Good Reasons in Ethics: An Examination of the Toulmin-Hare Controversy*

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> When philosophers use a word ...
> and try to grasp the essence of the
> thing, one must always ask oneself: is
> the word ever actually used in this way
> in the language-game which is its ori-
> ginal home? ... paradox disappears
> only if we make a radical break with
> the idea that language always func-
> tions in one way, always serves the
> same purpose ...
>
> *Wittgenstein.*

In contemporary life and in contemporary ethical theory there is a good deal of scepticism about the "rational basis of morality". We are told by some philosophers that morality rests on "The Arbitrary" or that our basic moral principles are but "pure postulates". It is sometimes said, that in seeking a *ground* for our moral judgments, we find, in the last analysis, only preferences. Our moral choices, as the existentialists never tire of telling us, are *just* choices and upon this "arbitrary choice" everything else depends. Thus, there is a sense of urgency about moral questions that we do not find about many other questions that philosophers discuss. As human beings we can hardly avoid making moral judgments, but often, at least when we reflect, we feel confused about the *basis* of some or perhaps all of our moral judgments. There

is a reasonably strong feeling among many philosophers that the traditional contemporary ethical theories, that is, intuitionism, naturalism, and emotivism do not help us out of our confusion. In fact if anything they seem to add to it. We find, perhaps as a result, a resurgence of "natural law theories" on the one hand and of a kind of anti-rationalist theological ethics on the other. We even hear a few dim cries, here and there, of "Back to Kant". But, none of these theories have even begun to win general acceptance among philosophers. The war of philosophic ethics still goes on. Thus, both in practical life and in philosophy, there is considerable perplexity about how, if at all, moral judgments can be justified and about the place of reason in ethics.

Onto this strange and perplexing stage has now come a fresh common-sensical approach that I shall call the "good reasons approach". In Stephen Toulmin's *An Examination of The Place of Reason in Ethics* we have a fully argued statement of this approach. He directly attacks the problem of justification in ethics, and attempts to undercut the kind of scepticism about morality that I have just sketched. But his own statement has itself not been too well received. Many of his critics have felt that Toulmin has not resolved the problem of good reasons in ethics, but has actually added a new twist to it by leading us to believe that somehow we can discover what are good reasons by seeing how people actually reason and by noting the logical peculiarities of moral usage.

R. M. Hare is perhaps the most distinguished of these critics and his own positive meta-ethical analysis, particularly in *The Language of Morals,* has exerted (as has Toulmin's book) a considerable influence on recent analytical discussions of ethics. I shall in this essay consider the grounds of disagreement between them with particular reference to the problem of good reasons or justification in ethics.

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[1] Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* (Cambridge, England: 1950), p. 2. Hereafter cited as *The Place of Reason in Ethics.*

(1)

First let me briefly indicate the basic structure of Toulmin's argument.

In everyday contexts we constantly face problems of decision. Even if we are led to say, with Hume, that value is "a chimera" or, with Freud, "that the judgments of value made by mankind" are "attempts to prop up their illusions with arguments", we still have to know *what to do*.[1] The "good reasons approach"[2] has given a "new look" to contemporary meta-ethical theory by taking this problem to be the central problem in meta-ethics.

"Good reasons" philosophers have, by their example, taught us to consider again the fundamental questions: 'What is the purpose of moral rules?', 'What is the function of morals?'. In the tradition of the later Wittgenstein, they have taught us to view moral discourse – – a form of life – – in its natural habitat where it is actually doing its typical work. Secondly, we are to look for criteria for moral judgments in actual moral discourse rather than for inductive or deductive criteria imported from some other context. Thirdly, we should give up the formalist's dream that, if only we are careful enough, we can *formalize* the logic of moral discourse by translating moral utterances out of their ordinary idiom into a new, clear, *deliberately constructed* notation (say, the notation of *Principia Mathematica* – – though, perhaps, adding some new notation for the imperatival function). We must give up the dream that, once formalized in this way, we can get a grip on fundamental moral problems and at last solve conflicts between rival moral theories (as well as moral perplexities) by calculation. The logic of moral discourse, in all its richness and subtlety, is just not formalizable in this manner. Instead Toulmin exhorts us – – if we are to understand moral argument – – to follow the advice of Tolstoy's character Platón Karatáev and not look for the "significance of any word or deed taken separately" but only in their characteristic employments, in their living contexts.[3]

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[2] I borrow the term from Abraham Edel. See his "Ethical Reasoning", *Academic Freedom, Logic and Religion*, American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, M. J. White, editor, II, 133.

[3] Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, p. 117.

