

The Varieties of Value

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I

My starting point is a strange and remarkable disproportion in the way in which philosophers distribute their attention between the two main parts of their subject. The two parts I have in mind are theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy: the critical study of thought as bearing on knowledge or justified belief and the critical study of thought as bearing upon action. I believe that what I am saying is definitely true, with very few exceptions, of the philosophers of the English-speaking world, and I am inclined to think that it is largely correct as regards European philosophers in general.

The disproportion in question is that, while theoretical philosophy concerns itself with the whole range of thinking that is oriented toward knowledge and belief, practical philosophy concentrates almost exclusively on moral action, action, that is to say, considered from a moral point of view. Individual theoretical philosophers may specialize, but, as a group, they attend with comparable degrees of closeness and thoroughness to perception, memory, our awareness of our own mental states, our beliefs about the mental states of others, and to inference, whether deductive or inductive, including the principles of logic, mathematics, and methodology, whose truth is implied by belief in the validity of inferences.

But, while every kind of thinking that leads to belief not directly related to conduct has had, and continues to receive, serious attention from philosophers, only moral thinking, among the whole broad range of our styles of thinking about action, is positively investigated. All the other kinds of thinking that determine choice and action tend to get lumped indiscriminately together, in a kind of common grave, as if worthy of consideration

only for purposes of contrast, as in service to self-interest, inclination, or desire.

Theoretical philosophy takes serious account of all the main institutionally organized interests of the intellect: natural science —physical, biological, and psychological; history; theology; linguistics; social science. Practical philosophy gives detailed, sharply focused attention only to morality.

There are, admittedly, blind spots in theoretical philosophy. But they occupy so small a part of the total possible field that the extremity of the opposite situation in practical philosophy is brought into higher relief by acknowledging them. The most important case is that of the very fitful attention given to the place of testimony or authority in the domain of knowledge or justified belief. Works of theoretical philosophy that aim to be comprehensive so as to serve as textbooks more often than not make no mention of the matter. But most of what each of us claims to believe with justification has been accepted on the authority of someone else, whether in person, as parent or teacher, or in the pages of a book.

It could be argued, however, that this is not too serious an omission, since testimony is inevitably a secondary, derivative source of knowledge. The authority, or his ultimate source, is worth believing only if he established the belief he is communicating for himself, and his clients can, and sometimes should, check his reliability.¹

But what is left out of the effective scope of practical philosophy, by its preoccupation with morality and its indiscriminating amalgamation of all nonmoral aspects of thinking about action, is the greater part of the total field. Matthew Arnold once made the puzzling remark “conduct is three-fourths of life.” I shall not pause to interpret it or to question its confident numerical precision. But, in something of the same spirit, I want to say:

¹Throughout this lecture “he” is to be interpreted as “he or she” and “his” as “his or her” wherever no reference to a specific individual is made.

the greater part of conduct is nonmoral. The great majority of everybody's practical thinking includes no moral considerations whatever. Shall I clean my teeth before or after I have my bath? Shall I choose an apple or a banana from the fruit bowl that is being passed around? Shall I wear my white shirt or the one with the green stripes? Shall I work in the garden or tidy up my desk? When practical problems like these confront us we ordinarily do not consider the question from a moral point of view and that is reasonable, for there is ordinarily nothing in the situation of choice to which moral considerations apply and to which they can attach themselves.

That is not to say that such choices never have a moral aspect. Consistent neglect of personal hygiene is morally objectionable as showing a lack of consideration for others. If the choice at table had been between animal meat and a salad, a vegetarian would see it as a moral issue. Somebody may just have given me a green shirt as a present and will think I do not like it if I do not wear it as soon as an opportunity arises. Perhaps the state of my desk is weighing more heavily on my wife's mind than the leaves lying about the garden. But these are special cases.

Another thing that needs to be acknowledged is that our actions are, in a way, much more systematically interrelated than our beliefs. Much of our action is carried out as a part of some fairly complex program, into which morality may enter. A man hurries to catch a train. Why? To get to work on time. What is the point of that? To avoid sour looks from his immediate superior at his place of work; to avoid prejudicing his chances of promotion; not to leave his two colleagues without help in the grim task of bringing up today's deliveries from the basement. Our beliefs, on the other hand, are comparatively atomic or autonomous. Many of them are worth having even if they are not part of some organized system.

