

## THE CLASSES OF MORAL TERMS

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Discussion of moral terms or moral judgments are apt to be introduced by a statement to the effect that by «moral term» the writer means such term as «right», «wrong», «duty», «virtue», «justice», etc.; or that by a «moral judgment» he means a judgment like «Stealing is wrong», «Honesty is a virtue», «The laws of this country are unjust», etc. Now there is nothing seriously wrong with this way of conveying to the reader what the writer intends him to understand by his use of the expression «moral term» and «moral judgment». But what must be tantalizing to many a reader is that the list of moral terms seems never to be given complete: some of the moral terms are given, but what would be the other members in the list? Moreover, it is clear that there are wide differences in meaning between certain moral terms, e.g. between «duty» and «virtue», so that even if these terms belong to the same genus, *moral* term, they evidently do not belong to the same species or *class* of moral terms. But what the classes of moral terms are, and what the relations among these classes are, are matters which writers on morals have hitherto either not investigated at all or discussed only partially and haphazardly. What I propose to do in this paper is to give a list of moral terms that will be close, at least, to being complete; and to give an exhaustive classification of these moral terms on the basis of similarity of meaning, at the same time indicating certain interrelationships among these classes. I say the list will be *close* to being complete because I cannot guarantee that it will be complete, since there may be some terms that I have overlooked, and since some words are only occasionally used in a moral sense, and so leave one in doubt as to whether they should properly

be included in a list of moral terms. The terms I include in my catalogue are only such terms as have well-established usages in moral senses. Almost all of them are used in other senses as well (e.g., «right» in «right hand») but we may nevertheless quite properly call them, as we in fact do call them, «moral terms» in so far as they are used in moral senses, because such usage is in their case so common. In dividing the moral terms into classes, I shall take one or two terms as representative of a class, and indicate roughly the meanings of the other terms I put into that class in terms of the representatives of that class; but I shall not attempt to define the class representatives themselves. The fact is that though the members of a class of moral terms will be sufficiently akin in meaning to justify us in regarding them as belonging to the same class, there will be slight differences in meaning among these terms, or in the contexts in which they are employed; but I shall not attempt to elucidate in detail such slight differences among the members of a class—I shall content myself simply with indicating in a rough way some of the more obvious differences. The important thing is that we should recognize that certain terms *do* belong in the same class as other terms.

What criterion or criteria do we employ to determine whether a given term is a moral term, or is used in a moral sense? This is a very difficult question to answer; but fortunately, while the answer would be of great theoretical interest, we need not give it here. In practice we usually have little trouble in recognizing that a certain term is a moral term or is used in a moral sense. Thus we all know that the words «duty», «deserve», «virtue», «justice» very commonly function as moral terms and we are seldom in doubt as to when they do so. In this paper I shall simply assume that as a rule we are capable of recognizing a moral term when we meet one, however it is that we do this; and that we can tell whether two moral terms mean much the same thing or differ in meaning. I do not think that this assumption will get us into any very serious difficulties.

Moral terms can be divided into five classes, as follows:

### I. *Deontological*<sup>1</sup> terms

As representative of this class I take terms «duty», «right» and «wrong» as they occur in such sentences as «It is one's duty to keep

1) From «το δέον (δέοντος)» = «that which is binding, needful, right, proper» (Liddell and Scott's abridged *Lexicon*). The term «deontological» is already in use, and in much the same way as I employ it there.

one's promises », « It would not be right to hit a man when he's down », « It is wrong to tell lies ». At first glance it may not seem that the term « duty » on the one hand, and the terms « right » and « wrong » on the other, should be put in the same class if similarity of meaning is to be the basis of classification, since « duty » does not mean the same as « rightness » or the opposite of « wrongness ». Yet these terms are, in fact, closely related in meaning, in the sense that the meaning of « duty » is specifiable in terms of « right » and « wrong »: for to say that it is A's duty to do x, is to say that it would be right for A to do x and wrong for A not to do x. The difference between « duty » and « right » and « wrong » is definable essentially in terms of a difference in the temporal point of view from which the act judged is regarded. When we judge an act to be right or wrong, we are viewing the act as being done or as having been done; when we judge an act to be someone's duty, we are viewing the act as still to be done. Thus, if A has a promise to keep, and has not yet done so, we are prepared to tell him that it *is* his duty to keep his promise; and it is only after he has kept his promise, or has finally decided not to keep it, that we would say he *did* the right thing or the wrong thing.

There are several words closely related in meaning to « duty », some of these expressing the same notion in different parts of speech. Thus there are two verbs corresponding to « duty », namely « ought » and « should » (sometimes « must » is used in place of these verbs). If it is A's duty to do x, we can say A ought to do x, or A should do x; but these verbs are not as forceful or emphatic as the word « duty », and of the two, « should » is considerably less forceful than « ought ». Thus we might say about an act that we regarded as of only slight moral significance that A should do it, but hardly that it was A's duty to do it: this implying that if A did not do it, the wrong committed would be only a slight one. But if A does not do an act that is said to be his duty to do, the implication is that the wrong he does (in failing to do it) is a serious one. Sometimes, instead of using the verbs « ought » and « should », we express the notion of duty by means of a sort of gerundive construction: that is, instead of saying that x *ought* to be done by A, we simply say x *is to be done* by A, or A *is to do* x.

The notion of duty may also be expressed adjectivally or participially. Thus if it is A's duty to do x, we may say A is *bound* or *obliged*, or morally bound or obliged, to do x; or that is *obligatory* for A to do x, or that it is *incumbent* on him to do it. Sometimes « *required* » or « morally required » is used in much the same way.