The good reasons approach should be contrasted with tradi-
tional meta-ethical theories. On the good reasons approach we do
not even start by asking directly, as both the intuitionists and
naturalists do, 'What is goodness?' or 'What is value?'. Rather on
the good reasons approach we return ethical inquiry to the ques-
tion, 'Which kinds of reasons are good reasons in ethics?'. Con-
stantly considering the function of ethics – – never forgetting that
"the scope of ethical reasoning is limited by its function" – –
we are directly to attack the problem of good reasons and justi-
fication in morals.

But the traditional theories have also considered this problem.
Surely, as Broad remarks in his discussion of Toulmin's book,[4]
Sir David Ross and Ewing have not neglected the question of
'good reasons' in their analyses. The jargon has been different,
but the question is asked and (particularly with Ross) answered
in some detail. Yet it must be admitted that this question is
secondary with Sir David while in Toulmin's practicalist ap-
proach it is primary. The typical non-practicalist is primarily con-
cerned with the definition of basic ethical terms as the starting
point in ethical theory. Only after we have answered these pro-
blems of definition which (according to them) enable us to know
the "ultimate characteristics which make one action right and
another wrong" can we satisfactorily take up and answer Toul-
min's problem.[5]

Toulmin argues that we need not take up this problem about
'What is goodness?' to answer the problem about "good reasons".
He further argues that the traditional theories do not really help
us with the problem about good reasons. In substantiating this
last claim he subjects traditional meta-ethical theories to a se-
arching critique. He tries to show how these theories break down
and how they do not help us at all in mapping the procedure we
use in trying do decide which reasons are good reasons in ethics.

There is a further consideration for taking the good reasons

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[4] C. D. Broad, "Critical Notice: *An Examination of the Place of Reason
in Ethics*", *Mind*, LXI (January, 1952), 99.

[5] See, for example, the preface to A. C. Ewing's *The Definition of Good*
(New York: 1947).

approach as central. Our usual puzzles about moral questions are puzzles about good reasons. Toulmin remarks about the central question of the "good reasons approach":

> Our question is at any rate one which we cannot help encountering in every ethical situation. Whenever we come to a moral decision, we weigh the considerations involved – – the relevent facts, that is, so far as we are acquainted with them – – and then have to make up our minds. In doing so, we pass from the factual reasons (R) to an ethical conclusion (E). At this moment, we can always ask ourselves, 'Now, is this the right decision? In view of what I know (R), ought I to choose in this way (E)? Is R a good reason for E?' When considering ethics in general, therefore, we shall naturally be interested in the question, 'What is it that makes a particular set of facts, R, a good reason for a particular ethical conclusion, E? What is "a good reason" in ethics?'; and this will interest us to a greater degree than questions like, 'What is the analysis of "right"?', and 'Is pleasure better than knowledge, or knowledge than pleasure?'.[6]

Toulmin's main problem is to indicate what kind of factual statements are good reasons or valid reasons for moral appraisals. As critics[7] have been quick to note, Toulmin gives us what is usually called a utilitarian criterion as a final court of appeal. Toulmin attempts, however, to show that there is no conflict between the deontologists and the ideal utilitarians (teleologists) and that, on his theory, he can account both for the role of *prima-facie* obligations and the appeal to teleological considerations. In brief, Toulmin is saying that if one wants to know if a particular act is right, in an unambiguous case where there is no conflict of duties, one appeals to the moral rule current in one's community. If, however, there is a conflict of *prima-facie* duties among which one must make a choice or if no rule applies at all, or if we are questioning the rule or even the whole moral code

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[6] Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, p. 4.

[7] C. D. Broad, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–95. Mackie points out how Toulmin argues (on the basis of linguistic analysis) to be ethics what John Austin argued for normatively. See John Mackie, "Critical Notice of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*", *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, XXIX (August, 1951), 120; H. J. Paton, "Review of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*", *Philosophy*, XXVII (January, 1952), 83.

itself, teleological considerations come to the fore. We test the moral rule or rules *qua* rules (or the social practice as a social practice) by the rather negatively stated principle: 'Preventable suffering is to be avoided'.[8] Toulmin himself puts it very succinctly: We distinguish good reasons from bad reasons "by applying to individual judgments the test of principle, and to principles the test of general fecundity".[9] That only these considerations govern the limits of moral reasoning can be discovered by noting the primary functions of moral discourse. We must, with an acute sense of context, ask ourselves why we have an activity we call morality. What is the function or role of moral discourse in life? Toulmin's answer is that morality and moral discourse function to guide conduct and alter behavior so that the people envolved can attain as much as possible of whatever it is that they want. Morality functions to harmonize the frequently conflicting and often disparate wants of the human animal so that we can all live a life with the least possible suffering.