Later on I shall consider whether some explanation can be found for this asymmetry in philosophical investigation of theory

and practice. But first I shall go on to illustrate it by looking at some strange views philosophers have been led to adopt; after that I shall distinguish nonmoral values, together with the motives that inspire action directed toward them, and inquire what the significant differences are between them and how they are related to each other; and I shall also argue that their neglectful amalgamation has had bad consequences for the philosophical understanding of morality.

II

The basis of the ordinary, and in my view mistaken, way in which moral and nonmoral values are contrasted is an ancient and, surprisingly, persistent theory about the springs of action. That is, of course, the Platonic doctrine which derives the conclusion that human beings are induced to act either by reason or by desire from the conception of human beings, in their life on earth, at least, as compounds of an immortal mental thing, a soul, and a transient physical thing, a body.

Roughly speaking, the soul is the seat of reason, and the body is the seat of appetite or desire. It is the function of reason to control desire. At a kind of ascetic extremity the demands of the body are wholly transcended, that is, when a human being is engaged in the ideal form of life, completely absorbed in theoretical contemplation. In Plato's version (of which what I have just presented is an exceedingly summary abridgment) this ideal of life is not conspicuously moral in any sense that we should recognize in the modern world. But the incorporation of the fundamental ideas of Platonism into Christian theology led to an identification of reason with the moral aspect of human nature, that is, as a combination of intellect with the will to act in accordance with its dictates, conceived as altogether opposed in character to desire or appetite.

The most influential expression of this point of view in post-medieval philosophy is that of Kant. The human agent, according

to him, is the scene of a constant battle between duty and inclination, and duty is something discovered by the only kind of reason which he sees as equipped to arrive at truth, the practical reason.

A familiar difficulty for the doctrine that human action is the outcome of a persistent competition between reason and desire is that it does not account for the power which it assumes that reason has to move us to action. Kant is insistent that the moral motive, which he takes to be the will to do duty for the sake of duty, is not part of the natural, body-bound equipment of human beings. It is purely rational in character. How, then, can it move us to act more than the knowledge that twenty-seven is three to the power of three?

Another difficulty for his kind of dualistic theory of human agency he deals with rather more persuasively. After all, reason, broadly understood as the intellectual or cognitive aspect of human nature, plays an important part in nonmoral activity, and as well, in immoral activity. A great deal of intellectual skill may be exercised in such seemingly morally indifferent activities as playing chess or proving a theorem in mathematics and also in activities that would conventionally be regarded as immoral, such as planning and executing a complex bank fraud or robbery.

For Kant such things are the work of understanding, not reason, *Verstand*, not *Vernunft*. In allowing this he does at least acknowledge that the domain of desire, inclination, or appetite is internally variegated in more ways than by simply being directed onto different objects. Some desires are immediate and more or less instinctive, such as those for food, drink, and sexual partners. Others, for more remote objects, like an elevated position in the world, call for a great deal of planning and calculation and require a lot of knowledge of causal relationships. Besides the imperatives of morality he recognizes that there are counsels of prudence and rules of technical skill. But he maintains an absolute distinction between these as hypothetical imperatives, leading us to act only upon the prompting of desire, from what he sees as

the categorical imperatives of moral obligation. When we follow our inclinations, then, our intellects, here called understanding, are in the role of servants to desire. When we do our duty, intellect, here called practical reason, is master.

An earlier eighteenth-century account of the springs of action, that of Bishop Butler, also acknowledges prudence, which with benevolence and conscience it describes as principles, as well as what Butler called particular passions. This set of distinctions makes the useful point that prudence and benevolence are of a second-order character and presuppose other desires —my own in the case of prudence, those of others in the case of benevolence — to supply them with content, since they are aimed at maximizing the satisfaction of those *two* classes of desire.

But Butler makes no explicit provision for the kind of action to which Kant's rules of skill would lead us. At least that is correct if the most straightforward interpretation is put on the phrase "particular passions." It suggests a sudden, emotionally intense state of mind, demanding immediate expression in action. Much the same is true of the words "desire" and "appetite." One desires an attractive person as a sexual partner; one has an appetite for food. But it would be absurd to speak of an appetite for good health (served by dieting, exercise, and giving up cigarettes), and it would at least be very artificial to describe good health as something one desired.

Now these facts about idiomatic correctness are trivial in themselves. But they bring to notice some questionable implications of the unidiomatic uses. In the first place it suggests that the purposes of human action are generally of a primordial, bodily kind, calling for little or no intellectual effort from those who entertain them. Second, their bodily character attracts a measure of moral stigma to the nonmoral springs of human action in general. It serves to obscure the fact that most human desires are not what puritanical moralists call animal desires, (For that matter, many of the desires of animals are not animal desires in that sense either.)