The term « obligation » carries the same notion as « duty » but is used in a somewhat different way: for example, we say it *is* A's duty to do x, but we do not say it *is* A's obligation to do x, but rather, A *has* an obligation to do x; also, we may put a person under an obligation, but we do not put him under a duty. As nearly as I can tell, to say that an agent has an obligation to do something, is to say that he has a presumptive duty to do it, that is to say, a duty that may fail to be actually his, but only under certain special conditions. (Instead of saying that A has an *obligation* to do x, we may say he is *obligated* to do it).

Another term that is closely related in meaning to « duty » is the term « responsibility », as when we talk about a person's responsibilities, or point out that it was Smith's responsibility to look after the correct operation of the trap-doors. A person's responsibilities are those things it is his duty to do in virtue of his occupying a certain position or performing a certain function. Thus we talk about a parent's responsibilities, a railroad conductor's responsibilities, a teacher's responsibilities, and so on: these are the things that it is such a person's duty to do in so far as he is a parent, a railroad conductor, or a teacher.

Let us now consider terms used more or less interchangeably with « right » and « wrong ». One pair of such terms is « moral » and « immoral ». « Moral conduct » may mean much the same as « right conduct » and « immoral conduct » as « wrong conduct »; but there is a decided tendency nowadays to restrict the use of the terms « moral » and « immoral » in this sense to right and wrong conduct in the sphere of sexual behaviour. It is perhaps worthwhile to point out in passing that the term « moral » has another moral sense (to be explained in the section on aretological terms), and at least two neutral descriptive senses: one in which its antonym is not « immoral » but « non-moral », as when we talk about moral terms and non-moral terms and moral senses and non-moral senses; and one in which its antonym is « amoral », as when we say about someone that he is completely amoral, meaning by that, that he has no sense of right and wrong at all though he is capable of having such a sense (if an agent is incapable of having such a sense—for example, an animal—we say it is non-moral rather than amoral). The terms « ethical » and « unethical » are also often used in the sense of « right » and « wrong », but, like the terms « moral » and « immoral », their use tends to be restricted to a particular sphere, in this case, the sphere of professional conduct. Thus a lawyer may be

said to engage in unethical practices if he does the sort of wrong acts than an agent is capable of doing in virtue of his being a member of the legal profession. «Ethical» also has a neutral descriptive sense similar to that of «moral» when the antonym of that term is «non-moral»; the antonym of «ethical» in this sense is, of course, «non-ethical». There is no sense of «ethical» in which it has an antonym corresponding to «amoral».

The remaining terms in this class need only be listed: «to right», «to wrong»; «rightful (ly)»; «wrongful (ly)»; «morally prohibited (forbidden)» (= «wrong»), «morally permissible (allowable, allowed)» (= «not wrong»), «may» («A may do x» = «It is not wrong for A to do x»); «morally proper», «morally improper»; «moral transgression» (= «wrong act»), «moral offence», «misconduct», «crime» (but this is usually used in a legal sense), «sin» (but this is usually used in a religious sense).

## II. *Aeteological*<sup>2</sup> terms

I take as representative of the class of aeteological terms the term «right» in the sense in which we talk about someone's *rights* and in which we say that someone has *a right* to something or to do something. This sense of the word «right», unlike its deontological sense, is easy to analyze: it can be defined partly in deontological terms (as in (a) and (b) below), and partly in non-moral terms (as in (c) below). It is this latter element in its meaning that provides us with a reason for putting it into a class distinct from the class of deontological terms. Let us see, then, what it means.

To say that A has a right to do x is to say:

(a) that it would not be wrong for him to do x and that it would not be wrong for him to refrain from doing x; in other words he may (in the deontological sense of that word) do or not do x, just as he pleases. Of course it may be A's duty to do x as well as his right (e.g. a legally appointed judge has both a duty and a right to judge others), but just in so far as we confine ourselves to saying that A has *a right* to do x, we imply nothing as to his duties. For this reason, also, it is not implied

2) From «αἰτέω» («I demand»); not to be confused with «aetiological», which is from «αἰτία» («cause»). I use term «aeteological» to name this class of moral terms because these terms are in fact characteristically used in the making of demands, and because the other Greek moral terms that might have served as roots for a more appropriate name have been pre-empted for other uses.

that A, in doing, would be doing *the right thing* (deontological sense of «right»), since it is not implied that A has a duty to do x. Thus I presume that I have a right to read detective novels, and if I am correct, this would mean that it would not be wrong of me to read them, and that it would not be wrong of me not to read them, either; nor would it be right thing for me to do to read them, nor is it obligatory for me to read them. In other words, I may (deontological sense) suit myself as to whether I read them or not.

(b) that it *would* be wrong for anyone else to interfere with or prevent A's doing x if he chooses. Thus if I have the right to speak freely, as I believe I have, all others have the duty not to prevent me from doing so if choose, and if they *did* prevent me, they would be doing wrong.

