankful for good-will rather than for service, for the motive rather than the quantum received".<sup>1</sup> Gratitude involves the emotional recognition of the good-will of one's benefactor.

Secondly, in giving primacy to the actions of requiting benefits the account demotes the emotion which is central to this quality; for it is from the sentiment expressed by them that grateful actions gain their chief significance.

(2) Sidgwick leads one further astray for in conceiving of gratitude

1. The Spirit of Obligations in William Hazlitt ed. Alexander Ireland p.312.

as a "duty" he effectively destroys the category of generous actions, of gifts and kindnesses. For what is left of generosity or kindness if the recipient has a duty to requite benefits, if the benefactor has a right to requital? Generous actions, in this light are seen to be merely disguised loans and the giving and receiving of simple favours and kindnesses is revealed as a system of implicit contracts (carrying the further temptation of one-up-manship for "the giver of benefits is in a position of superiority to the receiver").<sup>1</sup>

### Duty-model as symptom

The duty-model distorts gratitude but here - as I believe elsewhere - that model is a symptom of a deeper malady, a sign not only of a philosophical but, I believe, of a moral limitation also. The nature of this is hinted at in Sidgwick's account of the sentiment of gratitude as involving the acknowledgement of the superiority of the giver. It is stated openly by Kant in his Lectures on Ethics:

"Men are shamed by favours. If I receive a favour, I am placed under an obligation to the giver; he has a call upon me because I am indebted to him. We all blush to be obliged. Noble-minded men accordingly refuse to accept favours in order not to put themselves under an obligation" (p.218).

Kant rightly adds: "But this attitude predisposes the mind to ingratitude". And yet, although he recognises the dangers which stem from being thus "noble-minded", throughout the Lectures Kant seems to find such a disposition morally admirable.

1. In fairness it should be noted that Adam Smith, for instance, held that we have a duty to be grateful yet that the original benefactor has no right to gratitude (T.M.S.11.ii.1.3). But this is the use of "duty" I criticised in chapter 4 and it makes exposition very difficult and often leads to confusion. I believe that both Sidgwick and Kant fall into the error I wish to reveal here cf. for instance, Kant's remarks quoted later in this section.

The limitations of this ideal of fierce independence emerge in the brilliant portrayal of Mr. Crawley in Trollope's Last Chronicle of Barset. In his refusal to accept the kindness and generosity of others, through a desire not to be indebted, Mr. Crawley has indeed a kind of bleak grandeur. But what he lacks, and what is lacking in Kant's image of noble-mindedness, is a sense of shared humanity. Related to this is an inability to grasp the real nature of kindnesses, an inability from which, in the Lectures at least, Kant appears to suffer also. Thus in the Lectures (p.222) Kant can assert: "The man who bestows favours can do so either in order to make the recipient indebted to him or as an expression of his duty" - as though this exhausted the possibilities.

Given these views, it is no wonder that Kant does not give a satisfactory account of gratitude, although he recognizes the need for it. Indeed reading Kant's comments one realizes why gratitude is so important, for they clearly reveal one great temptation to ingratitude, to resenting gifts and help, to even perhaps transforming the good will of one's benefactor into ill-will directed at him. It is the temptation to regard people as either independent or indebted - a temptation which is embodied in the obsession many of us can develop to "even up the score" for good or ill.<sup>1</sup> But it is precisely of this view that a man must rid himself if he is to be truly grateful.

Implicit in the sentiment of gratitude is an acceptance of the fact that "no man is an island entire and complete"; human beings need each other's help and good will. The grateful man has the grace to be able to accept kindnesses as gifts not loans or patronage. Often it is as blessed to receive gratefully as to give - a fact to which Kant, for instance, seems often blind.

1. An obsession illustrated by innumerable Westerners.

### Models of gratitude

The account of gratitude put forward by Sidgwick and implicit in Kant gains its plausibility from concentrating on a narrow range of cases which are exalted into the model of gratitude. The model suggested is of one person giving another some commodity, money or perhaps labour, and later, when the position of need is reversed, gratitude is seen to consist in "paying back" the benefactor by giving a similar commodity and thus evening up the score. There are of course cases like this and I will discuss them, but I think that concentrating on them can be misleading.

Consider instead the following type of instance which I feel constitutes a more illuminating model: a person is in great distress, perhaps over the death of a relative, and receives comfort and solace from a friend. The bereaved feels great gratitude towards the comforter.

Anything less like a business arrangement, a quasi-contractual situation, it is difficult to imagine; no "things" have passed between the two parties and yet this action may be something for which the bereaved person feels enormous gratitude. For the benefactor has made his good-will and sympathy apparent, has transformed a lonely grief into one which is shared. <sup>1</sup>.

What form should the gratitude of the bereaved person take? In so far as any grateful action at all is needful it should be quite unlike a repayment: it may be an embrace, the verbal expression of heartfelt thanks or a small present. And here, as in the examples I have previously discussed, the actions are important and morally significant as the expression of thankfulness and appreciation, morally worthwhile emotions. (The sincere gestures also manifest a morally appropriate mode of understanding what has happened.)

1. Adam Smith in the opening chapter of Theory of the Moral Sentiments has very interesting observations on cases such as this.

The grateful man, then, acts in response to kindness and help but his actions are certainly not repayments, they are (generally) gestures of response, symbolic actions. What emotions do these gestures of gratitude express? What does the sentiment of gratitude involve? Recognition of the benefactor's good will and appreciation of it are central to gratitude but also there is implicitly the recognition of his own need by the beneficiary.<sup>1</sup> But this recognition of need and appreciation of help and good will need imply no self-abasement, no recognition of the superiority of the benefactor.

### Ingratitude

Some brief reflections on ingratitude help to confirm these conclusions. A man achieves great success in a particular area and then cuts dead those who have helped him to succeed. He is surely a person with a defective sense of human solidarity, a person who has such an exalted view of himself that he has forgotten, or blinded himself to the fact, that men need each other, it is part of their condition. And in this way he cuts himself off from his roots and thereby further loosens his hold on a sense of proportion.

One further instance. Iago's crime against Othello and Desdemona is a particularly evil one and part at least of the wickedness stems from the ingratitude displayed. Where gratitude is expressed, it is an acknowledgement that another person's good will matters to us: the ungrateful man declares himself at best indifferent, at worst hostile to his benefactor's good will, and to spurn a man's good will is amongst the most hurtful things that can be done to him. Iago went even further in evil: the very good will which was directed towards him by Othello

1. There are occasions when we are grateful for a person's good will even when what they offer us is not something we need - in fact it may be a hindrance rather than a help. But these are exceptional instances.

was used as a means<sup>to</sup> perpetrate his envy and ill-will.

The grateful person makes of good-will further good-will; ingratitude is frequently the transformation of good into ill-will.

Is there a duty of reciprocation?

Professor Feinberg would, I think, accept an account very roughly along the lines I have proposed. Nonetheless he believes that there is still a place for talk of a duty, if not of gratitude, at least of reciprocation:

"My benefactor once freely offered me his services when I needed them. There was, on that occasion, nothing for me to do in return but express my deepest gratitude to him. (How alien to gratitude any sort of payment would have been!) But now circumstances have arisen in which he needs help and I am in a position to help him. Surely, I owe him my services now, and he would be entitled to resent my failure to come through. In short, he has a right to my help now, and I have a correlative duty to proffer it to him" (Duties, Rights and Claims A.P.Q. 1966 p.139).

Feinberg here balks at the consequences of rejecting the repayment model of gratitude. It would indeed be a sign of the blackest ingratitude not to aid a benefactor in these circumstances, but this must be understood without invoking the contractual notions of a "debt" and of "owing" service. For the benefactor is not entitled to the service, he has no right to reciprocation. I admit that, as a matter of fact, past kindnesses are sometimes cited as grounds for a right to assistance from the beneficiary. But such an appeal involves the claimant in inconsistency - or bad faith: it is an attempt to have things both ways. But either one's past action to a man was a kindness, a free gift, or it was in the nature of a loan - and understood by the recipient to be such. If it was a loan then one does have a right to assistance now, but in that case gratitude on the recipient's

part is inappropriate as is a sense of having been generous on the giver's. <sup>1</sup> If, however, it really was a gift not a disguised loan then one has no claim on the recipient: he entered into no bargain, he undertook no contract, he simply accepted what was freely given. And indeed many a benefactor would be distressed if the beneficiary believed he owed, or might come to owe, service or help, for this would show that the nature of his action had been misunderstood: it was a gift with "no strings attached". The proper attitude on the part of a benefactor is exemplified by Mr. Jarndyce in Bleak House, he gives expecting no return, resenting no ingratitude. The generous person can, at most, hope that this kindness will be recognized by the one to whom it has been done, and that the recipient will freely help him should the need arise.

Failure to understand the nature of gratitude has led some to try to base the duties owed by children to parents on gratitude. <sup>2</sup> It is said that children owe their parents care and affection in return for the love and attention which have been bestowed on them; in view of the efforts and sacrifices they have made, parents have a right to some return. This is quite a tempting view but I believe it offers a misleading way of looking at parenthood. Naturally a parent hopes for affection and care from his children, but hope and not expectation as one's due is all that is appropriate. <sup>3</sup> To deny this is, I think, to

1. I recognise that in certain circumstances lending money and undertaking certain sorts of contracts can themselves be acts of kindness or generosity; we can be grateful too for the manner in which someone discharges his duty to us. But these complications are best left to one side until the basic differences are clearly seen.
2. Sidgwick considers the matter op.cit.pp.248-9.
3. In virtue of parent~~w~~kindness that is. There may be quite distinct grounds for expecting care as one's due. I seek only to deny that gratitude provides such grounds.

blind oneself to the element of risk which is sometimes involved in the free bestowal of kindness, forgiveness or affection: for one gives without any claim to response or recognition and one's beneficiary may disregard or spurn one's "gift", causing one the distress of knowing that one's good will is not valued and yet one can properly demand no redress for the slight.

But now, I have agreed that a beneficiary would show himself to be base if he did not assist a benefactor who was in great need, but I have also argued that such assistance is not owed: why then would it be wrong for the beneficiary to leave his benefactor to his fate? I will approach this question obliquely.

A person claims to care for his parents yet a time comes when they are in need and he has the opportunity and means to assist them and he fails to do so. Such a person does not really care: his action, or rather inaction, belies his protestations. Here, the way care must be expressed if it is sincere is by substantial action; words are not enough. Yet on many other occasions verbal expressions of care, gestures, might have been quite sufficient, indeed "giving" might have been inappropriate.

Similarly, in most circumstances the beneficiary's feeling of gratitude is appropriately expressed in symbols or gestures but an occasion may arise in which substantial action is required if the sincerity of the emotion is to be believed. If one's benefactor is in great need and you are in a position to help then, other things being equal, if you do not help you lack the appropriate emotion and so show yourself defective in a serious way. For the appreciation of others and particularly of their good will is an attitude of central importance to morality, and sometimes this appreciation can be shown only by alleviating a need.

### The unfeeling person

But what, it might be objected, if the beneficiary feels nothing towards his benefactor? Surely he should still do something for him? And if this is so then does this not show that a person has a duty to reciprocate benefits and that the sentiment of gratitude is of secondary not primary importance, that it is the action that matters most?

With the exceptions to be noted below, it is doubtless true that it is better that the benefactor's need be catered for and that his beneficiary should do so, than not. But it does not follow from this that gratitude is chiefly about performing actions and that the sentiment is peripheral, an added extra. For a man who "resented" his benefactor's kindness might help him in need, knowing it right to do so, yet still reproach himself for ingratitude. Such a man knows what he ought to do; he ought to assist his benefactor out of gratitude: the action ought to embody this moral sentiment. What he has managed to do is to perform the "external" aspect of this action: he has alleviated the need; but, while this is of course better than not alleviating the need, it is still less than can be hoped for. If such a man, say, hands over the required money without reviewing his state of mind towards his benefactor then he has not done all he should. He should have tried to bring himself to the proper state of mind in which to give the money. And it is possible to try to achieve the proper state of mind: as the example I quoted from Middlemarch in chapter 7 brings out, there are methods which can be employed - drawing one's attention to previously neglected aspects of one's benefactor's conduct, considering that one's own pride may be excessive, reviewing the need one was in and so forth.<sup>1</sup> The idea that

1. On this, see the very helpful remarks by Iris Murdoch in The Sovereignty of the Good and by Mary Midgley in The Objection to Systematic Humbug.

if one happens not to feel grateful this is just bad luck and all one can do is forget about one's feelings and get on with acting is a very superficial one; it embodies the naive view of the emotions which sees them as simply happening to a person while he remains entirely passive.