It might be thought that these historical considerations are not relevant to current thinking about morality. But that is far from true. In the English-speaking world, at any rate, moral philosophers have been obsessed with the cognitive problem of whether and how it is possible to establish the truth of moral beliefs. Their role in guiding action has either been ignored altogether or it has been explained by interpreting moral utterance as a kind of imperative, without pausing to consider the question of the circumstances in which it is reasonable for someone who issues an order to expect that it might be obeyed. Where the motives of action have been considered in any detail it is either in the course of discussing moral responsibility and the freedom of the will or as a problem in the philosophy of mind.

One striking example of the contemporary vigor of the dualism of morality and desire is the fact that in the copious index to the eight volumes of the best and most recent large-scale encyclopedia of philosophy in English, neither prudence nor efficiency is mentioned. I shall mention other examples when I come to discuss the bad effects on moral philosophy that I take the neglect of nonmoral values to have had. So far, I admit, I have been concerned with the variety of nonmoral springs of action or motives, rather than of nonmoral values. But the two things are directly connected. To want something, to have a preference for it, to have a favorable attitude toward it, to strive to get it or bring it about, to desire it — all this is to ascribe some sort of value to it. The ascription may be mistaken. In that case the rational agent modifies his wants, attitudes, preferences, or desires and hopes to do better next time.

III

The practice of treating nonmoral values as an undifferentiated mass (conceived sometimes as the objects of desire in general, sometimes as rationally calculated, systematic self-interest), although widespread, is not universal. One large, although little

remembered, exception is that of R. B. Perry, biographer of William James. His last major work, *Realms of Value* (1954) investigates a long list of different values. In building it up he follows the clue that, just as kinds of knowledge can be distinguished by looking at different intellectual or knowledge-seeking institutions, so kinds of value correspond to different institutions offering practical guidance for conduct. The main values he comes up with are moral, political, legal, economic, customary, scientific or intellectual, and aesthetic.

There is an evident bias in Perry's list in favor of the public and cooperative kinds of value. Unless these categories of the economic and the aesthetic are stretched in such a way as to detach them altogether from the institutions in relation to which they were introduced, there is no provision in his list for the greater part of the objects of human striving and for the values realized by it to the extent that it is successful. In nearly five hundred pages he has nothing, or next to nothing, to say about health, food and drink, sexuality, friendship, or the family.

His bias is to a great extent corrected in the other main treatise that sets out to expound the plurality of values. In G. H. von Wright's *The Varieties of Goodness* (1963) the crucial clue is, in accordance with the spirit of its epoch in English-speaking philosophy, rather minutely linguistic. It starts from the modest consideration of the different prepositions that can be attached to the word *good*: a thing or person can be good *at* or good *for* or good *as* something or other.

The kinds of goodness he enumerates are instrumental (as of knives), technical (as of carpenters), medical (as of eyesight), beneficial or utilitarian (as of advice), hedonic (as of a dinner or the weather), eudaemonic (as of the circumstances of life), and moral (as of the characters and acts of human agents). He admits that his list is not exhaustive. It strikes one as also perhaps insufficiently exclusive, but I shall not pursue that point here. He distinguishes, persuasively, happiness from welfare, taking the

latter to be the good of man, which it is the task of moral action to preserve and promote. Happiness, he says, in a suggestive but, as he admits, obscure and metaphorical way, is the consummation of welfare. He has nothing to say of aesthetic and intellectual value.

A third exception to the rule of neglect of the plurality of nonmoral values is C. I. Lewis, particularly in his *The Ground and Nature of the Right* (1955). He correctly points out that far from being simply moral words, “good,” “right,” and “ought” and their opposites apply to intellectual activities of believing and reasoning as literally and straightforwardly as they do to action. Second, they are far from confined to the domain of morality when they are applied to action. “The field of judgement of right and wrong,” he says, “extends to whatever is subject to human deliberation and calls for decision.”²

In listing the kinds of value he starts from a Kantian list of varieties of right conduct: the technical, the prudential, the moral. The end of technique is the minimally costly realization of some particular good. Prudence aims at maximizing the good of the individual in his life as a whole. Morality is directed toward maximizing the good of all. I believe that to define morality in such terms as these is a mistake, particularly when it is combined with the assumption that morality ought to prevail over prudence where the requirements conflict. For the fact is that they nearly always will. In every situation where we can choose what to do there is always something we *could* do which would augment the good of others at the expense of our own unless we are in the most dejected circumstances of anyone, so the assumption that morality should always override prudence implies that we should always sacrifice our own well-being for the sake of others. But I defer consideration of this topic for the moment.