(c) that the doing of x is an actual or potential object of interest to A. This requires a word of explanation. By «object of interest» I mean anything, whether a physical object, an activity, or a state of affairs, that the agent desires, wishes, longs or yearns for, would prefer to have or do or be the case, wants, needs, hopes for, etc. By «actual object of interest» I mean an object that the agent actually or presently desires, etc; by «potential object of interest» I mean an object that the agent would desire if he were more enlightened and knew the nature of the object better. Thus, though presumably an education is not an actual object of interest to the young child, it is a potential object of interest to him. Now rights are always thought of, by those who assert the existence of them, as being objects of interest, actual or potential, to those said to have the rights. This explains why our rights are things we demand, stand up for, defend, fight for, and so on; and why an infringement of our rights—which is nothing but the prevention of our doing or enjoying those things which we have a right to—is something that we characteristically resent. Yet it may seem doubtful to some readers that what we are thought to have a right to is always thought of as some object of interest, actual or potential, for did not Plato, for example, in the *Gorgias* argue that we have a right to be punished? And surely punishment it not an object of interest to anyone, but rather the contrary. But let us note, first, that Plato's view that we have a right to be punished strikes us as paradoxical at first, and paradoxical precisely because we think of a right as being an object of interest while we think of punishment as an object of disinterest; and, second, that the air of paradox is removed when we learn that Plato regards

punishment as a means of curing the corrupt soul, and hence as an object of interest after all to the enlightened subject. Thus Plato's concept of a right is not inconsistent with the foregoing analysis; and I suspect that any other counter-examples that might adduced would be amenable to the same treatment.

Let us now list the other terms in this class. «To be entitled to» and «to be warranted in (doing something)» have basically the meaning of having a right to, while «to entitle» and «to warrant» mean *to give a right to*. «Authority» means a particular kind of right, namely, *the right to command others* (as in the case of members of governments or officers of the law or of the armed services), and «to authorize» means *to confer a right (to something) on the part of one who has authority*; but these terms are more often used in a legal sense than in a moral sense. «To justify» an act means *to show or demonstrate (against charges that the agent did wrong) that the agent had a right to do the act*; a «justifiable» act is such that it can be shown that the agent had a right to do it, while an «unjustifiable» act is such that it cannot be shown that the agent had a right to do it, hence, a wrong act. «Legitimate», usually said of professions, occupations, or practices, means *such that an agent has a right to engage in (them)*, but this term is more often used in a legal sense than in a moral sense. «Due», as when we speak of what is due to one, means *such that the agent has a right to demand (it) and such, therefore, that it is the duty of (certain others) to grant (it)*, but since the second element seems to be the more emphatic part of the meaning of this term, perhaps it should be classified as a deontological rather than an aeteological term. «A claim» means *a presumptive right*: that is to say, if A has a claim to x, that is the same as saying that while A's right to x has not been established, there are reasons for believing that A has a right to x. Of course there may be some reason to believe too that B has a right to x rather than A, from which it follows that though only one person in the end may have a right to x, several persons may have a claim to it.

There are a number of terms belonging to this class that we use so commonly, and in such a variety of everyday situations, that we scarcely realize that basically we are using these terms in a moral sense; these terms are «own», «belong to», «give», «earn», and, in certain contexts, the possessive adjectives and pronouns «my», «mine», «your», «yours», etc. To «own» something means *to be in a position in which one has the right to use and enjoy it, and to dispose of it as one sees fit*; and if A owns x, then x is said «to belong» to A, and it is also said to be

« his » (A himself would say « It is *mine* »). That these terms really are used in a moral, aetiological sense may be seen from the fact that we are accustomed to contrast *ownership* with *possession*. To possess something is to be in a position in which one *in fact* has the power to use, enjoy, and dispose of it; a robber or gangster might be in such a position in relation to a certain object, but if he did not have a *right* to it, we would not say he *owned* it, or that it *belonged* to him, or that it was *his*. (Sometimes we qualify the underlined words with the adverbs « truly » or « really » to mark the contrast between ownership and possession). To « give » often means to transfer ownership to another; sometimes it merely means to transfer possession to another. To « earn » means (specifically) to *acquire ownership in*, or (generally) *a right to (something) by working for* (it); it does not entail, however, acquiring possession of it. Thus one may have *earned* a promotion without getting it.

### III. *Aretological*<sup>3</sup> terms

I take as representative of this class the term « virtuous » in the sense in which we talk about a virtuous motive, a virtuous action or a virtuous character. The fact is, of course, that we judge not only acts from the moral point of view but also motives and person; and that we may make one sort of moral judgment of an act when it is considered irrespective of its motive, namely, a deontological judgment, and another sort of judgment of an act when the motive which prompted it is taken into consideration, namely, the sort of judgment we are to catalogue here, an « aretological » judgment. Acts that we judge to be right or the agent's duty may be done from a variety of motives, but chiefly these motives will be of a self-interested sort, or of a benevolent or kindly nature, or they will be constituted by or proceed from what is often called « the sense of duty », which essentially comes down to the desire to do what is right or one's duty simply because it *is* right or one's duty. This last sort of motive is what we judge to be *virtuous*. We may also use the term—and in fact we probably use it more often, since there is a decidedly archaic flavour in the word « virtuous »—« morally good » to express our judgment of such a motive; and, less often, simply the term « moral » by itself (which is thus seen to have *two* moral senses, namely, a deontological sense and an aretological sense). It must be noted that when I say we judge a motive to be vir-

3) From « ἀρετή » (« virtue »).



tuous or morally good when we believe that motive to be constituted by a desire to do what is right simply because it is right, I am not giving a *definition* of « virtuous » or « morally good ». If to say (a) « His motive for doing x was morally good » were simply another way of saying (b) « His motive for doing x was a desire to do right just because it was right » then the term « morally good » would plainly be merely a descriptive term, since (b) is plainly a descriptive statement; but (a) is surely a moral judgment, and not merely a descriptive statement, and « morally good » is surely a normative or evaluational term and not merely a descriptive term.<sup>4</sup> To say, then, that a motive is morally good when it is constituted by a desire to do what is right simply because it is right is not to give a definition of « morally good »; it is, rather, to state what property a motive must have in order to have the *further* property of moral goodness, or, as C. D. Broad might put it, it is to state what is the *morally-good-making* property of a motive. As to what the term « morally good » *means*, that is another question, and a very difficult one, too, as difficult as the question of what « right » means. In this paper I shall attempt to answer neither one.

