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(Ethics through the nineteenth century)
RAZIEL ABELSON
(Twentieth-century ethics)
KAI NIELSEN

ETHICS, PROBLEMS OF. What ethics or moral philosophy is, and at best ought to be, has always been variously conceived by philosophers. There is no uncontroversial Archimedean point from which ethics can be characterized, for the nature and proper office of ethics is itself a hotly disputed philosophical problem. But there are some things which can be said on the subject that will elicit a wide measure of agreement, although in any description of ethics the emphasis and organization will display a particular philosophical orientation.

P. H. Nowell-Smith, in his widely read and influential book *Ethics* (1954), argues that in the past moral philosophers sought to give us general guidance concerning what to do, what to seek, and how to treat others. That is not to say that such philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Joseph Butler functioned like parish priests or a citizens' advice bureau: they did not seek to give detailed practical advice as to how we should behave on a particular occasion, but they did believe that they could communicate some general but crucial knowledge of good and evil. It was their belief that there is such a thing as a true moral code or a normative ethical system and that philosophers could show what it is. The philosopher's task, in their view, primarily consists in setting forth systematically the first principles of morality and in showing how it is possible to justify these principles. Such an exposition would include not only the philosopher's theoretical conception of the limits of moral justification but also his conception of the good life for man.

Traditionally, moral philosophy had a practical purpose; moral knowledge was not conceived as purely theoretical knowledge of moral phenomena but as practical knowledge about how we ought to live. The goal was not that we should simply know what goodness is but that we should become good. (Some argued that to know what goodness really is, is to become good.)

Yet this still does not adequately characterize what is distinctive about moral philosophy, for novelists, poets, dramatists, and sometimes even historians, social scientists, and psychologists have functioned, in one way or another, as moral sages and have claimed to give us, in some manner, some knowledge of good and evil. It would be difficult to deny that such men as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Sophocles and Shakespeare, Thucydides and Montaigne have sometimes been very perceptive in what they have said about morality. What distinguishes a specifically philosophical account of morality is its generality, its systematic nature, and its attempt to prove its claims.

Even within this traditional conception of the task of ethics, important disagreements have arisen. Such philosophers as Kant and Henry Sidgwick, unlike Bentham and Nietzsche, stressed the fact that it is not the philosophers' aim to discover *new* truths. Moral philosophy, they thought, should give a systematic account of the knowledge man already possesses; it should try to unify and show the ultimate rationale of the moral knowledge and practices man already has. There should be no wholesale rejection of practical moral claims, but an attempt should be made to unify and show the objective justification of most of these claims. Subjectivists, however, would challenge the latter aim, although in an important way there is less conflict between them and philosophers like Kant and Sidgwick than might at first be supposed. Subjectivists did not so much question specific moral practices as attempt to show, as did Edward Westermarck in his *Ethical Relativity* (1932), that the alleged objective foundations of these practices are in shambles. They maintained that common expectations notwithstanding, there is, and in reality can be, no such thing as ethics as a body of knowledge demonstrating how we ought to live. Traditional moral philosophers have been concerned to refute such general skeptical conclusions.

In attempting to do this, they tried to set forth a true moral code, that is, to determine the objective foundations of ethics and to show the sole grounds on which we can justify our moral beliefs. Skeptical moral philosophers tended to leave common-sense moral beliefs intact but questioned whether it was possible to give an objective underpinning to them.

Nietzsche stands out as stark exception to this in his conception of the task of a moral philosopher. He not only questioned the general methods of moral reasoning; he questioned, criticized, even rejected certain common-sense moral beliefs as well. He would not take morality itself as something given; he stressed the diversity of morals and did not seek to supply a rational foundation for our very common moral convictions but, rather, sought to discover new moral truths.

Yet, in spite of these differences, the writings of nearly all of these philosophers fit Nowell-Smith's over-all characterization of the traditional task of moral philosophy. They did not simply seek to clarify the use of moral discourse or to enable us to gain knowledge of moral phenomena but, skeptics and subjectivists apart, sought to give us objective practical knowledge about how we should live.

Even the skeptics and subjectivists lived in the shadow of this goal, for their primary purpose was to show that the moralists could not achieve it.

NORMATIVE ETHICS AND METAETHICS

Contemporary analytic philosophers, when they consider moral philosophy, usually construe their task quite differently. In relation to traditional moralists, Nowell-Smith himself is, in the words of R. M. Hare, "their champion, not their imitator." His *Ethics* is an example of the contemporary approach and is described as "a study of the words and concepts that we use for making decisions, advising, warning, and appraising conduct." The direct object of Nowell-Smith's study is not practice but knowledge: knowledge of the distinctive uses or roles of moral language or, to use another idiom, knowledge of the meanings of moral concepts.

Philosophers like Nowell-Smith and Hare do not set forth a moral system and try to show how it is rationally justified; instead, they analyze moral concepts, including moral systems such as hedonism and utilitarianism. They do not, in their philosophical essays, make moral statements themselves (except incidentally); rather, they discuss the meaning and function of such statements—in their works, moral words and statements occur in mention, not in use. Of course, traditional moral philosophers also analyzed moral concepts, but what distinguishes contemporary ethicists is that many regard analysis as their sole philosophical task.

In developing this distinction, we shall call the body of ethical statements, or the actual normative argument, of the moral philosopher his *normative ethics;* discussions of the meanings or uses of moral terms and utterances about the nature of moral concepts will be called *metaethics.* (Other philosophers use different terminologies. Normative ethics is sometimes called substantive ethics or morals. What we shall call metaethics has been referred to as analytical ethics, critical ethics, theoretical ethics, the epistemology of ethics, the logic of ethics, or ethics.)

We should first further distinguish between normative ethical and metaethical statements. Normative ethical statements are actual moral statements: "The treatment of Negroes in Harlem is a glaring evil," "John's leaving her without a word was cruel," "You ought to be more considerate." There are also more abstract and general normative ethical statements that are apt to occur in traditional philosophical treatises. The following are typical examples: "Pleasure and pleasure alone is intrinsically good, and pain and pain alone is intrinsically evil." "One ought not to use one's head but one's feelings in deciding what one ought to do." "Those rules and practices ought to be adopted which harmonize most fully the interests of as many people as possible."

Metaethical statements, by contrast, are about the uses or meanings of normative ethical statements, utterances, or terms, about the logical status of moral claims, about the nature of moral argument, or about what constitutes a morality. The following are typical examples: "Moral utterances are neither autobiographical statements nor statements of nonnatural fact but expressions of emotion."

" 'Good' is the name of a simple, unanalyzable, nonnatural quality." "The truth of fundamental moral statements can be known only through intuition." "The criteria for what can count as 'a good reason' for a moral claim can be determined only by determining the over-all rationale of that discourse."

