FOREWORD

The subject-matter of ethics: In order to define Ethics, we must discover what is both common and peculiar to all un-doubted ethical judgments; but this is not that they are con-cerned with human conduct, but that they are concerned with a certain predicate 'good' . . . This predicate is in-definable or simple . . . 'Good', then, denotes one unique simple object of thought among innumerable others; but this object has very commonly been identified with some other – a fallacy which may be called 'the naturalistic fallacy'.[1]

Thus G. E. Moore, seventy-five years ago, intentionally directed the thoughts of moral philosophers away from human conduct, and towards 'a certain predicate "good"'. He charged those who identified good with a *natural* object, such as happiness, of committing a fallacy, but yet provided no tenable answer to the question 'What is a *non*-natural object?'[2] So, unintentionally, he raised in other people's minds the prior question 'Does "good" denote an object at all?' His Cambridge colleague, C. D. Broad, spelt out the alternative: 'Or do sen-tences like "This is good", though grammatically similar to sentences like "This is yellow" which undoubtedly ascribe a certain characteristic to a subject, really need an entirely different kind of analysis? Is it not possible that the function of such sentences is to express or to stimulate certain kinds of emotion, or to command or forbid certain kinds of action, and not to state certain kinds of fact?'[3]

The theory that the function of sentences like 'This is good' is to express or to stimulate certain kinds of emotion is called

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'emotivism'. The theory that their function is to command or forbid certain kinds of action is 'prescriptivism'. A substantial part of the recent history of moral philosophy has been the history of attempts to square various refinements of either emotivism or prescriptivism with our common-sense intuitions about the subject-matter of ethics.

In spite of having been involved in the making of an Open University television programme with the title 'What use is moral philosophy?',[4] a title which one would be unlikely to bestow if one thought the answer was 'Not much', I must confess to a certain disenchantment with the enterprise on which Moore launched us when he directed us away from human conduct and towards 'a certain predicate "good" '. It was in this mood of disenchantment with a major movement in moral philosophy that I planned a course of Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures in which the emphasis would not be on the abstract 'object of thought' goodness, or on some function that sentences containing the word 'good' are thought to perform, but on less abstract and linguistic matters. Moreover, I thought, the investigation should differ from Moore's in another way. Like Socrates, he sought what is 'common and peculiar' to the subject under discussion. But to consider only what is common and peculiar to humans is to ignore what is peculiar to a particular human. For certain purposes it is right to treat people as equals; but for others, such things as who they are in relation to ourselves (child, pupil, husband or wife), and what sort of people they are, with what past and what future planned, are the things that matter.

Dr. Elizabeth Newson, Joint Director of the Child Development Research Unit at the University of Nottingham, examines how 'a sense of personal worth' is established in a child by the child's parents exercising a degree of caring that goes beyond what could reasonably be expected if the child was not their own. In her account of what she calls 'the socialisation relationship' she says that even moments between parents and children which seem to isolate and crystallise issues 'are never based wholly in the present, but take account of the past and anti-

cipate the future'. I think this is true, and that she is right when she says:

> What is typical and significant in the long-term relationship between parent and child is that every interchange, every minor or major conflict, has a *history of understandings* (*and misunderstandings*) which contribute to each partner's perception of the incident. Thus no exchange between parent and child starts from scratch, as it were, but from the vantage point of their mutual negotiations up to this moment. In the protracted nature of the relationship is its potency.

The relationship's potency is for giving the child a belief in 'his own intrinsic worth, his own fundamental *considerability*'. Children who have no sense and recognition of their own value, Dr. Newson says, are defeated children. If a child does not have a sense of intrinsic worth, she asks, 'how can he be motivated to achieve his goals, or indeed to set himself goals at all?'

Because of the way it is established, a sense of one's own worth cannot exist without a corresponding sense of the needs of others. As someone like William McDougall might have said, you cannot have a self-regarding sentiment without a complementary other-regarding sentiment. (Professor Findlay puts it rather more strongly in his lecture in this volume.)