Often instead of using the term « morally good » to judge an agent's motive, we use the term « good » simply; but this term as applied to motives is ambiguous. Not every good motive can be said to be a morally good motive. Thus we judge the motives of generosity and kindness to be good, but it would not do to regard these motives as *morally* good. The reason is this: the only beings we judge morally or from a moral point of view are moral agents, that is to say, beings who, as we commonly put it, « know the difference between right and wrong », or « have a sense of right and wrong ». Thus the behaviour of animals, idiots, and infants is not judged morally, just because these beings are incapable of moral conceptions or making moral discriminations; and such beings we may call « non-moral » agents. But it is conceivable that even non-moral agents might be actuated by benevolent or generous motives, and such motives we would still wish to judge as *good*: but being the motives of non-moral agents, who are not subject to moral judgment, we could not judge them to be *morally* good. And in so far as a moral agent is actuated by such motives and

4) I assume, of course, what perhaps some, though not most, philosophers would want to deny: namely, that there is a difference between descriptive statements and terms on the one hand, and normative, value, or evaluational judgments and terms on the other hand; and that moral judgments and terms belong to the latter class.

not by any thought of duty or what is right, he is to that degree no different from non-moral agents actuated by such motives, and hence his motives, too, could not be judged to be *morally* good. Thus «good» as applied to motives might mean *morally good*, or, alternatively, what we might call «*naturally*» good, or good simply. It is only in the former sense that «good» could be said to be a moral term; in the latter sense, there is no distinctive name for it, but if a name were needed, «quasi-moral term» might do.

Let us now consider other applications of the terms «virtuous» and «morally good», other, that is, than to motives. We also judge *persons* to be morally good, and we judge a person to be so if we believe that he habitually does what is right from a sense of duty, and that he would resist, also from a sense of duty, very powerful temptations to do what is wrong. The *character* of such a person we also denominate «morally good». Instead of using the term «morally good» we might use the term «virtuous», but in this usage that term has an archaic sound; its application tends to be restricted to women who are believed capable of resisting, from a sense of duty, temptations to sexual misconduct. Now a person might habitually do, or have a *disposition* to do, one sort of right act from a sense of duty, and yet perhaps fail to do other sort of right acts. Thus a person's sense of duty might lead him always to tell the truth, and yet on occasion for acts of generosity, he might fail to perform such acts—for a variety of reasons that we need not go into here. Such a disposition to do a particular sort of right act we call «a virtue». An action that is the manifestation of a virtue is said to be a *virtuous action* or a *morally good action* or a *good action* simply. Thus a virtuous or morally good action differs from a right act in that, not only is it right, but it also proceeds from a morally good motive. This reference ultimately to motives is what distinguishes aretological judgments generally from deontological judgments, which have no such reference.

We come now to the contrary «morally good», namely, «morally bad». The contrary of «virtuous» is also «morally bad»; «vicious», as we shall see, has connotations that would make it misleading to say that it was simply the contrary of «virtuous», but «vice» is simply the contrary of «virtue». One might think that what has been said about «morally good» would apply *mutatis mutandis* to «morally bad»; that, to be specific, just as an action is morally good if it is right and done from a desire to do right, so an action is morally bad if it is wrong and done from a desire to do wrong. But this would be incorrect. Mo-

rally bad actions are done many times by many people, and yet the desire to do wrong just because it is wrong seems to be non-existent among human beings, and if it exists at all, could occur only with such an agent as the Devil is supposed to be. If human beings do wrong, it is not from the desire to do wrong, but from some other, in itself usually harmless enough, motive. The swindler and the thief act as they do from a desire, presumably, to be well off, or to enjoy a certain object. The murderer may kill out of fear, or a desire to gain a fortune, or to eliminate a rival for someone's affections, or even, perhaps, from a pathological desire to see someone suffer, but not from a desire to do wrong for wrong's sake. Where it might seem that an agent *is* doing this—as in the rare case of one who apparently uses every opportunity that comes his way to do wrong—the motive turns out often to be nothing but a desire to defy society, to assert his own will against what he conceives to be the attempts of society to dominate him. In short, the desire to do wrong as such, unlike the desire to do right as such, may be regarded as being non-existent. The fact is we judge an action to be morally bad not because it is (we believe) wrong and is done from a desire to do wrong, but because it is wrong and is done *in spite of its wrongness or with indifference as to its wrongness*. It is when an agent knows or believes or has reason to know or believe that an act is wrong, and yet is indifferent to that aspect of the act, or at least does not allow that aspect to deter him from doing the act, that we judge his conduct to be morally bad. An agent who acts in this way not on one occasion only, but on many occasions, or at least is ready to do so, we judge to be bad, morally bad, or immoral; and the disposition to do any particular sort of wrong act with indifference as to its wrongness, is what we call a « vice ».

