

## 4 Morality and reality

In order to evaluate altruistic morality, some central problems of moral philosophy are worth penetrating. These primarily concern ideas about the relationship between morality and reality. Before discussing different moral rules, though, we should consider how morality can be evaluated. The first question is whether an action must be judged according to its agreement with moral rules or to its effect.

### 4.1 The anatomy of morality

A survey of normative ethics reveals two principal orientations. One is to make a moral judgement of actions in themselves: certain kinds of actions are right and others wrong. Such a "deontological" morality of rules is found, for example, in the Ten Commandments. Most religions include various decrees and taboos on how people ought to behave, and their instructions are often both clear and concrete. But the believer faces as much difficulty as an atheist who wishes to follow personal moral rules, when different rules conflict in reaching decisions. A solution is to arrange the rules in a hierarchy of importance. This, however, is not easy to attain if all the rules are supposedly valid for decisions of both great and little importance.

The second approach is to make a moral judgement on the basis of "teleological" morality. Here one weighs the consequences of actions, while not necessarily in any sense of logical consistency. Often this approach is called consequentialism, but we will use the transparent term "effect morality", showing that the focus is on the actual results of actions. As the Greek word "telos" means an end or intention, teleological morality is frequently given the latter significance in philosophical arguments; but we think it essential to distinguish between effects and intentions. The present section will therefore speak only of effect morality as teleological, leaving the problems of "intention morality" for the next section. When effects and intentions seem closely connected, a borderline issue arises of how to classify the reasons involved, and we have chosen to do so under effect morality.

Strong faith not only lends extra emphasis to particular deontological rules. It also lends power to a dominant idea which can serve as a foundation for a teleological system. This need not add further strength to the moral rules, but often leads to a weakening of them. The classic example of a teleological morality rendering a deontological one completely useless is the maxim - ascribed to the first Jesuit, Ignatius of Loyola - that "the end justifies the means". When such a crucial matter as saving souls for an eternal life is at stake, violence and compulsion become an acceptable price to pay; a more important moral principle overrides rules of lower rank. The same reasoning is illustrated by that of Ivanov, the Stalinist in Arthur

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Koestler's book "Darkness at Noon".

"Your Raskolnikov is, however," he says (referring to the chief character in Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment"), "a fool and a criminal; not because he behaves logically in killing the old woman, but because he is doing it in his personal interest. The principle that the end justifies the means is and remains the only rule of political ethics; anything else is just vague chatter and melts away between one's fingers... If Raskolnikov had bumped off the old woman at the command of the Party - for example, to increase strike funds or to install an illegal Press - then the equation would stand, and the novel with its misleading problem would never have been written, and so much better for humanity."<1>

It is curious to note how systems of strong faith, in comparison with more individual philosophizing, influence people's views about moral rules. Such systems increase the stress on a rule of action: "God has forbidden me to drink alcohol" is normally somewhat stronger than "I have resolved not to drink". But the firm belief in a higher goal can easily invalidate moral rules. Before God's will and the historic mission of the working class, all the rules and attitudes we regard as constituting good morals are readily ignored. Submitting one's actions to a lofty ideal, and abandoning other considerations, is seen by the majority not as a high or good morality, but rather as an excuse for acting quite immorally. If the rules are subjected to a great aim, their own force diminishes, even as the champions of that faith insist the contrary.

From a secularized standpoint, a pure effect morality without any rules of action is worrisome. Not least, there are huge practical problems in reaching a moral decision at all. It also becomes hard to predict other people's behavior, resulting in uncertainty and skepticism.

A more serviceable morality is to use rules of two different categories - rules of thumb, and principles. By rules of thumb are meant rules of a personal or conventional nature which one follows for practical reasons alone. Time is saved by devoting no special effort to a series of decisions. If there are solid specific grounds for not using a rule of thumb in a particular case, it costs little to break the rule. If one finds that exceptions are constantly being made, or that the rule often has negative consequences, one is of course justified in reconsidering the rule.

As for principles, they too may be personal or conventional. Their basis is that the rule itself has an intrinsic value. Besides the effect of a decision, the very fact that the motivating rule has been followed is valuable. To be sure, any faith in rules can be taken to absurd extremes, but the notion of an intrinsic value in some principles is obviously defensible. A person who consistently tells the truth, and one who sometimes lies, are poles apart. Thus an honest person can afford to confront many negative reactions to his honesty for the purpose of preserving his truthful character. However, every decision is accompanied by circumstances that could be called a special case. If flexibility is given priority, a principle becomes

scarcely more than a rule of thumb.

The saving of time and effort is a powerful argument for usually following a rule of thumb or a principle. In addition, a general and well-thought-out way of acting will presumably achieve better results than do spontaneous, quick calculations in the face of each decision. There are good reasons also for a secularized morality to pay close attention to rules of action. On the other hand, principles that exist not to be followed, but to impress people, belong more properly to the world of advertising than to morality.

When dealing with vital issues or when different principles come into conflict, a person must make a fairly total assessment. Some of the rules have to be broken. It is then difficult, indeed, to see any other solution than to weigh the consequences of various alternatives against each other. This view implies a need to regard effect morality as ultimate (that is, the final value) - and the more detailed rules of morality as proximate (that is, goals of secondary importance). Probably this is also an adequate picture of how most people think in practice and believe that others should think. One tries to find a middle path between thumping the rule-book and spinelessly adapting to situations.

The realm of rules is rife with instructions which are supported by religion, but which can still be identified as primarily social. Even without the Seventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal", our Christian world would recognize this rule as all other cultures do. Many such rules are characterized by the fact that their existence and clarity is more important than their exact formulation, as with rules for when and how to express one's respect and gratitude. The Bible's chief interest lies not in the merits and faults of specific rules, but in its ultimate value. On what scale should its consequences be evaluated? The very claim of great systems of faith is that they can give an ultimate meaning to human action.

Before listening to divine counsel, one must circumvent a serious problem with God's own morality. In the Old Testament, Jehovah was an omnipotent deity who governed both good and evil. In the New Testament, he remained omnipotent but was always good, not evil. We are thus compelled to account for the misery we see everywhere about us. It seems to be a cosmic contradiction.

The official solution, known as "theodicy", holds that evil is only apparent and that there is a higher good behind all things. God is good, yet we are incapable of perceiving divine harmony in its entirety. This idea of ultimate goodness is rather far-fetched and doubted by many. The reason for choosing such a solution is that the two alternative viewpoints are even more questionable. First, to regard God as good but not omnipotent would shake our faith in his final triumph. The rival, perhaps Devilish, power could be expected to promote other sorts of human behavior, and its disciples could turn out to be the victors. God's path would be merely an opportunity.

The second viewpoint revives an Old Testament god who is also evil. But this interpretation loses much moral force and becomes a doctrine of "might makes right". While a believer should naturally

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follow the decrees, they have no authority outside the circle of the faithful. With a strong position, advocates of religion may draw very sweeping and intolerant conclusions; but a church in a weak position can lay few claims on other citizens. Commandments then possess little more status than a rule like going to church on Sundays, an internal memorandum to the flock.

The biologist Thomas Henry Huxley made an attack upon theodicy: "For if the cosmos is the effect of an immanent, omnipotent, and infinitely beneficent cause, the existence in it of real evil, still less of necessarily inherent evil, is plainly inadmissible. Yet the universal experience of mankind testified then, as now, that, whether we look within us or without us, evil stares us in the face on all sides; that if anything is real, pain and sorrow and wrong are realities." <2>

Theodicy is not an easy thesis to accept, and we are tempted to agree with Stendhal: "The sole excuse for God is that he does not exist." Still, acceptance of the thesis may have numerous consequences for the church's moral claims. If God's ways are so indirect and incomprehensible, one can ask why the ordinary citizen should obey the meek morality which is preached by the church; for God's example ought to be as attractive as that of his earthly ambassadors. Despite this, not even the church follows Christ's path; the pulpit approves one morality, and the sacristy another.

Communism involves paradoxes as flagrant as those of theodicy. Democracy must be realized through dictatorship, the state shall be withered away by a stronger state, and the worker's freedom consists of obeying bureaucrats.

As the lure of Paradise and the classless society fade into a distant mist, the church and the party linger on. Believers must hope that these organizations know where they are going and are interested in getting there. Personal responsibility for one's own actions has been decimated, and the decisions lie with Big Brother, Stalin or Khomeini.

The visible, tangible bond is no longer between ideals and morality, but between official interpreters and morality. If one is skeptical of their sacral appointment, the prophets become only some out of many in a throng of concepts and concerns. What distinguish them are hardly clear thinking and warm feeling, but success in marketing: "Five hundred million Chinese cannot be wrong." Traditional success, however, is a limited argument that soon rings hollow. The Square of Heavenly Peace has ceased to be associated with Communist mass rapture, and other megastars may climb higher on the charts than Jesus.