In Lewis’s conception, technique finds means for ends that are inherently valuable, means that are on that account instrumentally

² C. I. Lewis, *The Ground and Nature of the Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 9.

valuable. These elements of value contribute to, or where negative presumably detract from, well-being, the systematized good of a life as a whole, and such individual well-beings add up to the good of all.

Inspired, but not dominated, by these three conceptions of the plurality of value, I propose the following list, not as a final account of the matter, but using each to compensate for the limitations of the others. There is the hedonic value of simple pleasure or enjoyment; the technical value of efficiency in the pursuit of any valuable end; the economic value of material benefit or advantage; the aesthetic value of what satisfies disinterested contemplation (a well-born cousin, perhaps, of hedonic value); the medical or hygienic value of health, physical and mental; the intellectual value of knowledge.

These valued things are occasionally but not necessarily or usually the objects of passions in any sense we could give the term, although any persistent desire is likely to become emotionally intense from time to time. Unless there were elemental or primary values there would be nothing for prudence or for morality to apply to. Hedonic and aesthetic value, as well as medical disvalue—pain and inability to function—are the most elemental values. Technically right action enables them, and, of course, other, secondary values, to be realized. Economically right action is, from one point of view, a form of technically right action, but of a more systematic and comprehensive kind. From another point of view it provides a simple means of getting valuable things without making them. The intellectual value of knowledge is valued for its own sake, as the object of a desire to know which is inadequately described either as curiosity or by Aristotle's term, "wonder." Knowledge is also, and more fundamentally, valuable as a means, supplying the causal information needed for technical skill.

It does not matter that the list I have proposed makes no claim to completeness, so long as it is at least representative of the main kinds of value in a way that the earlier lists I have mentioned are

not. It is clear what steps need to be taken to improve on it. There is a large body of literature concerned with the rational conduct of life to be consulted in which that inquiry is not only not confined to morality but may be concerned with it only to a small extent. The genre begins with the wisdom components of the scriptures of China, India, and the Jews. It is largely disentangled from religion in the post-Aristotelian philosophers of classical Greece. It reappears in the long sequence of essayists and aphorists from Erasmus, Montaigne, and Bacon, by way of French *moralistes* and Voltaire down to Schopenhauer.

IV

For a number of reasons it is a mistake to describe these particular values as all being kinds of pleasure, even if books with such titles as *The Major Pleasures of Life* are sources it is sensible to consult in seeking inventories and accounts of them. The first is that pleasure suggests, even if it does not strictly imply, passive enjoyment. Human beings find their most intense and persisting satisfactions in activity; if they are fortunate, indeed, in their work. But work and pleasure are conventionally opposed, as when an immigration official inquires into the purpose of a traveler's visit to a foreign country.

Second, there is also an informal association of the same kind between pleasure and bodily enjoyment. That is not to say that the phrase "pleasures of the flesh" is a pleonasm, but only that it is to these that the mind turns first when pleasure is mentioned. That is no doubt a distortion brought about by religious asceticism. It is a distinction of the same sort as that which leads to the identification of morality with sexual abstinence in unreflective thought and colloquial speech.

Third, and still as a matter of rhetoric more than semantics, the ordinary conception of pleasure is of an enjoyment or satisfaction that is atomic or instantaneous. But most satisfactions or realizations of value are much more systematic than that. Listen-

ing to a symphony or eating a good dinner is not ordinarily a sequence of momentary delights whose total value is the sum of the value of its parts.

Nevertheless, something which could, with suitable precautions, be described as pleasure, but which is better described as enjoyment or satisfaction, is the ultimate basis of all value. It is what is crucially present in what I have called the more elemental cases of value: the hedonic, the aesthetic, and the medical. Derivative values —the technical, much of the economic, much of the intellectual —depend on their service as a means to these ends. The “principles” of prudence and morality, to the extent that they are seen as the harmonious maximization, respectively, of individual and general good, are directed to the realization of no proprietary value of their own but are applied, as devices of rational selection, to potential values of the elemental type or to values instrumental to them.

Besides morality, then, in human choice and direction of conduct are prudence, like it a procedure for the maximization of prior values, and a great range of specific values and disvalues, varying greatly among themselves as immediate or instrumental, as atomic or systematic, as passive or active, as bodily or mental, as momentary or enduring and so on. This conception corrects two erroneous pictures of the objects of human wants and efforts. The worse of the two simply identifies all the nonmoral values as mere inclinations or desires, aimed at pleasure conceived in the narrowest, most colloquial sense. The second opposes morality to self-interest, taking all particular desires to be self-interested. Neither view is usually affirmed explicitly. But Kant, although he knew better, usually writes as if the first mistaken picture were correct.