Not all discussion of normative ethical talk or belief is metaethical, for there are also statements of fact about people's moral opinions, and there are sociological and psychological descriptions of normative ethical beliefs and language, explanations of why people use moral language in the way they do, and accounts of its origin. The following are examples:

Descriptions of moral beliefs: "Most people believe that nuclear warfare under any circumstances is evil."

Descriptions of moral language: "For many children 'cooperative' and 'uncooperative' come to have the same force as 'good' and 'bad.' "

Explanations of moral language: " 'Cooperative' and 'uncooperative' come to have the same force as 'good' and 'bad' because they are used in the same contexts that 'good' and 'bad' are used in and with the same approbative/disapprobative force."

Accounts of the origin of moral language: "Moral discourse arose because people felt the need for some over-all method of control over the native egoism and aggressive impulses of human beings."

Such descriptive talk about moral discourse is not about the meaning or use of moral terms or utterances, the logical status of such utterances, or the method of validation of moral statements—and thus cannot be properly called metaethical. Sociological or psychological questions of fact about moral discourse, or more generally about people's moral beliefs or attitudes, can conveniently be called questions of descriptive ethics. Descriptive ethics can, in various ways, be relevant to metaethics or normative ethics, but it is most certainly distinct from both.

It is sometimes difficult to tell from mere inspection whether a given statement is a part of descriptive ethics, but the following criterion can be utilized: The truth of a statement in descriptive ethics depends on what moral opinions are actually held by the people referred to, or by what beliefs they have about how people actually behave (purely linguistic behavior apart); the truth of a metaethical statement depends on the kind of utterance people would actually be making if they made a certain moral claim, or on the uses or meanings of the terms in the utterance.

For example, the claim that a moral statement is really a statement about the likes and dislikes of the person making the statement is a metaethical assertion. In order to test its truth one might consider whether the utterances "I like to do it" and "I ought to do it" express the same meaning. To show that the claim is false, we need only point out that the sentence "I don't like to do it, but I ought to do it" is not self-contradictory. We do not need to know anything about the actual moral opinions of the people involved; we need only to know what they and we believe counts as an intelligible or possible moral utterance or expression. By contrast, "Most young Catholics do not really believe that birth control is wrong and hope the hierarchy will change its position about this" can be known to be true or false

only by knowing something about the actual moral convictions of people.

A normative ethicist tries to set forth a system of true normative ethical statements or at least to show how certain fundamental normative ethical statements are rationally supported. Some ethicists are iconoclasts and moral critics like Nietzsche and Camus, and seek to show that at least some of our actual normative ethical ideals are irrational. Some, like Kant and Sidgwick, are concerned to exhibit the rational foundations of common-sense normative ethics; they seek to state the heterogeneous claims of common-sense morality in some systematic order, to state its fundamental principles, and to show how they can be rationally justified. Some, like Bentham and Dewey, pursue both courses, with emphasis on the latter. (It is important to note that in doing these tasks a very considerable amount of metaethics also is done.)

A metaethicist tries to analyze and perspicuously display normative ethical discourse. He typically starts with everyday first-order moral (normative ethical) talk, but he also concerns himself with the claims and systems of normative ethicists. His object is not to engage directly in moral argument, reasoning, or normative ethical discourse at all but, as a kind of conceptual cartographer, to give a clear description and/or account of that discourse. His effort is not, even in the most general terms, to tell us how to live or to justify living in a certain way but to make clear what morality is all about and, particularly today, to ask whether normative ethics is really possible as a rational inquiry. If it is, how can it be rationally pursued?

RELATION OF NORMATIVE ETHICS
TO METAETHICS

Two questions naturally arise: What is the relationship between normative ethics and metaethics? Why should philosophers concern themselves with metaethics at all?

Many philosophers who are antagonistic to analytic philosophy think that contemporary moral philosophy has regressed in so exclusively concerning itself with metaethics. On the other hand, a few purists among analytic philosophers think that since the sole proper concern of philosophy is with the logical analysis of language or the analysis of concepts, philosophers ought *not*, as philosophers, to do normative ethics. Philosophers, they argue, are not seers; they have no special insight into "moral truth," and therefore they have no right at all to preach to their fellow men or tell them how they ought to live. But this, it is argued, is in effect just what they do when they engage in normative ethics.

Many moral philosophers, including this writer, take the less extreme position that to engage in normative ethics properly is not to preach or in a direct, specific, and casuistic way to tell one's fellow man how to order his life. It is, rather, to criticize irrational moral beliefs and to search for certain general, rationally justifiable moral principles. Its aim is finally to discover and articulate a sound normative ethical system. A moral philosopher should do both metaethics and normative ethics; the crucial thing is not to confuse them and to be clear about their intermural relations.

Yet there is a conviction on the part of many philosophers, and perhaps justifiably so, that a philosopher's main task is to do metaethics. This conviction has been engendered by several considerations. There has been the recognition that philosophical attempts to set forth a rational and objective normative ethic have not been notably successful in spite of the fact that philosophers have been engaged in that activity for the last 24 centuries. Furthermore, the arguments for moral skepticism—skepticism about the feasibility of articulating an objective normative ethic—have been very telling. Finally, and most importantly, it is felt by many philosophers that the logical status of moral utterances and the nature of moral reasoning are so unclear that we cannot profitably do normative ethics until we have a far more adequate metaethic than we have at present. Because of such convictions, a central and pervasive question in metaethics is whether normative ethics is possible. If it is, then it is reasonable to argue that the articulation of a rational normative ethical system is, as G. E. Moore believed, the ultimate aim of moral philosophy. If such a system is impossible, then the task of moral philosophy is to show why this is so and to limit itself to metaethical analysis.

Even if we conclude that in some way it is possible to articulate a sound normative ethic, questions still arise about the relevance of metaethics to normative ethics. What is the logical relationship between metaethical statements and normative ethical statements, or between a normative ethic and a metaethic? And what (if anything) is the normative relevance of metaethical analysis? What, in short, is the proper role of a metaethic with respect to the moral life?

It is frequently claimed that metaethical theories and metaethical statements are all normatively neutral (the neutrality thesis). This is taken in different ways. To ask if they are normatively neutral is to ask at least one of the following questions: (1) Do metaethical statements or theories entail any normative ethical statements or theories? (2) Do normative ethical statements or theories entail any metaethical statements or theories? (3) Do at least some metaethical theories presuppose certain specific normative ethical doctrines? (4) Do at least some normative ethical theories or doctrines presuppose certain specific metaethical beliefs? (5) Do metaethical theories have a normative ethical role? (6) Do one's metaethical beliefs sometimes alter (causally impinge upon) one's normative ethical beliefs or attitudes?