The idea may still persist that while the grateful man helps his benefactor out of gratitude there is an alternative and one which is of equal or even greater moral worth viz. reciprocating benefits out of a sense of duty. We are faced here with the return of Nowell-Smith's conscientious man who was dismissed in chapter 5, with the idea that the conscientious man does exactly what the grateful man does but from a different motive. But there are many occasions when the action a grateful man would perform, if it were performed by one similarly benefited but who did not feel grateful, far from being morally commendable would rather be a species of deception, of hypocrisy. Thus, if one does not feel grateful one cannot properly express fullsome thanks or offer an embrace or many other gestures, for these express appreciation and that is what the non-grateful man does not feel. <sup>1.</sup>

These limitations on what one can do without having the appropriate feelings are by no means restricted to gratitude, even clearer cases are provided by forgiveness and reconciliation. <sup>2.</sup> It is in the light of these limitations that I wish to briefly reconsider Kant's unfeeling man, who I mentioned in chapter 5. Kant has just argued that those who do good out of "inclination" deserve praise but not esteem, for their action is not done from duty:

"Suppose then that the mind of this friend of man were overclouded by sorrows of his own which extinguished all sympathy with the fate

1. In fact some of the difficulties raised by being given presents by those you dislike etc. tend to be smoothed over by accepted etiquette. Though one might debate the rightness of this polite insincerity.

2. cf. Mary Midgley op.cit.

of others, but that he still had power to help those in distress, though no longer stirred by the need of others because sufficiently occupied with his own; and suppose that, when no longer moved by any inclination, he tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination for the sake of duty alone; then for the first time his action has its genuine moral worth." (Moral Law p.64.)

Kant here seems to suggest that the now unfeeling man can do all that in the past he did from inclination, but that now, because he is acting for the sake of duty, the man's actions will have more moral worth. But it is simply not true that this man can now do what he once did. Kant writes of him relieving distress out of duty, but in fact only a certain type of action is open to him: he may be able to offer goods to the distressed but, "hypothetically, he cannot give what the distressed person may most need, heartfelt sympathy, a sense of having one's sorrow shared. And this is a fundamental limitation.

Kant wins our sympathy for this man and we do not, of course, wish to condemn him. But it is quite another matter to hold him up as an example; he is admirable for the effort he makes to overcome his limitations but it is vital to see that he is limited, he is, at least temporarily, morally maimed.

We sympathise with this unfeeling man because we understand why he is like he is. But this does not mean that it makes sense to postulate a systematically unfeeling person, a man with no feelings of sympathy or gratitude, no passion for justice, who yet performs moral actions "for duty's sake". As Mary Midgley has written of the man Kant describes as "cold in temperament and indifferent to the sufferings of others" (ibid.):

"If he seems literally to have no feeling on any subject, I think we shall find him so mysterious that we shall not know how to

judge him at all - we may just give up and consider him a lusus naturae" (op.cit.p.164).

Whatever he may be, such a man is not a model of human moral excellence.

Considering Kant's example of the sorrow-laden, and so emotionally deadened, man does, I think, help us to see why people have wanted to talk about acting gratefully etc. for duty's sake. What they have wished to say may be more clearly expressed by observing that this man knows what he ought to feel and so do and is doing the best he can towards this - by performing the "external" act - though he falls short. But (a) it is only because he has (or at least has had) some emotions and acts (has acted) on them that we can make sense of his conduct here. (b) Such a man is not an alternative to the grateful man, still less is he morally superior to him; he is, at best, aspiring to become a grateful person but is as yet at a lower stage.

#### Anonymous gratitude

Before this account of gratitude is concluded one further complication should be noted. A person may act to assist a benefactor because of the kindness he has received from him yet do so anonymously - perhaps because the benefactor is sensitive to others knowing of his need. In cases such as this, the action of helping a benefactor cannot be intended to communicate to one's benefactor one's appreciation since one's identity remains hidden. Nonetheless such an action might be performed because one is grateful. In a similar way, although many of our actions towards those for whom we care are intended to show that we care, other actions are performed because we care but not in order to communicate our care. Because there are these cases, however, we should not be led to deny either the existence or the importance of those actions which are gestures expressing a person's feelings - and most grateful actions, I would suggest, fall into this category.

## Conclusion

To conclude: central to gratitude is a complex emotion and it is as expressions of this emotion that many actions have their moral value. As I have indicated, gratitude is not an isolated case: the value of many actions lies in the emotions they express. Furthermore, people are better for having these feelings even if no opportunity to express them arises so that they never impinge on the world "outside", as may, for instance, be the case with respect to those who have helped us but are now dead.<sup>1</sup> For these feelings constitute a proper way of understanding the conduct of others and our relations with them.

It would be quite wrong to deduce from this that concern about the moral sentiments is narcissistic, an inward-looking attempt to cultivate one's soul.<sup>2</sup> The objects of these feelings are "out there", the feelings are focused on the world beyond the self and in these feelings morally important aspects of that world are properly acknowledged. In this way, ingratitude is a failure to appreciate the goodness of others and one's own position as a dependent being; gratitude honours the goodness of others and acknowledges one's dependence on the goodwill of other people.

1. We may, in fact, out of gratitude to one person, say, someone who is dead, benefit others, perhaps people specially connected with or cared for by the benefactor, or perhaps people not so connected but to whom one wishes to transmit the good-will shown to oneself.
2. In Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake? Pritchard betrays just such a misunderstanding in discussing Aristotle's account of the virtuous man. The virtuous man, Pritchard has already explained, is one who, for instance, helps another because of a "desire.... arising from sympathy with that other" (p.11). But Pritchard goes on to explain his dissatisfaction with Aristotle's account of the virtuous character because: "At best it can only make clear to us the details of one of our obligations, viz. the obligation to make ourselves better men; but the achievement of this does not help us to discover what we ought to do in life as a whole and why; to think that it did would be to think our only business in life was self-improvement".(p.13) Hence it seems Pritchard must equate developing a desire to help those in need, expanding one's sympathy etc., with "self-improvement" - this term being used in a slightly derogatory way. The real mistake is Pritchard's, his faulty understanding of the emotions and their moral place.

CHAPTER 9    VIRTUES AND UTILITY

Choice, action and its consequences I have suggested have been overstressed to the exclusion of other important areas of moral value. I have argued for the importance of vision and feeling and shown that the value of the emotional and "inner" life is not exhausted by their consequences. People may be the better for certain ways of seeing and feeling even if these cannot be acted upon.

Hume on the virtues

It will be evident, then, that I do not accept Hume's claim, in the Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, that the virtues are prized in so far as such qualities are pleasant or useful to others or as they are pleasant or useful to their possessors.<sup>1</sup> This I believe to be an inadequate and obscuring account which has far greater support from philosophers than it deserves.

What lends support to the view is the fact that many of the qualities of character we admire are in general of great utility. It might even be plausible to suggest that were these qualities not in general useful, we might not prize them. But granted all this, it does not follow that we prize such qualities for their utility, that their utility is the grounds of our admiration. On this I take issue with Hume: with regard to many virtues, their generally good consequences are (at most) preconditions rather than the grounds of esteem. Failure to recognize this has contributed to a penurious view of moral worth.

In this chapter I wish to show that Hume's view fails as a full account even of those qualities to which at first it looks most

1. "Personal Merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others". Section IX, part I. (p.268)

applicable. Even here a richer conception of moral worth is required than this utilitarian approach can provide.

Geoffrey Warnock in The Object of Morality distinguishes two sorts of virtues, "those dispositions whose tendency is to increase the effectiveness or capacity of a person and those which tend to determine to what use his capacities will be put".<sup>1</sup> The former I will term "enabling virtues" and such qualities as temperance and courage fall into this category. It is widely accepted - as Hume's account requires - that the enabling virtues are valuable solely as means, they are prized for their utility. Such a view is strongly supported by Georg Von Wright in chapter 7 of The Varieties of Goodness (especially pp.149-54). I do not accept this as entirely adequate. I will argue against it by examining one of the most interesting recent discussions of courage. I will try to show that it omits some important elements in the possession of courage and that taking note of these helps one to recognize that courage is admirable for more than its utility.

#### Courage and cowardice

In Courage and Cowardice<sup>2</sup> James D. Wallace approaches courage via a discussion of cowardice. He distinguishes two aspects of cowardice, and correspondingly of courage. (i) The coward fails to do what he really believes he has good reason to do because he is afraid. Thus a man may believe that he should attempt to rescue those stranded in a burning house but his fear prevents him. (The examples are mine not Wallace's.) (ii) The second aspect of cowardice is exhibited by the man who really believes that it would not be worth the risks to perform a certain dangerous action but whose belief is due to his being excessively

1. I am not completely happy with the second half of this distinction but for present purposes my reservations are not important.

2. In Studies in Ethics ed. N. Rescher.

afraid of the risks involved (and this excessive fear is not simply due to ignorance of the relevant facts). Thus a man may be so frightened of a fire that he does not even think he should attempt a rescue - he judges it foolhardy to do so. Wallace summarises:

"A coward, then, is someone whose excessive fears prevent him from acting on his practical reasoning in situations where it would be neither foolhardy nor beyond human endurance to do so, or whose excessive fears lead him to give too much weight to dangers in his practical reasoning, thereby leading him to avoid actions which he would otherwise do...A coward...is someone who is incapacitated".

The corresponding aspects of courage may be readily inferred.

#### Modifications

This discussion is a distinct improvement on that offered by many other philosophers. (Compare the simplicity of Ross' view: "Vice is passive obedience to natural instinct, virtue the controlling of instinct by a sense of duty or by some other high motive...." Aristotle p.206.) It is still, however, not satisfactory. It oversimplifies the relations between fear, practical reasoning and action and it neglects those elements of cowardice, and correspondingly of courage, which are not related to practical reasoning as such.

(1) The first aspect of cowardice Wallace notes is where the coward fails to do what he believes he has good reason to do because he is afraid. There is a variety of possibilities falling under this aspect which are worth distinguishing. A man may decide that he will go into the burning house but become paralysed by fear, or panic, and run away. Or he may enter the building but be seized by fear so that his skills disintegrate: he cannot think clearly or co-ordinate his movements. These are instances of loss of self-control. Here fear overcomes a man - as much as it is ever true that an emotion "overcomes" a person. There are, however, quite different cases. The coward may judge that all

things considered he should attempt to enter the burning house, it may be quite clear to him that this is the right thing to do, yet he may calmly decide to do no such thing. And he may slip away calmly, with ingenuity, even poise. He is totally in control of himself, fear does not "overcome" him, yet he leaves because he is too frightened to do what he believes he should. He is a coward. It is important to recognize such cases for they show how pervasive and complex the effects of an emotion such as fear can be.

(2) Great fear can stop a man from even thinking about what he should do. And while in the grip of fear one's view of what should be done tends to be distorted and irrational.

(3) By concentrating exclusively on the relation between fear and practical reasoning, Wallace neglects very important occasions of courage and cowardice. Walking through a field one finds oneself confronted by a bull. The question of whether or not to face danger simply does not arise, the danger is already there. Yet this is a typical case in which courage or cowardice are exhibited. And the utility of courage and the incapacitating nature of cowardice may be especially clear in such a case. To recognize the great importance of courage it is necessary to recall how often we are faced with unchosen and unavoidable risks and dangers. (Aristotle indeed was of the opinion that to remain calm and undismayed in sudden alarms was a better proof of courage than to behave as calmly when the danger had been foreseen. Nicomachian Ethics chapter III, VIII.)

(4) Cowardice may show itself in a hundred irrational fears and anxieties: fears of the dark, of possible murderers, alarm at noises and shadows... Such fears may limit one's actions eg. some people will take any steps to avoid being alone in a house at night. But even where they do not affect one's choices these fears are limiting; they impose a constant, unnecessary vigilance and they corrode one's vision: the coward sees the world as pervaded by risks, dangers and alarms. The

courageous person, in contrast, fears the "right things in the right way".

### Why courage is prized

Wallace is expressing a common view when he argues that courage is prized because courageous men are a social asset. Cowardice is incapacitating, it stops men furthering the common good; men with courage have overcome these incapacities, they can face dangers when the good of others demands it. Courage is prized for its utility.

A major difficulty faces this claim: we admire the courage of even the malicious and anti-social - and we admire such men's courage no less because it is exercised in a way contrary to the common good (though of course our overall view of these men is very different). The grounds of our admiration for courage seem to be independent of considerations of the common good, of its social utility. It might be objected that courage is such a rare and valuable commodity that we praise it even in bad men in order to encourage its cultivation which is, in general, for the public benefit. I do not find this a very convincing reply: if it were true, we might indeed praise a bad man's courage but we would scarcely prize it. Yet it seems to me that is precisely what we do. The most that might be conceded is that if courage were not in general a social asset we might no longer prize it (which would establish only that the social utility of courage was a precondition of its being admired). But I am not sure that even this is true.