V

Bishop Butler’s term for the nonmoral, self-related maximizing principle of conduct, “self-love,” is unfortunate. It suggests self-

admiration rather than a concern with the interests of the self. Two other terms for what he has had in mind are “self-interest” and “prudence.” Neither of them is altogether satisfactory.

The defect of self-interest as a term for the disposition to guide one’s choices so as to have the best life possible is that it is connected too closely to the pursuit of competitive satisfactions or values. There are many objects of human desire which are competitive in that their realization or enjoyment by one person inevitably excludes their enjoyment by another. The most obvious examples are material possessions and money. But there is also status, since ruling political elites, Olympic teams, titles of nobility, and so forth are inevitably limited in number. Power, to some extent associated with status, is scarce as a matter of logical necessity. It is an asymmetrical relation: if A has power over B in some respect, then B does not have power in that respect over A. Furthermore power does not amount to much unless it is power over a number of people.

We call someone self-interested if he is predominantly concerned to maximize his competitive satisfactions. But many of the values which people want to realize are noncompetitive. Many more are countercompetitive in that the satisfaction of people other than the agent is an essential part of them. The desire for knowledge that leads someone to make new discoveries yields something that he wants and would not have been available to be advantageous or otherwise satisfying to other people unless he had discovered it. There are three qualifications to this thesis, but they are all contingent. The first is that what is discovered may be something that other people do not want to know, not merely in the sense that it does not interest them, but that they wish that it was not known. A prime instance is scandalous information about some public figure. Perhaps in most such cases more people will want to know than will desire that the fact should not be known, although the desire of the interested majority is likely to be less intense.

A second qualification is that some discoveries confer a competitive advantage on their discoverers: money, reputation, Nobel Prizes. A third is that the effort the discoverer puts into his inquiries might have been put into some form of activity even more beneficial to other people. This possibility of subtraction from benevolence is not a very serious one. The discoverer is more likely to have selected as an alternative course of action either some other line of research or else something even more remote from benevolence, although no more hostile to it, like working in his garden or sailing a small boat. But then there is also the chance that he might have chosen to do something malevolent. Work can keep people out of mischief as well as preventing them from doing straightforward public good.

It would be quite inappropriate to describe someone who labors at an engrossing intellectual or artistically creative task as self-interested on that account alone. Further conditions must be satisfied; for example, that he has taken it on only as a means to the acquisition of competitive goods —“money, fame, power and the love of women” in Freud’s phrase —or that in carrying it out he has neglected some specific obligations, to his family, perhaps, or his creditors.

It is not merely inappropriate but absolutely mistaken to describe as self-interested the action of someone whose purpose in doing it is the satisfaction of someone else. Although universal benevolence, altruism in the fullest sense, is rare, and perhaps nonexistent, everyone but a small minority of psychological monsters has a direct interest in the well-being of some people other than himself. As Hume rightly observed, our generosity is somewhat confined. The theory of kin selection, by supplying the evolutionary explanation of our concern for those who share our genes, puts this limited instinctive modicum of altruism on a scientific basis. But beyond this there is in most people a measure of what Hume called sympathy. By that he meant that a desire, on the whole, and other things being equal, that other people,

whoever they may be, should not suffer. There is also acquired or learned altruism, which takes the form of a direct concern for the well-being of people to whom one is not related.

Concern for the welfare of others, or moral action generally, may of course be prompted by self-interest as a means to the agent's individual advantage. Most often, perhaps, that takes the negative form of acting so as not to incur their hostility and the unpleasant consequences to which it may lead. In that case the concern for others is self-interested. But even if that motive were operative in all of an agent's altruistic conduct to some extent, it would not follow that he was entirely self-interested. Our motives are often mixed.

I am inclined to think that there is an intermediate region between calculating, self-interested altruism and an immediate desire for the well-being of others. This is where an agent forgoes an advantage he would get at their expense because of what taking it would do to his self-respect or, again, where he is driven to act in such a way by feelings of guilt. But, although these sorts of cases show concern with the self rather than others, they are not directed toward a competitive advantage and could not reasonably be called instances of self-interested conduct.