Apart from paradoxes, a further problem arises when we take a step from suprahuman to human morality. Are these two dimensions closely related, or separated by a gap that restricts our insight? There is no incontestable reason why God ought to bother about human actions. If a man stuffs himself while his brother starves, this is only a temporary trifle which God corrects in the essential perspective - the eternal one. Why should God care whether we feel love, hate or envy? For a

human intellect, the norms applied on Judgement Day are very difficult to understand: "The last shall be the first." Why speculate on the unforeseeable when everything depends upon divine grace in the end? And surely a heresy cannot anger a good, all-powerful deity? The point worth debating is whether God observes mankind with a smile of sympathy or of amusement.

By the same token, it is evident that the materialistic theory of history must be true or false regardless of how many enthusiasts it has, or of how enthusiastic they are. Capital accumulation and the falling profit ratio proceed irrespective of popular moral support - raising the question of whether such grandiose hypotheses have any moral relevance for human actions. It seems more rational to devote one's energy to actions that have an effect. For God and History, a prayer or song has no importance; singing a ditty for a child appears smarter than breaking into a psalm or the "International".

A popular assumption, even among many nonreligious people, is that one needs a god in order to give morality a firm basis. If the ultimate aim is unclear, so are the morals. Both the problems of paradoxes and of separate dimensions, though, speak against the ability of faith to issue moral directives. An option is to let God take care of the divine morality, and let ourselves take care of our own morality as best we can.

Altruism is also a norm with religious roots that extend beyond the circle of the faithful. Its most general formula can be stated thus: "What benefits others is good; what benefits oneself is bad." This simple rule represents the backbone of the Christian-humanistic moral outlook. It will be illuminated from many angles in these pages, before judging whether or not it should be considered honest, desirable and possible.

Most of us would agree that moral rules ought to be guiding lights for human action, like a backbone that unites and supports isolated decisions. A knowledge of evolution provides suggestions about the fundamental goals that guide human behavior: survival and reproduction. Altruistic morality takes no account of these, and pursues a contrary course. Man's purpose is to serve a quite different aim than his own interest - with his mind, his work, and ultimately with his life.

Can a morality with such presumptuous claims be taken seriously at all? Certainly an altruistic morality can never completely dominate a society, but it has long been a factor with some influence over actions. In official morality, it has always played the main role. Exactly what one is obliged to sacrifice oneself for may vary: a nation, class, leader, god and so on. The list is as interminable as the altruistic message is monotonous: nature's elemental rules are to be replaced by a cultural myth.

## 4.2 Intentions

An alternative to the choice between rules and effects is to make

morality deal chiefly with intentions. This section will discuss teleological morality in the sense of intention rather than effect.

That intentions are what count most is a very common attitude. The legal distinctions between murder and manslaughter are a practical example of this view. Not everything goes according to plans, and bad luck or clumsiness can cause plenty of suffering. The moral difference is sizeable, even if it makes less difference to the victim. A shift of focus from actions to intentions is often said - as by philosophers and lawyers - to indicate a higher stage of social development. We must, however, examine the matter more closely.

The obvious drawback of such "intention morality" is that intentions are easy to manipulate. Fine intentions can be ascribed to the worst actions, notably by embellishing them without enough exaggeration to provoke counterreactions. Intention morality entails a transfer of judgement from the action to the actor, and allows great leeway for sympathy or antipathy toward this person. The judge readily sees the intentions he expects to see.

Intention morality is strongly coupled to altruism. Since the action's effect means, to an altruist, less than do sacrifice and thoughtfulness, the giver becomes the central figure. His sacrifice is real, but the intention is more important and frequently makes the difference between a good and a bad action.

In terms of reciprocal morality, grave doubt attaches to intention morality, because real actions are of primary significance. From the reciprocal perspective, much would be gained in many cases by lending less weight to presumed intentions than to palpable reality - that is, limiting the influence of expectations and prejudice on our judgement. Paying attention to others' intentions in preliminary assessment of a new situation is unavoidable, but they should not be key factors in the final assessment of an action. Clear-sightedness benefits from skepticism about appealing intentions.

### Goals and terms of value

Intentions can indeed be constructive, and have a positive function in a debate, as general goals that lend meaning to particular acts. Yet a crucial requirement is that the aim must not be inoffensive and empty of content; there have to be opposing aims for a discussion to become possible. Greater equality and more individual freedom are two aims which fulfill this criterion, since they can be weighed against each other. If they are made so benevolent that nobody objects, they lose all intellectual force and turn into weary words of propaganda. Without any opposition, the issue reduces to a display of maximum heartfelt desire. A term too highly esteemed meets the same fate as a definition too wide: it lacks precision and usefulness.

Some groups try to establish a preferential interpretation for esteemed terms of value. If this attempt is too successful, a paradoxical situation can arise. The term becomes less universal, more precise in a new form, and thus also more controversial. For instance,

"law and order" is a basically innocuous state of affairs, but various implications and values associated with the term are repugnant to many people, who therefore keep their distance without going so far as to favor lawlessness and disorder. While we all use and abuse such terms of value, they tend to produce inertia rather than confusion. A balance is struck which makes their abuse tolerable.

Slippery terms of value are not the only obstacles to a rewarding debate. More serious are certain propositions that claim universal validity. The problem is sometimes a resemblance between principles and what physicists call subatomic particles. Instead of obeying Newton's laws, they may appear at any time and, just as quickly, vanish back into a vacuum. The positron is such an unstable entity, which suddenly ceases to exist and revives, giving no explanation. Intellectual axioms that exhibit the same behavior, or "positron principles", also have a positive charge. But these come and go in a less random manner, being manifested when they serve a purpose and, as discreetly as an English butler, disappearing when their presence is thought inappropriate.

The principle that "all men have equal value", for example, has a number of peculiarities. Its advocates may refer to the equality of all men before God, and to the Nazi holocaust as an illustration of what can happen if the principle is flouted. An experienced debater would not want to challenge so fine a principle - and he knows that he, too, will eventually have use for it, since it is definitely a universal principle. Yet despite general approval on a rhetorical level, few people believe in this principle on an intellectual level. The church has both created saints and destroyed heretics. Each of us attributes to others a host of good and bad characteristics. Perhaps our judgements are tainted by human folly, but does God know any better? According to holy books, God divides mankind into white and black sheep, which surely implies an evaluation. Even before God, then, we are not of equal value. If only God is a proper judge, it is still improbable that an omnipotent God would take notice of our imperfect judgements. Besides, we judge only people's earthly actions toward each other, not their unfathomable souls. Should it be a sin to evaluate people differently, the sin is committed by everyone, including God. And these problems in no way disturb the consensus that the principle in question is desirable as well as correct.

Nor are its advocates worried by the instability that can make this principle live and die in practice like a positron. But such principles cause something more than confusion. There are further consequences of a cosmic morality which both exists and does not exist, branding us all the while as sinners. We ought to value others' children as highly as our own. We should be as mindful of colleagues' concerns as of our own. Implicit evaluations of this sort are what turn a positron principle into a moral and intellectual plague. Everybody is guilty, so who shall cast the first stone?

Guilt is solid currency for an authority. How can we resist demands from above, when we have already confessed to being guilty? The argument's arbitrary applications are as obvious as its emotive

force, which renders it dangerous and unreliable. A positron principle has the central feature of resting on sheer faith, not on reason. Its sudden disappearance is a blow to the weak in spirit, but harmless to believers. For the latter, it seems quite stable, and its mystical qualities even help to camouflage it from critics.

A totalitarian state gives rise to many new opinions with such qualities, claiming the same general validity and showing the same aversion to exposure of their inconsistencies. With the right loyal attitude, no contradictions are observed. It is a matter not of thinking, but of wanting to believe.

In a discussion of morality, the common terms of value which have fluid meanings play a role of obscurantism, yet do not result in total blindness. What really confuse the discussion are the positron principles. By claiming to be lofty, good and general, they distract us from productive consideration of serious principles. Which of these are good and which are bad? How can one strike a fair balance between different interests?

### Goodness and foolishness

A complication in regard to intentions is that they are so often combined with irrationality. Goodness and sensible behavior refuse on many occasions to go hand in hand.

Innumerable films show a scene where the villain points a pistol to the head of the heroine, telling the hero to drop his weapon and give up. The hero always does so because he is good. We realize that the villain has no notion of keeping any promise to release the heroine, but intends to kill them both. The tables are turned, however, and the villain is disarmed, which had been impossible as long as the hero was armed. Thus weakness and goodness are proved to yield strength - at least on the screen.

Frequently the hero's foolishness is simply a compensation for the director's inability to create an imaginative plot. Even so, to be foolish is seen as virtuous; heroes think little, and instinctively do what is good, whether or not it seems foolish. A further objection to this standard scene is that the hero, by giving up, not only risks his own life but may also increase the heroine's risk of being killed. A more effective response to the villain's threat could be to deliver a counterthreat, against either the villain or his henchmen, which can dissuade him from escalating the violence. Such a strategy, though, is not heroic; an act of self-sacrificing stupidity is required.