In discussing which reasons are good reasons in ethics, Toulmin is quite clear that he is doing a purely descriptive job. If we take Toulmin's theory to be a normative utilitarianism dressed up in modern linguistic idiom, we miss most of what Toulmin is trying to do. Toulmin is not trying to argue for utilitarianism as a normative ethical doctrine, but is trying to show that the kind of criteria sketched above in virtue of which certain kinds of reasons are good reasons is part of the very *logic* of our moral talk. Though he rejects any ideal language method and regards the traditional meta-ethical theories as so many "disguised comparisons" or "beguiling analogies", he is aware that he himself is doing a purely descriptive job. As Toulmin puts it, he is giving "a descriptive account of the function of ethical concepts";[10] "what is wanted . . . is some device for bringing out the relation between the manner in which ethical sentences are used and the manner in which others are used – – so as to give their place on the language

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[8] Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, pp. 149–50.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

map."" Toulmin attempts to explicate ordinary moral discourse. He tests the accuracy of his pure description against ordinary usage. Toulmin makes it very clear that he will rest his case finally on ordinary language or usage. He puts it unequivocally when he says, "The only facts, upon which the truth of what we have to say will depend, are those more familiar, unquestionable facts of usage . . ." [12]

But, his appeal to and his use of ordinary language immediately gives rise to a problem. The problem springs essentially from Toulmin's rejection of an *ideal-language method* with its device of the formal mode, etc. and from the systematic ambiguity of 'good reasons'. Toulmin maintains that he is only describing moral talk, yet at many points, in talking about which reasons are good reasons in ethics or about validity, or about which reasons are "worthy of adoption", it is difficult to tell whether he is just giving a description or whether a normative (prescriptive) element sneaks in to determine his standards for deciding which reasons are good reasons.[13] At some points, it seems that he is not merely describing moral discourse as finally dependent on utilitarian standards but actually recommending (in effect) a liberal, secularist morality.[14] In emotivist jargon, Toulmin's "good reasons", stated in the way he states them,

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[11] *Ibid.,* pp. 194–95.

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 144.

[13] Passmore, in discussing the Oxford philosophers rather generally directs this kind of argument both against Toulmin and Paul Edward's account of induction. He remarks that they talk as if they were simply content to notice how 'good reasons' are used in ordinary life though they fluctuate between a descriptive and prescriptive used of 'good reasons'. Passmore then comments that this is hardly meeting the issue with Mill, Hume, and Russell, for the latter were anxious to show that science is better than superstition and that some reasons are better than others. See J. A. Passmore, "Reflections on *Logic and Language*", *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy,* XXX (December, 1952), 171. For a detailed criticism of Toulmin on the same general point, see John Mackie, *op. cit.,* pp. 114–24.

[14] See (among others) Rossi-Landi's comments on this. Ferrucio Rossi-Landi, "Review of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*". *Methodos* III (1951), 129.

remain emotively unneutralized.[15] This point about a prescriptive element entering into an allegedly pure description has been made in different ways by almost all his critics, both sympathetic and unsympathetic.

I have elsewhere tried to indicate how Toulmin's general conception of the functions of morality might be defended [16] and I have also indicated how his distinction between two kinds of moral reasoning and his conception of moral grading criteria might be developed, in a more adequate way.[17] Basically I am claiming that Toulmin's kind of considerations set limits to moral reasoning by specifying correctly the role of morality as a form of life, and that if we are committed to reasoning morally, certain criteria become, in terms of this function, good criteria for moral judgments. Hare and many others believe that Toulmin has confused meta-ethical questions with normative ethical questions and that he has in effect *advocated* a certain way of life while believing that he is only explicating what is to count as 'ethics' or 'morals' and what is to count as 'good reasons' in ethics. Hare has made some ingenious arguments to establish this, but I believe them to be wrong and I believe Toulmin's position to be defendable from this sort of charge. I shall, however, limit myself here to showing the invalidity of what appear to be Hare's "knock-out" criticisms.[18]

Toulmin's view, I shall argue, is only persuasive in the sense that it implicitly recommends that we reason morally rather than non-morally. It is *not* prescriptive in the sense that it recommends a limited pattern of ethical reasoning as "ethical reason-

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[15] Note Aiken's remark: "I fancy that a subtle imperativist such as C. L. Stevenson would find something more to say about 'good' or 'relevant' reasons". Henry Aiken, "Commonsensical Ethics: *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*". *The Kenyon Review*, XIII (Summer, 1951), 525.

[16] Kai Nielsen, "The Functions of Moral Discourse", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 7 (July, 1957), pp. 236–48.