If Dr. Newson is right about this then I suppose that there is some sort of psychological contradiction involved in the idea of a person with a sense of his own intrinsic worth whose goals are exclusively egoistic: the so-called 'rational egoist' is a psychological impossibility. This provides a link with the paper by Bernard Mayo, Professor of Philosophy at St. Andrews University, for he attempts to show that personal integrity is very much the same thing as moral integrity 'by taking as a test case the rational egoist, for whom non-moral considerations are supposed to be overriding, and showing that he is not merely unacceptably, but inconceivably, defective'; and a stepping-stone in his attempt is the thought that 'someone for whom future situations are of no concern is radically "dissociated"; and someone for whom considerations for others are not considerations has also "come apart" in a bad way'.

Mayo's approach, of course, is not that of a research psychologist. It is that of a moral philosopher reflecting on the adequacy of Hare's proffered criteria for a judgement being a moral one. He is primarily concerned with the 'overridingness' criterion, that is, that moral principles cannot be overridden, they are superior to, or more authoritative than, other kinds of principle. After listing five difficulties with the view that overridingness, together with prescriptivity and universalisability, constitute sufficient conditions of morality, he suggests that we should stop asking what it is for one consideration to override another, and instead consider the agent *for whom* they are considerations. 'When we speak of certain considerations being dominant *for an individual*, the point is not that they dominate *other* considerations, but that they dominate *him*.' (A similar point is made in Susan Khin Zaw's paper, and is implicit in Hampshire's.) This means that we have to consider what it is for a person to be the one and only person he is. And here it is not just a person's past that matters. More importantly, Mayo says, he is constituted by what Bernard Williams calls his 'projects': 'A person's future is, in an important sense, *his* even more than his past is.' To a limited extent a person can disown his past, but he cannot disown his future. This is significant for consequentialist theories, such as utilitarianism:

> The Williams thesis claims that it would be glaringly unacceptable to require someone to abandon a 'project' of his at any moment, just in case the results coming in from the impersonal hedonic computer happen to swing that way. The project in question need not, of course, be a moral one; but it may be; and if it is, we have a *prima facie* case of lack of moral integrity required as a sacrifice at the utilitarian altar.

Mary Warnock, Senior Research Fellow of St. Hugh's College, Oxford, describes herself as 'a confessed perpetrator of the naturalistic fallacy', but she does not mean by it quite what Moore meant. Moore's use of the term was, in fact, a bit of an imposture. The fallacy in the naturalistic fallacy, he makes

plain in Section 12 of *Principia Ethica,* is the fallacy of identifying the 'is' of predication with the 'is' of identity. It is the fallacy of inferring, from the proposition 'I am pleased', that 'I' am the same thing as 'having pleasure'. He calls it the naturalistic fallacy because he holds, *for other reasons,* that in all propositions like 'Pleasure is good', in which what comes before the 'is' is a natural object and what comes after it is an ethical one, the 'is' is not the 'is' of identity. It is a bit of an imposture because calling it 'the naturalistic fallacy' suggests to people who have not read *Principia Ethica* that the battle has been won on logical grounds, and that they need not consider the 'other reasons'.

Mrs. Warnock's naturalism is her allegiance to the view that 'feeling strongly about something, valuing it highly, is an inevitable consequence of the nature of human understanding'. Following Sartre, she argues that people would be incapable of deliberate action if they had not the power of conceiving possibilities, and of envisaging the unreal, this power being the faculty of imagination. It is imagination, also, which supplies the meaningfulness of experience. Hence the importance of a proper education of it.