VI

“Prudence” is a better word than “self-interest” for the disposition to pursue the greatest good for oneself in one's life as a whole or, as one might put it, to pursue a good life by rational means. Its fault is a certain negative, defeatist quality. It implies a strategy of minimizing losses rather than of maximizing gains, of caution and wariness rather than adventure and enterprise. The rationality it enjoys is limited in the way that economic rationality is limited. A man may feel that his life is less good than it might have been if he had given more of his attention to listening to serious music. In criticizing his current conception of a good life for himself he is not accusing himself of imprudence. Prudence,

as we ordinarily understand it, is a resolute avoidance of harm. It is also opposed to spontaneity, presumably on the ground that more surprises are unpleasant than agreeable.

Nevertheless prudence is well-established, and much less misleading than self-interest as a name for the rational pursuit of a good life by an individual, and it does apply well enough to the style of consideration an agent would give, if rational, to the major decisions of life, those on which his long-run happiness or well-being depend: of what career to follow, of whom to marry, of where to live. So I shall continue to use it and the adjective “prudential,” with the added warning that these words are not to be interpreted in a purely negative sense.

The intellectual aspect of that concern with rational pursuit of a good life whose motivational aspect is prudence is wisdom, the common subject matter of the books which I suggested earlier as a source for a fuller list of the varieties of value than I had provided. More precisely it is worldly wisdom, or *Lebensweisheit*. That, of course, is what most unsophisticated people mean by the word “philosophy.” The adverb “worldly,” often put in front of “wisdom,” tends to invest the wisdom referred to with a morally questionable or disreputable air, as if it were inevitably cynical. However, it was probably put there in the first place to distinguish it from the sort of wisdom that is concerned with what, if anything, happens to us after death.

VII

So far I have been arguing that the nonmoral ends of action cannot be treated as the objects of an undifferentiated mass of desires nor, collectively, as the objects of self-interest. Desires for specific things differ in many ways. Some of them are for competitive goods, but others are not. Desires for competitive goods are, no doubt, self-interested, but self-interest as a disposition is not simply having and acting on such desires. Every time I eat something I am taking out of circulation something someone

else hungrier than I might have eaten. Self-interestedness, as a trait of character, is a relative notion, like tallness. To be self-interested is to be more than usually indifferent to the claims of others to the objects of one's competitive desires.

Other desires are for noncompetitive objects; others again, for countercompetitive ones. Among these last are those desires for the well-being of others which are among our motives for moral conduct. As such, along with other elemental incentives, like hunger, sexual appetite, curiosity, taste for the beauty of nature, and so on, they help to constitute the raw material on which prudence or practical wisdom operates to arrive at the largest possible system of harmonious satisfactions.

What this appears to imply is that prudence is ultimately sovereign over morality, since part of the rational conduct of life is a matter of deciding what part morality shall play in it, to what extent the various desires which impel us to moral action should be indulged. (Prudence is in addition *epistemically prior* to morality, to the extent that morality is a matter of protecting and promoting the well-being of others, since to pursue the well-being of others we have to know in what it consists, what, as the sometimes insincere saying goes, their best interests are. But that is another matter.)

In accepting the implication of the sovereignty of prudence or wisdom over morality it seems that I am in direct collision with the widespread conviction that moral reasons for conduct override all other claims, or, more extremely, that its overridingness is what makes a reason for action moral. There are obvious difficulties with the theory of overridingness. What *in fact* overrides other reasons for action in cases of conflict is quite commonly not supposed, by either the agent or anyone else, to be the moral element in the conflict. But if the overridingness of the moral is its being *right that it should* override then the question is: what sort of "should" is this? If it is a moral "should" the thesis is empty. It must be, then, a prudential "should" and, to the extent that the

thesis is defensible, it is. The question Why should I be moral? is a question as to the place of morality in the good life rationally pursued. Self-interest and morality are calculated to come into conflict. But since prudence and self-interest are far from the same thing, prudence can enjoin abstention from self-interest, and it does.

But does it enjoin complete abstention? Many theories of morality, intentionally or not, imply what could be called moral imperialism or moral totalitarianism. By that I mean the view that in every situation of choice there is something the agent morally ought to do, from which it follows that every other choice in that situation would be morally wrong. Ordinary utilitarianism, and any unguarded consequentialist theory, has this implication when it proclaims that one ought always to do that which contributes most to the general happiness or to the good of all.