A more illuminating way of looking at what is valuable about courage is to look at what the courageous man can do and at the sort of person he is. By the side of the courageous man, the coward appears diminished and unfree, a "smaller" person, a person in servitude to human frailty. The coward is limited by his cowardice, there is much that he cannot do which the courageous man can, in the face of danger he tends to "go to pieces". Not only is the coward unable to implement

many decisions but many courses of action cease to occur to him as genuine possibilities. His beliefs and vision too may become distorted. Either he lives in a world filled with alarm or - perhaps even worse - he comes to complacently judge the cowardly course the best. Thus a coward's world becomes narrowed by his fears and, at times, his very fears prevent him from seeing how circumscribed his world has become. In contrast, courage can be seen as a condition of freedom: to the extent that a man is courageous he rises above the limitations set by fears.

It is tempting at this point to invoke the second half of Hume's theory and to suggest that we admire courage just because of its utility to its possessor (whatever his aims). But this suggestion too should be resisted. There are instances of conduct which it is natural to describe as courageous, conduct which is highly admirable, but of which it is most implausible to hold that the courage exhibited is prized for its utility, as a means to some further end, for, in an obvious sense the behaviour has no utility, the agent no further end. The sort of case I have in mind is that of someone going to a terrible death, perhaps to execution, with calmness and dignity - one thinks for instance of Marvell's description of the behaviour of Charles I in An Horatian Ode, courageous in the grand manner. But also of the very different figure of the "whisky priest" in Graham Greene's novel The Power and the Glory. A man terrified by pain, drinking brandy to dull its prospect, he nonetheless goes to confess a dying man, realizing he is walking into a trap and dubious even about whether the dying man will want him; he goes to do his duty suspecting all the time it will be useless and knowing it will mean his death. This is his death:

"A small man came out of a side door; he was held up by two policemen, but you could tell he was doing his best - it was only that his legs were not fully under his control. They paddled him across to the opposite wall; an officer tied a handkerchief round his eyes... Everything went very quickly like a routine....and the little man

was a routine heap beside the wall - something unimportant which had to be cleared away" (Penguin edition p.216).

There is nothing here of regal presence or grand occasion, nothing theatrical, yet the priest has conducted himself with courage; at the end he has risen above his own intense fears. <sup>1</sup>.

Wallace claims that our admiration in such cases is parasitic on our recognition of the general utility of courage. But I suspect that this is to say no more than that if courage were not in general useful we might not prize it - which may or may not be true but which does not in any case illuminate the present example. A "tough-minded" objector might say that our admiration here was "merely aesthetic", I am sure Kurt Baier would maintain this. But if so, it is aesthetic with a difference: our admiration is far different from that we would bestow on a woman's figure or an acrobat's poise. More than this, however, may be claimed. What is "aesthetically" pleasing about courage itself derives from our deeper admiration for this quality. This is seen most clearly by considering the coward: the coward going to execution is aesthetically unpleasing because his behaviour expresses his cowardice; his outward demeanor may not be very different from that of a grief stricken man whom we do not find aesthetically unpleasing. This partial dependence of the aesthetic on the moral tends to be overlooked by those who, like Baier, wish to dismiss many of our judgements of people as "aesthetic".

The calmness and dignity of a man in the face of execution is admirable in a way similar to the patient endurance of intense suffering: it represents a triumph over human frailty, it transcends the natural reactions to which we are prone. Certainly we admire those who have unusual powers and abilities, the man who can balance a dozen chairs on his chin or keep six oranges in the air. But to appreciate the

1. I am grateful to Mr. John Hall for suggesting this example.

enormous difference in the depth of our admiration for courage and endurance we need to recognize the centrality and pervasiveness of fear and pain in the human condition, the way our lives can be moulded by our fears and our intolerance of pain. Recognition of our servitude to fear and pain is necessary if we are to appreciate the source of our admiration for courage and endurance. And this servitude not only involves our action but fundamentally affects what we are: our fears are part of ourselves, part of the texture of our being, they form part of the way we apprehend the world and ourselves in it. We can be diminished by our fears.

Is the ideal to be striven for total fearlessness? And if this is the implication, does this not show the inadequacy of the position arrived at, for on it one cannot discriminate between courage and foolhardiness? I believe this account does not commit me to an ideal of fearlessness. It is claimed that courage is admirable as a condition of freedom from fear, but it does not follow from this that fearlessness is the ideal condition of freedom: not to fear certain things is indeed liberating but to fear nothing is to become the puppet of one's own confidence. The foolhardy man is not liberated by his confidence, he is rather confined by it to folly, for he does not take adequate account of dangers.

It may be objected that I have misunderstood the point. Fearlessness as an ideal does not imply that danger is not recognized and adjusted to; the fearless man recognizes dangers but he does not feel fear of them. I have doubts whether this proposal is even coherent, it involves a most peculiar conception of the emotions. Even accepting, however, that the proposal makes sense, fearlessness, so understood, does not seem to me the ideal and for reasons that will by now be familiar. Fear is a way of understanding dangers, it is not dispassionate understanding plus unpleasant sensations and escape-impulses.

Fear is the appropriate way of understanding certain dangers. As Aristotle contended: "There are some evils which it is proper and honourable to fear and discreditable not to fear...." (Nicomachian Ethics III,VI). If the significance of certain situations does not affect one emotionally then, I should say, the true significance of those situations has passed one by, one has not understood them.

CHAPTER 10    THE DIVERSITY OF MORAL WORTH

In the last chapter I argued that Hume's theory, that the virtues are all prized for their utility to their possessor or to others, was too simple even in those cases where it looked most plausible. In doing so I once again showed the richness and diversity of the grounds of our appraisals of moral worth. The final sections of this chapter will be devoted to a detailed examination of some particular examples of high moral worth. By this means I hope, among other things, to further substantiate the findings of the foregoing chapters concerning the importance of a person's outlook, emotions and so on, in appraising that person's moral worth. However, my primary aim in this chapter is to argue that such is the richness and diversity of moral lives that no single model of excellent moral worth is satisfactory. We quite properly admire the moral characters of individuals A and B even though the excellences exhibited by A are not all the same as those of B and even though A could not combine his excellences with those of B, nor B his with those of A.

The neglect of diversity

There is surprisingly little discussion of this whole matter, the assumption apparently being that there are many ways of missing the target, only one of hitting it.<sup>1</sup> I will briefly consider some of the possible reasons for this neglect. Firstly, there is the moral philosopher's great emphasis on blame, on what it is to go wrong morally. Morally admirable conduct is then seen primarily as the avoidance of these pitfalls; virtues, in so far as they are considered at all, are seen as simply the absence of vices. Secondly, and connectedly, there is

1. Exceptions here are Pritchard and Nowell-Smith, but I have already shown the unsatisfactoriness of their views in chapter 5.

the undue concentration on actions, and particular, unconnected actions at that. This is linked to a rigid conception of moral action <sup>1.</sup>: every moral act is seen as involving the choice of the best course of action ("the right action"), one is at fault if one fails to perform just this action. But this misconstrues much moral conduct. It assumes there is always some single right action to be done, failure to perform which is blameworthy (and thus the moral life is presented as a number of disconnected problems to be solved). In fact much of the time a person is faced with a wide variety of opportunities taking any one of which may be very commendable. Furthermore, as I observed in chapter 7, this conception of moral activity is far too piecemeal, the agent is conceived as being, as it were, buffeted from moral problem to moral problem <sup>2.</sup>; it overemphasises the place of calculated choices and ignores long term projects and commitments <sup>3.</sup>, it ignores the overall orientation of a person's life.

When instead of this segmented, local approach we consider a substantial section of a person's life, we realize the need for more comprehensive concepts by which to approach the appraisal of moral worth. I have of course argued at length for the importance of the virtues here. But the virtues are not the only concepts that can do the required job, other concepts can also delineate overall <sup>an</sup> orientation of the person, outlook, feelings, spirit and action. I will, in this chapter, be making use of closely related concepts such as aspiring to certain ideals.

On taking an overall view of moral lives the evident diversity of admirable men and women is such that my thesis might seem unexceptionable.

1. See, for instance, Sidgwick as discussed in chapter 7.
2. Edmund Pincoffs: Quandry Ethics Mind 1971 is interesting on this.
3. Cf. B.A.O. Williams: Utilitarianism: for and against, the section on integrity.

Three of the men who are most admired throughout the world are Jesus, Socrates and Francis of Assisi.<sup>1</sup> On examination, the diversity of these men is most apparent and it is implausible to suggest that one of them might have acquired the excellences of the others while retaining his own particular excellences. What is admirable about Socrates? Among other things, one would cite his passion for truth, the way he directed his intellect towards major questions, undermining the "wisdom" of those held to be sages, rather than seeking fame and position. His courage and integrity throughout his life and particularly as highlighted in his death spring to mind and one ought not to neglect the sense of humour he displayed indicating as it does what he found pretentious, what he valued. Contrast this to the character of Francis: his simple, trusting nature, his kindness to people (and of course animals), his openness, his closeness to nature and his humility. Put thus together, we see that, for example, Socrates could at most pretend to the kind of openness and trust Francis displayed, he was much too sophisticated for it to be genuine and his sophistication and love of truth are connected. Similarly, the attitude of Socrates to people seems rather more "bracing" than the sympathy of Francis; both attitudes are needed but are probably only possible in different people.

### Theories of unity

While the apparent diversity of admirable moral-characters might be acknowledged, in a number of quarters it would be claimed that there is an underlying unity.

(a) From the point of view of this thesis the major representatives of such a claim are, of course, legalism and utilitarianism. The legalist discerns the unifying feature of law-abidingness in all persons of high

1. We know relatively little about any of them - which probably aids consensus here!

moral worth, however unlike they may appear. The utilitarian finds in all morally admirable persons the common factor of their (at least intended) utility. Since much of this thesis has been aimed at rebutting the legalist and utilitarian conceptions of moral worth there is no need to consider them further here.

(b) It is maintained by Christians that Jesus is the perfect man, thus a person's task in life is to become as like him as human frailty allows. In theory then, Christians would see in all morally admirable people imperfect imitators of Jesus. As I do not share the Christian's presuppositions I will not examine this claim in detail: unless one accepts that Jesus is God-made-man there seems no reason to believe that he provides the standard of human excellence. (And even if one did accept the divinity of Jesus one might still doubt whether he could be the model of human excellence. In her poem Was He Married? (p.6 Two in One) Stevie Smith traces some of the consequences of assuming that Jesus was God, consequences concerning the remoteness of his alleged humanity.)

In practice, those who have been recognized as saints, and thus as models of moral worth, have been very diverse: a person as simple, devout and trusting as St. Theresa, "the little flower", and one like St. Thomas Aquinas, intellectual, sophisticated, a brave explorer into truth. I do not see how anyone could combine the moral excellences of these two very different people.

(c) Professor P.T. Geach in The Virtues (especially chapter I) defends a substantially Aristotelian approach to the virtues. He argues that the virtues are qualities that all men need. And he points out that this concept of need is a teleological one. He thus sets out to defend a teleological approach to the virtues (and indeed to establish the respectability of teleology in general). I do not think his approach succeeds but since I do not have the space to adequately discuss teleology or Aristotle's understanding of the virtues, I do not propose

to enter into that dispute here. In fact, Professor Geach himself abandons the attempt to establish "what men are for" as unnecessary. Despite divergent, even irreconcilable ends, Geach contends, men can agree on certain indispensable conditions of any ends being realized.<sup>1</sup> For men of very different view can find a consensus to co-operate in building houses, roads, hospitals, etc.,

"And on the basis of this consensus we can see the need of the four cardinal virtues to men: these virtues are needed for any large-scale worthy enterprise, just as health and sanity are needed. We need prudence or practical wisdom for any large-scale planning. We need justice to secure co-operation and mutual trust among men, without which our lives would be nasty, brutish and short. We need temperance in order not to be deflected from our long-term and large-scale goals by seeking short-term satisfactions. And we need courage in order to persevere in face of setbacks, weariness, difficulties and dangers" (p.16).

On the whole, despite some rather shaky arguments,<sup>2</sup> I would accept Geach's point that men do need these qualities and so thus far the diversity of admirable moral character is restricted. But three important points should be noted.

(i) Even if these virtues are needed, it does not follow that they are prized simply because they are needed - I have demonstrated this with

1. Geoffrey Warnock in The Object of Morality puts forward a very similar argument - generally more perspicuously.
2. Eg. p.17 "Men need virtues as bees need stings. An individual bee may perish by stinging, all the same bees need stings; an individual man may perish by being brave or just, all the same men need courage and justice". I think there remains ambiguity here: "bees need stings", for the benefit of the species or for that of the individual? This is very important when we consider justice, for while human society without justice is virtually impossible, many individuals are unjust and seem to thrive - without this seeming merely fortuitous; so does each man need justice? Undoubtedly good men need justice etc. in some measure so the weakness of the argument does not affect that point.

respect to courage in the previous chapter.