There are contributors to this volume who would not dream of using words like 'eternal' and 'eternity'; there are others to whom the words seem to come quite naturally. P. Æ. Hutchings, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Western Australia, is one of the latter. (Roy Holland is another.) Hutchings says that what distinguishes all love from lust is that 'it bears an impress of eternity'; and much of his paper is an explanation of what it is for it to do so. 'Love is at once *now* overwhelming, and with respect to subsequent "nows" essentially preemptive.' 'Faithfulness is the giving of that, due, time for love's unfolding.' The problem, of course, is what to say about the failing case. This is what Hutchings calls 'the sting in the paper's tail'.

Moore, I said, directed the thoughts of moral philosophers away from human conduct and towards 'a certain predicate "good" '. We saw how, in doing so, he unintentionally provoked a question about the *function* of sentences like 'This is good': 'Is it not possible that the function of such sentences is to

express or to stimulate certain kinds of emotion, or to command
or forbid certain kinds of action, and not to state certain kinds
of fact?' I then remarked that a substantial part of the recent
history of moral philosophy has been the history of attempts to
square various refinements of either emotivism or prescripti-
vism with our common-sense intuitions about the subject-
matter of ethics.

One of our common-sense intuitions is that there is a place
for reasons and reasoning in practical matters. We talk of a
person's reasons for doing something, and also of his reasons for
thinking some action right or wrong. Does the functionalist
approach to ethics lead us to give a distorted account of this?
To talk of the functions of language is to talk of what is pri-
marily inter-personal. Does the functionalist approach favour
modelling our account of personal choice of action on inter-
personal debate?

The emotivist might reply that the function of an ethical
sentence is not merely to influence others, it is to express the
speaker's emotion, his approval or disapproval of something.
His reason for saying that some action is right is that he has a
feeling of approval towards it; and feelings are personal, not
inter-personal. Professor R. M. Hare, who is a prescriptivist
and not an emotivist, has a short way with this: ' "I approve
of A" is merely a more complicated and circumlocutory way of
saying "A is right". It is not a statement, verifiable by obser-
vation, that I have a recognisable feeling or recurrent frame of
mind; it is a value-judgement; if I ask "Do I approve of A?",
my answer is a moral decision, not an observation of intro-
spective fact.'[5] Hare himself, in his book *Freedom and Reason*, tries
to show how a theory of moral reasoning can be founded on
two logical properties of 'ought'-statements, their being pre-
scriptive and their being universalisable. This puts the place of
reasons and reasoning in practical matters firmly in the public
domain. The question is: Is the inter-personal-debate model of
personal choice true to what we find when our approach to
human conduct is, so to speak, direct, and not inspired by a
wish to defend a particular account of the function of ethical
sentences?

In connection with this question it is interesting to compare the papers by Dr. Margaret Boden, Reader in Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Sussex, and Stuart Hampshire, Warden of Wadham College, Oxford. Dr. Boden remarks that 'the prescriptivist view of ethics characterises morality as a matter of proclaiming (and, preferably, following) specific priorities that should govern conduct', and argues that there are philosophically significant analogies between moral thinking so understood and the reasoning of sufficiently complicated computers. In saying this she is not arguing *against* the prescriptivist view of ethics, but *for* 'a basically mechanist view of the universe, and of human beings as creatures of it'.

Hampshire, on the other hand, argues against what he calls the 'computational morality' of the Cartesian or council-of-war model for the human act of choice. The computational moralists who pursue the ideal of an explicit weighing of arguments before moral decisions are made and opinions formed, he says, 'in fact arrive at a pretence and are deceived by their own abstractions'. They model the rationality of the act of choice on the rationality of a public debate. But the rationality of the ideally rational man is as much perceptiveness as power of argument. There is, he says, nothing exceptional or anomalous in the reasons for our conclusions, whether practical or theoretical, not being present to consciousness at the time, and not being accessible to consciousness afterwards. As Aristotle put it, the agent must have the virtues within him.