If in claiming that metaethical contentions are all normatively neutral, one answers (6) in the negative, then one is surely mistaken. Most philosophers no doubt overestimate the extent to which conceptual considerations have causal effects on practical matters—including moral beliefs—but many people, perhaps foolishly, have altered their normative ethical beliefs upon accepting a noncognitive metaethic.

However, most analytic philosophers who have wanted to maintain the neutrality thesis have wanted to contend that (1), (2), (3), and (4) should be answered in the negative. Some, however, have wanted to maintain that only (1) and (2) should be answered in the negative.

The belief that normative ethical statements are about

what ought *to be done* or ought *to be* the case, that they are about what is right or good to *do* or good to *make* the case, and that metaethical statements, by contrast, are about what *is* the case strongly inclines one to the neutrality thesis on the ground that a normative statement can never be derived from any nonnormative statement or subset of purely nonnormative statements. Thus there can be no entailment either way.

It might be argued that so to deny an entailment between normative ethical statements and metaethical statements is to presuppose a number of metaethical theses that are themselves quite questionable: that one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is," that there is a clearly demarcated line between factual statements and normative statements or between descriptive discourse and prescriptive and evaluative discourse.

It is, of course, trivially true that if we can make no fundamental or clear demarcation between fact-stating or descriptive discourse and normative discourse, or if normative discourse is a subspecies of factual discourse, then there will be no general reason to deny an entailment between metaethical statements and normative ones. Whether there is such a demarcation in discourse is one of the central issues of contemporary ethical theory.

Some who would answer (1) and (2) in the negative would answer (3) and/or (4) in the affirmative. There is no entailment between normative ethical claims and metaethical claims, but normative ethical claims presuppose a certain metaethic, or any given normative ethic, is compatible only with a particular metaethic or at least with a certain range of metaethical theories. Where we have an entailment between two statements, *p* and *q*, then if *p* is true, *q* is true; and if *q* is false, *p* is false. But if *p* is presupposed by *q*, then if *p* is false, *q* as well as not-*q* is void; but *q* can be false without *p* being false. If "Bentley has some students" (*p*) is presupposed by "Bentley's students are Irish" (*q*), then "It is false that Bentley's students are Irish" does *not* show that Bentley has no students; but if *p* is false and Bentley has no students, then neither "Bentley's students are Irish" nor "Bentley's students are not Irish" is false, for both statements are voided when such a condition obtains.

Let our ethical case be "Moral statements can be true or false" (metaethical statement *p*). Let us try to assert that *p* is presupposed by normative ethical statement *q* ("It is patently false to claim that the innocent under certain circumstances ought to be punished"). If *p* is false, *q* is not false but in an important sense is meaningless or void, for the falsity of *p* shows that the very labels "truth" and "falsity" are not applicable to *q*. In this way the intelligibility, and thus also the truth, of a given normative ethical claim presupposes the truth of a given metaethical statement. If the metaethical statement is false, we cannot assert the normative ethical statement. But it still remains the case that the adoption of that metaethic would not constitute a good reason for accepting the normative ethic or normative ethical statement in question rather than some conflicting normative ethic or normative ethical statement, for if *q* presupposes *p*, so does not-*q*. Since "John's children are bald" presupposes that John has children, so does "John's children are not bald."

The converse does not hold. It is not the case that a given metaethical theory or statement presupposes the correctness of a given normative ethical theory or statement. Consider this case: "Moral utterances are expressions of emotion" does not presuppose "Communism is a glaring evil" or "One ought to experience one's emotional life to the full." These normative statements could be rejected without voiding the metaethical statement. Such a metaethical claim is not voided by any normative ethical statement, no matter how general. Even the falsity of "People ought to do what they are emotionally disposed to do" does not void "Moral utterances are expressions of emotion." The metaethical statement in question only asserts that if an utterance is moral, it expresses the emotions of the speaker; it does not tell one what one ought or ought not to do. It does not say one ought or ought not to do what one is emotionally disposed to do. It only implies that when a speaker asserts "People ought never to do what they are emotionally disposed to do," this utterance, like any moral utterance, expresses the speaker's emotions.

Here we can see in a specific case that a metaethical statement does not presuppose a given normative ethical statement and appears not to presuppose any specific metaethical statement or type of metaethic. It would quite generally appear to be the case that no metaethical statement or metaethic presupposes a normative ethical statement or a given type of normative ethic. If there were no normative ethical claims at all, there could be no metaethics, but that is a different matter.

If correct, the above line of reasoning has important consequences, for it makes it apparent that a given metaethic or metaethical theory does not entail any normative ethical claim, statement, or theory; and the converse relationship also holds. It is also the case that no metaethical theory presupposes any given normative ethics. In these very important respects the defenders of the neutrality thesis seem to be correct. But it would also appear to be the case that we can make certain normative ethical claims only if certain metaethical claims are true. The truth of these metaethical claims does not insure the truth of the normative ethical claims, but the normative ethical claims cannot be true unless the metaethical claims are. In this respect metaethics does not seem normatively neutral.

Finally we consider (5): Do metaethical theories have a normative ethical role? From the above discussion we can see that we are in a position to make one important assertion, namely, that from the truth of any given metaethic or metaethical statement we cannot conclude that a given normative ethic or normative ethical statement is true. But metaethical theories do have normative implications. If "No moral statements can be true or false" is true, then we cannot assert as a normative ethical statement that it is false to say that communism is evil. Thus there are normative functions of metaethical statements, but it is important to determine just what they are and how they work, for on this turns the pragmatic value of metaethics.

It is sometimes argued that metaethics has normative implications because, without being a normative activity itself, it can still serve as an instrument for greater rationality in our actual moral life. Given the fact that we want to be more rational in our moral thinking, and given the fact

that we can be more rational, metaethical analysis can be extremely useful.

There are some important ways in which the above contention is true. Metaethical analysis can undermine certain obscure beliefs about morality and in that way can further the moral life. This is not to say that if a man changes his metaethical beliefs, there is any reason for him to change any given normative ethical belief (such as that the infliction of pain is evil). But metaethical analysis of the meaning of "x is wrong" or "x is right" may enable him to be clearer and more certain in the organization of his moral beliefs and in his efforts to justify them. To take obvious examples, the man who believes that "x is right" means "x is commanded by God" may in certain situations be unsure of how to decide or demonstrate what it is that God has commanded. On the other hand, a man who believes that "x is right" means simply "the speaker feels that x is right" may have difficulty in justifying or finding convincing reasons for doing what he feels is right. However, further metaethical analysis may show that moral judgments do not require special insight into the mind of God or into some nonnatural realm, and moreover that there are rules of valid reasoning appropriate to moral argument. To reason morally may be to reason in accordance with a rule of inference that says "If something causes pain, it is, *ceteris paribus* (all things being equal), not to be done." Thus, moral beliefs may be represented in what is presumably a more coherent and perspicuous way, and one no longer need feel mystified about them and uneasy about their having an objective rationale.