Foolishness is a popular approach in many situations. Behavior that appears enjoyable on momentary inspection would be avoided if given due consideration. A "good" thought of almost childish caliber may arouse positive feelings, and the spreading of such disorganized pleasantries is a means of winning sympathy or appreciation. If one has no serious solutions to propose, one can anyhow voice some pious hopes. By expressing goodness in a ceremonial manner, a naive initiative is toned down and even earns respect. For a more productive plan, the



good intention is emphasized less than the rational arguments about how to achieve the aim. This emphasis is a propagandistic hindrance that is avoided by pious hopes.

As far as ignorance plays a role, there is a dilemma. In practice, most people are clearly ignorant about the majority of laws that hold in modern society. Yet ignorance is an unacceptable reason for lesser responsibility, since it would cause enormous legal problems. Hence everybody is supposed, and obliged, to obey even the laws they do not know of. On the private level, however, ignorance is an excellent argument: "I had no idea..." An act that lacks a conscious negative intention may also receive a milder legal judgement. Similarly, an insane person is said to have neither moral nor legal responsibility for breaking rules that he cannot mentally cope with.

Even to those who support intention morality as such, the legal entanglements must be obvious. Subjective arbitrariness grows when we must guess about what the accused thought, might have thought, or thought of thinking. To complement the lawyers with psychologists does not solve the problems, but allows more room for polished pleas and histrionic defendants. A way to free oneself from suspicion of egoistic actions is to pretend such ignorance that one hardly imagines the possibility of them. Exploiting a situation for one's own advantage is represented as unthinkable. Whoever cannot conceive the existence of robbers and swindlers is, naturally, at a safer distance from these sorts of action than one who confesses to comprehending their motives. Innocence is not a bad first line of defense.

Thus, intention morality has two great defects. Intentions are of very dubious value for action, since it is the effect that is critical; moreover, intentions are easy to falsify. In any case, many "good" intentions seem both intellectually and morally questionable.

### Intentions and moralizing

Moralistic expressions can have various intentions and orientations. The official intention is sometimes only personal: "That's what I think, but everyone has to make his own choice. I don't believe mine is better than any other." The next step is to urge an audience: "You should follow my moral advice." This, for psychological reasons, must be done with a certain delicacy, to avoid provoking protests against arrogance. The general ambition, for instance, may be advanced in purely personal terms according to the first method. In matters of taste, too, it is less provocative to say "I think it's absolutely beautiful" than to claim "It's absolutely beautiful". In addition to personal and general intentions, there is often a third: the advertising intention. "Now you have understood what high, fine principles I stand for. So you ought to take a more generous, admiring, or trustful attitude toward me."

The general intention is the morality of philosophical interest to us. Which rules and actions deserve to be emulated? This is the question which should be the focus of moral discussion. But a large

proportion of general moral expressions are mainly advertising morals which, instead of being applied, are meant to create a positive attitude toward those who express them. A person who advocates a moral duty to die for one's country, or to help the poor, frequently thinks that he accepts it, but often his primary intention is to gain good will for himself. He can only succeed if his statement is taken to heart, so it is made with emotional force and/or intellectual conviction. As well as mundane moral utterances, more sophisticated designs are commonly no more than advertisements. Many philosophers have attained honors by expounding useless principles and rules that nobody follows. The very shouldering of difficult projects is considered worthy and agreeable.

Advertising intentions are hard to attack effectively for several reasons. If heroes alone were to advocate heroism, silence would prevail, and therefore statements of dubious truth are welcomed as support for an attractive ideal. When a morality consists chiefly of advertising, an attack upon it is also somewhat pointless. To ask whether heroes really set good examples is a serious but ingenuous enterprise, like criticizing a billboard's picture of reality in spite of the latent small print: "Stop! This is only an advertisement."

For any discussion one has to presume that the participants are serious, in the sense of having general intentions. If, instead, an advertising intention is given to explain an opponent's opinion, the result is a pie-throwing contest. Still, it is often the most correct explanation and many opinions are mystifying without it. The aim of debating may be to defeat an ostensibly serious view which is mainly intended for personal advertisement. The dubious statement is seldom a vulgar appeal, but more frequently a devoted apology for a goal that is seen as high and fine. Truth and realism become secondary issues, barely hidden by duping oneself or others, and doubt can be dismissed by claiming that the doubter does not think as highly or finely.

It is important, in a broad treatment of moral philosophy, to stress the key function of advertising intentions in such debate, since their role in the debate itself is kept discreet.

The subjectivity and intellectual limits of intentions can be illustrated by comparing two people who live apparently similar lives and make the same decisions about concrete actions. One of them - often somebody you dislike - may continually be said to have egoistic motives for his efforts at earning a promotion, or for buying a new car and a holiday trip. The other - often yourself - has no egoistic motives, but wants a promotion because it will benefit the company, a new car in order to please his wife, and a holiday for the sake of his children. In the usual primitive terminology, where all that is not egoism must be altruism, the latter's behavior is totally altruistic. The only problem is that the perfect egoist and the perfect altruist behave identically. This "flexibility" cannot reasonably be called a moral asset. It is, rather, an instrument for manipulation through intellectual confusion.

### 4.3 Realism

The "naturalistic fallacy" often arises in a moral debate. A thesis of G. E. Moore, it means that facts do not in themselves allow us to conclude anything about their desirability. A value judgement is quite distinct from a description. To infer an "ought" from an "is", according to Moore and others, is always wrong.

Moral philosophers may disagree on most matters, but they are widely united on both the validity of this "fallacy" and the need for righteous indignation. Indeed it does sound valid at first, if also a bit banal: "is" and "ought" are words with different significance. This, however, is a puerile observation; to philosophers, something more qualified must be involved. Let us begin by examining what is at stake: the relevance of "is" in a normative judgement.

The criticism is against those who allow facts and actual circumstances to weigh heavily in their normative views. They are held to be influenced too much by these conditions and to see no other alternatives. Yet the critics' aim is not only to allow for alternatives, but to isolate an "ought" debate entirely from an "is" debate about the nature of reality. In discussions of virtue and paradise, life on earth is of no account.

Moore did formulate the thesis, but Hume is commonly considered its godfather. Hume's central lines are often quoted:

"In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it."<3>

Is this really a strong argument? Nobody has ever said that "is" and "ought" are synonymous, but are they "entirely different", without any connection? Often a dichotomy creates a division that does not fundamentally exist. Light and dark are seen as each other's opposites, but they are not only held together by shades of gray; dark is fundamentally just very little light, nothing entirely different at all.

Like most ideas, the naturalistic fallacy can be understood in a strong sense, in which it has a message of substance, right or wrong. There is also often a weak sense which normally has little or nothing to say. An advantage for theses in a weak sense is that they are hard or impossible to attack; but since they then carry such a limited message, attacking them is frequently not worth the trouble. Therefore, we shall focus on discussing this thesis in a strong sense, but we will later also pay attention to its weak sense.

If values and facts are "entirely different", then the person bringing facts into a value-discussion commits a fallacy. If facts and values are like apples and pears, they should be split into two discussions. The number of pears has no part in a discussion about the quality of apples.

Such a split has occurred in science, and values have been removed from scientific discussion. What Copernicus thought was desirable has no relevance to whether the heliocentric explanation is true or false. The significance of values is limited to what is often called the context of discovery. Certainly affections and values had an influence in motivating Copernicus in his task, but in the context of justification they have no proper place. Giving them an influence consciously or unconsciously could fairly be labelled committing "the ideological fallacy" - turning an "I wish" into an "it is". With the pears dismissed from the apple-discussion of science, it might seem reasonable to suppose that there should also be a discussion about pears free of apples, that is, a value-discussion based solely on values.

The weak sense of the naturalistic fallacy is that an ought-conclusion can be drawn from is-premises, if there is also at least one ought-premise. The "is" does have relevance, but an "ought" is needed too. From being confined to 0 percent of a value judgement, facts can now expand to 10, 50 or 90 percent, which is a crucial change. The only restriction is that facts cannot constitute 100 percent, because at least one value is required. (This statement might be of importance when somebody claims that no values are present. Certain philosophers may have made the claim, but their debate is special and limited; it is disputable whether this restriction can have any deep bearing on discussions of specific ethical questions.) Moreover, in any discussion the arguments from one side can be objected to on the ground that they are seen as wrong or irrelevant. But such objections can be raised against values as well as facts. In the weak sense of the thesis, there is no basis for assertions that a fact is inappropriate per se - that it is an apple in a discussion strictly about pears.

To understand Hume's point of view, we think it is plausibly seen as a part of his general philosophy. The naturalistic fallacy can be regarded as a reasonable consequence of his skepticism: the questioning of causality as such. Hume maintained that we have no valid reason to consider one thing as causing something else. The timing between events, for example, never proves that there is a causal connection; empiricism and rationalism cannot establish a connection between phenomena. A burning fire is one thing, the radiation of heat is another, and we cannot say that the blaze causes heat.