(ii) Since I am arguing for the diversity of people of excellent moral worth, I of course deny the cardinality of these four virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and courage (nor is the position altered if they are supplemented by the "theological" virtues Geach mentions). By the cardinal virtues I understand: "a set of virtues which are such that (1) they cannot be derived from one another and (2) all other moral virtues can be derived from or shown to be forms of them". (Frankena Ethics p.50) It is the second condition which I maintain is not fulfilled. Throughout, particularly in chapter 4, I have been at pains to distinguish the different strands of morality. Justice is principally occupied with one strand and the non-institutional strand is neither a special form of it nor can it be derived from Justice. Further, a man might exhibit the virtues Geach holds to be cardinal yet not be much of a man for he might be cold, ungenerous and self-righteous - he might be Tom Tulliver (see chapter 2).

(iii) I would resist any attempt to restrict the term "virtue" (with its connotations of excellence) to qualities that could be shown to be needed in the way Geach has suggested these four qualities are needed. For the virtues he considers are held to be common to those "whose first practical premises, formulating their ultimate ends are not only divergent but irreconcilable" (p.13). And I see very good reason to recognize that moral excellences are exhibited not only in the means to ends but also in the ultimate ends a man sets himself; whether a person prudently, courageously, temperately and justly helps himself or prudently, justly... helps others is a profound moral difference, a difference in his worth.

Thus while there are grounds here for granting that justice, prudence, temperance and courage are needed, no satisfactory reason has been offered to deny the diversity of moral excellence.

## Factors contributing to diversity

None of these theories of unity beneath apparent diversity is convincing. And the stronger point should be made that it is not just that no-one has so far come up with the right model or formula but that the whole search for a single formula or model to encapsulate the moral worth of persons is misdirected. Individuals can be greatly good in greatly different ways. In Social Morality and Individual Ideal (in Freedom and Resentment pp.26-44) Strawson makes similar points about the connected<sup>1</sup> area of ideal images or pictures of human life, arguing that it "is a region of diverse, certainly incompatible and possibly practically conflicting ideal images or pictures of a human life, or of human life". Moreover, he suggests that his claim - and I feel the same about my contention: "may be seen not merely as a description of what is the case, but as a positive evaluation of evaluative diversity. Any diminution in this variety would impoverish the human scene" (p.29).

In recognizing this diversity it is important to see the way in which a person's possible excellences are closely affected by a variety of factors.

(a) Natural abilities. A person's moral excellences are often related to his natural abilities. The proper exercise of a certain talent, for instance, may challenge a man to adopt a particular posture towards that talent and its field of operation eg. a person who genuinely devotes

1. Connected but not identical. His examples of "personal ideals" include: self-obliterating devotion to duty or to the service of others; personal honour and magnanimity; asceticism, contemplation, retreat; action, dominance and power; the cultivation of an exquisite sense of the luxurious (p.26). Some of these would count as forms or components of moral worth but ideals such as dominance and power or the cultivation of the luxurious seem far too selfish to be forms of moral worth. Further, I am unconvinced by Strawson's distinction between the "ethical", to which these personal ideals belong, and the "moral". In drawing this distinction Strawson falls into exactly the same sort of traps as, in chapter 5, it has been seen Urmson does; he tends to confuse performance of duties (with which he identifies the "moral") with being a person of adequate worth.

himself to the intellectual life also accepts a commitment to intellectual integrity, individual humility and to developing a passion for the truth. In choosing, or as it can seem, being "called" to, a vocation one is often choosing - or being called - to be a certain kind of person, one orientated in a particular direction. Thus in becoming a teacher one is choosing to cultivate not only certain talents but also certain qualities of character: patience, impartiality, respect for one's pupils and so on. Other occupations will require other virtues.

(b) Projects and causes. Similarly when questions about commitment to a cause or project arise, questions of character and possible excellences may also need to be asked. In discussing Sartre's famous case of the boy who had to decide between joining the Free French and staying at home with his widowed mother, David Mallock makes the following valuable observation:

"It is relevant, too, to take into account what one knows of one's own character. It would be foolish to stay if one thinks one is likely to resent one's mother for it and take that resentment out on her, or if one thinks one's own temper and foolhardiness will lead one to do something rash and be uselessly killed. Such a choice does involve, in a sense, choosing what kind of man you want to be, and in making that decision it is wise to consider what kind of man you already are, for the viable possibilities open to one are limited by one's present character" (op.cit.p.173).

Two points should be noted here. Firstly, people do not start the moral life with a tabula rasa, they tend naturally to have various strengths and weaknesses: some are short-tempered, others equable; some generous, others mean - one has only to watch a group of toddlers for this to be confirmed. These natural differences are often important in conditioning the "shape" of excellent character to which individuals may sensibly aspire. Secondly, Mallock rightly brings out the way in which major choices in connection with, say, a cause are also decisions about

character and possible moral excellences: to join the Free French is to put oneself in a position where, for instance, courage will be a key excellence; staying at home involves aspiring to a pattern of excellence in which patience and personal affection will be central.

(c) Disabilities. Even more than abilities, disabilities can determine the possibilities of one's moral character. Thus the person who spends most of his life confined to bed by illness tends also to be confined in the mode of goodness he can attain: his life may be moulded to a posture of courage, patience and endurance. Other moral qualities such as kindness and generosity may be virtually denied him. Yet despite not being able to display these qualities a person in this position may impress us as being of great moral worth.

(d) Individual history. The way in which a person's individual history may affect his possible virtues is not perhaps obvious but, as I will show, it is important. What a person does earlier in life may greatly determine how he can be virtuous in later life. Thus, for instance, if a person has sinned greatly, how he patterns his life in relation to that past fault may be crucial to his moral goodness, it may shape his moral character. The drunkard or gambler who reforms may devote his life to temperance and saving others from intemperance. For such a person, what he has done wrong in the past becomes, as it were, the channel which directs his goodness. To suggest to such a person that he would do better, say, working for Oxfam, would generally <sup>1</sup> be to have missed the point: you would not be solving his problem which is to make moral sense of his life, now that he has repented, in the light of that past failing. It would be easy but crass to try to cheapen this by hack-psychologising about expiation of guilt, offering some sort of mechanistic view.

Accident of birth may leave a person with various responsibilities and obligations. This seems generally recognized. What is more

1. Sometimes, of course, where interest in the past sin is becoming morbid it might be sensible advice.

elusive but is, I think, important is a certain type of family tradition. The fact that a person is born into a family of doctors, teachers, social "activists" etc. may direct that person towards a particular type of excellence, a family pattern of virtuous living. Again it is easy to make this appear superficial, even ridiculous. I grant that a tradition can constrict, even warp. My point is merely that people can be quite properly inspired to pursue a certain type of excellence by the perception of their family's past; they may see themselves as continuing a tradition. (Conversely a person may devote his life to trying to make recompense for his family's exploitation etc.)

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of individual history as it affects moral excellence, however, is the evil or good done to a person. General D'Hubert, in Conrad's The Duel, whom I briefly discussed in chapter 3, is a good example of this. Key qualities in his excellent character, generosity and mercy, have their source, their occasion, in the wrongs done to him by Feraud. It is in the noble and generous way he has responded to Feraud's atrocities and savage absurdities that the principal moral significance of his character has been gained. D'Hubert's remark about Feraud is true in more than one way: "It's extraordinary how in one way or another this man has managed to fasten himself on my deeper feelings".

A further instance may be useful. Imagine a parent in Northern Ireland whose son or daughter is murdered. The way the person responds to this evil will probably shape the whole of his or her subsequent moral life. Does this person nurse the pain, encourage hatred against the killers, extend it to the whole of their "kind", as would be only too natural and understandable? Or does this person resist the vast temptation, perhaps join the peace-people, attempt to repay evil with good? And if this latter course is adopted what is crucial in appraising the moral worth thus exhibited is the antecedents of this conduct: that it is a freely given offering of good for evil. (Notice how legalist talk of

"requiredness" seems totally out of place, indeed insensitive, here.)

### The implications

"This is all quite interesting," it may be said, "the psychology of moral experience does tend to be neglected." But these comments should not be dismissed as mere psychologising. I have been attempting, however briefly, to locate the moral goodness of individuals in a fuller, more intricate pattern than that in which it is normally placed. How does this further the argument about the diversity of patterns of moral excellence? It should confirm the inadequacy of the "check-list" view of moral worth: the idea that all morally admirable people must display characteristics X, Y, Z....

I will summarise some of the points made in, and others suggested by, the foregoing discussion.

- (1) For some morally admirable individuals certain moral qualities are simply not possible (as in the case of the bed-ridden) yet they remain persons of high moral worth.
- (2) Even when someone in fact displays a number of moral qualities it may be important to recognize a certain key quality and to locate the person's overall posture within that pattern. For example, a person's whole moral life may have the unity of remorse or, as has been suggested of Schweitzer, gratitude for life. Here the limitation of our virtue words must be acknowledged; there are many morally significant patterns for which there is no single term and there is a danger that, partly because of this, these patterns will be neglected. The importance of literature in articulating these patterns will be exemplified in the rest of this chapter and explicitly discussed in the final chapter.
- (3) The situation in which a person (or group) finds himself may be so extreme that certain qualities emerge as the only way of being excellent eg. in time of war or natural disaster courage and endurance may come to have such significance.

(4) The combination of talent, personal history, social circumstance etc. may be such as to produce a very different combination of excellences in different individuals so that their characters are incompatible, yet each is properly admired as of excellent moral worth. The final part of this chapter will be devoted to a careful examination of some different types of excellent character, bringing out their diversity and incompatibility.

(5) Even if it were true that all morally excellent individuals could be encompassed by a single formula or model, nevertheless concentrating on this unity would obscure the more important (and I think for moral philosophy more interesting) differences. It would ignore what is distinctive about our various saints and heroes.

In view of the points I have just made, the question perhaps arises whether I am not denying philosophy's job altogether in stressing this diversity and particularity. Is not a significant part of the philosopher's enterprise to discern unity and pattern? This is a role I accept and do not wish to undermine. What I believe should be eschewed is the false unity which disguises the richness of moral phenomena. I have been careful to write about recognizing patterns, orientations and so on, and evidently patterns and orientations are recognizable across individuals - and may be imitated.

The point to be made is not that there are as many types of moral excellence as there are excellent individuals: no, there are discernable patterns and types. But certain patterns, postures and orientations are incompatible with others yet each may be excellent. Thus there are persons, reformed sinners, those who have been greatly wronged etc., whose moral life makes sense only if we view the antecedents to their conduct and character, only if we see to what they are responding; others, such as certain politicians, must be appraised in the light of the state of affairs they are trying to bring about, and

there are yet others whose lives are the embodiment of a particular ideal.<sup>1</sup> Excellent all, but incompatible.

### Three examples of moral worth

I will now examine in detail three individuals all of whom I believe are persons of great moral worth. My chief aim will be to bring out the diversity of excellence they embody and the need for different concepts in approaching different types of goodness. I have in addition two other important purposes. Firstly, notwithstanding the differences to which I have just alluded, I will show the similarity in the scope of these appraisals: the need to take account of the outlook, emotions, judgements of the characters as well as their actions. In this way many of the points made in earlier chapters will be substantiated. It is valuable to see how in practice they enter into a detailed appraisal of an individual. Secondly, since the cases I will consider are taken from literature I will be exemplifying one of the roles of literature in the moral life and thus preparing the way for a discussion of literature and appraisals of moral worth which will be conducted in the final chapter.

### Fleda Vetch

Henry James' novel The Spoils of Poynton (Penguin Modern Classics) focuses on Fleda Vetch, a penniless young lady who becomes an intimate friend and companion of Mrs. Gereth with whom she shares a sensitivity to and love of beautiful things. The passion they come to share is a love of Poynton, the house to which Mrs. Gereth and her husband devoted their lives, transforming it into a perfectly composed

1. Obviously these are the most clear-cut cases; some combination of several of the elements mentioned is properly necessary to justly appraise most people.

treasure house. However, Mr. Gereth has died and his son Owen nominally owns the house and on his marriage may be expected, with his bride, to displace his mother who will be required to retire to the dower-house, Ricks.

Owen becomes engaged to Mona Brigstock, a girl who is so insensitive and philistine that Mrs. Gereth refuses to leave Poynton and her precious "things" which she (correctly) believes Mona would neither appreciate nor take care of. Eventually, in Fleda's absence, Mrs. Gereth does depart but she takes with her the best pieces from Poynton. Mona threatens to break off the engagement unless Owen recovers the "spoils". Mrs. Gereth refuses to return them. Such is the feeling aroused by these proceedings that Mrs. Gereth and her son will no longer meet each other and thus Fleda becomes their intermediary.

These "negotiations" prove to be very taxing on Fleda for she is buffeted by both parties each implicitly demanding her support and allegiance. Consequently Fleda has to walk a tightrope of delicacy, tact and sensitivity over an abyss of hurt, hypocrisy and betrayal. All is made even worse by the fact that Fleda must hide her love for Owen, who is after all engaged to another woman.

Mrs. Gereth will not yield in her refusal to return the "spoils" until she divines Fleda's love for her son. On sensing this she sends Fleda away to London, where Owen is staying, urging her to "let herself go" and to "save" Owen from Mona. As a gesture of her faith in Fleda as a proper guardian of the treasures, she secretly returns them to Poynton.