That metaethical beliefs can be helpful in this way assumes that metaethical theory can attain the kind of clarity that would enable us, with some justification, to claim that certain metaethical beliefs are true or at least probable. This is not easy to establish; yet, if it can be shown that some metaethical beliefs are well warranted, then, in the way we have exhibited above, we will have shown how they can clarify normative ethical thought and in this way have an important normative ethical function.

DISCOURSE IN NORMATIVE ETHICS

We must now consider the familiar Kantian question: "Is normative ethics possible?" That is, is it possible to state and rationally defend a normative ethic in such a way that all rational men, after carefully reflecting on the considerations pro and con, would find it acceptable? Is philosophical normative argument possible?

To see, or at least to begin to consider, whether it is or not, let us examine some important normative ethical claims and see if they can be so defended. As this examination proceeds, it will become apparent why so many contemporary philosophers have concerned themselves almost exclusively with metaethics, for when we push normative inquiries to a certain stage, the conclusion often turns to some considerable degree on metaethical issues.

Normative ethics tries systematically to establish the general principles for determining right and wrong or good and evil. In attempting to produce such an answer, many ethical questions are asked, but they can all be subsumed under three general questions: (1) What is right and wrong? (2) What is blameworthy and praiseworthy? (3) What is desirable or worthwhile? Here (2), which presupposes an answer to (1), will be ignored (see EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS, PARALLEL BETWEEN), and we shall concentrate on (1) and (3).

It is important to see that (1) and (3) are distinct questions, for while it may be that everything that is desirable to do is also something that one is obligated to do, it is still not the case that to *say* that something is worthwhile or desirable is the same as saying that one is obligated to do it. Questions about what is desirable to do, what is worthwhile, or what is good in itself may not even strike one as moral questions. If a woman struggles with herself about whether it would be more desirable to be a dentist or a doctor, she is not, at least in typical situations, facing a moral dilemma, although it may be a very crucial personal problem for her; but if a woman struggles over whether to tell her husband that she is going to have a child by another man, she is, in our society at any rate, definitely involved in a moral problem. Yet it is surely not implausible to argue that morality exists for man and not man for morality; that those practices which should be thought of as involving duties and obligations are so labeled because it is believed (perhaps mistakenly) that in the long run they will bring about a better or more desirable life for more people than would the institution of any alternative set of practices. This is not to urge the metaethical thesis that "x is right," "x is obligatory," or "x ought to be done" means "x is the most desirable thing for everybody" or "x is the best possible or most worthwhile act under the circumstances." It is, rather, designed to show the ethical relevance of questions of the third type.

In asking "How should we live?" it is certainly not unreasonable to argue that one ought always to do that act which under the circumstances would have the best or most desirable consequences for everyone involved. After all, what better, more worthwhile thing could we do than to do what is best for everyone? This does not settle the issue in favor of teleologists over deontologists, but it does make the teleological position sufficiently plausible to make it worthwhile to give careful consideration to (3). A teleologist in ethics argues that the only thing we have to know in order to decide whether or not an act is right is whether the act, among all the alternative acts we might perform, would bring about the best total state of affairs. Deontologists, by contrast, assert that there are at least some other considerations, besides the goodness or badness of the consequences of actions or attitudes, that make actions or attitudes right or wrong. Yet even a deontologist can quite consistently consider (3) an ethical question.

Granted that it is crucial in knowing how we ought to live to determine what is worthwhile, desirable, or good in itself, just how would we do it? This issue is a central one in moral philosophy. But before we consider some of the central positions and issues involved in any decision here, it is essential to make an important distinction. In asking our question we are asking what it is that makes something *intrinsically* desirable, good, or worthwhile. That is, what (if anything) is worthwhile for its own sake or in itself, quite irrespective of its consequences?

To say that x is intrinsically desirable (good, worthwhile)

is to say that, *ceteris paribus*, the existence or occurrence of *x* is more desirable (better, more worthwhile) than its nonexistence or nonoccurrence because of its own nature alone, completely apart from any positive or negative desirability possessed by things to which *x* is conducive. To say that *x* is extrinsically desirable (good, worthwhile) is to say that *x* is conducive, directly or indirectly, to something else, *y*, which is intrinsically desirable (good, worthwhile).

This distinction, like most distinctions made by philosophers, has been vigorously attacked. There are serious questions concerning whether it is a clear distinction; questions concerning its applicability and importance in moral assessment; and, to say the least, it certainly must be questioned whether intrinsic and extrinsic are all the fundamental varieties of goodness. But, historically at least, this distinction has been of considerable moment, for most of the classical normative ethical theories have been theories about what is intrinsically desirable or worthwhile.

Normative ethical theories about what is intrinsically desirable can be conveniently divided into monistic and pluralistic theories. Monistic theories, like hedonism and self-realizationism, claim that one, and only one, kind of experience or reality is intrinsically desirable or good; pluralistic theories maintain that there can be more than one kind of intrinsic desirability or good.

The respective merits of these views will become somewhat more apparent if we examine what could be said for and against ethical hedonism.

Ethical hedonism. One of the strongest and most persistent theories about what things are intrinsically good is ethical hedonism. An ethical hedonist contends that pleasure, and pleasure alone, is intrinsically good. But hedonism is not just a theory about what is intrinsically good; it also attempts to be a complete normative ethical theory. It aims to tell us which moral principles are justified, what general types of moral rules we should follow, and, in principle at least, it aims to tell us what general types of action are good and what attitudes are desirable. It would, in short, supply us with a complete normative ethical theory, but the whole edifice of such a theory rests on its doctrine about what is intrinsically good. This doctrine is not sufficient to establish hedonism as a complete normative ethic, but it is necessary.

The hedonist's contention is that pleasantness is either identical with or a criterion for intrinsic goodness. To establish either claim involves establishing (1) that pleasure or pleasant (enjoyable) experiences are always intrinsically good and (2) that *only* pleasure or pleasant (enjoyable) experiences are intrinsically good. Neither (1) nor (2) is sufficient by itself.

What can be said for (1)? There is no serious question about whether sometimes a pleasant experience is intrinsically good; the question is whether it is always intrinsically good. There are bad pleasures or evil pleasures, it will be argued. The Klan member who takes pleasure in beating a Negro to death or the sadistic doctor who takes pleasure in hurting his patients does something that is evil. To take pleasure in deliberate acts of cruelty is evil.