On the reasonable assumption that the most comprehensive account of the goal of moral action is the increase of the general good and the reduction of its opposite, it becomes necessary, if this excessive moralism is to be contained, to recognize distinctions within morality. I suggest that, first of all, there is the field of moral obligation proper, which requires us not to act so as to harm or cause suffering to others. Here are to be found the almost universally recognized rules which forbid killing and injuring others, stealing from them, deceiving and defaming them. It also includes the keeping of promises. The expectations and plans of others depend on our honoring our undertakings to them. If we do not, harm will generally ensue to them.

Second, there is the field of charity, in which the aim is to reduce or prevent by our action harm to others that has not been caused by us but by natural causes or the actions of yet other human beings. Here, as in the first field, the aim is negative, the elimination of harm or suffering. But the requirements of charity are open-ended. As far as a single human agent is concerned there is no limit to the opportunities he is presented with of charitable

action. It is probably correct that no one has ever seized all the opportunities for charitable conduct that it was practically possible for him to take, themselves only a small part of those it was conceivable for him to respond to. Of course people are charitable to markedly different extents. The more charitable are more morally admirable than the less. But the noncharitable are not wicked or, at any rate, not in the way or to the extent that those who fail in their duty are.

Third, there is action directed toward the positive increase of the general good, of well-being or happiness. This is morally admirable so far as it is motivated by a direct concern for human welfare. When it is, it is neither a matter of obligation nor a form of charity; it should be called, rather, generosity or, perhaps, benevolence. The opportunities for the exercise of generosity are as boundless as those of charity. If it, as well, is included in the scope of duty or obligation, as it is by most consequentialist theories of morals, even if inadvertently, a quite unacceptable concept of morality is implied. As Popper has commonsensically observed we surely do not feel that there is any moral claim on us to augment the happiness of those who are already reasonably content. It is more important to concentrate our concern for others on cases where we can reduce suffering.

Most positive contributions to the general well-being are probably motivated not by a general concern for the greater well-being of mankind but by impulses of personal affection for family and friends, at the smaller end of the scale, and by such factors as ambition, the love of knowledge, or the desire for artistic expression at the larger end.

I am proposing as rational a conception of morality which is both finite and negative, at least in its primary part, the domain of obligation. It is negative, but not finite, in its secondary part, the domain of charity. It is rational because it takes account of the differences both of importance and of practicability of the *two* kinds of requirements of conduct. An indication of the higher

importance of obligation is that the legal systems of all politically organized societies include the enforcement of the rules of duty as their primary constituent.

It is a mistake to run obligation and charity together, since it is to ask too much. By treating what it is reasonable to insist on with what it is reasonable only to encourage, it tends to weaken the more important claims of obligation. By setting an unreasonably high standard of conduct it is calculated to bring about inadequate performance over the whole range of morally desirable conduct.

The need for some sort of distinction along these lines has long been evident to those engaged in practical moral thinking of a reflective kind. Catholic moral theology, from an early stage of its history, accepted the idea of supererogation, the doing of morally good deeds beyond the call of duty. That admission recognized that most human beings would not adopt morality as a vocation. To absorb the full claims of charity into the domain of the obligations one recognizes is to aspire to sainthood. The first Christians, convinced that the destruction of the world was imminent, did have this aspiration. So, from time to time, have various Protestant groups. Moral utopianism, however, is hard to sustain when the millennium obstinately fails to arrive.

But a distinction between the morally essential and the morally optional is seldom to be found in philosophical treatments of morality. Views which imply that there is no distinction are embraced without awareness of what they entail.

On the other hand, the inclusive, nonfinite view is ultimately a necessary consequence of the conception of human nature embodied in supernaturalist religion. If human beings are really immortal rational souls in temporary association with desiring bodies, it is the welfare of the soul that must determine the character of a good life, and it will be one in which moral claims of obligation and charity prevail over all others. The acceptance of supererogation by the church is a makeshift or compromise, a

reluctant accommodation to human moral weakness. It is altogether more at home in a secular ethics.

In claiming that only the primary, strictly obligatory part of morals —not harming others and keeping one's promises to them— is essential and compulsory it may seem that I have run into inconsistency. For did I not say that morality is subject to prudence, rather than the other way round? But primary morality is that part of morality as a whole, I should contend, that prudence endorses as overriding other ends of conduct and motives directed toward those ends. To follow it is to satisfy elemental impulses of our nature. It is also desired as enabling us to be the kind of person we want to be. Furthermore it is prudent, in the narrowest, calculating sense, in two ways. It preserves us from the hostility of others and it contributes to the maintenance of social peace and of practices that are indispensable for effective human cooperation.