In the course of the negotiations Owen has fallen in love with Fleda, moreover Mona has been making herself very unpleasant over the "things" Mrs. Gereth has appropriated. Consequently Owen proposes to Fleda. Fleda, however, deeply in love though she is, refuses him until he is "free", released by Mona.

"The great thing is to keep faith. Where is a man if he doesn't?

If he doesn't he may be so cruel. So cruel, so cruel, so cruel!"  
 Fleda repeated. "I couldn't have a hand in that you know: that's  
 my position - that's mine. You offered her marriage: it's a  
 tremendous thing for her." (p.140)

Throughout their relationship Fleda is deeply concerned that Owen should comport himself well. Her moral concern is indeed relevatory of her love. <sup>1</sup>.

Fleda "rejects" and so loses him, for Mona has got word of the return of the spoils and she it is who "lets herself go" and so Owen is recaptured. Fleda and Mrs. Gereth are left desolate. The story has a final bitter irony: the house Fleda and Mrs. Gereth have loved so much, and so selflessly, is burned down.

"Mr. Henry James," Conrad observed, "is a historian of fine consciences." Underlying the account of this family quarrel, at the core of the novel, is a sensitive exploration and presentation of a "fine conscience", an admirable type of moral worth, Fleda Vetch.

Fleda is introduced to the reader as sharing Mrs. Gereth's love of beauty, her deep appreciation of art. But, and this is a contrast which is central to understanding their different moral natures - the way in which this aesthetic sensitivity is related to the rest of Fleda's life is quite different to the part Mrs. Gereth's love of beauty has in her life. To simplify a little: Mrs. Gereth's character is a debased version of Fleda's.

There is nothing grasping or avid in Mrs. Gereth's love of Poynton and beautiful things, it is an utterly unselfish and indeed, as the novel makes clear, a noble passion. But Mrs. Gereth has become an aesthete in everything. Morality has become subsidiary to aesthetic "high standards", and high standards have become her "deep morality".

1. "She never knew the extent of her tenderness for him till she became conscious of the present force of her desire that he should be superior, be perhaps even sublime." (p.128)

Even people are evaluated in terms of their response to beautiful "things" - do they know the "marks"?

The case with Fleda is quite different. "Almost as much as Mrs. Gereth's her taste was her life, but her life was somehow larger for it." (p.20) Fleda's aesthetic sensitivity, her "taste", is central in understanding her excellence for it is very closely related to her moral sensitivity. But unlike Mrs. Gereth's her "taste" does not undermine morality. Thus in Fleda's life beautiful things are firmly "placed": they are far less important than people, even than the barbarian, Mona. Indeed "things" are only beautiful to her in a certain moral context - improperly acquired they lose their attractiveness. Even more centrally, "aesthetic" concepts become transformed in Fleda's consciousness into a means of moral discrimination: "fine", "sublime", "vulgar", for instance, all become very specific instruments of moral appraisal.

But it is not so much in details such as I have mentioned that the aesthetic sensitivity of Fleda Vetch is tied to her moral character. In a more pervasive way her "taste" is moralized, she brings to the moral that fineness and sensitivity of response and appraisal which is evoked in her by the beautiful. The terms in which, towards the end of the novel, Fleda criticises Mrs. Gereth bring out in contrast something of the special type of excellence Fleda embodies:

"You simplify far too much, you always did and you always will. The tangle of life is much more intricate than you've ever, I think, felt it to be. You slash into it," cried Fleda finely, "with a great pair of shears; you nip <sup>at</sup> it as if you were one of the Fates."  
(p.160)

Others take a partial, and arrogant, view, they lack imagination and fail to respond fully to life. Whereas Fleda's "taste" expands to become an "active sense of life"<sup>1</sup>: in imagination, thought, and feeling she

1. Cf. James' remarks about "taste" in the Preface to The Golden Bowl (Penguin ed. p.18).

discerns the intricate tangle of life and she responds fully to it. This is the "fine conscience" whose history Henry James relates.

### The young captain

Very different from Fleda Vetch are the other two examples of moral worth that I will consider. Both are depicted in Joseph Conrad's tale The Shadow Line (Everyman edition).

In this tale, Conrad portrays a young man who has reached "the shadow line", the point at which life seems flat, wearying, dissatisfying. On impulse, the man gives up his perfectly satisfactory berth as a ship's mate and prepares to sail home, unclear what he will do with his life. By, as it seems to him, a miracle, before he can leave he gains command of a sailing ship. The story traces the ordeal of his first voyage as captain. But it does much more than that: it depicts the maturing of a man to moral excellence; it presents his transformation from unfledged youth to an admirable man. It traces his crossing of the shadow line.

The callowness of the young man emerges early in the tale in a variety of ways. It shows, of course, in his actions, for instance, in the way he waves triumphantly to his rival for the job and in the way he bullies the steward of the officers' hostel. In his emotional responses we see the same immaturity, thus he responds in a very heated fashion to the steward's request for payment in advance and the steward's "impudence" rankles for an unduly long time. Bearing the same hallmark are his lack of sympathy with others and his willingness to dismiss people as of no account.<sup>1</sup> Finally, his deficiencies are confirmed by the way he reacts to Captain Giles, the universally esteemed Master Mariner, deeming him foolish and interfering. The young man's whole outlook displays a loss of

1. On learning that the steward, if reported, may overdose himself on drugs, the young man pronounces: "He doesn't seem very fit to live, anyhow." (p.237).

faith and hope in the world, a blank despair. From this slough of despond he is roused by his success in gaining a command and his maturing process begins.

The new captain's first sight of his ship releases a hidden aspect of his character <sup>1</sup>: "I knew that, like some rare women, she was one of those creatures whose mere existence is enough to awaken an unselfish delight. One feels that it is good to be in the world in which she has her being" (p.245). The ship is the focus of an entirely selfless appreciation; his reaction to it is a token of the shedding of some of the selfishness of immaturity, and a sign of a new emotional warmth.

On arriving on board a further "firming" of his character begins to take place as he consciously places himself within a tradition of command and service, a "dynasty" of which as a new captain he is the latest representative. It is a dynasty continuous "in its experience, in its training, its conception of duty, and in the blessed simplicity of its traditional point of view" (p.247).

The young man's multifarious ordeal begins at once with the problems left by the previous captain, a man who died in despair, disgracing this "dynasty" by trying to take his ship to the grave with him. Burns, the first mate, prevented this disaster and brought the ship safely to port. His resentment of the man who has displaced him presents the young captain with one of his first problems. In the considerate, patient yet firm way he deals with Burns, the captain displays his growing maturity; the responsibilities of command have a strengthening effect on his character.

Once at sea, the ordeal comes from two quarters: a fever which rages through the crew and a terrible calm. The strains which are put

1. Here and elsewhere my discussion owes much to F.R. Leavis' essay The Shadow Line in Anna Karenina and other Essays.

upon the captain, and in coping with which he morally matures, are many. There is the physical strain of constant vigilance as he seeks a wind; later, as the crew weakens, further physical demands are made on him to simply maintain the vessel. Increasingly there is spiritual strain: the terms in which the captain recalls - and at the time recorded - the voyage make clear that a moral struggle is involved. Looming large in this spiritual struggle is his battle with himself: his doubts about his ability and worthiness to command, his increased sense of sin.<sup>1</sup> When things are at their worst these fears blend with the temptation to see an active malevolence, that of the evil dead captain, at work. And that way madness lies.

Throughout it all, the young captain overcomes his temptations and weaknesses, retaining his self-possession and offering strong and selfless leadership. Eventually, due to his unceasing efforts, the ship and its stricken crew are guided to port.

"You may say, if you like, that the outcome of the ordeal is the emergence of the young Captain confirmed and fortified in his vocation; proved fit and unflawed, the good seaman and Master Mariner, after exposure to the ultimate spiritual strains as well as the others. And that is part of the truth." (Leavis, op.cit.) An important part of the truth I think. The captain has become part of the "dynasty", he has learned to cope with the trials of nature and himself, with the strains and responsibilities of command.

Other transformations have also occurred which do not so easily fit into the pattern of "the emergence of the Master Mariner". The young man's peevishness, his arrogance, his quickness to stand on his dignity, above all his easy dismissal of many people as of no account, have gone, purged by his ordeal. In the course of the voyage there

1. Which is itself a sign of moral growth compared to his former arrogance and dismissal of others as unfit to live.

emerges a new, generous and imaginative appraisal of others, something which is linked to, yet transcends the "blessed simplicity" of the "dynasty's" outlook on life.

The excellence the captain finally embodies <sup>1.</sup> is a way of understanding and undertaking one's calling. This involves the full performance of one's duty in the face of whatever natural or human difficulties may be met. But it also involves seeing in one's vocation not simply a set of duties required of one but also an ideal to be aspired to. <sup>2.</sup> And this ideal has its source in a tradition, in this case of seamanship, which involves a way of viewing oneself and other people which ennobles both. The excellence of the captain, however, transcends even this commitment to his calling in the way in which he rejoices in a fineness beyond the self: by the end of the voyage the crew of his ship have won the young man's "undying regard" and become, like the ship itself, "creatures" whose mere existence is enough to awaken an unselfish delight.

#### Ransome

The Shadow Line contains also an ideal of simple goodness in the ship's cook, Ransome. Ransome has an extremely weak heart, which is why he is a cook rather than an "active" seaman, but other than the captain he is the only member of the crew to escape the fever.

In many respects an institutional model of worth fits well when applied to Ransome. He does his duty to perfection whatever the pressures or obstacles, always being where he is wanted and always doing his job cheerfully and willingly. "That man noticed everything, attended

1. And "it's the type of human excellence and not merely the good seaman that (Conrad) has in mind" (F.R. Leavis op.cit.p.119).
2. Contrast this way of understanding one's duties with the legalist position put forward by Baier and expounded in chapter 1.

to everything, shed comfort around him as he moved." (p.296) When a squall seems about to hit the ship and the fever-weakened sailors are attempting to haul the mainsail close up, he, anonymously, works harder than any. He does his duty and then much more than his duty. And the heroism involved in his doing his duty and more than his duty can be fully appreciated only when we realize how terrified he has been about his heart and how much he clings to and values life - facts attested by the way he demands his discharge as soon as the ship is safely in port.

The notions of duty and dutifulness are indispensable in appreciating Ransome's moral worth. But I think something additional is required. As the captain works with Ransome in a moment of crisis he hears him panting and avoids looking at him "for fear of seeing him fall down and expire in the act of putting out his strength - for what? Indeed for some distinct ideal" (p.300). The "consummate seaman" in him was aroused. Ransome not only does his duty superbly he also aspires to - and is inspired by - an ideal, much as the captain is, the ideal of the seaman which is a moral as well as a vocational ideal. Central to this ideal is, of course, the perfect performance of duty but it also involves following in a tradition which incorporates an outlook and attitude of service and fidelity to one's fellow seaman and one's ship and a way of carrying oneself in the face of danger and torment.

#### Some comparisons

All three of these admirable individuals display in their various ways, selflessness, courage, trustworthiness and strength of feeling. In the case of all three, in assessing their characters, account needs to be taken of more than "their solution to practical problems", though these of course play an important part; the overall manner and spirit of their conduct and their pervasive moral outlook are also vital elements in the assessment of their worth.

In approaching the excellence of Fleda we gain no help from

a legalist perspective, there is little that is rule-like in the way she conducts her moral life; she has few duties or obligations, though, as shown in her rejection of Owen, she very clearly asserts their importance. Nor is utilitarianism enlightening here. Fleda's eyes are not often on the utility of her actions; the vocabulary which she employs in considering action is much more varied and intricate than that generally displayed by utilitarians. Her aim is not to see Owen, still less herself, happy but for him to behave freely and honourably, being "sublime". The concepts she applies to her actions include such notions as avoiding "vulgarity", seeking "fine" and "noble" courses of action and so on. Utilitarians have rarely shown themselves patient with, let alone sympathetic to, the aesthetically derived terms in which I have suggested Fleda's character should be approached. It is of course open to the utilitarian to either deny Fleda's worth or to say that she would have been better to employ a standard of utility. But more than saying is required here; the burden of proof seems to lie on the utilitarian.

Utilitarianism is no greater help in thinking about the captain and Ransome; the legalist approach, however, is valuable, particularly in the case of Ransome. Clearly "duty" is a key notion in appraising the lives of the two sailors. But I have pointed out that even in the (simpler) case of Ransome more is in question: there is an aspirational aspect, a way of conducting one's life in which an ideal is pursued. This ideal, I have suggested, is rooted in a morally fertile tradition of outlook and behaviour.

In the case of the captain, as in that of Fleda, the quality of his apprehension and appraisal of others is a major factor in appreciating his excellence. Both Fleda and the captain also rejoice in things outside of themselves with a purely selfless passion. The captain approaches his ship (as Fleda the "spoils") not as its owner but in a spirit of guardianship.