To this the hedonist replies that there is nothing wrong with such pleasure per se. Its effects, namely the pain it brings to others, is bad; but if we consider the pleasure in isolation from its effects, it will be seen that there is nothing bad about it taken by itself. It is intrinsically good but extrinsically bad because it is conducive to something that is intrinsically bad, namely pain.

Some will argue that taking pleasure in giving pain to others is both intrinsically and extrinsically evil. Even in the case where an act inspired by sadistic motives has good effects, they will still hold that the act is intrinsically evil. (An example might be a sadistic doctor who enjoys giving shock therapy because he likes to watch his patients suffer but who administers this therapy only in cases where it is the best available treatment to cure the patient.) The nonhedonist may also appeal to majority opinion and maintain that most people will agree that it would be a better world if doctors didn't take pleasure in giving pain. The hedonist will reply that it is not opinion which determines what is intrinsically good or bad. He will point out that the sadistic doctor's pleasure slightly lessens the sum total pain in the world, so in such a situation a world in which he took pleasure in his work would be intrinsically better than a world in which he did not, for the more intrinsic good there is in the world, the better. Those who deny this are either being irrational or are making a miscalculation, for character traits that accompany such sadism usually cause a good deal of unnecessary suffering. But if such behavior has exactly the same effects all around as the behavior of the doctor who does his job with repugnance or just as a matter of routine, then, if one carefully and impartially reflects on it, one will come to appreciate not only that a world with such sadists is not a worse world but is actually a better world, for there will be more pleasure (more intrinsic good) in it than in a world in which this is not so.

The dialectic of this normative ethical argument gives rise, quite naturally, to two metaethical issues. In the first the nonhedonist in effect argues that if *x* is ordinarily believed to be intrinsically good, then *x* is intrinsically good—or at least that this ordinary belief is a necessary condition for *x*'s being intrinsically good. The hedonist rejects this and claims instead that only what the clearheaded, impartial, and informed man believes to be intrinsically good is intrinsically good. Both are in reality arguing about what it means to call something "intrinsically good" and about the logic of justification of claims of intrinsic goodness. To do this is to do metaethics.

Suppose the nonhedonist grants that there would be more total pleasure in the sadist's world but still maintains that such pleasure is intrinsically evil and the hedonist, recognizing this, continues to assert it is intrinsically good. How, if at all, could we rationally resolve this issue? Both claims are apparently synthetic, and they are in conflict. To say they are essentially contested or that neither is true or false—for they merely exhibit a disagreement in attitude—is to assume without argument a metaethical position; and exactly the same thing is true if one asserts that one is immediately aware of the truth of the hedonist's or the nonhedonist's claim. Further progress toward resolving this normative issue calls for clarification of the meaning of the terms "good" and "pleasure" and of the logical status of "Pleasure is intrinsically good."

We have noted some, but by no means all, of the difficulties in establishing that pleasure is *always* intrinsically good. But let us assume that we have in some way established its truth. We still have not established the truth of hedonism, for we must also establish what is much harder to establish, that *only* pleasure is intrinsically good. Here most people part company with hedonism and adopt some form of pluralism.

Ethical pluralism. G. E. Moore argues that the claim of the hedonist is absurd, for it commits him to the belief "that a world in which absolutely nothing but pleasure existed—no knowledge, no love . . . no moral qualities—must yet be intrinsically better worth creating—provided only the total quantity of pleasure in it were *the least bit greater* [italics added], than one in which all these things existed *as well as* pleasure." There are many things of great value. It is, it is argued, absurd to think that only one of them should be classified as worth having for its own sake. Many people who have reflected on the matter regard knowledge, freedom, conscientiousness, a sense of identity, and awareness to be intrinsically good as well.

The hedonist can reply to Moore's argument by agreeing that a world with knowledge and love in it is better than a world without such knowledge, but he will argue that it is not *intrinsically* better. A world with love and knowledge in it will, in the long run, lead to a world with greater happiness in it. We so readily assent to Moore's remarks because we all, on good grounds, believe this; but such a belief is quite compatible with the truth of hedonism.

Part of the difficulty in this argument stems from confusions on both sides about the concept of pleasure. Some critics of hedonism think of pleasure as consisting in delightful sensations. They think that a hedonist is claiming that the only things desirable for themselves alone are things like being rubbed, stroked, or massaged. But this, of course, is an absurd parody of the claims of hedonism. The hedonist does not identify pleasure with such delectable sensations. His use of "pleasure" is identifiable with enjoyable states of consciousness. He claims that something is intrinsically good if, and only if, it is an experience that is enjoyable whenever a person has it. But this is not to treat pleasure, as one treats pain, as a sensation. It is, in a way that is very hard to characterize correctly, a dimension or quality of experience.

Is it true that the only kind of experiences we want for their own sake are enjoyable experiences? (If true, is it logically true or contingently true?) Are these experiences the only things that are intrinsically desirable? Most philosophers have remained pluralists on these questions. How, for example, does the hedonist know that knowledge always has only extrinsic value? Why not, at least for some kinds of knowledge, both?

Again metaethics becomes relevant. Suppose a man says: "I don't find self-knowledge or scientific knowledge intrinsically desirable at all. If it leads to happiness, it is worthwhile; if not, not. Similarly, a sense of one's humanity or a sense of identity has no intrinsic merit. To have a sense of identity and an understanding of oneself is valuable only if it leads to happiness; if it does not, it is without intrinsic worth. Pleasure, enjoyment and pleasure, or enjoyment alone is intrinsically good." But, let us further

suppose, the ethical pluralist continues to claim that self-identity and some kinds of knowledge are intrinsically good. How, if at all, can we settle this issue? How, if at all, can man either *know* or even have good reason to believe he is right? Here again fundamental metaethical issues lurk behind the scenes.

It is very natural for people to argue here, unwittingly switching to a metaethical argument, that what it *means* to say that something is intrinsically good is that it is enjoyable, pleasant, or productive of pleasure. This is to make a metaethical claim that can be countered by metaethical arguments—that it is an intelligible question to ask if all those things which are enjoyable are intrinsically good; that it is not self-contradictory to assert "It's pleasant but it has no intrinsic worth"; and that it can be pointed out that "Those things which are fecund sources of pleasure are worth seeking for their own sake" is not an analytic statement. We could, by a suitable stipulative redefinition of this last statement, make it true by definition, the one before it self-contradictory, and the question self-answering. But this does not settle the question(s) of why these definitions should be accepted as normative and how a stipulation can reveal "normative truth."