[17] Kai Nielsen, "Justification and Moral Reasoning", *Methodos*, vol. 33–4 (1957).

[18] I have examined some other criticisms and I have tried to explicate, defend (where possible) and modify (where necessary) Toulmin's type of theory in my doctoral dissertation (Duke University, 1955), Chapters VI–XI *Justification and Morals*.

ing". I know of no way to establish this point one way or another except by analyzing various bits of ethical and alleged ethical reasoning to see if there are bits of discourse which we clearly know pre-analytically to be ethical reasoning which will not fit with Toulmin's conceptions. This sort of analysis should be carried out, not only for his criteria, but also for his very conception of the function of ethics.

(2)

I shall start my analysis with an examination of some facets of the discussion between Hare and Toulmin, for Hare believes that there are some paradigms of *moral* reasoning for which Toulmin's theory cannot account. I am not convinced by Hare's arguments and I shall try to show why I am not convinced.

In mentioning the Hare–Toulmin controversy,[19] I will mention the issue about Toulmin's peculiar kind of non-analytic 'evaluative inference' only to dispose of it; for, while it looms large in the argument between Toulmin and Hare, it does not seem to be fundamental in evaluating the adequacy of Toulmin's good reasons approach. In fact I believe that, even if Toulmin's reply to Hare about this kind of inference were perfectly adequate, it still would not answer what I regard as the fundamental point at issue in the present discussion. The issue I regard as fundamental in the present context is the issue of whether or not these so-called rules of evaluative inference or, as I prefer to call them, normative principles are themselves specifically *moral* principles.[20]

[19] The controversy takes place in the following publications. Hare's specific criticisms of Toulmin are in his review of Toulmin's book. He also makes some general criticisms of the "good reasons approach" in *The Language of Morals*, though he remarks that Toulmin avoids the crudest of the errors he brings out there. Toulmin's reply to Hare is directed ostensibly only to the arguments in *The Language of Morals*, but the issue between Hare and Toulmin seems fairly joined in these discussions. I shall use Hare's remarks from *The Language of Morals* when I deem they apply. See R. M. Hare, "Review of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*", *Philosophical Quarterly*, I (July, 1951) 372–75; R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, pp. 44–45; S. E. Toulmin, "Discussion: *The Language of Morals*", *Philosophy*, XXIX (January, 1954), 65–69.

[20] I do not mean by the above to equate evaluative rules of inference with

I will turn directly now to Hare's criticism that Toulmin's good reasons are themselves moral judgments. Hare tries to establish his point obliquely by posing a dilemma for Toulmin. The dilemma centers around the interpretation to be given to a crucial passage in Toulmin's concluding remarks. The crucial passage is the following:

> Our discussion of the function of ethics led us on to a critique of moral judgment, but the two remained clearly distinguishable. And, by preserving this distinction, which our self-appointed guides tended to overlook, we were able to keep the chief problem in the centre of our vision. Of course, 'This practice would involve the least conflict of interests attainable under the circumstances' does not *mean* the same as 'This would be the right practice'; nor does 'This way of life would be more harmoniously satisfying' *mean* the same as 'This would be better'. But in each case, the first statement is *a good reason* for the second: the 'ethically neutral' fact is a *good reason* for the 'gerundive' moral judgment. If the adoption of the practice would genuinely reduce conflicts of interests, it is a practice *worthy of adoption,* and if the way of life would genuinely lead to a deeper and more consistent happiness, it is one *worthy of pursuit.* And this seems so natural and intelligible, when one bears in mind the function of ethical judgments, that if anyone asks me *why* they are 'good reasons', I can only reply by asking in return, 'What better kinds of reason could you want'? [21]

Hare correctly notes that Toulmin does not think that to declare something is a good reason for a moral conclusion is itself a moral judgment. Hare thinks that to make such a claim is to make a moral judgment; but, whether it is or not, Hare now presents the following dilemma to Toulmin. To see the dilemma,

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normative principles. Toulmin does not regard them as so equated though he does say that there is a formal possibility of stating evaluative rules of inference as major premises of practical syllogisms, though to put them in this fashion, Toulmin argues, misrepresents the role they play in moral practice. My major point is that, whether we treat them as rules of inference or as premises of practical syllogisms, they are normative principles or value judgments in their own right. In this discussion, I shall ignore the controversy between Hare and Toulmin about this issue. Rather, I shall treat the principles as premises. This procedure, I think, is quite justified; for in *The Place of Reason in Ethics,* such a conception of evaluative rules of inference is only briefly mentioned and never developed, much less argued for.

[21] Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics,* p. 224.

note A and B below taken from the above long quote from Toul-
min.