There are then important similarities in the elements of which one needs to take account in justly recognizing the moral worth of these three people; the similarity is particularly marked with regard to Fleda and the captain. The elements so needed are of a variety and intricacy which displays the poverty of utilitarian and legalist understanding of moral worth. But for all the similarities in the approach they require, Fleda and the sailors represent very diverse, even incompatible models of human moral excellence - not even Ransome's worth is, I think, quite the same as that of the captain.

Fleda's moral excellence is dependent on an intelligence and sophistication of which Ransome is incapable. Conversely, Ransome is capable of an open, unselfconscious loyalty, dedication and obedience of which Fleda's acutely conscious and questioning nature is not. The captain's character is crystallised around a vocational and ethical tradition and ideal, Fleda's around a moralized "taste". And there is no ideal "blend". Without a calling Fleda could not display the captain's excellences, within his vocation "taste" has necessarily a subsidiary role. But might there not be an ideal person, a saint, whose life displayed the perfect combination of Fleda and the captain? I cannot see how, for part of what is admirable about them is the totality of their commitment to and identification with the way of life in which their moral worth is displayed.

There are a number of types of moral worth which are rightly admired and rejoiced in but their instantiation must generally be in different lives; the diversity of moral excellence is too great for any one model to suffice.

CHAPTER 11    THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JUDGEMENTS OF MORAL WORTH

In chapter 2, two theories concerning moral appraisals were rejected. The first, a "crude" utilitarian theory, saw blame and praise as sanction and reward respectively. A number of reasons were given for rejecting this theory, the only one I need mention here is that the theory confuses moral appraisal with the expression of moral appraisal. The second theory maintained that the point of moral appraisals lay in the registering of faults and the practical uses to which registers were put. I accepted that this theory was helpful in institutional areas. However, as much of this thesis has shown, an institutional model applies only to certain aspects of morality and cannot be extended to cover it all. Hence this theory was rejected as an overall view: there is no general moral register.

These two attempts to specify the point of moral appraisals were found to be unsatisfactory. Indeed it was suggested that even to raise the question of the point or purpose of moral approval and disapproval might be inappropriate. However, I accepted the validity and importance of the question: what is the significance in our lives and those of others of moral approval and disapproval? And the need for an answer to this question may be felt to be the more pressing in view of the findings of the last chapter.

In this chapter I will be answering this question and in doing so I will salvage what is valuable from the rejected theories viz. the importance of appraisals of moral worth in regulating the behaviour of people and the practical interest we have in people's moral character when we make judgements about them.

Brandt's theory

In a well-known paper, Blameworthiness and Obligation (op.cit.),

Richard Brandt argued against construing "blame" as an action, concluding that blaming was a complex state of mind rather than an act and as such need not have a purpose. However, in a more recent article Brandt has defended a modified utilitarian theory of blame. In A Utilitarian Theory of Excuses (P.R. 1970), as the title suggests, Brandt is principally concerned to put forward a theory of excuses but in the course of this he offers a clear and interesting theory of blame - and, by implication, of other moral appraisals.

Brandt argues that central to a moral code is a person's "disposition to feel remorse or guilt" and also his disposition to have "condemning or anti-attitudes" towards other people because of the way they behave. These features are seen as playing the same role in the moral code which punishment plays in a system of criminal law - one of a number of affinities between Brandt's rule-utilitarianism and legalism.

At first it appears that Brandt is slipping back into seeing blame as a type of action. But this is not so, and here Brandt has a valuable insight. The "moral system", he argues, operates in part by "the threat of disapproval by other persons whom they admire or respect". Further, people dislike being "rated low by others as to traits of character" or being the objects of others' indignation; they do not like others to regard them as immoral, unreliable or cruel - just as they do not like being regarded as stupid or dirty (p.352). And while there is often a "palpable aspect" to this disapproval, it is not essential that the disapproval be voiced: it is enough that an individual knows that other people subscribe to, have internalised a code by which his action and/or character is condemned. <sup>1</sup>.

Thus judgements of the actions and moral worth of others play a large part in maintaining a "moral code" in society. But important

1. Clearly this ties in with many of the observations made in chapter 8 about the importance to us of other people's emotions and attitudes.

though this is, the primary way the moral system works is through an individual's conscience, through the built-in aversion he has to doing certain things:

"The mere thought of doing these things stirs up faint rumblings of anxiety or guilt. And the actual doing of them leaves one most uncomfortable" (p.353).

In addition, people with well-developed consciences dislike having to think of themselves as "persons of a certain sort".

This last point of Brandt's is a perceptive one. Very often what troubles an individual is not particular evil actions but something rather less palpable: fear of the sort of person he is becoming as shown not only in what he does but in his manner of acting, his impulses and unchosen thoughts and feelings.<sup>1</sup>

Brandt's basic conception then is that the moral system works by aversions, "mostly aversions just to doing something of a certain kind or acting like a certain sort of person". Excuses fit into this system in that excused behaviour is just such behaviour as cannot be prevented by such aversions eg. accidents, behaviour under hypnosis. By not morally blaming such behaviour "the preventive capacities of the moral machinery are in no way reduced".

These feelings, attitudes and aversions, it may be objected, are not chosen, how then does utilitarianism come to have any application here? Brandt's reply is that while adults may have little control over their attitudes - though surely some? - they do have a great deal of influence over their children's. A child can be trained so as to feel

1. A good example of this occurs in Susan Hill's novel, set in the First World War, Strange Meeting (Penguin 1974). One of the central characters, Barton, is totally disorientated and numbed by his experiences. He is desperately worried that he is losing the capacity to feel, that his emotions are "freezing". As he says to his friend, Hilliard, "I am afraid of myself. Of what I am becoming, of what it will do to me." (p.128).

or not to feel guilt, remorse, condemnation, indignation and so on.

And indeed people in our society are so trained.

We have then, according to Brandt, some choice over the nature of the moral system which operates in society. A given system will have gains and losses: gains in deterring oneself and others by disapproval, losses in terms of discomfort and suffering caused by this disapproval. Brandt's theory, a form of rule-utilitarianism, is that an agent is blameworthy (praiseworthy) to the extent that "the moral code the currency of which in that society would maximise utility would condemn (praise) him for it" (p.353).

Brandt goes on to argue that the utility-maximising code is one in which people would be trained to feel guilty or condemn others only if the action "manifested a defect of character" (p.355). A defect of character is in turn equated with a defect in motivation.<sup>1</sup> So if an action does not exhibit such a defect it is not open to moral criticism for "if a person's level of motivation is adequate the "moral system" has done its job" (p.356).

If he is inadequately motivated then it is a good thing that an agent has guilt feelings and that others disapprove of him, for guilt feelings and disapproval increase motivation in the desired direction, they "reinforce" the trait. This happens in the following way (Brandt admits that this aspect of his theory "may be only roughly correct"):

1. A valuable corrective to this one-sided view of traits is to be found in Character and Thought (A.P.Q. July 1978). In this paper Lester H. Hunt argues that central to having a particular trait of character is a certain way of seeing things, the possessor of a trait holds a belief, one "entrenched" in action, that certain things are right and good. For instance, in distinguishing a spoiled child from a frustrated baby, Hunt writes: "What is distinctive about his outward actions depends on something distinctive about the way he sees things; he can lay claim to something simply by expressing his frustrated desire for it because he regards his desire as the reason why he should have it." (P.183) I have much sympathy with this view which ties in with what I have said about educating in virtue etc. But it is not sufficient as an account of virtues and vices as these are normally understood, emotion and motivation do need to be included - a conclusion with which Hunt need not disagree.

the guilt feelings, which are unpleasant, "become associated with the idea of the action....and the unpleasant associations provide a "boost" in the right direction for similar situations in the future" (p.357). A similar effect occurs if the agent realizes that others disapprove of what he did, and the knowledge that he has been disapproved of has a ripple effect on others. Finally, "all of these experiences may have a purely cognitive function: of impressing on all parties, more firmly, the conception of what the standard behaviour is" (p.357).

Here then is a fully articulated way of conceiving the significance and influence of blame, admiration and appraisals of moral worth, one which avoids many of the pitfalls of such theories. However, I have a number of major criticisms of the theory; having made them, I will try to enlarge on some of Brandt's insights and to deal with some of the issues he raises.

### Defects

Initially, it appears as if a comprehensive view of moral appraisal involving an adequate appreciation of moral character is to be found in Brandt's account. However, it emerges that the reinstatement of character is only partial. Emotions, thoughts and attitudes are seen as important certainly, but only in so far as they affect the level of motivation in oneself and others and thus as (and only as) they are productive of action and good consequences. Moral character is of interest only as a means, not as of value in itself. Brandt's theory is reductive.

This reductivism is connected with a very inadequate understanding of the emotions, one which very closely parallels the conception of the emotions criticised in chapter 2. For instance, on a number of occasions Brandt writes of the discomfort of guilt as though in repentance and reformation a person acted in order to reduce this discomfort - rather than seeing the discomfort as a way of apprehending the wrongness

of the action. . The aversions to which (perhaps rightly) he gives a central place in morality are assumed on his account to be mechanical aversions to various forms of discomfort rather than a rational and moral aversion to wrongdoing and the realization of weakness or viciousness.

These impressions are confirmed by Brandt's theory of the effects of moral disapproval in which he argues that unpleasant guilt feelings become associated with the idea of the disapproved actions thus providing a "boost" in the right direction for similar situations in the future. It is not necessary to repeat the criticisms of such a "booster" theory of emotions made in chapter 8. The major point to note is that while this may be a satisfactory account of a child's moral state, and, regrettably, something residual in ourselves, it is an essentially non-rational, mechanistic view of the growth and significance of moral approval and disapproval. This theory cuts out the rational apprehension of the fact that one has done wrong and the resolution to reform; insight and understanding are left with no place. And Brandt presents this view apparently without noticing that "association" has replaced rationality. Brandt's references to the "machinery of morality" (parallel "the legal machinery") are no mere stylistic quirk.

Finally, in his statement about the job of the moral system Brandt's inadequate conception of morality is most apparent: "if a person's level of motivation to do certain sorts of things is adequate, the "moral system" has done its job." A moment's reflection reveals the vast shrinkage in the understanding of morality this implies: what a person feels or thinks, his concerns, his way of seeing things and so on are seen as morally important only in so far as they affect the agent's motivational level. The place of understanding and contemplation in morality is not even considered.

Brandt's view, then, is one with which I strongly disagree,

particularly in its use of psychological theory. Yet his paper leaves one with a number of important challenges: why do we teach children to blame and make judgements of moral worth? What importance do such judgements have in a "moral system"? How, for instance, do they differ from "aesthetic" appraisals?

### Education and the significance of appraisals of worth

We are naturally interested in other human beings and our curiosity extends beyond superficially wondering about their possessions and idiosyncracies to a desire to know what things matter in their lives, how they feel and behave in various circumstances; in short, our curiosity extends to their moral character. Nor, despite the dangers in that direction, should this curiosity be too quickly dismissed as "nosiness", any more than a scientist's attempts to understand the properties of an unknown compound.

Children seem to share this curiosity about the "workings" of others and both parents and schools attempt to channel and to educate this impulse. In schools, for example, pupils are encouraged to make and substantiate assessments of fictional and historical characters: what do they think of Maggie Tulliver or Emma Woodhouse? Was Lear more sinned against than sinning? etc.

It would seem possible, in principle at least, to encourage children to form moral judgements only about types of action and never to direct their moral appraisals on agents, never to consider the praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of individuals or their overall moral worth.<sup>1</sup> But, as I have observed, we do not do this; we encourage the formation of judgements of moral worth. Why then are children pointed in this direction? What are the gains to the "moral system" of such a practice?

1. Some indeed have argued that we morally ought to do this.

Knowledge of the moral character of those with whom one interacts is of enormous practical importance. Would A make a good colleague? He is able but is he, for instance, conscientious, would he be loyal? Ought one to ask B to babysit: is he reliable, trustworthy? Can one turn for comfort to C? Is he considerate, sympathetic? Throughout all aspects of our lives we must make decisions of this sort about our relationships with other people and in doing so their moral characters frequently figure as importantly and often more importantly than their talents or temperament. If we encouraged children to judge only actions not agents, they would be cut off from this knowledge of the characters of others, they would be incapable of predicting and relying on the actions and feelings of others. All of which is not to deny that often we are mistaken about the characters of others and, furthermore, that individuals do sometimes act "out of character".

It is important to notice that our practical interest in the characters of others is by no means limited to predicting their actions. As I took pains to point out in chapter 8, other people's feelings and attitudes are of great importance to us: we value their good will and wish to avoid their ill will etc. Often we wish to turn to those who we know will share our feelings and concerns - and we would not be satisfied even with the best intentioned pretence.

"An excellent case can be made out for the importance and value of imbuing children with the knowledge of the character of others," it may be replied, "but you must establish more than this. You must show why children should be educated to make moral judgements about character and this involves not only discerning certain traits etc. but responding to them with admiring or condemning attitudes and the like."