If instead we claim that all men desire or seek pleasure (enjoyment, satisfaction of desire), and only pleasure, for its own sake, this would be, depending on how we took it, either a most questionable psychological claim or a disguised tautology. Whether tautologically true or empirically true, the claim would still not constitute a *normative* claim. That people desire or seek pleasure only for its own sake does not *eo ipso* establish that what they seek is desirable or intrinsically good; and, if the only thing people *can* seek is pleasure or satisfaction of desire, then it makes no sense to say that it is good that they do so, for they cannot do otherwise. But if they do always in fact seek pleasure for its own sake but might seek something else instead, then it is appropriate to ask why they should continue to seek it or why it is good to seek it at all.

If the hedonist, like Sidgwick, claims that on careful reflection he is aware, through immediate or intuitive insight, that only enjoyable states of consciousness are intrinsically good, then he is again engaged in metaethics. He is relying on the possibility and, granted the possibility, the correctness of some intuitions. Sidgwick is not alone in having or claiming to have intuitions, and others, after careful reflection, have intuitions or what they take to be intuitions that conflict with Sidgwick's. Are they all genuine intuitions? How can we know which "intuitions" (if any) are correct? W. D. Ross, for example, has intuitions that are diametrically opposed to Sidgwick's. How can we tell who is right, or is there in reality no right and wrong—no moral truth—here? Are they not both simply expressing their preferences and trying to get others to adopt their attitudes? In trying to assess this normative ethical dispute, we are ineluctably led into fundamental metaethical controversies.

If the hedonist tries to resolve the argument in his favor in another way, he is also led into metaethical controversy and he also, if he so argues, shows how in the interests of his theory he has arbitrarily extended the meaning of "pleasure." Suppose he says that the man who judges

some knowledge to be intrinsically good says he *wants* that knowledge for its own sake and not simply because of the pleasure or power it will give him. Similarly, the man who says that, painful or not, he *wants* to keep his self-identity shows that he is, after all, unwittingly reasoning as a hedonist, for in judging knowledge and self-identity to be intrinsically good, he shows that he *wants* them for their own sake; and to say that *x* is pleasant is to say that *x* is a part of experience that all people or most people want to continue on its own account. To be a hedonist is to argue that something is intrinsically desirable if, and only if, it is an experience that the person who has it *wants* to prolong for its own sake.

If this is so, hedonism appears to become true by definition, in which case pluralist theories are unintelligible rather than false. But this may be an arbitrary redefinition of the word "pleasure" in the interests of a normative ethical theory, for ordinarily it would seem that one could understand someone's contention that, even though an experience is painful, he wishes to continue having it because he regards it as having intrinsic value. Such a wish may be irrational, but it certainly does not appear unintelligible. This gives us some reason to believe that such a hedonist is operating with an arbitrarily extended definition of "pleasure."

The hedonist could reply that this is not so, for if we stress, as we should, intrinsic value (that is, an experience worth having "on its own account"), it is not so evident that it makes sense to say that we seek painful experiences on their own account or for themselves, or that we seek nonpleasurable experiences on their own account or for themselves.

Whoever is right here, it is again apparent that to adjudicate this normative ethical issue between the hedonist and the nonhedonist, we must resolve a metaethical dispute about the meaning of "pleasure" and about the relation of "pleasure" to "good."

The hedonist may take yet another tack in his own defense, but again he is led into another metaethical controversy. He may grant, given ordinary moral consciousness and the moral discourse that reflects that consciousness, that it is of course correct to assert that knowledge, self-identity, and many things other than pleasure are intrinsically good. But he still may argue that ordinary moral consciousness is, in many respects, irrational and parochial, and that we cannot rely on it or the discourse it enshrines to give us an understanding of what morality is really about. This raises a cluster of metaethical issues about the nature of justification in ethics.

The point of the discussion about the question of what is intrinsically good or worthwhile has not been to settle this ancient issue in favor of hedonism or in favor of any pluralistic theories, but to show how these normative ethical issues will, when pursued relentlessly, finally turn to a considerable degree, although not entirely, on conceptual controversies. It is these controversies that metaethics is designed to handle.

Normative ethics is actual, so in one plain but trivial sense it is possible; but normative ethical issues lead to metaethical ones, and whether a sound normative ethic is possible turns on the proper answer to certain metaethical questions. (That the relation is not quite that simple will become apparent later. The final constraint on any metaethics is living moral language.)

To settle what is intrinsically good or what is worth seeking for its own sake does not, by any means, exhaust the normative ethical questions that deserve careful treatment. Even the teleologist must go on to determine what is the best thing to do. If he is a pluralist, he must determine which one of various conflicting intrinsic goods is most desirable; and a hedonist must decide what is most pleasurable and *whose* pleasure is to be considered. Other ethical monists have similar problems. But if we are teleologists we will reason in this way, unless we are also egoists: whatever is intrinsically good should be promoted. If the greatest amount of good to everyone involved is realized, then we will have achieved what should be done. Our obligation, as moral agents, is always to promote the greatest possible net good. But, as deontologists and others have been quick to bring out, there are all kinds of questions about this position. Most pressing, perhaps, is the question of whether the rightness of an act depends entirely on its consequences. Is it really the case that an act is right if, and only if, it maximizes intrinsic good?

Suppose act *A* or rule or practice *A* involves breaking a promise or lying, while act *B* or rule or practice *B* does not; but act *A* or rule or practice *A* has *slightly* better consequences. Is it clear that we do the right thing in performing act *A* rather than *B*? It is not so clear. Many moralists would claim that the right thing to do here is *B*. This, they say, is even clearer if the consequences of *A* and *B* both lead to the same amount of total intrinsic good. Where this last situation obtains, teleologists would say that there is no reason for saying one act or one rule is right and the other wrong; but surely an act or rule that involves lying or breaking a promise is, *ceteris paribus*, morally inferior to an act or rule that does not involve lying or breaking a promise. In determining what is right and wrong, it is important to determine what things are intrinsically good and what contributes to a maximum amount of intrinsic good, but such knowledge is not by itself sufficient to give us knowledge of what is the right or wrong thing to do. Moreover, we seem to have a further and independent criterion for justice, for it is not clear that we should always seek the maximum net good; we should be concerned with the equity of its distribution as well. It would seem that we should seek that state of affairs which will, as far as possible, realize the maximum net good for *everyone* involved.

There are a host of questions here about what is the right, just, or fair thing to do that any sound normative ethic must answer. We cannot here examine them in detail, but it should be reasonably apparent that satisfactory answers to them again lead to making a decision about appropriate answers to metaethical questions. Can "right," "ought," "just" be defined or explicated in terms of "good"? Is discovery of the criteria for good also discovery of the criteria for right? Are there independent objective criteria for rightness or justice? What is the logic of justification in ethics? What is (are) the meaning(s) of "moral"? This discussion would again show that normative

ethics, pursued diligently, naturally leads, when pressed to a certain level of abstraction, to the conceptual inquiry called metaethics.