I think there is more to be said on this on both sides. It is not a purely academic issue, for much sometimes hangs on our understanding of what it is to be a rational human agent – for example, when someone's defence against a charge of murder is that of 'irresistible impulse'. In her paper ' "Irresistible Impulse" and Moral Responsibility' Susan Khin Zaw, Lecturer in Philosophy at the Open University, tries to discredit 'a picture of the rational human agent as not a subject but a helpless Newtonian object whirled along by his desires, powerful forces whose strength and direction determine his apparent actions'. It is not that an 'irresistible impulse' is irresistible in the way in which a physical impulse, such as a hearty shove in the back,

is irresistible. The impulse does not come from outside the
agent; it is his own impulse. Nor is its irresistibility a matter of
its being strong or overwhelming. His desire is irresistible in
that he has no reason for it, and hence there is no reasoning to
be argued against: he merely acts in pursuit of the end, without
attempting justification and impervious to deliberation about
it as an end. The desire is irresistible because it does not express
itself in the form of practical reasoning, and so there is nothing
to resist it with. But this does not mean that it is not the agent's
own impulse.

I suspect that Dr. Boden is resourceful enough to find an
analogue in computational morality for the distinction be-
tween an impulse which is irresistible but the agent's own, and
one which is irresistible but comes from outside the agent. But
could even the most intelligent computer be programmed to
recognise absolute goodness, that is, goodness which we re-
cognise by the light it itself provides, and in connection with
which it is natural to introduce the idea of that which is eternal
in a human being, namely the soul? Roy Holland, Professor of
Philosophy at the University of Leeds, affirms that in the
absence of absolute conceptions there can be nothing profound
in ethics. He mentions as one of a number of possible sources of
scepticism about absolute conceptions the philosophical train-
ing which disposes people to look to the performative element
of discourse for solutions to problems about absolute senses of
words. People so trained, he says, will see the idea of the reality
of absolute value as a shadow cast by prescriptiveness and
universalisability.

Perhaps the capacity to recognise absolute values is too rare
for us to speak of a common-sense intuition about it. And yet
there is an intuitive feeling among the philosophically unaffected
that is affronted when philosophers say that moral values are
subjective. There was mention of this at the end of the tele-
vision programme to which I referred earlier. The speakers are
Professor Hare and Dr. Anthony Kenny.

HARE . . . If I tell you that I think that torturing is always
    wrong, you get some information about what I think

about torturing. The second thing that happens, however, is different. What I have conveyed to you, and what, if you agree with me, you will think, will be that torturing is wrong, which is something prescriptive.

KENNY But I don't get any information about any objective moral values, and I think that this is what some of your critics have had in mind when they say that your view annihilates moral values. You denied that it does this but it seems to me that you do annihilate moral values in the same sense as somebody annihilates Santa Claus when he tells a child that Santa Claus doesn't exist.

HARE Of course, it would be an awful pity to annihilate Santa Claus if Santa Claus was doing any good, but if either he didn't exist or he wasn't doing any good, or if the belief in him might have been of positive harm, then it wouldn't be a bad thing that people should learn that he doesn't exist and learn to get on without him.

I am struck by this, and by the fact that J. L. Mackie devotes the first and longest chapter of his recent Penguin book, *Ethics*, to 'The subjectivity of values'. I am prompted to ask the Wittgensteinian question: What can it mean to say that people are wrong (or right, for that matter) about an entire realm of being or discourse (in this case, the realm of moral values)?

This is not an easy question. One way of approaching it is via a critique of the Lockean empiricist dogma that for ideas not to be fictitious or invented is for them to have 'a foundation in nature', the criterion of an idea's having a foundation in nature being that it is *causally produced* by something in nature.[7] Perhaps this dogma is somewhere at the back of Mackie's subjectivism. To judge from his book *Problems from Locke*, he is broadly in agreement with Locke on the language and reality issue.