(A)   Of course, 'This practice would involve the least conflict of in-
terests attainable under the circumstances' does not *mean* the same as
'This would be the right practice'; nor does 'This way of life would be
more harmoniously satisfying' *mean* the same as 'This would be better.'
But in each case, the first statement is *a good reason* for the second:
the 'ethically neutral' fact is a good reason for the 'gerundive' moral
judgment.

(B)   If the adoption of the practice would genuinely reduce conflicts
of interests, it is a practice *worthy of adoption*, and if the way of life
would genuinely lead to a deeper and more consistent happiness, it is
one *worthy of pursuit*.

If A, as Toulmin thinks, is *not* a moral judgment, then what is
its relation to B, which Hare contends is clearly an *elaboration*
of A? B, Hare argues, is "unambiguously the expression of a
moral judgment".[22] But, since B is a moral judgment and a further
spelling out of A, it seems strange to say that A is not itself a
moral jugdment.[23] However, if A is a moral judgment, "then it
would seem impossible to reach it by any other means than the
making of a moral decision – – and this Mr. Toulmin does not
seem to think he is doing".[24] And, Hare concludes, "it certainly,
if it (A) is a moral judgment, cannot be established by an *appeal
to usage*".[25] Whichever way Toulmin moves, he is trapped. If he
denies A is a moral judgment, then how can B be an elaboration
of A; and, if A is a moral judgment, how can we establish it by
appealing to the way people use words?

Hare goes on to illustrate how this is a *normative ethical con-
flict* by the following example:

Suppose, for instance, that we were maintaining that 'this practice
would involve the least conflict of interests attainable under the cir-
cumstances', was a good reason for 'This would be the right practice';

[22] Hare, "Review of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*",
op. cit., p. 374.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid.*

and suppose that someone were disputing this, by saying 'without con-
flict the full development of manhood is impossible; therefore it is a
bad reason for calling a practice right to say that it would involve the
least conflict of interests'. We might reply as Mr. Toulmin does here,
"This seems so natural and intelligible . . . what better kinds of reason
could you want"? And if we said this, and the other man replied, "I
don't find it natural or intelligible at all; it seems to me that the devel-
opment of manhood is a cause superior to all others, and provides the
only good reason for any moral conclusion", then it would be clear that
what was dividing us was a moral difference. To say that all we were
differing about was the meaning of the word 'ethics' would be im-
plausible.[26]

I shall now try to show how Toulmin might escape Hare's di-
lemma.

Hare's example is plausible at first reading precisely because
it is subject to at least two interpretations. On the most plausible
of these interpretations, there is really no conflict at all between
Toulmin and his supposed critic. On the other and less plausible
interpretation, however, while Toulmin and his critic are indeed
in conflict, I shall argue that they are not in *moral* conflict. In
either event Hare does not get the results he seeks.

I shall now try to show why, on the first mentioned interpreta-
tion of Hare's example, Toulmin and his Nietzschean critic (as I
shall call him) are *not* in conflict. The argument is as follows.
Toulmin maintains that the function of ethics is to insure the
harmonious co-existence of many individual interests *as possible*.
In terms of this function, 'this practice would involve the least
conflict of interests attainable *under the circumstances*' is a
good reason for doing X. But, suppose someone were to rebut this
reason for doing X by saying, "No! It is a bad reason. Without
conflict the full development of manhood is impossible!"? Toul-
min, if he were shown that the Nietzschean's factual claim did
in fact obtain, could admit that the Nietzschean's reason was a
good reason but still continue to hold that his own reason was
also a good reason because he had talked about the interests
'attainable under the circumstances'. The recognized circum-
stances have changed; that is, it is now granted that mankind

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[26] *Ibid.*

cannot be fully developed without conflict. Toulmin could say, on the basis of this new information, 'Conflict is necessary for the full development of interests and thus, since we ought to develop our interests as much as possible, we ought to value conflict. Still, we ought not to allow any more conflict of interests than is necessary for the full development of mankind! In his example, Hare retains the qualification "attainable under the circumstances" in his first statement of the Toulmin type of argument, but he drops it his second statement (viz. "it is a bad reason for calling a practice right, to say that it would involve the least conflict of interests"). Toulmin would not necessarily have to deny the Nietzschean's moral claim "that the development of manhood is a cause superior to all others . . .". In fact he might argue that his own conception of the function of ethics as seeking to realize the harmonious compossibility of as many desires *as possible* seeks to realize that end. As Hare has set them up, the initial "moral differences" between the "two adversaries" are reconcilable without either party giving up their claim that their respective reasons are good reasons. Toulmin's theory covers such a situation. Hare has traded on an ambiguity to make his example work and because of this ambiguity his criticism of Toulmin on this point seems more plausible than it is in fact.