Such a theory is hard for most people to take seriously, but philosophers clearly do so. Bertrand Russell<sup>5</sup> comments on Hume's critique by saying that it has not been effectively refuted. At the same time, Russell notices Hume's problems by pointing out that Hume makes many causal statements even in the very sentences where he

questions causality. It is impossible to take any practical action without very strong assumptions about causality. It is also quite difficult to say or write anything consistent and intelligible without implying causality. The objection against causality is a statement of principle, after which the philosopher continues to act and argue as if there is causality. But for a man who holds that there can be no connection between one "is" and another "is", the thesis that there can be no connection between an "is" and an "ought" is much more limited. The first objection is harder to make reasonable than the second.

Hume thinks that reason is overstated and that the real forces explaining human behavior are our passions. These highly regarded passions are, of course, also products of evolution. They are, furthermore, a product of the human "is", as Hume acknowledges in the following passage, sounding like a modern sociobiologist: "A man naturally loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins better than strangers, where everything else is equal. Hence arise our common measures of duty, in preferring one to the other. Our sense of duty always follows the common and natural course of our passions." <6>

After these examples, we think that it is justified to question Hume's position as a wholehearted critic of naturalistic ethics. Would he have objected to the next quotation, in which Wilson pinpoints the foundation of passion-intuitionists? "These centers (the hypothalamus and limbic system) flood our consciousness with all the emotions - hate, love, guilt, fear, and others - that are consulted by ethical philosophers who wish to intuit the standards of good and evil. What, we are then compelled to ask, made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They evolved by natural selection. That simple biological statement must be pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers..." <7>

Hume certainly puts his voice behind the limitations of reason: ethical judgements come from the spine - not the mind. There are, however, good reasons to believe that our rational thinking is more responsive to change, so it is worthwhile to consider whether the message from the spine should be modified. That is why ethical judgements are not, and should not be, left exclusively to emotions, but seriously evaluated by the reflective mind. Still, this mind should remember that it is, and always will be, in the head of a Homo sapiens, not in the head of an omnipotent God creating a new world out of clay. Who we are, where we are, and how we got here, are all crucial for the answer to where we ought to be going.

A plausible explanation for the frenzy surrounding this "fallacy" is that it shields moral philosophizing from troublesome confrontations with reality. The most common mistake - not least by philosophers - is the opposite association: that an "is" can be inferred from an "ought". Seeing reality through astigmatic glasses, one commits the "ideological fallacy". <8> A pessimist sees misery, an optimist joy, and a UFO-freak visitors from outer space.

Often there is a failure to notice any difference between the

naturalistic and ideological fallacies. One can then easily make interpretations such as that Stalin was motivated by the biological ideas of Professor Lysenko, or Hitler by those of Doctor Mengele. Dangerous science becomes the villain in the drama, and hostility toward knowledge lies close at hand. But the tyrants in question, like idealistic philosophers, mainly asserted their ability to do right by sheer intuition. Thrones are occupied by visionaries, not scientists.

The battle against reality, though, is not wholly unproblematic. It is a basic rule of moral philosophy that an "ought" implies a "can". To demand that somebody do something which is beyond the bounds of possibility appears meaningless, so this rule is hard to get around. What constitutes a "can" is more disputable, but one thing is clear: real actions are also possible actions. Reality is realizable, while not all philosophical propositions are. And besides what is possible, what is normal has significance for a moral debate. The merits of moral condemnation decrease sharply if almost everybody would have done as the accused did in the given situation. When many people are "disposed but not yet exposed", it is doubtful whether the judgement can be called moral to begin with.

How people really behave is equally pertinent to the formulation of norms. An effort to reach a new goal without knowing one's location is usually fruitless. It would, of course, be nice to avoid the task of realistically assessing the difficulties of a change. Such avoidance is turned into a virtue by keeping a safe distance from the "naturalistic fallacy".

For instance, the issue of how to treat prisoners of war might be taken as a mere matter of opinion. Everyone has something to say that he thinks is useful, intelligent or suitable to his image. But a person acquainted with how soldiers treat their prisoners has, in our view, an essential advantage. He is far more likely to produce an interesting "ought", which is not just a private comment but may be relevant for establishing a social rule. What behavior should and can be stopped, and with what rules?

Nothing compels us endlessly to embrace the advice of a "visitor from reality". There are irrelevant facts, contradictory while relevant facts, false facts, and distorted facts; the conclusions are rarely obvious. Nevertheless, to claim that weighty facts have no strong bearing on the formulation of norms is rather absurd. Except for many philosophers, all who hold definite ideas and want to influence other people's attitudes know that facts are important, and that weighty facts are worth finding. To divorce facts from norms is like dividing action from its effect - a powerful argument builds upon a convincing link between them.

The philosophical separation of values from facts is in poor agreement with empirical experience. A customary line of argument runs through three stages: a value principle, some urgent reasons, and a thesis. The value principle should have greater support than the thesis, among those one is trying to convince. The reasoning is supposed to help one lead those who support or accept the value principle to approve the thesis as well. Granted, the value principle

is not a fundamental element, but a judgement based, in turn, upon facts and other values. Yet the latter are not to be analyzed, as they would divert attention from the reasoning. While the value principle becomes well-meaning and diffuse, it has to do chiefly with the technique of discussion. Most statements that "this is a fundamental value" are a way of controlling the discussion; they must sound so personal, complicated and benevolent that they do not attract debate. One wants the focus to remain on the thesis and the selective reasoning behind it.

Many opinions about crime and punishment originate in views of two value principles: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" and "turn the other cheek". These principles themselves depend on a number of circumstances. If various facts surrounding the effects of crime prevention, relapsing criminals and so forth, should clash with the principle one adopts, a problem arises. As far as possible, one attempts to interpret the facts in accordance with one's opinion. But if this fails, the opinion must be reconsidered. One cannot uphold a specific opinion solely on the basis of values. Facts are needed too.

When we persist in analyzing a value principle, its components come to light. The pure values that ultimately emerge are often so harmless and general that they yield meagre conclusions: pain is negative, crime is bad. To say "My fundamental values are socialistic" is then as informative as saying "I think red is a pretty color". Differences of "value" tend to rest upon divergent ideas about reality. By calling them values, one averts potentially damaging criticism and tries to make it a question of taste.

There is nothing wrong with gathering opinions into a single premise for application to particular issues, even if the label of "value principle" is unfortunate. But in certain cases the value principle is backed up by vacuity, not by opinions about actual circumstances. At times, we all take positions on a weak foundation and fortify it with fitting arguments later, while a ritual value principle serves as the facade. However, a shortage of facts does not turn an opinion into a matter of faith and values, unreachable by facts and experience.

In science as in practice, realism is a virtue; but in philosophy it has a lower status. Most gene mutations are deleterious, most experiments flop, and most new products are economic fiascos; the constant ambition is to find a better solution, and experience should teach some humility about the probability of success. The majority of challenges lead nowhere, and present reality is always a strong candidate; the boldest ideas, which assume many changes, have the least chances of success. If one's system proposes "a new human being", one has taken a long step from reality toward fantasy, and social systems that are more suited to bees than to people suffer an essential weakness. When moral philosophy has a constructive ambition, reality is crucial.

A constructive outlook, though, is not the only possible aim. Moral philosophy can also be regarded as a purely creative activity. In this perspective, reality is a dull restriction. On the other hand,

it does not mean that realism and creative quality are mutually exclusive. In art, the rule has rather been that realistic novels, films and paintings are the great masterpieces. Creative geniuses have often shown their ability to penetrate people's reality, revealing their thoughts and emotions. Reality does not at all feel trivial and boring: on the contrary, a creator makes us see nuances and connections which we had glimpsed, but never gazed upon so clearly.

In these terms it is difficult to understand the reverence for artificiality and unnaturalness, or the conviction that human goals are better if concocted by prophets than if they are part of human nature. We continually meet the notion that visions are beautiful clouds, high above ground that is simply a low swampland. One must ask how the path to paradise can be pointed out unless one knows the terrain and one's place on the map. Knowledge about paradise is itself of such low quality that the risk of pursuing a mirage is sizeable. The campaign against the "naturalistic fallacy" is an attempt to set faith over thoughts, and fantasy over reality.

In the weak sense, the term "naturalistic fallacy" is inappropriate - using facts is not a fallacy. Since the "fruit-cocktail view", that both facts and values are relevant, is no more than common sense, it will hardly be a disputed matter and would probably appear to warrant a description but no specific name. When looking at the "naturalistic fallacy" thesis in the strong sense, there is also a need for change. An appropriate term for it would be "Moore's mistake".

#### 4.4 Romanticism of nature and culture

To escape at least partly from the world of fantasy, one has to admit certain verities which keep one's feet on the ground. This is often intellectually easy but emotionally hard. Our entire organism is oriented towards living and we do our utmost to defy the inevitable, taking grateful advantage of each opportunity. We seem bound to die in the end, yet try with the help of imagination to find unknown detours that feel more appealing. Life's ephemerality is a truth we avoid facing.