But what, then, makes a *motive* morally bad? For we do talk on occasion of someone's having acted from a morally bad motive. I must confess that I am not at all clear as to what conditions have to be fulfilled for a motive to be judged morally bad, and so I shall simply leave this matter for someone else to deal with. Suffice it for the present to record the use of the term « morally bad » as applied to motives and to place that term in its proper class.

A fact of which most moral philosophers do not seem to be explicitly aware is that the words « ought » and « duty » have an aretological sense as well as the more usual deontological sense, and this has given rise to some needless puzzlement with a number of them. The aretological use of these terms is to be found in such statements as the

following: « If he sincerely believed that it was his duty to kill pagans, then it was his duty »; « Since he thought it was the right thing to do, he ought to have done it »; « An man ought to do what he believes he ought to do ». These sorts of statements, or statements which suggest these (e.g. « Since he believed it was his duty to do it, I wouldn't have respected him if he hadn't done it ») are common enough, and yet are apt to seem paradoxical to someone who deliberately turns his attention to them for the first time. They seem paradoxical because they seem to imply that what *is* one's duty is determined by what one *thinks* to be one's duty—something the consequences of which we need not elaborate on here. But the air of paradox is quickly dispelled with the realization that « duty » and « ought » in these statements are used in two different senses, an aretological as well as a deontological sense. Let us show this in the case of the statement « A man ought<sub>1</sub> to do what he believes he ought<sub>2</sub> to do ». Now here « ought<sub>2</sub> » is used in a deontological sense: that is to say, if a man believes he ought<sub>2</sub> to do x, that is tantamount to his believing that he would be doing the right thing if he did x and the wrong thing if he did not do x. But to say he ought<sub>1</sub> to do x because he believes he ought<sub>2</sub> to do it, is tantamount to saying that his conduct would be morally good if he did x (and did it because he believed he ought<sub>2</sub> to do it) and morally bad if he did not do x. Thus it can be seen that while the sense of « ought<sub>2</sub> » can be explained in terms of « right » and « wrong », the sense of « ought<sub>1</sub> » must be explained in terms of « morally good » and « morally bad »; and it is for that reason that I say « ought<sub>2</sub> » is used in a deontological sense while « ought<sub>1</sub> » is used in an aretological sense. « Duty » in one sense is simply the substantive corresponding to « ought<sub>1</sub> », as in another sense it is the substantive corresponding to « ought<sub>2</sub> ». Thus it is not the case that what is one's duty<sub>2</sub> is what one thinks to be one's duty<sub>2</sub>; the most that is true is that what is one's duty<sub>1</sub> is what one thinks to be one's duty<sub>2</sub>.

Let us now run over briefly the other moral terms that belong to the class of aretological terms, and show how they are related to those already discussed. « Rectitude » carries the notion of (a) a strict adherence to moral rules or principles (b) from a sense of duty, but (a) is the more prominent element in its meaning; its Anglo-Saxon synonym is « uprightness ». « Righteous » means much the same as « morally good » or « virtuous ». « Dutiful » means (with reference to acts) *done*, (with reference to agents) *disposed to act, not only in accordance with duty but also from a sense of duty*; it differs from « morally

good » in that it has more of a descriptive flavour as contrasted with the latter, which has more of a normative or evaluational flavour. « Wicked » and « iniquitous » mean much the same as « morally bad ». « Evil » has this meaning also, but is often used in a non-aretological sense to refer to that which is the opposite of the good of man; thus pain, disease, hunger, etc. may be said to be evil, but obviously not the way in which a man can be said to be evil, i.e. wicked or morally bad. « Vicious » also means morally bad, but carries with it the suggestion of violence or virulence; similarly, « heinous » and « odious » carry with them a suggestion of that which is hateful, while « vile » suggests repulsiveness as well as badness. « Atrocious » suggests extreme violence or an extreme sense of outrage on the part of the viewer of the deed. « Sinful » suggests that the act that is wrong is so because it is contrary to the will of God, and therefore, that the sinful deed represents defiance of God. « Corrupt », « depraved », « perverted », « degraded », « degenerate » all suggest a *lapse* in one way or another from a state of moral goodness into a state of moral badness. « Villain », « scoundrel », « rogue », « rascal », « knave » all denote persons who are morally bad in various ways and to various degrees.

#### IV. *Axiological*<sup>5</sup> terms

I take as representative of this class term « deserve ». Corresponding to this verbal form there is the participial « deserving » and the substantival « desert ». « Deserve » and its other grammatical forms may be used, like most of the other moral terms so far mentioned, in a non-moral sense as well as in a moral sense. An example of the latter use is: « The evil doer richly deserved the punishment that was meted out to him ». An example of the former is: « This plan deserves the most careful consideration ». The logical subject of the verb « deserve » is always an agent, although the grammatical subject may be an action, a motive, a character, or something else, thus: « His action deserves blame », « Such a motive deserves disapproval », « His is a character that deserves the highest esteem ». That the logical subject in these judgments in an agent may be seen from the fact that all these judgments can be re-formulated without changing their meaning so that

5) This term is already in use, but not in the sense in which I use it here. The latter is close to the original sense of « ἀξίος » (« worthy », « deserving »); in the usage of other writers « axiological judgment » generally means either the same as what I call « value judgment » or the same as what I call « evaluational judgment » (see concluding section).

the name of the agent becomes grammatical subject of the judgment, as follows: «He deserves blame for his action», «An agent who is actuated by such a motive deserves disapproval», «His character is such that he deserves the highest esteem». In short, it is agents only who deserve; motives, actions, character do not deserve anything, but are, rather, the things *on account of which* agents deserve whatever they do deserve.