We may conclude then that, on the *first* interpretation of Hare's example, Toulmin and his imagined adversary are not divided by a moral difference that could only be resolved by treating Toulmin's criteria for good reasons in ethics as moral judgments and by arguing for them morally. Hare has not got the kind of conflict he needs to make his point. However, since Hare could amend his example in such a way so as to set up the sort of situation he wants, I shall *assume* that the second interpretation of Hare's passage is the correct one.

I shall now try to show why, on the second mentioned interpretation of Hare's example, Hare still does not make his case that Toulmin's criteria are themselves moral judgments. It will be remembered that, according to Hare, Toulmin and his Nietzschean critic ar divided by a moral difference. I shall argue (assuming the correctness of Toulmin's conception of the primary

function of ethics) that what divides them is not, strictly speak-
ing, a moral difference, but a non-moral valuational difference.

My argument can best be brought out if we reflect on the part
of the '. . .' in Hare's quote from Toulmin;[27] the relevant part that
Hare left out (and this may be *symptomatic?*) is "when one
bears in mind the function of ethics . . .".[28] This is important be-
cause Toulmin is giving an analysis of the place of reason *in*
ethics and insists, throughout, on the *finite* scope of all reasoning
and on the autonomy of the mode of moral reasoning. If
we bear in mind Toulmin's argument to the effect that the pri-
mary function of ethics is to harmonize peoples' actions in such
a way as to satisfy as many independent desires and interests
as are compossible or compatible,[29] we can see that B is *not* "un-
ambiguously an expression of a moral judgment"; but, rather, in
terms of Toulmin's conception of the function of ethics, it is a
statement which could readily be interpreted in the context in
which Toulmin uses it as an explication of what we *mean* by say-
ing an utterance belongs to the mode of moral reasoning. Cer-
tainly, Hare's "Nietzschean critic" of Toulmin, who urges the
value of conflict for the full development of mankind, is disputing
noramtively and valuationally with Toulmin; but, he is *not* argu-
ing *morally* with him because the Nietzschean has by his very
arguments gone beyond moral considerations altogether. If we are
taking a moral point of view, we have no alternative but to oppose
the Nietzschean. If there is no room within moral discourse for the
Nietzschean's claim, then we can hardly say his claim is a moral
claim. How could it be said that we *ought* to follow another course
of action when there can be, within morals, no other course of
action to follow?[30] Hare forgets that moral reasoning like any
other mode of reasoning is a *limited* mode of reasoning with its

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[27] See previous footnote and internal quote from Toulmin in Hare's state-
ment.

[28] Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics,* p. 224. This remark occurs in
the crucial summary passage Hare refers to. See our quote *in extenso,* foot-
note 21, italics mine.

[29] For Toulmin's statement of the primary function of ethics see Chapter
II, p. 28.

[30] I am assuming that within moral discourse 'ought' implies 'can'.

own peculiar criteria and range of application. He seems just to assume that any valuational question or any question about conduct is a moral question. He does not argue directly against Toulmin's conception of the function of ethics or against his contextualism, but seems just to take for granted that any question about what ought to be done is a moral question.

Assuming the adequacy of Toulmin's conception of the function of ethics, I believe, the following contention is justified. Hare neglects the contextual presuppositions of the mode of reasoning in assuming that B (viz. "if the adoption of the practice would genuinely reduce conflicts of interest, it is a practice *worthy of adoption,* and if the way of life would genuinely lead to a deeper and more consistent happiness, it is one *worthy of pursuit.*") is clearly a moral judgment. Hare's argument seems persuasive because B, not placed in context, does seem to be a moral judgment; and, Toulmin and the Nietzschean do dispute normatively, but then dispute takes them beyond *moral* good and evil. If, as we are now assuming, Toulmin is right about the primary function of ethics then B, as Toulmin uses it, is not "unambiguously" (or ambiguously) a *moral* appraisal.

Since, because of the ambiguity I noted, Hare's example is not a good one to bring out how moral questions are limited in scope and do not cover all valuational questions, let me give a simple example of my own. This example will put in a more plausible light Toulmin's contention that moral reasoning has a definite context and that many questions about what should be done are just beyond the scope of moral reasoning altogether. Note the following dialogue between a "Toulminite" and Jones, a confirmed esthete, preaching "Art for Art's sake".

(T = the "Toulminite"; J = Jones.)

T: If a social practice tends to contribute to the deeper and more consistent happiness of mankind, we have a good reason for accepting the practice.

J: No, that's a bad reason.

T: Why, what better reason could you want?