An elementary knowledge of biology is enough to convey another insight with far-reaching consequences. Life on earth has an enormous capacity for reproduction. Since not all of those born can live at once, there is also an abundance of death - and not only by aging, but by violently perishing in the cradle or prime of life. High birth rates accompany high death rates. Predators and other perils require a high birth rate in order not to cause total extinction; still, if these external pressures diminish, this birth rate soon leads to hunger and death. In every species, the scheme of nature is an individual tragedy and a colossal waste. Darwin calculated, for the sake of general reflection, that one elephant pair without environmental constraints would have grown, during 750 years, into a population of nearly 19 million animals. <9 > This example was chosen because elephants



reproduce quite slowly; the rate is thousands of times higher for many other organisms.

Garrett Hardin continued this calculation and underlined its conclusion by pointing out that, in another 750 years, elephants would cover the land area of the world. Another illustration of the force of growth is that humans, at the present level of population increase, will cover the same area in the same length of time.<10> We certainly agree to the objection that all such calculations are hypothetical - it will not happen. The reason is that, long before such a situation has developed, the Eleventh Commandment will be broken: "Thou shalt not transgress carrying capacity." When a species multiplies without any restriction, this does not fade into a soft self-regulation, but leads to a crash, and resources will not be sufficient to feed more than a part of the number that lived at the population peak. Here is a law of nature for humans as well as animals. Already Malthus noticed that the force of man's expansion conflicts with the earth's limits; that life without restrictions would expand and cover millions of earths.<11 > It is a force that definitely does not yield a state of harmony and absence of conflict.

Such realities are unpleasant to romantics. A Buddhist monk treads softly so as not to step on ants, wearing a mouthpiece so as not to swallow flying insects. Illusions are attractive, whereas reality is only a dreary vestibule to paradise. Indeed, reality is not even real, but a nightmare: one dreams of joining the lion and lamb in Eden's eternal harmony. There are versions of romanticism which call themselves "ecological", regarding the world - or parts of it - as giant organisms with vast complexity, yet also with great sensitivity to influences that can disturb the balance of nature. Thus an outlook similar to primitive animism is modernized into a naive doctrine of harmony. More biologically informed people would be less inclined to accept the nature-romantic view of reality.

A way to avoid restricting the romantic imagination is to draw a sharp distinction between nature and culture. If culture should also be too much influenced by science's distasteful dissections, one is forced to chop again. Morality is separated from the rest of culture, and becomes a battlefield for the imagination. Culture-romantics are as unhampered by cultural reality as the nature-romantic is by natural reality. Indigestible facts can be ignored and replaced by comfortable narratives of how a good human being would like them to be.

Huxley, in a stylish passage, portrayed a moral judgement of nature. "Thus, brought before the tribunal of ethics the cosmos might well seem to stand condemned. The conscience of man revolted against the moral indifference of nature and the microcosmic atom should have found the illimitable macrocosm guilty."<12> It ought, perhaps, to be added that this was only an incisive rendition of the judgement, not an ironic attack on it. Here was a viewpoint that Huxley developed and defended. Another instance of such moral criticism of nature was given by Annie Dillard: "I came from the world, I crawled out of a sea of amino acids and now I must whirl around and shake my fist at that sea and cry shame."<13>

The question is what effect these moral verdicts have, apart from a comic one. Some philosophers do express disappointment at nature's villainy; but others enjoy the possibility of free creativity, once adaptation to natural reality has been replaced by a declaration of war. However, nature can be worse than a shameful past. It can be a living bacillus in our cultural idyll, a limitation or a threat, but never an ally. Against this ailment, there is only one remedy - an overdose of altruism.

We are constantly confronting the desire to find far-fetched, artificial explanations. Occam's razor lies unused. Every prophet who announces the goodness of man, the complexity of culture, and the inscrutability of God, impresses a flattered and confused public.

One proposal of a "higher" morality is the view that human life is sacred. According to this principle, it is wrong to take any step that extinguishes a human life. At first sight the message is quite sympathetic, since almost no morality is as repulsive as one whose proponents, shrugging lightly, sacrifice people for higher ideals. The end never justifies all means, but the leap is long from there to the sacredness of human life. Nature evidently has little respect for such a law, and culture too seems generally influenced by other principles. An alternative to the sacredness of life is to accept that life is extremely dangerous and both personally and socially, we choose alternatives despite their greater risk of violent death. Automobility is widespread although safer modes of transport exist. Medical care often lays down priorities between life and death. Every officer in war acts upon quantitative assessments that accept loss of life. In many issues, we show that human life is not a sacred principle and that some lives are weighed against others, as well as against other values.

Opposition to the death penalty also demonstrates an unwillingness to take decisions that entail death. The death penalty involves a number of further judgements about, for example, general preventive effects and the possibility of reversing an unjust sentence. A more fundamental question is that of human responsibility. Should a criminal be considered personally responsible for his actions, or seen as a victim of circumstances? The answer is important for an attitude toward the death penalty - but most decisive is the sacredness of human life.

When it comes to euthanasia, the view that one should not extinguish sacrosanct life collides with the individualistic notion that every man is his own ultimate master. An abortion opponent's conviction that life begins at the instant of conception, neither earlier nor later, reflects a need to delimit the human sphere. Each of us becomes a sacred creation at a special moment. The tale of creation is modified and launched anew.

The conflict between mankind and nature makes it ever more difficult to pursue the doctrine that man always comes first. Both luxury consumption and poachers with hungry children can be considered secondary. In a hypothetical choice between Somalian famine and the survival of whales - a choice that clever tacticians are glad to avoid

- many people prefer to help the whales. They doubt that human life is sacred, or that it is a good deed and a duty to populate the earth as densely as possible. There is clearly little interest, for various reasons, in acquiring another billion passengers on the planet. The more we ponder the idea of human life being sacred, the more it looks like one of those "positron principles" altruism has generated.

A dominant idea in moral philosophy is a holistic view of humanity. Some philosophers and animal-rights activists challenge this view, but often with an alternative that implies another holistic concept, an expanding circle.<14 > In this alternative, too, ethics is not considered as rules created and perceived by living biological creatures, but in a perspective from above. God, or His slightly secularized successor, looks down upon Earth and gives some moralizing instructions. Henry Sidgwick wrote: "I obtain the self-evident principle that the good of any one individual is of no more importance from the view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other...and it is evident to me that as a rational being I am bound to aim at good generally - so far as it is attainable by my efforts - not merely at a particular part of it."<15 >

Whether the Universe cares for humanity, or all beings with developed emotions, or all living creatures, is discussed at length. However, it is worth asking if such philosophical speculation can be considered to have any ethical relevance. The similarities in arguments for the alternatives are sometimes seen as a strength, but it seems more appropriate to regard them as different caricatures of a way of reasoning. From the point of view of the Universe, everything we do is insignificant. Our significance is based upon our being special biological individuals with personal desires and wants - we are not neutral or unresponsive toward ourselves. The starting point of morality is that we are distinct individuals, not parts of any holistic entity.

#### 4.5 Double standards and public relations

Double standards of morality are strongly and uncompromisingly condemned. As may be expected, their disciples are no more eager to appear in public as preachers, than an unscrupulous car salesman would acknowledge saying anything but the whole truth. But notwithstanding the absence of advocacy for double standards, their reasoning is employed on a vast scale and must therefore be examined.

In the form which is commonly rejected, a double standard often amounts to false public relations. A person speaks for something he thinks an opponent is impressed by, although not believing in it. But there is another form which better deserves the name of a double standard and can be defended more easily by its proponent. This is when he really has an ideal, yet does not live up to it. Still, he shares the view that one should live according to one's principles. His problem is an inability to do so, and he chooses between three different options.

The first is an honest but "lowly" approach, adapting his moral

statements to what he can apply in practice. The second is to praise high ideals with the reservation that he himself is unable to obey them. But this message "Do as I teach, not as I do" has an obvious weakness. The power of examples is so great that the message may fall flat if one makes an exception for oneself. If an effective blow is to be struck for high ideals, they must be applied in person. However, the reasoning presupposes that he cannot do so, which leads to the third option: a "good lie". One supports a fine rule and pretends to follow it. When evaluated, this alternative seems to many people better than both a retreat to "lower" ethical rules and a stance with personal reservations. The same reasoning is the backbone of the unofficial argument for double standards.

To lack all belief in the ideals one champions is best termed hypocrisy. This is almost always the type involved when double standards are condemned - and especially when by somebody who himself practices double standards. No objection can be made, since this type is hard to defend morally in view of its pure and false opportunism toward ideals that one does not share. Even so, unanimous condemnation naturally does not dissuade plenty of people from hypocrisy. Genuine double standards are of more interest in ethics, but they vanish from the discussion without a trace, unable to be praised and not condemned either. A good intention exonerates a lie, according to the unofficial morality of double standards.