What sort of things do agents deserve? In general an agent deserves either an object of interest or an object of disinterest. Objects of interest that are deserved, or thought to be deserved, may be anything from simple approval on the part of the agent's fellows to eternal happiness; objects of disinterest that are deserved or thought to be so may be anything from simple disapproval to eternal damnation. An object of interest that is deserved is usually called a «reward», especially if it is something more substantial than mere approval; an object of disinterest that is deserved is usually called «punishment», especially if it is something more substantial than mere disapproval. The words «reward» and «punishment», however, are often used in a wider sense than this. «Punishment», for example, may be used to refer to any object of disinterest that is imposed for the violation of any rule or for an action contrary to the will of an agent who possesses power, whether such an object of disinterest is deserved or not; and the same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to «reward». In this usage, of course, «punishment» and «reward» are not moral terms at all.

How are judgments in terms of «deserve» connected with judgments in terms of the other moral words so far discussed? Or, to say the same thing in another way, how are axiological judgments connected with deontological, aetiological, and aretological judgments? The connection with deontological and aetiological judgments is indirect and exists only in so far as these are connected with aretological judgments. Between aretological and axiological judgments, however, there is a direct connection, as follows: An agent is judged to deserve approval for doing morally good actions, being actuated by morally good motives, or having a morally good character; an agent is judged to deserve disapproval for doing morally bad actions, being actuated by morally bad motives or being indifferent to the rightness or wrongness of his acts, and having a morally bad character. In addition to this, an agent is judged to deserve punishment for doing morally bad actions, and the degree of punishment judged to be deserved is proportional to the badness attributed to his action; the badness of the agent's action

in turn, grating the presence of a certain motivational condition—namely, indifference to the wrongness of the act—depends on the degree of wrongness of the act. People will differ widely concerning the degree of punishment they believe to be deserved by an agent for any particular morally bad action. Thus an agent who wickedly robs a poor widow may be thought by one person to deserve very severe punishment, perhaps even hanging (in fact there are people who would say, «Hanging is too good for such a man»), and by another agent a term of only a few months in jail. When this is the case, however, it will, I think, be found that the two observers also differ in their estimate of the moral badness of the action, and ultimately, of the wrongness of the act. In addition to being judged to deserve approval for doing morally good actions, an agent is sometimes judged to deserve reward for doing them, but the conditions which have to be fulfilled for this to be so are not nearly as clear-cut as in the case of the deserving of punishment. In general, an agent is not thought to deserve reward for doing his duty because it is his duty, that is, for morally good conduct simply. In order to be thought deserving of reward an agent must either perform an extraordinarily difficult and onerous duty, such as most people might be expected to fail in; or do a deed that, while fully discharging his obligations, goes considerably beyond this, and is, as it is often described, «above and beyond the call of duty»; and he must do all this from morally good motives.

Let us now consider the other terms belonging to this class. They are mainly two: «worthy» and «merit». Let us discuss «worthy» first. To say that an action is worthy of approval is much the same as to say that it deserves approval. But in the case of motives and character, as contrasted with actions, we are more apt to say «worthy» than to say «deserve»; thus we are more apt to say that Smith's character is worthy of approval than to say that it deserves approval. Also we generally say that someone *deserves* to be rewarded or to be punished only when there actually is someone to do the rewarding or the punishing; if there is no such agent, then we are more apt to say that he is *worthy* of reward or punishment. In the above instances, «worthy» is used predicatively or appositively; but it is also used attributively, as when we speak of a worthy deed or a worthy man, and then it means «worthy of approval». «Deserving» is used similarly, but of actions rather than of characters. «Unworthy» as used attributively means «not worthy of approval», and indeed, «worthy of disapproval». «Worthy» is also used as a suffix, as in «praiseworthy» and «blame-

worthy », but a more frequently used suffix having this sense is « -able » or « -ible », as in « laudable », « commendable », « creditable », « estimable », « respectable » and in « reprehensible », « discreditable », « detestable », « abominable », « damnable ». The word « merit » as a verb means much the same as « deserve », but as a noun it is not used in quite the same way as « desert ». We say « a man of merit » but not « a man of desert ». « Merit » as a noun seems to mean « a quality (or qualities) worthy of approval », while « desert » means « the condition of deserving reward or punishment ». There is also an adjective formed from « merit », namely, « meritorious », which is used in much the same way as « worthy » or « deserving ».

Two other axiological terms are « demerit » and « condign ». Demerit is the quality antithetical to merit. « Condign » means *deserved*, now said usually of punishments.

#### V. *Dikaiological*<sup>6</sup> terms

To this class there belong only three terms with their antonyms and various grammatical forms, namely, « just », « fair », and « equitable ». The last term in this group is perhaps hardly to be counted a moral term at all, since it has an emphatic descriptive sense definable in terms of impartiality; the first member of the group is undoubtedly a moral term, although it too has a descriptive connotation of impartiality; and « fair » falls some-where in between the two in respect of its relative normative and descriptive emphases. I shall discuss the term « just » first and then say a word about the other two terms.