We should not think of morality as somehow uniquely imposing obligations *ab extra* on unregenerate human nature. Exactly analogous conflicts between what we unreflectively want to do and what we realize would, on rational consideration, be best for us to do crop up in other domains of conduct. There is nothing particularly moral about our struggles to resist the temptation provided by delicious but fattening food; by the greater easiness of not bothering to fix the leaky tap; by the pleasure of spending money it would be more prudent to save.

VIII

I have been arguing that morality is not the same thing as the good life, even if its primary part is an essential constituent of the good life and its secondary, charitable, part is a desirable constituent of such a life, to be fostered by moral education but not to the extent of obliterating all other human purposes. I have represented our impulses to dutiful and charitable action as part of ordinary, earthly human nature and not tied up with some quite distinct, and, indeed, opposed, supernatural ingredient in our con-

stitution. I have claimed, too, that most positive good is secured by action in which moral motivation plays little or no part. I have assumed that there must be nonmoral goods to give morality, as a second-order mode of determining action, a content, namely, the desired ends of others which it is the task of morality to promote, in its negative way.

I began from the fact that, apart from aesthetics, morality is the only major field of practical thinking which has received serious and systematic attention from philosophers. I shall finish by discussing two bad consequences which follow from this narrowness of view. It should, perhaps, be added that these are, in themselves, intellectually bad, although like other intellectual mistakes, they may indirectly have morally bad consequences as well, may lead to avoidable harm to people other than the mistaken theorists.

The first of these bad results is that a number of areas of first-order reflection about practice are insufficiently investigated. The most important of them are the technical, the economic, and the medical. There are large bodies of doctrine about the way in which to pursue efficiency, economic advantage, and health. But the general assumption prevails that there is nothing problematic about these ends themselves. The usual assumption is that efficiency, economic benefit, health, and other nonmoral values are entirely uncontroversial and objective. It is assumed that we all agree in our criteria of these values and that we can unquestionably set about the discovery of rules which order actions as better or worse means of realizing them. That assumption is mistaken.

Consider the case of health. It is an interesting and somewhat suspect fact that textbooks of pathology tend to define disease or illness, the lack of health, in statistical terms. They identify it as a condition of body or mind that deviates from the average to a pronounced degree. As it turns out, they do not adhere to this principle. Pathologists do not regard being two meters tall or having red hair, both properties of a small minority of the human

race, as forms of illness. More fundamentally, they do not answer the question Why should the medical profession strive to bring everyone into much the same bodily and mental condition as everyone else? To the extent that they are right to do so is precisely to the extent to which being in the average condition is one that people generally want to be in or enjoy being in or that leads to persisting states of that kind.

But people's wants and satisfactions vary. One person's health could be another person's illness. There is, plainly, room for dispute. So is there in matters of efficiency and economic benefit. A precise and conclusive procedure can be imposed to settle questions about them. But, like the criterion of statistical normality in the case of health and sickness, this smothers the contestable nature of the value in question rather than eliminates it.

To make this point about health, efficiency, and so on is not to take a skeptical attitude toward medical and technical judgments. There is possibility of dispute here, but it is comparatively marginal. The range of relevant factors is sharply limited: to pain, dysfunction, and death in the medical case, to time and cost in the technical case. That consideration leads into the second bad consequence of the obsession with morality at the expense of other fields of practice.

In emphasizing the distinction between morality and the undifferentiated remainder of forms of practice and particularly by detaching moral motivation from ordinary human nature, from desires and emotions, ethical theorists have exaggerated beyond reason the difference between them as matters of knowledge or justified belief. For the past half-century ethical theory in the English-speaking world has been dominated by the noncognitivist account of moral convictions and utterances which takes them, not, as they seem to be, as statements, true or false, reasonable or unreasonable, but as interjections or imperatives.

That point of view draws strength from the association of moral judgment with the elevated kind of aesthetic judgment that

is regarded as the only kind of valuation seriously comparable with it. If the object of comparison had been the humbler aesthetics of food and clothing, of furniture and scenery, the outcome could well have been different. For there, there is much less disagreement than there is about art, particularly about art that has been recently created and to which people have not had time to become accustomed. Apparently unresolvable disagreement about art is, in fact, much greater than it is about moral issues. The comparison, then, exaggerates the variety of moral opinions, in one way, as, from the other end, does the mistaken assumption that in the domain of technical, economic, and medical value disagreement can, in principle, be conclusively resolved. The obsession of theorists with morality, to the exclusion of other forms of practice, deprives the latter of the philosophical attention they deserve and encourages radical misunderstanding about morality itself.