A society with a sweeping altruistic morality is necessarily saddled with sweeping double standards. Putting every fine principle into practice is beyond human ability, so one applauds the rules and claims to follow them until one is disproved. This does lie in one's crass self-interest, but it is also done in the conviction that the ideal is worth striving for. While such a distance between words and actions is certainly a moral problem, double standards succeed in bridging the gap, to the preachers' relief. As Mark Twain noted: "To be good is noble, but to teach others how to be good is nobler - and less trouble."

In reality there is a positive attitude toward double standards. Those who advocate and apply a "lower" morality are often held in less regard. A consumer of pornography ought at least to be ashamed and hide his values. Widespread double standards become a serious moral problem when high and unrealistic ideas are advanced to earn public admiration and discreet mockery.

The strong position of double standards is illustrated by the fact that they can even be admitted for what they are. A person may express opinions about how he should behave in order to harmonize with his high ideals. But next he confesses that he probably does not behave any better than most people. He is a sinner, yet conscious of his guilt, and this can be regarded as somewhat finer. That is his own view, and surprisingly many others agree. An idealist who betrays his ideals is granted respect for his unrealized ambitions.

What makes it surprising is that the opposite logic holds in most situations. Ignorance of right and wrong counts as an extenuating circumstance for a wrongdoer. Children, madmen, and uninformed

accessories to crime, who behave obliviously without understanding their options for action, are assigned less moral guilt. One who knows what is right, yet does wrong anyway, is considered to have committed a darker deed. When high ideals are involved, however, a knowledge of what is right does not lead to greater demands and responsibility, but is taken by itself as a step in the right direction. This strange virtue cannot, of course, be termed an admission of double standards, and is usually labelled as humility. The latter word, despite its positive significance in many contexts, is primarily just a token of double standards in ethical matters.

The alternative to such a dialectic morality is a realistic morality, where practice and theory unite. This means getting rid of false altruism and seeing that people do what they say should be done. It need not mean a new morality which simply depicts the practice along with every defect; far from being amoral, the alternative is a series of rules that are conscientiously applied. If it does not essentially clash with self-interest, neither does the difference have to be great. The point is to get away from the bizarre principle of maximization that, the more self-sacrificing a moral is, the better. Multiplication and elevation of moral rules have the main effect of promoting double standards. The natural conclusion is that double standards are not combated by apparent criticism of hypocrisy, but by adapting morals to reality, which calls for a revision and abandonment of altruistic features.

How then should we view those who, in practice, depart from the conventional - or their personal - ethics? People who make a virtue of registering their attitudes in all issues can be very tiresome. Most of us learn not to protest against trivia, lest we sound like energetic schoolmasters. Everyone meets situations where it seems best to passively accept others' values or prejudices, and to delay comment until a question arises which can yield a rewarding debate. We are all guilty of faulty reportage, but this may be no worse an error. Contrasts between our own behavior or values, and the conventional picture of perfection, do not feel sufficient to warrant a dire accusation of double standards.

However, when a politician or anyone else embarks on an issue actively, things are otherwise. If he makes a moral claim by asserting the superiority of a principle, he invites moral inspection of his own person on that basis. One who fails to follow the morality for which he agitates has taken a moral sidestep of quite a different magnitude than one who departs from normal morality. His enemies have a chance not only to topple him, but also to attack his ideology since, if an idea is supported chiefly by double standards, a shadow is cast over it. And the shadow is well-earned. An ideology which is preached without being applied even by its preachers does not merit kind treatment, nor does a false preacher. Crooks exist in every camp, and a few cheaters are not decisive for an ideology - yet what if nobody at all is honest? When one sexual moralist after another proves to have illicit relations, and when communist leaders consume as much as capitalist billionaires, some food for thought is served. Not a heavy,

embarrassed sigh, but a critical reflection.

This is as true for intellectual giants as for politicians. The taller they are, the more justified criticism may be; there is much to say for a principle of being hard on saints. When an idea derives part of its strength from a great name, the time has come to look closely at the figure behind the name. Delight over the exposure of an honored personage who abuses his own principles is, to be sure, resisted by many people, who think he should be held in high respect. His followers squirm in their seats and make shabby excuses, but they should reconsider instead of whining. Once again, the brighter a preacher's reputation, the more proper it is to attack him in order to get at his real message. Attempts to support an ideology by marketing the preacher as a genius can only render an attack upon him essential. The shift toward questions of personality is not due to the critics, but to the propaganda of glorification; an attack is a legitimate countermeasure.

Bertolt Brecht is a good illustration. His critics approach with cap in hand, to be identified with the masses and with deep commitment. Brecht, however, does not appear to have lived as he lectured. Firm in his communist faith and East German citizenship, he always collected his royalties in West Germany and kept them in Swiss bank accounts.<16> The real Brecht casts a shadow over the poet of "Mother Courage".

It is another matter to mount an assault upon some obscure talent whose name lends no further luster to the ideals he champions. Having no saintly halo to aim at, his audience loses one clear ground for a personal attack. Trying to banish an idea by characterizing its advocate as a leper, and inspiring fear that he has made it dangerous to touch, seems unfair. A personal attack is a dubious ploy when intended, not to bring the opponent down to a level where intellectual issues are most decisive, but to push him onto a lower level and thus avoid objective discussion. Besides, even good ideas come from very suspect sources. Winston Churchill's words are worth recalling: "The greatest lesson in life is to know that even fools are right sometimes."

In sum, our reasoning about double standards shows that the conventional perspective ought to be radically altered: good and lofty intentions do not play a heroic role, but are the driving force in a comprehensive morality of double standards. Personal attacks on weak or ordinary spokesmen may be tactically smart, but are morally questionable. If someone's reputation supports an idea, he should be submitted to scrutiny rather than uncritical admiration. No innocents suffer when he is hanged for crimes against his own morals.

## 4.6 Universality

In the quest for common criteria of moral systems, a recurrent principle is that of universality. A rule which is valid only for certain individuals in particular situations does not help much. To qualify as a moral principle, it has to be applied in a uniform manner; and an important aspect of the universality principle is its

consistent application in the same type of situation at different times, with different individuals involved. Such a rule must not be random or personally biased.

Another component, in addition to its consequences, is implicit in the universality principle - morality must be honest. Rules that are held to have good side-effects although they are not followed do not satisfy this condition. One may approve of an idea because it works well as a suggestive appeal, but it does not become a good moral rule by being an effective slogan. Rules which exist only to be preached, not used, can hardly be seen as serious moral rules.

T.H. Huxley made an outspoken claim: "... the foundation of morality is to have done, once and for all, with lying." <17> This restriction seems most reasonably, but unfortunately conventional moral philosophy has a more complicated relationship with truth as John Mackie points out: "To identify morality with something that certainly not will be followed is a sure way of bringing it into contempt - practical contempt, which combines all too readily with theoretical respect." <18>

Given just these two requirements, consistency and honesty, the field is still fairly free for conceivable rules that fulfill the universality principle. So it is by no means a sufficient criterion for good morality, yet it is a necessary one. We include it here since we do not share the usual view that this principle is of little interest. On the contrary, it seems a fruitful starting-point for several important questions.

Support for the universality principle can be found in a sentence from the Sermon on the Mount, quoted in our first chapter: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." This statement is as powerful as much else in the Bible. Its support for that principle, however, is very limited - for the term "would" is as tricky as a Trojan Horse. The author, St. Luke, had a quite specific conception of what the term meant, and the entire passage is a plea for a purely altruistic morality. Our thoughts to go Henry Ford's classic assurance: "(You can have your Ford in) any color, so long as it's black." But when Christian ethics come under hard attack, this minimum rule is cited as an example of their sensible, balanced character. Its popular name, the Golden Rule, gives an impression of circumspect moderation.

A leading issue is how well the altruistic morality presented in the Sermon on the Mount can be universalized. Luke embarks on a paradoxical journey to find moral duties. He begins from a self-centered egoism that places demands on others to satisfy it. The obligation to "lend, hoping for nothing again" is based on an egoistic desire of the recipient, which is accepted and must be fulfilled. The sentence with the Golden Rule universalizes this desire, so that it also becomes a desire of the "good-doer" to borrow without repaying. He sounds slightly schizophrenic, since he should basically have the same low desire as the recipient and, at the same time, is supposed to be a distinctly one-sided benefactor.

If the message is taken as a proposed social law, it points to

definite problems. Greedy people will presumably want more money, and vain people more clothes. Nothing clearly tells either the recipient or the good giver where to stop. The giver may consider parting with his last penny and underwear. Once destitute, at least some givers should release some of their repressed desires and beg someone else for the necessities of life. It all becomes a universal rule of moral duty to support beggars until one joins them.