In this section we have sought to establish that many fundamental normative ethical disputes require for their resolution an examination of metaethical issues. Our primary means of achieving this has been through examining some of the conflicts that arise in normative ethics between ethical hedonism and pluralistic theories. In trying to resolve certain fundamental issues in normative ethics, disputes quite naturally arise concerning the intelligibility of the concept of intrinsic goodness, its exact nature, and its centrality in moral reasoning. As we have seen, disputes which arise between ethical hedonists and nonhedonists over whether pleasure and only pleasure is intrinsically good lead to metaethical disputes over the meaning of "pleasure" and over the logical status of such claims as "Pleasure alone is good." Furthermore, even if the normative ethical beliefs of a given normative ethical theory (such as ethical hedonism) conflict with ordinary moral beliefs, it will only follow that this normative ethical theory is in error, if it is true that a normative ethical theory is sound only if it is in accord with ordinary moral beliefs. But this is also a thesis in metaethics and requires metaethical analysis for its rational resolution. Finally, as we have also seen, when normative ethicists consider what is the best thing to do and what ought, everything considered, to be done, metaethical questions concerning the meaning, criteria, and intermural relations of "right," "good," "just," and "ought" come to the fore. To know whether a rational normative ethic is possible, we must have some reasonable answer to such metaethical questions.

METAETHICAL RELATIVISM AND SUBJECTIVISM

Given the difficulty in justifying any normative system, we should now examine various forms of the familiar assertion that moral claims, unlike factual claims, are all subjective. There are confusions here and distinctions that must be made before we can profitably pursue some of the metaethical questions that have been central to moral philosophy.

The difficulty in discussing the charge that moral claims are all relative or all subjective is in knowing exactly what the charge is. People who have made such claims have meant many very different things. (See ETHICAL RELATIVISM for distinctions between descriptive relativism, of which cultural relativism is a subspecies; normative relativism; and metaethical relativism. As the article makes apparent, it is metaethical relativism that is at the bottom of the most serious perplexities connected with the assertion that all moral claims are fundamentally relative or conventional.)

To understand clearly what is involved in a conventionalist's challenge concerning morals, a few remarks about metaethical relativism, its cousin ethical skepticism, and subjectivism are in order.

Relativism and skepticism. Metaethical relativism claims that there are no objectively sound procedures for justifying one moral code or one set of moral judgments as

against another code or set of moral judgments. Ethical skepticism claims that no one can ever say with any justification that something is good or bad, right or wrong. Some actions may be right and others wrong, but there is no way of knowing which is which.

Ethical skepticism at first appears to be a normative ethical doctrine, but it is difficult to understand it as anything other than a claim about the logic of justification in ethics and thus as a part of metaethics. The skeptic leaves open the possibility that some actions or principles are right or wrong, but he claims we can never be in a position to know that this is so. This claim refers to what is logically possible to do and thus is about the nature of moral concepts. This means that if we are to find good arguments for ethical skepticism, they must be found in some metaethical argument about the meaning of ethical terms and/or the nature of moral argument.

Subjectivism. It is here that subjectivism becomes relevant. Subjectivism, as it is construed by philosophers, is a metaethical contention about the logical status of moral utterances. It is usually taken to mean any one of the following. (1) A moral utterance is merely an autobiographical statement about the attitudes or feelings of the person making the statement. (2) Moral utterances merely express the attitudes or feelings of the utterer and are used by him to evoke or invite similar attitudes in others. (3) Moral judgments *purport* to refer to something outside the speaker's mind, but in reality they only express, although in a disguised way, his approbations and disapprobations. (4) There is no way of rationally resolving *fundamental* moral disputes, for fundamental moral judgments, or *ultimate* moral principles, cannot correctly be said to be true or false independently of the attitudes of at least some people. (A fundamental moral dispute is a dispute that would not be resolved even if there were complete agreement about the nonmoral facts relevant to the dispute. Ultimate moral principles are those which would divide people in such situations of moral dispute, and fundamental moral judgments are the conflicting moral judgments people would make when they disagreed morally, even when they were in complete agreement about the nonmoral facts relevant to the dispute.)

All four of these metaethical claims are to be contrasted with a fifth sense of "subjectivism" that is not metaethical but probably is closer to what most nonphilosophers would mean by "subjectivism in ethics." This is the contention that the moral judgments people make are all formed or at least very strongly influenced by their emotional biases or prejudices. In short, (5) asserts that all moral judgments are prejudiced judgments.

It is evident that many moral judgments are unwittingly biased and thus are subjective in sense (5), but, unless "bias" and "prejudice" are to be evacuated of all their content, it is clear that this form of subjectivism presupposes the possibility that *some* moral judgments are not subjective in that way. Sometimes people make moral judgments in a calm, impartial way after a due consideration of the facts; and even if this empirical truism would turn out to be false, this would be of a considerably less strictly philosophical consequence than might at first be

thought because we would still be able to conceive what it would be like for moral judgments to be objective. The problem would not cause philosophical bewilderment, although it would surely lead to social chaos.

The first characterization of subjectivism given above is a typical way in which analytic critics of subjectivism state the position they are criticizing. Such a subjectivism is plainly untenable. To say (a) "One ought never to lie" is not to say (b) "the idea of never lying, as a matter of psychological fact, arouses in me a pro-attitude toward never lying." I could surely say, without contradicting myself, that the idea of never lying arouses in me a pro-attitude toward never lying, but all the same I ought to suppress that pro-attitude. But since this is not self-contradictory, (a) and (b) cannot be identical in meaning; and if they are not identical in meaning, subjectivism in sense (1) is false. What would establish the truth of (b) is reasonably evident, but what, if anything, would establish the truth of (a) is not at all evident; however, if they have the same meaning, what would establish the truth of one would establish the truth of the other. Nevertheless, we have no reason at all to think they have the same truth-value.

A good case, however, can be made for the claim that this first kind of subjectivism is but the straw man of certain analytic philosophers and that in this form it is seldom maintained by serious philosophers.

Some philosophers, who wish to limit subjectivism to (1) or perhaps to (4), say (2) is not subjectivism at all but a simple and very unsatisfactory variety of emotivism. Others have wished to call emotivism a new subjectivism. It is a moot point whether all forms of emotivism should be called subjectivistic, but (2) would deny any interpersonal validity to moral claims and would deny that they could be true. This would seem enough to warrant calling this form of emotivism a subjective metaethic; later we shall examine whether it is an adequate metaethic. But such a paradoxical claim, if true, would surely give us a negative answer to the Kantian question "Is a normative ethic possible?" It would not entail the impropriety of any normative ethical claim, but if true, there could be no question about justifying a normative ethical claim or a normative ethical system. However, (2) is highly implausible.