J: Why, the practice ought to be rejected because it leads to too much happiness. Only if people suffer can they really appreciate art.

T: But, preventable suffering is bad.

J: But, this suffering isn't preventable. It's necessary for people to appreciate art.

T: You mean *you* would accept suffering for the sake of art.

J: I'm not talking about myself. I just happen to like art; but, I say that other people ought to suffer so they could learn to appreciate art. The cultivation of esthetic taste is the only end worthy of attainment.

T: But, if you were those "other people" you would agree you ought to suffer, wouldn't you?

J: I said that I wasn't talking about myself. I mean those *other* people ought to suffer so that they would learn to appreciate art. I'm not saying anything about what I would do if I were they.

T: But I thought we were talking about what ought to be done. And if we are, we can't avoid that question.

Now, in a quite plain sense, Jones' ends could not count as moral ends. True, he uses certain grading words like 'worthy', 'ought', and 'bad'; but, he uses them in senses which are not ordinarily taken to be moral senses. No one would say, unless he was trying to defend some philosophic theory at any cost, that Jones' considerations were moral considerations though, certainly, they are valuational considerations about possible lines of conduct. If we are attempting to explicate in a meta-ethical sense the nature of ordinary moral reasoning, we must start here. We must say simply that Jones' reasoning does not count as moral reasoning. If we are meta-ethicists, it is our task to say *why* Jones' considerations are not ethical considerations. However, if the above example or Hare's example turn out upon analysis to have features we recognize to be moral, then we should say that our first pre-analytic judgment was at least partially mistaken. If we think, for the moment, of our meta-ethical analysis as an "ideal language", we must recognize, as E. W. Hall so well puts it, "the ideal language is not reared in a vacuum nor are its fundations laid in the clouds", rather it is tested against our everyday language.[31] But, we must start somewhere and the starting point for Toulmin's analysis as well as Hare's is ordinary language.[32] Ordi-

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[31] E. W. Hall, *What Is Value?*, p. 196.

[32] Hare, *The Language of Morals*, p. 92.

nary language is their basic *analyzandum*. In terms of ordinary language, 'morality' has a certain limited function. And in terms of this function, Jones' considerations are beyond the scope of considerations that could be called 'moral considerations'. Hare's own example, if it is given the second interpretation so as to make it clearly alternative to Toulmin's criteria, does not seem to be a moral example. Perhaps, Hare could give an analysis of his Nietzschean's argument which would prove my own pre-analytic judgment about it wrong. But, this would take showing and Hare does not show it but merely points out that the Nietzschean uses *value* words or grading words meaningfully. But, are all uses of 'good', 'bad' and 'right' and 'wrong' moral uses?

Back of Hare's criticism lies his own conviction that there is no *logical* difference between general valuational questions and moral questions. Morals seem more august, etc., than other valuational questions because morality is so indispensible to us; but moral considerations differ from general value considerations only psychologically and in their class of comparison.[33] In point of logic, the relation between a good moral act and a good car is the same as between a good car and a good candy bar. Surely their *criteria* are different because they deal with a different class of comparison; but, this is true of 'good car' and 'good candy bar' too. Toulmin rightly criticizes Hare for neglecting to note that moral utterances function like categorial imperatives, while other value utterances function like hypothetical imperatives and for not giving enough attention to the peculiarities of moral criteria.[34]

Neglect of the above logical peculiarities of moral utterances has the following effect on Hare's criticism of Toulmin. *Within the mode of moral reasoning,* Hare's questions simply cannot arise. Hare's Nietzschean, as the esthete, has declared himself "beyond *moral* good and evil"; by his proclamations, he has made himself, in effect, "impervious to the kinds of reason which mo-

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[33] Hare, himself, admits a great deal of work needs to be done. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, pp. 143–44.

[34] Toulmin, *"Discussion of The Language of Morals"*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

rality acknowledges".[35] In Aiken's way of speaking, value words like 'good' and 'ought' and 'right' have a spectrum of meanings (uses), some moral and some non-moral. If we do not constantly pay attention to the context of these utterances, we are led into confusion. Toulmin has deliberately limited himself to the mode of moral reasoning. And, he has indicated how this mode is an independent mode of reasoning. More than that, he indicates that he is not answering and points out that one *cannot* answer all the valuational questions at once without regard to context. Hare seems to press a meaningful question about moral discourse only because he has forgotten Toulmin's injunction that we can only understand the uses of words in their contexts and we can only trust logic so long as it keeps in touch with life.[36] Unless we are doing philosophy, we never ask if a way of life that would genuinely lead to a deeper and more lasting happiness for all is a *practice worthy* of achievement. Such a question just does not arise either for a moral agent or for a practical (non-philosophical) moral critic. As meta-ethicists, we must simply accept this as a fact and try to explain *why* it is so and what there is about morality which makes it so.