Another formulation of the universality principle, nearly as famous as the Golden Rule, is the philosopher Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative: "Act as if your principle of action would thereby become a general law of nature." This has a noteworthy undertone. If interpreted as a criterion for all actions, it implies such enormous consequences as to be an overwhelming ambition. Nobody could obey it except petty grandees and self-appointed supermen: those who either follow the conventional pattern or want to be prototypes for one. We should, rather, keep in mind that a "general law of nature" in regard to many questions is simply "Do as you please". Only when certain actions seem morally significant does the time come to think about a suitably precise law. Doubtless it is better to imagine, not directly compulsory rules, but rules that ought not to be broken. This is the obedience we expect of others and are ourselves morally obliged to show. As a model, allowing whatever is not forbidden must be a little more tolerant than forbidding whatever is not allowed.

Kant had some altruistic ideas; for example, he saw virtue as an absence of self-interest in the well-known altruistic manner. His philosophy is not always unambiguous, but he took a basically liberal stance, advocating a very open system where individuals would decide the form of their morals. Since Kant's words, unlike Holy Scripture, are the mere meditations of a mundane mortal, his personal intentions are less important - the categorical imperative stands on its own legs. Yet the Golden Rule is strongly guided by the message in Jesus' sermon.

An essential difference is the categorical imperative's social ambition: it involves creating a law. The Sermon on the Mount is more concerned with an attitude toward other human beings, and does not critically examine the moral right in the related claims. The Bible comes closest to maintaining that a need entails, if not a right, a duty of good people to help others.

The obligation to be helpful has a much less conspicuous place in egoistic systems. A thesis such as "Everyone for himself, God for all" does not violate the universality principle as long as it applies consistently - special treatment by God must lie outside that criterion. Nor is an egoistic rule like "First come, first served" any worse than a rule of politeness like "After you". There is no inherent error in constructing moral principles on the basis that everyone should take care of himself; this so-called ethical egoism qualifies itself as moral. What does not do so is an opportunistic egoism, in which principles are quickly replaced according to personal whims. Someone who shouts "First come" when he is first, but "After you" when someone else is first, violates the universality principle.



Egoistic rules, though consistent, may still collide with the ambition of creating a workable social law. A rule that everyone has the right to rob others if he needs money is difficult to combine with a functioning society. It should perhaps be noted how such a deranged egoism, "a right to rob", approaches a deranged altruism with a "duty to let oneself be robbed". The extremes meet each other, and neither equation balances: deranged egoism conveys such strong rights that it cannot be generalized, while altruism places such demands on the giver that they outweigh the demands on the recipient. Both have obvious trouble in harmonizing with the fundamental principle of universality. Deranged egoism requires unacceptable rights, and altruism unacceptable duties.

If one has greater social ambitions for laws, the conclusion must be that their effects are important. It is a matter of creating neither lawlessness nor overambitious idealism. A key condition is that law-abiding behavior possesses a positive value in itself, whereas laws that are generally ignored have little effect and undermine legal and ethical systems alike. Hence, laws should be formed only from realistic rules which most people will follow.

With these clarifications, the categorical imperative points sharply toward a reciprocal morality, as it seems reasonable to think primarily of rules that facilitate cooperation - rules for people who are not trying to cheat each other and do not want to be cheated. It is important, however, that the rules be distinct and be the same for everybody. If they are to work as a social law, which is the goal, then some practical logic must exist. In addition, there is the morality of integrity: a person acts upon what he thinks best, without any special demands on others' actions as long as these stay within the same limits. Thus one observes the requirement of consistency.

A further interpretation of the universality principle is neither unusual nor implausible. The more general and comprehensive a rule is, the better its morality is. Advocates of altruism have many proposals for what constitutes good morality, such as self-sacrifice and love of mankind, where even loving one's enemies is preferable to a more limited target of affection. But we do not find this a viable thesis. As more people are embraced by a concern, the more vague and diluted it becomes, and a love of mankind might have no meaning at all. There is a conflict between quantity and quality. The wide interpretation also often builds upon an egocentric fallacy when criticizing more limited rules. "My children and others' rascals" is not a warped attitude, when one grants it to other parents as well. For them, my children are "others' rascals", and those parents will have priorities that benefit other children - yet the same principle is followed. To distinguish between duties in terms of kin-selection criteria is, therefore, quite in line with the universality principle, and moreover it has firm biological roots.

As can be seen, the universality principle is a good tool that helps to separate valid moral rules from ideas whose chief function is conscious illusion, suggestive ambition, or banal self-deception.

## 4.7 Three philosophical schools

We think that a brief presentation of some important movements in philosophy would shed interesting light on the problems of altruism. Three schools have been chosen which focus upon the individual's rights and duties.

### The social contract

Morality in general, and particularly the connections between leaders and their subjects, raise questions that depend heavily on one's view of natural human rights.

A prominent contribution was made by social-contract philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in the seventeenth century. The idea of a social contract, namely that people lived in a disorganized manner until they suddenly assembled to form states, is of course a product of imagination - but its abstractness has certain advantages. In earlier, organic concepts, society came first and the individual was an easily exchangeable cell added to the social body: he existed for social purposes. The social contract turned this issue around by asking, "What good is society from the individual's point of view?"

Hobbes' natural condition was a hard struggle full of suffering; the *status naturalis* is a *status hostilis*. Yet he is not as pessimistic as in popular accounts of him. When speaking of struggle and battle, he means constant preparedness for conflict, not actual involvement in it. To him, the condition was not unrealistic, but rather Darwinistic.

Man did best by investing all power in an autocrat, "Leviathan". When faced with living precariously or living under threats from many tyrants, he was wise to choose only one of them. Hobbes also set limits on the autocrat's power. Things should not be any worse for citizens than in the natural condition, so there would be a private sphere in which people could find peace. But this right was not specifically supported by the system, and was more theoretical than practical right. Hobbes gave dogged chase to the notion that an autocrat served the general good. His outlook bothered everybody; the exponents of autocracy were not flattered by such a portrait, and the friends of reform did not relish his recommendation.

Locke saw the natural condition as a much better environment, where human circumstances were not as harsh as in Hobbes' version. Hence society had to be better in order to qualify as suitable, the requirement for a voluntary social contract being that people would live better than in that condition. Locke was among the first to consider restricting state power through both a division of its functions and a limitation of its claims on individuals. The state should not be omnipotent - citizens had a private sphere to be protected. Locke rejected Hobbes' model on the ground that no sensible person would sign a contract to avoid foxes and polecats by instead submitting to a lion. Through his influence over the English opponents

of parliamentarianism and the "founding fathers" of America, he gained significant importance.

A third great social-contract philosopher was Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<22> He took a very idealistic view of pre-contract conditions, and it can best be described as primitive communism, a view which has endured in many socialistic ideologists. No struggle for existence occurred and a decline started when people staked out plots of land as "their own". His version is a somewhat secularized form of Paradise before the Fall.

But Rousseau did not regard the social contract as an original sin. It was a step forward and, just as for Hobbes and Locke, was a voluntary agreement with the basic requirement that the new situation be better. This he fulfilled by creating the "general will", a metaphysical entity larger than the sum of individuals, which justified the formation of society. The general will added something at no cost. Individuals must subordinate themselves to it, yet being part of it, they were not giving up anything to anyone else. By submitting, they merely followed something identical to themselves but bigger. Thus Rousseau reverted to the organic view of society which had been challenged by the earlier social contracts.

The idea of a "general will" - an abstract popular volition, which was not the same as the real will of the people - has been adopted by countless dictators. Rousseau's explanation for creating it was muddled, and has not been clarified by his disciples. The cover of the original edition of his book "The Social Contract" bore an illustration of Leviathan decapitated. But the physical despot was not replaced by more than a metaphysical and collectivistic general will, so the despotism continued.

However, the main current in discussions of the social contract is Locke's. The individual does not cast himself blindly into the arms of Leviathan or the general will: he tries to defend his integrity, while delegating certain tasks to the state. He does not exist primarily for the state - quite the contrary. This perspective has long been attacked, but has grown ever stronger.

### Utilitarianism

Of the many forms of altruism, a fascinating variant is created by Jeremy Bentham, and James and John Stuart Mill, in the nineteenth century. Utilitarianism can well be seen as the most secularized type of altruism.<23> Despite an elaborate and systematic philosophy, it is often misunderstood. Its central thesis is "the greatest possible happiness for the greatest possible number", and is just as altruistic as it sounds. Criticism of this philosophy came to focus largely on other aspects.

Happiness is indeed a vague concept, so the more concrete notion of "utility" provided the gold standard into which different values

were converted. Yet reduction of everything to utility disturbed many people - what had become of honor, beauty, God's will, the historic mission? Moreover, the actual calculation of consequences seemed an unphilosophical neglect of intuition, ambition and faith. Most people scorned utilitarianism as a narrow-minded clerk's attitude, since its very structure was an investment analysis. As a result, it was branded as egoistic by the sheer momentum.

There are good answers to all this criticism. In a previous section, we developed the view that ultimate morals should deal with consequences. Utility is a handy measure of consequences, and if one is to compare effects, they must be converted to a common measure. What is not measured goes overlooked, making conversion essential even if problematic. When beauty gladdens, it has utility. The objection is frequently made that utilitarians think narrowly, but in fact it is the opportunities of coping with the long-run perspective in practice that present a decisive difficulty for the utilitarian model. All future consequences must be brought into its calculation.