Another way of approaching it is via the following consideration. One can settle, by the use of the appropriate criteria, whether or not something *within* a realm exists, is real, is objective, or whatever. But what can it mean, without any criteria, to say this of the entire realm? One can do so only by treating

another realm as a paradigm. Kenny comes close to treating
the realm of people as a paradigm when he accuses Hare of
annihilating moral values *in the same sense* as somebody anni-
hilates Santa Claus when he says Santa Claus does not exist.
Of course moral values do not exist in the same sense as existing
people exist. If they did they would be people. The common-
sense intuition is not the positive one that moral values *are* any-
thing (people, or anything else that someone may favour as a
paradigm of existence, reality, objectivity, or whatever) but the
negative one that they *are not* illusory, or matters of taste, or any
of the other things that the term 'subjective' means in various
realms of being or discourse. Being a negative intuition it
emerges only when confronted with subjectivism, and can find
expression only in the not-further-explicable complaint that the
subjectivist has somehow impoverished the world.

There are points of resemblance in the substance, though not
the style, of Holland's paper and that of J. N. Findlay, Pro-
fessor of Philosophy at Boston University. Both men eschew
what I called the functionalist approach to moral values. (As
Findlay puts it: 'Imperatives are secondary structures in value-
constitution; the primary structures are the ultimate objects of
necessary, rational pursuit and avoidance.') Both acknowledge
a debt to Plato. But Findlay acknowledges a further debt – to
Meinong. And it is in Meinongian terms that he discusses the
'objectivity' of moral values:

> For there to be values or disvalues for someone . . . it is
> essential that his interests should *colour* the things in which he
> is interested, should somehow flow over from the attitudinal
> into the objective order. Values and disvalues must be pre-
> sent 'out there', just as facts and probabilities and hypo-
> thetical outcomes are given as 'out there': they must con-
> tribute to the total phenomenological scene. . . . The dry
> world of neutral fact exists only for certain sorts of philo-
> sophers.

This, however, is by the way. Findlay's main concern is to
provide a high-altitude survey of all in the constitution of
human values that can safely be generated by our universalising

zest along with our sympathising and empathising sense of affinity with our fellows.

Holland concludes his paper by contrasting the ethics of absolute conceptions with consequentialism. He shapes his discussion round an example provided by Bernard Williams: A visitor arrives at a South American town to find a firing squad about to shoot twenty Indians as a reprisal for acts of protest against the government. The captain of the militia offers the visitor a 'guest's privilege' of shooting one Indian on the understanding that if he does so the rest will be set free, but if he does not, all twenty will be shot. There is no chance of the visitor's overwhelming the captain by force, so what should he do?

Holland speaks of 'the sense of outrage at being asked to contemplate Williams' example and other examples of a similar kind' and says: 'It is a kind of *temptation*: that is what the revulsion is about and if anyone does not feel it I would suppose that for him the examples provide material to be ingested like data by a computer.'

The sort of consequentialist considerations which Holland finds abhorrent are to the fore in the paper 'Assessing the value of saving lives' by Jonathan Glover, Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at New College, Oxford. Perhaps the main thing that emerges is that we have not established criteria to enable us to answer the sort of questions of priority that arise. Why not? Is it possible that there is an intuition, even in the least religious of us, that we ought not to take certain responsibilities upon ourselves?

GODFREY VESEY

Honorary Director
The Royal Institute of Philosophy

Professor of Philosophy
The Open University

NOTES

[1] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge University Press, 1903, Table of Contents, Ch. 1, Sections 1, 2, 6, 7, 10.

² He provided an answer, but it was not tenable. In fact he later described it as 'utterly silly and preposterous'. (P. A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University, 1942, p. 582.)

³ Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, p. 58.

⁴ The script is in Godfrey Vesey (ed.), *Philosophy in the Open*, Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1974.

⁵ R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Oxford University Press, 1952, pp. 6–7.

⁶ Godfrey Vesey (ed.), *Philosophy in the Open*, pp. 52–3.

⁷ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690, Bk 2, Ch. 30, Sections 1–2.