Now, there is a rebuttal to the above line of reply implicit in Hare's criticism of Toulmin. Hare remarks that to say we are only differing *about* the use of word 'ethics' or 'morals' would be quite implausible.[37] Certainly considerations here do turn on the *use* of 'morals' or 'ethics'. But, need we say that we are *merely* disagreeing *about* the use or meaning of these *words*? Could we not say just as well, if we wished to talk that way, that we were differing about something "extra-linguistic", i.e., about the kind of activity or form of life we call morality? Indeed, the above kind of "Toulminite" is saying 'morality' means such and such; but, it is not clear that they are *just* differing *about* word *usage*. Rather, they are differing about the ordinary *use* of 'morality' and, as Ryle and Wittgenstein have shown, it is misleading to

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[35] See Henry Aiken, "Commonsensical Ethics: *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics*", Kenyon Review, XIII (Summer, 1951), 525.

[36] Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, p. 117.

[37] Hare, "Review of *The Place of Reason in Ethics*", op. cit., p. 374.

classify such a question as a linguistic question or as a non-linguistic question.[35] Now, it seems that, in terms of the ordinary (stock) uses of 'morals' or 'ethics', Toulmin's conception of the function of ethics is far more adequate than that of Hare's Nietzschean critic. To say this does not rule out the Nietzschean's normative program; but it does show its irrelevancy to an explication of the place of reason in ethics ('ethics' now in its ordinary uses). Toulmin sets out merely to explicate this. He does not attempt to explicate the place of reason in the "special morality" of a moral iconoclast who, in terms of the ordinary uses of 'morality', is beyond the pale of moral considerations.

Toulmin could further rebut Hare's argument in the following manner. The conflict Hare brings out in his example is a practical valuational conflict but not a moral conflict. Surely, the Nietzschean's problem is a practical problem about what is to be done; and, the issue cannot be settled between the Nietzschean, in Hare's example, and Toulmin by an appeal to *word usage*, but only by making a practical (normative) decision concerning what is *to be* done or what should have been done. But their conflict, in terms of the normal extension of the word 'morality', is beyond *moral* good and evil. *But, this is not to say their disagreement is any the less real or any the less over what course of action to follow, but only to point out that if we are committed to a moral point of view, their issue is already decided in Toulmin's favor.*

The above point may be further clarified by the following considerations. Toulmin does not attempt, as Hare thinks he does, to derive an 'ought' from an 'is' of the word usage of 'ethics'. Toulmin is saying that in terms of the primary functions of ethics such and such are good reasons in ethics. *Ethics itself is a nor-*

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[35] Gilbert Ryle, "Ordinary Language", *The Philosophical Review*, LXII (April, 1953), 172. Ryle also significantly remarks: "The phrase 'the ordinary (i.e., stock) use of the expression "..." ' is often so spoken that the stress is made to fall on the word 'expression' or else on the word 'ordinary' and the work 'use' is slurred over. The reverse ought to be the case. The operative word is 'use'." Or again (p. 171), "Hume's question was not about the *word* 'cause'; it was about the *use* of 'cause'." See also, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (370), p. 116 (474), p. 135.

mative discipline; but, in specifying the place of reason in ethics, we are not asking for a justification of ethical reasoning as an activity. Rather, we are trying to explicate the logic of ethical reasoning. The context we seek to explicate is itself an *ought-context.* To answer Toulmin's question about good reasons is to say: Given this context, given the kind of activity that morality is, these are our criteria of moral reasoning.

I have tried to show that Toulmin escapes from Hare's dilemma. Toulmin's criteria were not shown by Hare to be moral judgments themselves. My main argument was that B (viz. "If the adoption of the practice would genuinely reduce conflicts of interest, it is a practice *worthy of adoption,* and if the way of life would genuinely lead to deeper and more consistent happiness, it is one *worthy of pursuit."*), when taken in the moral mode of reasoning, is not itself a moral judgment. I tried to do justice to Hare's contention by pointing out that B and Toulmin's criteria are themselves value-judgments. Hare is quite right in contending that, *finally,* their acceptance or rejection rests on a *decision* or *commitment.* My point here against Hare is that in arguing about Toulmin's good reasons this need to appeal to a decision or commitment comes very late. If one is already committed to the moral point of view, one need not make any further "moral decision" to accept Toulmin's criteria for good reasons. On the good reasons approach: seeking to explicate the kinds of *reasons* that can count as good reasons *in* ethics, we can quite properly ignore these questions of decision or commitment.