Our own objection against the philosophy is its altruistic element. Most other critics have regarded this not as a defect, but as a virtue, and have thus ignored it. To place man outside himself as a neutral judge is to ask the impossible. Still one can pretend, and again we have a philosophy that turns its back on our biological identity.

According to utilitarian morality, for example, one should assess how much one wants a particular job and what the effects on others will be, in comparison with a rival job-seeker. If he is competent and really wants the job, one should consider refusing an offer. This altruistic act will increase the world's happiness, as long as his gain exceeds one's own loss. Likewise, one may buy a toy for one's child in a shop and be confronted by another child who covets it more than he does. The utilitarian solution is to hand over the toy. As a private morality, utilitarianism works poorly - for one cannot forget that every subject is partial to himself and those nearest him. It becomes a false attitude imposed upon one's real behavior.

In public life, utilitarianism may be more applicable. What should a politician strive for? To create an attractive party image and get reelected is a typical answer, but with what substantial aims? Safeguarding pensions, supporting child benefits, and renewing the public sector, sound more like proximate than ultimate goals. We think that "the greatest possible happiness for the greatest possible number" is an honorable goal, in harmony with democratic ideals. It is also a principle favoring the self-interest of politicians, namely reelection. A good program in this sense does not, of course, ensure victory, which depends on communication and image as well. Yet to have this principle as a basis for substance is not a disadvantage.

Two qualifications must be made, though. The number of people should be limited to the electorate, since it is these who define a political task - on their own behalf, not mankind's. And when a politician is involved in the decision's consequences, he will naturally weigh himself favorably, pursuing his self-interest rather

than wider utility. He should therefore be circumscribed, to minimize the chance of abuse; his self-interest has to coincide as far as possible with the utilitarian principle. Free democratic elections are a strong incentive in this effort. To rely on a politician's character is to set hope before experience, and one should never expect a politician to become a genuine utilitarian. One can, however, let utilitarianism become a clearer political principle to which a politician must adapt in order to be elected. Neither will the voter be a true utilitarian, but the sum of all voters' partial judgements may be a utilitarian approximation.

The astonishing thing about the debate over utilitarianism is how little interest it aroused in its altruistic cousins. It was, after all, an attempt to create a systematic, unselfish morality. But "pure" altruists seem more concerned with sacrifices than with their results - the gesture is important, the gift less so. Other altruism argues for losses, while utilitarianism does not: a sacrifice which is greater than the beneficiary's advantage should not be made. Martyrdom and mortification are not praised by utilitarian morality, implying a huge advance over other altruism. It has numerous adherents in some philosophical circles, yet its small significance in the general debate means that other systems must be the main representatives of altruism.

### Libertarianism

A critique of altruistic ideals is conducted chiefly by the liberal tradition which is often called libertarianism or new liberalism. Its leading figures are economists who, in economic contexts, give a central role to "economic man" - a rational person who acts out of self-interest. This self-interest becomes the decisive force in the economic system. The supreme spokesman for these economists is an Austrian, Friedrich von Hayek, due to his own books<sup><24></sup> and to the so-called Chicago school, a group of colleagues surrounding him as a professor at the University of Chicago, including such luminaries as Milton Friedman. The libertarian economists have often launched hypotheses about how economic man can account for various phenomena, and have shown that this view of mankind is not just philosophical but possesses good explanatory value for actual processes in economics.

The classic objection is that economic man as a perspective is mistaken, rendering the whole economic theory an idealization. The difficulty, however, is that his brother is the "political man" at the basis of democracy. What is democracy without voters who are able to judge politicians' proposals and opinions, and decide which is best? If a citizen is a helpless victim of influence and cannot really make economic choices, he can hardly choose a party either. If capitalism is not controlled by economic man, it loses much of its legitimacy, but democracy too is an illusory system without political man. The implication is that marketing directors and parliamentary politicians should abdicate in favor of potentates with unlimited mandates. A

self-appointed aristocracy plays the necessary role of a good shepherd - to ask the sheep must be a weak alternative.

The Russian-American author Ayn Rand is prominent in a libertarian school with a more philosophical than economic outlook. Her philosophy, "objectivism",<sup><25></sup> is allied to Locke's tradition. The philosophical foundations are mankind's natural rights. Mankind has not deferred any rights to the state, so it has few legitimate claims upon the citizens. Human relations should be essentially voluntary. An approvable power, the "night-watchman state" (a term originally used by Lasalle as invective, but subsequently accepted as a designation),<sup><26></sup> is one which limits its activities and claims to protecting the citizens from each other. The state, even in democratic form, is a threat to the citizens' freedom.

Rand is best known to many people through her literary works. These may lend her philosophy a lopsided tone which does not necessarily follow from her main ideas. A pervasive theme is the phenomenal industrialist, who is held back by envious mediocrities with political power. If the hero is given free rein, his exertions have positive effects for lesser talents as well. By stopping him, the state also harms everyone else whose interests it pretends to represent.

Nietzsche replaced servile Christianity with a few strong individuals, who stood up from the grovelling congregation and assumed the mantle of the Old Testament God.<sup><27></sup> These supermen went their own way and treated other people as useful tools. The strong were beyond good and evil. But Rand's heroes strictly obey the ethical rules of rights that forbid them to exploit other people, so they fundamentally differ from Nietzsche's. They too are godlike, yet more like the New Testament god - strong and just, although naturally not altruistic.

Whether the strong are the chief victims of altruistic morality is, however, debatable. The threat from a bureaucracy with an altruistic image is less that it crushes heroes, than that it represents a conspiracy of little people who stunt the development of other little people. It encourages irresponsibility, incapability and learning to be helpless. It degrades the citizen into a victim of power, who either prays to a savior for help or, in his name, frantically forces others into solidarity and salutary gymnastics on the prayer rug.

#### 4 Summary

Morality and reality are connected not only by the fact that moral rules, tacit or explicit, influence our actions. In earlier chapters, evolutionary forces have been shown to shape our behavioral patterns, and this human constitution - not some imaginary altruistic ideal - must be the basis for how morals are formulated. Discussion of whether to follow a morality of rules or of effects, then, leads to the conclusion that effects of actions are the foundation on which rules

are built.

Morality can also be used to manipulate people. One reason is that intentions are easier to distort than effects of actions. Thus a lofty, good moral is often preached in order to win prestige - an advertising intention. If feelings of guilt are instilled in others, one can exploit their altruism. Unless one personally intends, and is able, to follow the morality one advocates, this is a double standard, and the connection with morals is clear: a more elevated altruistic morality yields ever more double standards.

The thesis of the "naturalistic fallacy" is a confused argument against a rational discussion of ethics. What we are is most important for what we ought to do. Hypocrisy is generally and forcefully condemned, but what rightly can be called double standards are in effect presupposed by the agitation for an ethic of unrealistic ambitions.

We maintain that morality should be required to be honest, containing rules which people can apply and have a serious ambition to apply. This is possible both for the morality of integrity and for reciprocal morality. Further, in our view, each of these spheres can satisfy the universality criterion: a rule must apply consistently for different people in the same type of situation. Contrary to common opinion, altruism has difficulty in living up to that criterion. A universal altruistic rule that must derive from somebody else's needs is logically problematic, and unsuitable in practice.

#### Notes Chapter 4. Morality and reality

1. Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, p. 127.
2. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*, p. 71.
3. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* p. 469.  
Moore coined the term "the naturalistic fallacy" in a different sense in *Ethica Principia*: "And it is a fact, that Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good. But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not 'other', but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call the 'naturalistic fallacy' and of it I shall now endeavour to dispose."  
But as Bernard Williams notes "... the doctrine of the naturalistic fallacy is not or at least rapidly ceased to be, a ban merely on defining *good*. Rather it was taken as setting up two classes of expression ... The ban prohibits any attempt to deduce an evaluative conclusion from premises that are entirely non evaluative" (*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* p. 122)
4. Sober *Philosophy of Biology*, p. 204
5. Russel, *History of Western Philosophy*.
6. Hume, quoted from Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, pp. 268- 269.
7. Wilson *Sociobiology*, p. 1)

- 8 Folin, *Den Påklädda Apan*.
- 9 Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 69.
- 10 Hardin, *Living within Limits*.
- 11 Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*..
- 12 Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*, p. 59.
- 13 quoted from Williams (1989) p. 209.
- 14 Singer, *The Expanding Circle*.
- 15 Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*.
- 16 Johnson, *Intellectuals*.
17. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*, p. 146.
18. Mackie, *Ethics, Inventing Right and Wrong*, p.132
- 19 Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*.
- 20 Hobbes, *Leviathan*
21. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*.
22. Rousseau, *Le Contrat Social*.
23. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*;  
Mill, *Utilitarianism* .
24. For example Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*..
25. Rand, *For the New Intellectual*; *The Virtue of Selfishness*.
26. Lund, Pihl & Sløk, *Europas idéhistoria*, p. 228.
27. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.