As I have argued at length, human beings do not just "respond" emotionally like a dog salivating at the sound of a bell, the emotion they feel towards something is their mode of understanding that thing.

Thus, I believe, children should be educated in involved, emotional responses to good and bad elements of character for this is the proper way of understanding such traits: cruelty and callousness, at their extremes, are traits to be revolted by not simply to be recognized and noted for future reference. Nor do parents and schools impose such emotions, children seem to naturally react in this involved way to the moral characteristics displayed by others. Parents, schools etc. rather attempt to educate and refine these responses and in doing so are educating in a central area of human relationships.

Moral appraisal of those with whom we interact is very closely bound up with treating them as human beings, not to respond to another person's good and evil in this "involved" way, it seems to me, is to treat that person as, in certain respects at least, less than human. For part of what treating someone as a fellow human-being - as opposed to, say, a psychological "case" or a moron - involves is having towards him what Strawson has called "reactive" attitudes: such attitudes as resentment, gratitude, forgiveness and indignation.<sup>1</sup> But these attitudes are themselves conceptually tied to appraisals of moral worth. Thus only if one blames someone for a deed can one resent it; only if you believe a man to be culpable can you be indignant about his deed; you can feel gratitude only in response to what you judge to be another's good will. In this way one can see that appraisal of moral worth is not an optional extra of a "moral system" but rather is central to our whole conception of a shared, human life.<sup>2</sup>

It might perhaps be possible to create a society in which no

1. The foregoing closely follows the argument in P.F. Strawson's paper Freedom and Resentment.
2. God might be able to "hate the sin and love the sinner" but then he is supposed to be infinitely above humans and does not take part in a shared human life; I doubt if the same is possible for a man - without assuming a god-like detachment.

such reactive attitudes existed, in which, therefore, the actions of other individuals were viewed rather in the way we now view natural benefits or disasters. But the consequences of such radical alterations on society as a whole and in particular on a person's view of his own agency and responsibility seem to me horrible to contemplate. Thus, for instance, it is not clear how if they did not learn to direct condemning and admiring moral judgements towards others, individuals could come to apply such appraisals to themselves. And if we no longer directed these attitudes towards ourselves then our whole conception of ourselves as continuous, responsible, moral agents would be transformed. Would there then be a place for those staples of the moral life, repentance and reform? It is difficult to see how there could be.

#### Regulating behaviour

Brandt is absolutely right to claim that our judgements of moral worth, our admiration and disapproval of agents, have a very important influence on the behaviour of others in maintaining what he calls "the moral code". And this is a major part of their significance with the model "system". But such judgements cannot be made in order to have these effects. For disapproval by others of our behaviour and character is effective only if it is believed to be sincere; if we feel that the disapproval is affected, "put on" for our (or society's) benefit, then it becomes ineffective. Essentially it is what others feel about us that concerns us here. As Strawson has pointed out (op.cit.) reactions of disapproval or admiration of actions and character are significant and important because they are genuine reactions to those actions and characters, not assumed with an eye to regulating the behaviour of others. This remains equally true when society's moral disapproval exhibits its "palpable" aspect, for the form that this most often takes is one of words or gestures and, as I made clear in chapter

8, it is in so far as these words and gestures express sincerely held attitudes that they matter to us.

The "practice" of involved moral judgements of persons has, then, major significance in regulating behaviour. Knowledge that others will disapprove of his behaviour may prevent a person acting even when he himself has no qualms of conscience, so great a value do some people place on the good will and approval of others. Where, however, such disapproval seems to be most effective is when disapproval by others is joined to self-disapproval: then it truly bites and may prevent a person straying (again) from the paths of virtue.

#### Incompatibility and the efficacy of approval

It might be argued that my account of the diversity and incompatibility of morally excellent character is inconsistent with the regulating influence of moral appraisals on which I have just insisted, for if moral appraisals are to guide people in a morally desirable direction this will be possible only where morally desirable directions are compatible; if they are incompatible then the "influences" will tend to cancel out and so moral approval and disapproval will be inefficacious.

Firstly, even if this criticism were sound, it would be telling only against praising or admiring certain types of excellent moral worth. For my argument has been that certain types of excellent character are incompatible. I have certainly not claimed that if a character embodying virtues A,B,C is incompatible with a character evincing virtues D,E,F then the possession of A,B,C is possible only at the cost of exhibiting the vices  $\neg D, \neg E, \neg F$ . Not to possess a particular virtue, A, is certainly not to exhibit the "corresponding" vice,  $\neg A$ ; we must retain sufficient of the connotation of excellence for the virtues that we do not assume such an equivalence. One can be a person who is not characterised by the virtue of courage without being a coward - indeed

this is the state in which most of us find ourselves. Thus if my account of the diversity and incompatibility of admirable moral character is accepted, this is perfectly consistent with granting that adverse moral judgements can "motivate" both oneself and others away from the defects in question.

Secondly, I have never denied that many virtues are compatible, that, for instance, most admirable persons have need of the four so-called "cardinal" virtues. Thus the practical significance of moral approval can be accommodated also in a great many instances.

There remains the question of those admirable characters and characteristics that are incompatible. I believe that even here moral approval has practical value. A good case might be made for the utility of a "moral system" (I prefer to say "moral outlook") which embraces the pluralism I have suggested, which admires a diverse and incompatible group of excellences. In establishing this, an answer would be needed to the question of whether approving/praising incompatible qualities results in the neutralization (even negation) of motivation towards both. This is a psychological question but one to which the answer seems clearly in the negative. The not dissimilar case of professions and vocations suggests itself: one can recognize and commend the value of doctor and teacher and social worker without being incoherent, even though the same person cannot (generally) adopt more than one of these callings. And any commendation one gives may have "motivational influence"; far from negating each other these praises may produce a valuable effect on a number of individuals, each influenced towards a different calling according to their talents and "bent".

This seems clearly true when applied to approving of and influencing others. But one's own case still appears to present problems for, *ex hypothesi*, one can only become one of these types of incompatible character. How, then, can one make sense of judgements of moral worth in one's own case?

## Removed and direct moral judgements

I have concentrated in this thesis on the area of removed moral judgements, "spectator" judgements, including those detached judgements a man may make about himself, rather than on direct moral judgements, those which involve a choice or decision concerning what one should do.<sup>1</sup> I think that removed moral judgements have received insufficient attention from moral philosophers. Further, when they have been discussed, theorists have tended to try to link them closely with direct moral judgements (as we have seen Brandt does). I will suggest that the relation is more indirect.

What relation, then, is there between removed judgements of worth and one's own direct judgements about one's moral character, the ideal of moral worth to which one should aspire? Judgements that certain individuals are lacking in moral worth, display defects of character, may have an important part to play in reminding the person judging where he himself is going wrong or may warn him of possible pitfalls. "I must try not to become like that" is our follow-up to many of the adverse judgements we make. And "that" here may well involve not just a particular action but a pervasive outlook or trait. Such a trait may be revealed not only in decisive actions but in gestures, looks, jokes and so on. Thus, for example, I often am led to reflect that I must not come to think and feel as if teaching were a battle, "them" and "us". I must beware of feeling satisfaction in putting a child "down", must not see a peaceful lesson as a "victory" and so on. In many areas of our lives we recognize in others warps of character that could easily come to distort ourselves, and thus our moral appraisal of others can put us in a better position to avoid these flaws.

Removed judgements of positive moral worth may also have direct influence on the person making them. They present him with

1. This distinction is made by Maurice Mandelbaum in The Phenomenology of Moral Experience.

various aspects of character to aspire to, often increasing the "attractiveness" of particular virtues. In the courage one judges another to display one can find an inspiration to try harder to develop this quality in oneself, one can find a model to imitate in another person's cheerful and thorough performance of duty etc.

Removed positive judgements, however, do seem to present the problem. Many of these judgements commend incompatible models of excellence but since one can embody only one of these models, is it not as if one were offering oneself contradictory advice? It is not. Making a judgement that A is a person of excellent moral worth does not thereby commit one to the direct judgement that one should become like A. Removed judgements of positive moral worth do not entail "corresponding" direct judgements; rather they set out as excellent a number of options or models - as one might judge several professions to be admirable without thereby recommending oneself to train in all of them. How, then, are direct judgements of moral worth made?

Questions concerning a person's own moral character do not arise in vacuo. Many of the factors which were discussed in the last chapter as contributing to the incompatibility of forms of human excellence have an important bearing here. Thus one's job or profession may be such as to demand the formation of one's character in one direction rather than another. The social setting in which one finds oneself may make certain traits particularly valuable, even necessary; those aspects of one's personal history previously alluded to: family traditions, the good or evil done to one, the evil one may have done, these and much more direct the development of one's character.

Particularly I would mention the importance of a person's present character. The ideal to which one aspires ought to be considered in the light of what one knows oneself to be already. If one is particularly lacking in patience and sympathy then it would be folly to set oneself an ideal of moral character in which these qualities are

central. I am not arguing in favour of complacency here, such a person ought to try to eradicate these defects - but courage is not always best learned at the head of a cavalry charge.

Having noted all this, however, I believe that most individuals are drawn to one particular form of goodness of character rather than others. They can recognize and admire other forms of excellence and desire that many people embody them - as one can admire and encourage other callings - but ultimately it is this mode of excellence that it seems right for them to aspire to. The factors just considered, thoughtful examination of these ideals and of oneself, all play their part, but at some point we seem to go - to have to go - beyond this: a certain form of moral excellence exerts its magnetism. And here, of course, I have been obliged to employ metaphor.

It is easy to ridicule this choice as mere whim, patent irrationality and so on. And I concede that it does involve a non-rational move. But this move takes place after, or in the context of, a rational, careful evaluation: it is a "choice" between what one has judged to be excellences, not the blind following of a whim.

#### Broadening moral vision

In the previous sections of this chapter some major aspects of the significance of appraisals of moral worth have been shown. (1) I have shown the utility of these appraisals to the person making them in predicting the conduct of others and so modifying one's interactions with them. (2) The practical importance of these appraisals in regulating the behaviour of those who are the objects of them has been demonstrated, and there is a ripple-effect on others who are aware that such appraisals have been made. (3) The importance of moral appraisals in uncovering cautionary "models" of what should be avoided and also in highlighting admirable individuals for imitation by those

who make these judgements has also been brought out. (4) I have briefly shown how these judgements of moral worth form a central strand in the tapestry of human relationships and indicated how much of what is distinctively human in our relationships with each other would collapse if this strand were removed.

Having then very firmly established the practical importance of moral appraisals of this type, their centrality to the "moral system", I wish to venture on a largely uncharted region: to consider the importance of moral appraisals in the life of the person who makes them, not as these judgements confirm and express his established moral convictions, but as they enlarge them, as they broaden his moral vision.

Works of art provide a major arena for this exploratory form of moral appraisal: it is particularly, though not, of course, exclusively, in relation to works of art that we exercise our most conscious, prolonged, thoughtful and refined exploration and judgement of moral worth. In novels, plays, stories and films some of the key objects of our most considered moral appraisals are to be found, and our approach here is both an instance of and a model for one important aspect of the significance of judgements of moral worth.

I fear that the reaction of many to the assertions of the previous paragraph would be to conclude that in so far as they are true these appraisals must be fairly unimportant, merely on the fringes of the moral life. Such a reaction I believe to be badly mistaken, for it assumes that novels and other works of art are not properly central to people's lives but are "entertainments", charming perhaps but scarcely of major importance. Whereas I contend that major novelists (to limit myself to that form) "are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote, awareness of the possibilities of life". And central to their presentation of the "possibilities of life" is "an intense moral preoccupation" (F.R. Leavis The Great Tradition p.10).

Why should it be with respect to literature especially that we find this important exercise of moral appraisal? Partly it is that - despite all one's shifting insights - in a novel, for example, one is presented with "fixed" characters, their behaviour tomorrow is not going to put everything up for reassessment. Further, and very importantly, one is given the information one needs to arrive at a considered judgement: one is presented not only with a character's actions but also with his feelings, thoughts, doubts, impulses and so on. In "real life" one often has access to no more than hints of these things <sup>1</sup> - though as I have observed one does, one has to, work on such hints. Hence with respect to fictional characters it is often possible to make a truly comprehensive assessment: traits, demeanors, ideals and all (instead of the provisional and workaday for which we often have to settle).

But underlying this is the fact, to which I have just alluded, that major novelists are deeply concerned with moral questions; in their novels we are presented with implicit claims and valuations: such and such is an admirable way to live, this mode of life for all its attractions is defective, this character, although charming, is wicked and so on. And in doing these things, the great novelists present us with possibilities we have not considered before; often they offer as admirable what are, at first sight, unlikely candidates; they question our assumptions and thus invite us to understand and exercise our judgement rather than automatically responding with our pre-held convictions. In

1. An exception to this is those very few people with whom one is truly intimate and they seem to form a very special moral case. While we feel gratitude, resentment, indignation, etc. towards them (and so do make involved moral judgements) when it comes to appraisals of overall worth Hazlitt's comment captures at least part of the truth:

"We hardly inquire whether those for whom we are thus interested, and to whom we are thus knit, are better or worse than others - the question is a kind of profanation - all we know is, they are more to us than anyone else can be."