« Just » as a moral term is used in two main ways: one in which it is analogous in a certain respect to the deontological terms, and one in which it is analogous to the aretological terms. When, for example, we talk about a just decision or a just distribution of goods, « just » is used in a way analogous to the way in which « right » in its deontological sense is used, in that reference is made only to the objective characteristics of the decision or the distribution without regard to the subjective conditions, in particular the motives, which led the decision or the distribution; and so we may denominate the *objective reference* of « just ». When, on the other hand, we talk about a just man, « just » is used in a way analogous to the way in which « good » or « virtuous » in their aretological senses are used, in that reference is made to the

6) From « δίκαιος » (« just »).



motives of the man in question. Though a man might always render just decisions and effect just distributions of goods we would not consider him to be a just man if believed that his motives for doing so were those of fear or self-interest; in order for us to call him «just» we must believe that he is actuated by morally good motives. When «just» is used in this way, then, we might talk about its *subjective reference*. In certain expressions, «just» is ambiguous as between these two uses. Thus when people talk about a *just deed* it is often not clear whether they are referring only to the objective characteristics of the act or taking into account its motives as well. In what follows I shall confine the discussion to «just» in its objective reference.

In its objective reference «just» is treated by some speakers as if it were interchangeable with «right» in the deontological sense of that word. For example, I have heard students say «Keeping promises is just» as if this were the same thing as saying «Keeping promises is right». More often, however, «just» is used in a narrower sense in which not all right acts would also be called just, and it is this fact which makes it necessary to put «just» in a different class of moral terms. In the narrower, or dikaiological, sense of «just», the sorts of things that, *par excellence*, are called «just» are the conduct, including the decisions, of persons who possess some kind of authority over others or the right to regulate their affairs in some way. Thus laws, which ultimately represent the decisions of a certain person or persons that the people living in a given area shall act or refrain from acting in certain ways, may be called just or unjust; punishments and rewards meted out by judges, school officials, parents, et al. may be so called; the conscripting of some person for and the exempting of others from military service; and so on. In this sense, though not all right acts are just, all just acts are right; and though not all wrong acts are unjust, all unjust acts are wrong. It would be thought paradoxical for someone to contend that a certain act was just, nevertheless it was wrong. Still, such contentions have been made; but I think that it would be possible to show in such cases that the speaker was confusing a general rule with a specific instance. Though in general it may be just to punish those who steal, in a specific instance it may not be, and hence wrong: but a confused speaker, while realizing that in the specific instance in question punishment would be wrong, might be led by his assent to the general rule, that punishment of theft is just, to commit a *dicto simpliciter* and say that punishment in this instance, too, is just—but yet wrong.

What I have said here about the connection between «just» and «right» is all that I propose to say now about the connection between dikaiological terms and the other moral terms. A full account of this connection, while of the last importance for certain problems of moral theory, particularly that of the standard or criterion of right action, would take far more space than I have already used; and in any case, it is a story in its own right, which I hope to tell on another occasion. For the present I shall conclude by saying a few words about the terms «fair» and «equitable». «Fair», like «just», may have either an objective reference or a subjective reference; we may say that what a man did was fair or we may say that the man himself is a fair man. This however, is not true of the term «equitable», which has an objective reference only. In its objective sense, «fair» seems to have much the same meaning as «just», the chief difference between the two terms being the contexts in which they are employed. The term «just» is commonly applied to the acts and decisions of persons holding public office of some kind; it is also applied to the institutions established by (and thus representing certain decisions of) such persons. Thus we speak of the acts and decisions of rulers or judges as being just; of just wars, just laws, a just society (regarding that as the product of deliberate planning on the part of those possessing power or authority); and so on. What is just or unjust, in this sense, affects, or is of concern to, a great many people, and touches upon basic interests. «Fair», on the other hand, seems to be applied in contexts where the interests involved are not so fundamental, and to the acts and decisions of persons whose public roles are severely circumscribed. Thus we are more apt to say that the decision of a parent or teacher or referee of a game is fair, than that it is just. «Fair» also seems to be used in cases where a man is his own judge or has the power to distribute benefits not only as amongst others, but as between himself and others. So a man who decides what share each person, including himself, should get of an initially common stock of goods would be said to make a fair or an unfair distribution; but if he himself were not concerned in the distribution, he might be said to effect a just or an unjust distribution. The term «equitable» seems to be used particularly for allotments or distributions of good (or burdens), and has much less of a normative, and more of a descriptive flavour than the other two terms.

The above constitutes, I believe, a nearly complete list and an exhaustive classification of moral terms. But it may be objected that

I have made no mention of the moral virtues such as truthfulness, courage, loyalty, gratitude, hospitality, etc. «Truthfulness» and the rest, however, are not moral terms at all, no matter how much they may figure in moral discussions or in moral judgments. They are all descriptive terms which stand for things that most people have thought to be endowed with certain moral qualities or to stand in certain moral relations, and it is the names of these qualities and relations that constitute the moral terms. It will be noted, also, that I have omitted from my list a term that plays a prominent role in many ethical treatises and that might, therefore, have been expected to be included: namely, the term «good» («better», «best») as it occurs in such sentences as «Pleasure is good», «The life of pleasure is not as good as the life of reason», «Friendship is better than money», etc. My reason for omitting this term is that in this sense I do not consider it to be a moral term at all, nor do I consider the sentences quoted immediately above to express moral judgments, however much they may be the object of the investigations of those called «ethical philosophers». That «good» in these sentences is not a moral term may most easily be seen if we try to qualify it by an adverb to make clear in which specific sense we are using the word. «Good» is, of course, notoriously ambiguous. We speak of «good» men, «good» pictures, «good» food, «good» knives, etc., when it is quite clear that we do not have the same specific properties in mind. There is, no doubt, a generic similarity among these properties, a similarity consisting probably in the fact that each of them is the object of some sort of favourable attitude on our part, but nevertheless when we say that a picture is *good* we do not mean just the same thing as when we say a knife is *good*, and when we say this is *good* roast beef we do not mean just the same thing as when we say this man did a *good* deed. Usually we have no difficulty in discriminating among these different senses of «good», but in cases where there might be doubt (and even when there is no doubt) we sometimes qualify «good» by an adverb or phrase to make clear in what sense we are using the word. Thus we might say that something is *aesthetically* good, or good *from the prudential point of view*, or *instrumentally* good, or *morally* good. In talking about a piece of music as being good we could, then, if we wished, say that it was aesthetically good, but it would make no sense to say that it was morally good; and in talking about an action, we might say it was morally good, but it would make no sense to say that it was aesthetically good—unless, indeed, this were an odd way of saying that it was graceful or

elegant. Similarly, in talking about happiness as being good, and as being better than, say, knowledge, it would make no sense to say it was *aesthetically* good; we should have to find some other adverb with which to qualify the word « good ». The adverb that is most commonly used to do this is « intrinsically »: and, making use of this adverb, we can say that a question which has frequently occupied the attention of philosophers is whether happiness is what is *intrinsically* good, or whether it is something else. Now the important thing to note here is that in talking about happiness it would make no more sense to say that happiness was *morally* good than to say that it was *aesthetically* good. Happiness is not the sort of thing that could have *moral goodness*; it could not have the same property as an action done from a sense of duty. And if happiness could not be said to be *morally* good, it would make no sense to say that « good », as used in evaluating happiness, was a moral term nor that the judgment « Happiness is good » was a moral judgment.

What sort of term, then, is « good » as used in discussing such things as happiness? It is sometimes called a « value » term, and this would be a suitable name for it except that the expression « value term » is ambiguous. It may stand not only for the sort of term that « good », in the sense of « intrinsically good », is, but also for the sorts of terms that « right », « just », « beautiful », « odious », « vulgar », « etc. », are. It may stand, in other words, for any kind of term that is used to express an evaluation or appraisal, whether that evaluation or appraisal be a moral, aesthetic, charientic<sup>7</sup>, or some other kind of evaluation or appraisal. It would be convenient if we exclusively adopted, say, the term « evaluational » to refer to the whole genus of terms used in making evaluations or appraisals, and restricted the use of the term « value », as an adjective, to the specific case of « good » (and its synonyms) where that word means « intrinsically good ». This would enable us to say that « good », when it means « intrinsically good », is a *value* term, and that value terms are a species of *evaluational* terms alongside of moral, aesthetic, charientic, and possibly other kinds of terms. Similarly, we should have to recognize *value judgments* as a species of the genus of *evaluational judgments* alongside of moral, aesthetic, charientic and possibly other kinds of judgments.

Still, it may be urged, *the good*, in the sense of *the intrinsically*

7) For an explanation of this term see my article « 'Charientic' Judgments », *Philosophy*, April, 1958.

*good*, has been the subject for centuries of what have been called « ethical » inquiries; and is « ethical » any more than the Greek-derived synonym for the Latin-derived « moral »? Now it is true that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* value question and moral question seem to be inextricably combined; and they are combined, also, in such later works as Mill's *Utilitarianism*, Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*, More's *Principia Ethica*, and many others. This combination, however, seems to me to have produced a good deal of unnecessary confusion. Who is clear, for example, what the term « utilitarianism » stands for? In Mill one can find statements which would lead one to believe that it stands for the doctrine (a) that the good is happiness; and for the doctrine (b) that a right act is one which produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Yet these are two logically independent doctrines, neither of which entails the other; they may both be true, or both be false, or one may be true and the other false. To call both these doctrines « utilitarianism » is to make that term needlessly ambiguous; or, alternatively, to insist that « utilitarianism » is univocal, but that it stands for both doctrines (a) and (b) is to convict oneself of being muddle-headed. Similarly, to call both these doctrines, or pairs of doctrines corresponding to these, « ethical » doctrines, is either to make that term needlessly ambiguous, or else to show oneself to have failed to grasp a distinction. There may, indeed, be a connection between the right and the good: it may be, for example, that right acts are that promote the good, and it may be task of morals to determine whether this is actually so or not. But this would not be sufficient to justify us in putting « good » (=« intrinsically good ») under the heading of *moral terms*; for it might equally well be true that right acts are those that promote happiness, or those that promote the beautiful, and yet, even if it were so, no one would consider that a reason for classifying « happiness » or « beautiful » as moral terms. What is sometimes called a person's *moral code*, or his *code of ethics*, is one thing, and what is sometimes called his *set of values* is another. To be sure, his moral code may include an item, for example, to the effect that he ought to respect each person's set of values, and his set of values may include loyalty to a moral code; yet there will be many items in the one that will not belong to the other. What distinguishes moral or ethical theory and what I suggest should be called « value » theory is that the former is concerned with, among other things, examining the validity of the items contained in any person's moral code, and the latter is concerned with, among other things, examining the validity of the

items contained in any person's set of values. It happens that historically a number of philosophers<sup>8</sup> have published the results of their investigations of both kinds within the compass of one book and called the book «ethics», but this should not blind one to the fact that judgments in terms of «good», where that word means «intrinsically good», are nevertheless not moral judgments.

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8) But not, be it noted, most of the eighteenth century British moralists.