(I have, I am afraid, been unable to retrace the source of this quotation.)

the great novels we cannot fit moral templates over the characters; we are challenged to relocate the points at which moral discriminations are to be made - which is not to say we must agree with the novelist's assessments, but we must think. Since I have used many literary examples throughout, I will resist the temptation to illustrate further.

### The significance of exploratory appraisal

What significance has this exploratory exercise of moral appraisal in a person's moral life? From art we take away into the rest of our lives, and to the appraisal of those we encounter, a deeper understanding of the moral life, of the patterns, types and modes of excellence possible within it. The same, of course, applies to defects: one may now look suspiciously at what one hitherto took to be an acceptable pattern of life - as displayed by others or oneself. <sup>1</sup>.

This deepened understanding and appreciation of moral worth, then, affects our behaviour in a variety of ways as it alters our vision of the lives and traits of others and of ourselves, as it affects "our active convictions<sup>as</sup> to the nature of our world and our fellow creatures, convictions as to the hierarchy of the value of things - which are to be more esteemed, and which less". <sup>2</sup>. In addition such explorations are likely to have valuable side-effects in increasing our humility and flexibility and in reducing our proneness to make unreflective, conventional, moral responses.

1. For instance, Bettelheim's condemnation of the "business-as-usual" attitude of some of his fellow Jews in the concentration camps forces one to think again: can one any longer readily assume that striving to carry on normally is the virtuous response to appalling situations? Would one, in the light of this, adopt a business-as-usual attitude oneself?
2. Part of Ortega y Gasset's definition of "culture" quoted in Lester H. Hunt Character and Thought op.cit.p.185.

It would be possible to elaborate the beneficial practical consequences of these exploratory appraisals for they are many. But to do so would be to risk clouding the view that I have offered throughout this thesis, that in apprehending and assessing other people, and ourselves, we are rightly concerned about more than "their solution to specifiable practical problems", we consider "their total vision of life" and this is shown in many ways including "their assessments of others, their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive and praiseworthy".<sup>1</sup> It will be seen, therefore, that I maintain that what a person judges to be morally fine or deficient, and the terms in which he makes his assessments, form a very important element in assessing him morally; the sensitivity and generosity of a person's moral appraisals is an important component of his moral worth.

But why, it may be demanded, should this be? Why should such moral appraisal be regarded as more significant than, say, a person's aesthetic judgements? Having aesthetic bad taste is no vice, what is so special about "moral bad taste"?

In the formulation of the challenge there is a (perhaps unconscious) denigration of "aesthetics". The colour or cut of the clothes someone wears or the decor of his living room are relatively unimportant choices. But it would be a mistake to assimilate all aesthetic judgements to these. A fervent response to cheap emotionalism on television or in literature seems to me a significant matter (why else do we educate in this area?): it is likely to pervade a person's actions and appraisal of others, to corrode his vision and so be a moral factor. Aesthetics and morals tend to be opposite ends of a continuum rather than operating on two different planes. However, having reasserted that "aesthetic taste" is far from negligible, I do agree that there are times when aesthetic and ethical appraisals may

1. Iris Murdoch Vision and Choice in Morality - quoted in chapter 1.

be contrasted, and so the question of what is special about moral appraisal remains.

The far greater practical importance of ethical appraisal might be pointed out, and all the points made in the previous sections of this chapter might be rehearsed. But once again, while it is true and very important, this would be to answer the challenge solely in the challenger's terms whereas I wish to throw doubt on the completeness of those terms. I will, therefore, try a different tack in order to show the greater centrality of moral appraisal in our lives.

In chapter 7 I discussed an example derived from Iris Murdoch. I argued that a woman, M, showed a moral improvement in correctly re-appraising the character of her daughter-in-law, coming to the conclusion that what she had taken to be flaws were in fact admirable qualities. I will now sketch an example of an equivalent change in the realm of aesthetics. A person, B, has spent much of her life thinking York Minster, near which she lives, is a monstrosity. However, she takes a course in architecture and comes to look at this building in a new way, now seeing what a fine edifice it is. I take it that B's aesthetic judgement has been refined and improved. What then is the difference between M's transformation and B's? That there is a major difference seems indisputable.

I will consider the possibility of distinguishing the transformations in hypothetical terms: what actions may these transformations have prevented? Suppose that in their unregenerate state both M and B had put their thoughts into words: B might, at most, dissuade a few people from seeing or admiring York Minster and they would be deprived of a pleasure.<sup>1</sup> M, however, might do much worse: she might be guilty of detracting from her daughter-in-law's character.

But what is wrong with detraction? Without adequate basis

1. Perhaps even of an inspiration, but establishing that would involve a detailed argument.

you lead someone to form a poor opinion of the person from whose character you detract with (the likelihood of) a corresponding loss of esteem. And why is that important? The "recipient" of the slander may well have no practical connection with the person slandered - the most he perhaps does is to transmit it to someone else - so the wrongness of detraction cannot be explained just in terms of the material loss likely to be suffered by the person who is defamed.<sup>1</sup> In any case, the minor nature of the material loss in many cases can scarcely explain why detraction so often seems a major wrong; indeed the material losses, removal of marks of respect etc., tend to matter to the person who is defamed mainly in that they convey the loss of other people's esteem and good opinion which is what really concerns him. Furthermore, we see defamation as a wrong even if the person who is defamed never hears about it or suffers as a result. But now, if the wrongness of detraction lies in its potential to produce in others an unjustly low opinion of the person who is defamed have we not excellent reason for condemning the detractor for forming such an unjust picture of the defamed person in the first place? And if the wrongness of detraction is not to be sought in the consequences it produces then I would suggest that its wrongness can be explained only in terms such as these: the detractor commits wrong in expressing and so aligning himself with his unjust judgement - and he can so align himself without any "external" action. In either case we have equally good reason to regard the transformation from an unjust to a just picture of the person who is judged as an important moral improvement, a far more central and significant transformation than any in the realm of aesthetics.

The whole of this argument is, I fully recognize, conditional on the acceptance of detraction as a significantly immoral action. But anyone who denied this would be well on the way to denying the moral

1. Though, for obvious reasons, the courts are generally only involved where material loss has been suffered.

significance of conversation and hence of a substantial segment of our lives.

To generalise: I have argued in this thesis that many important actions are admirable or deplorable in so far as they express certain attitudes, feelings and judgements; equally there are, as I have just illustrated, actions which are admirable or deplorable in that they "produce" these judgements and dispositions. But if this is so then these attitudes, feelings and judgements must be regarded as themselves having an important status in the moral life, even if, by some chance, they are not outwardly expressed. The exploratory exercise of moral appraisal affects precisely these attitudes, judgements and feelings; its importance in the moral life is thus considerable.

It must be stressed<sup>d</sup> that, although no neat, direct link between them and particular actions may be made, these exercises of one's judgement of moral worth are not idle. Iris Murdoch (once again) makes the point clearly.

"As moral agents we have to try to see justly, to overcome prejudice, to avoid temptation, to control and curb imagination, to direct reflection. Man is not a combination of an impersonal rational thinker and a personal will. He is a unified being who sees, and who desires in accordance with what he sees, and who has some continual slight control over the direction and focus of his vision." (The Idea of Perfection in The Sovereignty of the Good p.40)

To this directing of reflection and control of vision exploratory appraisals of moral worth have much to contribute.

Above all, these exercises of moral appraisal are not a self-regarding cultivation of fineness, a sort of spiritual preciousness; on the contrary, they are a response to and a recognition and valuation of the moral world which is beyond the self.

In morality we do not have something merely law-like, a

"machinery" for regulating society, rather we have vital aspects of the world which should be acknowledged and explored. The possibilities of moral worth of human beings are an important part of morality and the full appreciation of these possibilities is itself an admirable element of human moral worth.

### Review of conclusions

In the opening chapter of this thesis I outlined eight features which characterise a legalist understanding of moral worth and showed how a number of these features were also to be found in the utilitarian approach to moral excellence. I shall find it convenient to summarise some of my main conclusions in this thesis in point-by-point contrast to these features.

(1) On the legalist (and most utilitarian) theory, moral worth is seen as acquired by action, performance of one's duty. I have shown that, while actions are very important, the emotions, thoughts, impulses and appraisals of a person must also be seriously considered. These elements in a person's overall vision of life are morally important, and not simply as the means to good performances. A proper account of the emotions shows them to be more than motivational boosters or inhibitors; they are ways of understanding situations, actions and persons and it is an important component of moral worth that a person's emotions are in a "healthy" state. Similar conclusions have been established about a person's "vision" and appraisals.

(2) Dutifulness is put forward by the legalist as the major, if not sole, meritorious trait. I have shown (a) that duties are only one, albeit an important, strand of morality; many meritorious actions are not the performance of duties - nor are they "above-and-beyond duty" - their merit does not lie in their requiredness; (b) the performance of duties does not prove a person to be of adequate moral worth; (c) dutifulness is not a substitute for the other virtues, it is one among other virtues

and these other traits cannot be modelled on dutifulness, rather some must be characterised in contrast to it eg. mercy and forgiveness.

(3) The sense of duty, on a legalist account, is the moral motive. I have shown that the proper place of this motive is within the institutional area of duties and obligations, within the quasi-legal segment of morality. Outside this area references to it tend to be an index of the confusion generated by the monopoly of "duty" - further unfortunate results of which have been amply demonstrated. I have shown that many motives other than the "sense of duty" are also "moral". In particular I have stressed the importance of actions motivated by various feelings and, further, have demonstrated that many actions are morally significant because of the emotions they express.

(4) Legalists, at least implicitly, hold that the true bearer of moral worth is the will. I have argued that a person may be morally better for behaving unconscientiously ie. with a "weak will" and so we must accept a broader conception of moral worth. I have shown that this broadened conception may fruitfully be approached by the virtues (and related notions such as aspiring to an ideal). In doing so, I concluded that virtues are not simply trained responses but are dispositions of emotion, thought and action: they involve ways of feeling and seeing. This conclusion led me to offer an alternative model of thoughtful moral agency, not as calculation and balancing, but as the constant struggle to adjust and correct one's vision.

(5) Implicit in the legalist theory is the assumption that there is a single model of moral worth. The conclusion to which I have come is that this assumption is false; we admire very diverse and even incompatible types of moral character. I explained the factors contributing to this pluralism and welcomed such moral diversity.

(6) Positive moral worth is seen by legalists, and even more obviously by utilitarians, as a social asset; excellent traits of character are prized for their utility. I have acknowledged the utility of many of

the virtues but pointed out that they are prized for more than their utility. Courage, it has been shown, is not only useful but a condition of freedom, gratitude embodies a morally fine emotion, one in which morally important aspects of the world are celebrated. Our grounds for prizing excellent traits of character are very diverse and not reducible to the utility of these traits.

(7) I will reverse the order of the last two features mentioned in chapter 1, dealing first with the accounting metaphors. I observed that accounting metaphors, talk of "moral marks" etc., play an important part in a legalist, and utilitarian, account of moral worth. I have shown that in appraising even particular actions, in many cases both virtuous and vicious aspects must be recognized and so no single "mark" can be awarded. In making overall judgements of moral worth not an arithmetical but an organic and dynamic understanding is, as I have made clear, what is required. The diversity and incompatibility of types of excellent moral worth further undermine this neat "summing" approach to worth.

(8) Legalists and utilitarians regard judgements of moral worth as having important practical significance in maintaining the "moral code". I have demonstrated the practical significance of moral appraisals of persons in (a) the "information" they provide the person who is judging (b) the way they help to regulate the behaviour of others (c) the models for imitation or avoidance they highlight for the person judging (d) the way they underlie "reactive" attitudes and thus form a central strand in human relationships. But I have also stressed the exploratory role of moral appraisal, the way in which exercising one's judgement enriches one's moral vision, a vision which pervades one's thought, feeling and action. Finally, I have shown that, irrespective of its usefulness, in moral appraisal we are seeking to do justice to the persons we appraise.

The view of moral worth and the significance of our moral

appraisal of persons which has emerged in this thesis is far less neat and clear-cut than the legalist and utilitarian theories in opposition to which it has been articulated. I have shown which elements are required for a full account of moral worth but I have been able to explore only some of these: many virtues and ideals, for instance, remain to be examined so as to bring out our grounds for prizing these qualities. But what my account lacks in tidiness I think it gains in the illumination it sheds. If we return, as I have tried to do, to seeing moral worth as involving the whole of an individual then we gain new insight not only into moral worth, but also into those actions from which legalists and utilitarians seem to start their theories. For man is not primarily actor or producer of consequences, but a thoughtful, feeling, active being, the moral significance of whose conduct is to be sought in the way in which it bodies forth his total orientation towards the good.

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