Subjectivism in senses (3) and (4) is a far more serious threat. If (3) were true, no rational normative ethic would be possible; and if (4) were true, it would seem questionable whether we could answer the Kantian question affirmatively. Yet there are powerful considerations favoring (3) and (4). They give substance and greater precision to the frequently voiced and very confused claim that *alles ist relativ*. We could, of course, raise difficulties about (3) and (4), but we would always be faced with the possibility that (3) or (4), more adequately stated or modified, could avoid these difficulties. A more direct approach would be to state an adequate metaethic that was not subjective in any of the above senses and that clarified the nature of the problem about justification in ethics and treated how it could be answered by showing how moral disagreements can be rationally resolved and how they have certain formal and perhaps nonformal conditions of adequacy. Before considering the adequacy of certain traditional nonsubjectivist metaethical theories, we must explain these formal requirements and state the problem of justification somewhat more fully.

FORMAL FEATURES OF MORAL DISCOURSE

Most fundamentally, the question of justification in ethics is the question of stating, elucidating, and defending a sound procedure for determining the truth of conflicting moral claims and the soundness of moral arguments. In everyday life we are barraged with a variety of moral claims and counterclaims; the moral arguments in support of them are diverse and conflicting. How are we finally to decide among them? Is it really the case that metaethical relativism or some variety of subjectivism is correct? Moralists have traditionally claimed objectivity for their moral principles, and this claim of objectivity seems to be embedded in our everyday moral discourse. But is this claim actually justified? Can we show that there are objectively true moral judgments or that there are sound moral arguments?

Such a question clearly calls for a characterization of what could be meant by calling a moral judgment objective. A moral judgment is objective if, and only if, it is either true or false and if its truth or falsity does not depend on the peculiarities of the person who makes the judgment or on the culture to which he belongs, but shall be determinable by any rational agent who is apprised of the relevant facts.

It should be noted that there are some metaethicists who claim that there are objective moral judgments and yet deny that moral judgments or statements can properly be called true or false. They recognize that moral judgments do not have the kind of necessary truth characteristic of mathematics, and they argue with considerable plausibility that moral statements are not true or false in the way that empirical statements are true or false—there are no ethical characteristics, rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness, that are either directly or indirectly observable. Since this is so, they conclude that there are no objective moral facts which would make moral judgments true or false; because of this, "truth" and "falsity" are not correctly applicable to moral judgments.

Even if it is true that moral judgments differ from factual judgments in this way, it does not follow that we cannot correctly say that moral judgments are true or false. To assert that a judgment or statement is true is to give a warranted endorsement of that judgment or statement, but what makes the judgment warranted varies according to what we are talking about. To be capable of being true, a statement need not state a fact or assert that certain empirically identifiable characteristics are part of an object or an action. Rather, what is necessary is that the statement in question be publicly warrantable, that is, that it admit of some publicly determinable procedure in virtue of which rational men could come to accept it. If a given statement has a sufficiently powerful warrant to justify our claiming that we are certain of it, then we can properly say it is true. But what and how we warrant what we are talking about depends on *what it is that* we are talking about. We can

properly call a statement or judgment in any area objectively true if it would be endorsed without doubt by informed, reasonable, reflective, and careful observers.

Such a publicly determinable judgment, whether true or false, is objective. If, by contrast, its acceptability depends on some cultural or individual idiosyncrasy of the person(s) involved, then the statement is subjective and cannot have the kind of truth required for an objective moral judgment.

There are some features other than the claim to objectivity that are held to be formal requirements of all moral judgments. Moral judgments all make a claim to universality—if I judge that I have a right to disregard a certain regulation or that I ought to do a certain thing, I implicitly judge that relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar situations also have a right to do it or ought to do it. Similarly, if I say that it would be a good thing if x would do y, I give one to understand that it would be a good thing for anyone relevantly like x and similarly situated to do y. And if I say of something, "It's a good one," I must say, on pain of incoherence, that anything exactly like "it" is also a good one. What, exactly, counts as a relevant similarity or a relevant respect cannot be determined apart from the context and nature of what we are discussing, but what constitutes a relevant similarity is often evident enough in a given context. At any rate, this kind of universality or generalizability is built into the very use of moral expressions and helps govern what can count as a moral judgment.

Moral discourse is also a form of practical discourse; its primary use is not that of asserting, questioning, or reaffirming that something is the case but that of making something the case, of criticizing or appraising something that is the case, or of molding attitudes toward certain states of affairs or actions. This is what is meant when we say that moral discourse is essentially action-guiding and attitude-molding.

Beyond the claims to objectivity, universality, and practicality, it is also frequently, but not always, asserted that moral discourse is an autonomous mode of discourse. This means that no moral or normative claim is derivable from, or depends for its validity on, purely nonmoral or nonnormative statements alone. Certain inessential and unimportant qualifications apart, no moral statement is entailed by any set of purely nonnormative statements. Morality, no matter how carefully elaborated, can never become or be reduced to an empirical science. We cannot discover what we ought to do or what is desirable from a knowledge of nonmoral facts *alone,* including the facts about human nature and conduct. (For further discussion, see ULTIMATE MORAL PRINCIPLES: THEIR JUSTIFICATION.)

METAETHICAL THEORIES

Metaethical theories, where they are not explicitly subjectivistic, attempt to account for four central features of moral discourse: that moral judgments claim universality, autonomy, and objectivity, and that moral discourse is a form of practical discourse—it guides conduct and tends to alter behavior. In handling the problem of justification, these various theories divide on what form the justification

of ethical judgments can take, but with one exception about autonomy they agree that a clear characterization of moral discourse must square with the fact that moral discourse in some way satisfies these four conditions.

Not all metaethical theories will be discussed; rather, concentration will be on some of the central aspects of naturalism, intuitionism, and noncognitivism. (For a fuller account of contemporary metaethical theories, see ETHICS, HISTORY OF.)

Naturalism. As a distinctively metaethical theory, naturalism contends that moral terms are completely definable in nonmoral terms and that moral judgments are a subspecies of empirical judgments. In reality, moral terms stand for purely natural characteristics.

Naturalism is an attractive theory, for, if correct, ethical theory could become an empirical science. We would have finally uncovered a perfectly objective method for confirming or disconfirming moral judgments, including fundamental moral judgments. There would be no need to appeal to intuition or to regard moral judgments as essentially contested, incapable of rational resolution because ethical naturalism, if true, shows us how we can have a purely empirical knowledge of good and evil.

Whether this desideratum can be realized depends on whether the naturalist can show that all moral terms are actually equivalent in meaning to terms standing for purely empirical characteristics—qualities or relations capable of either direct or indirect observation by empirical methods. It is here that certain objections, first formulated in the twentieth century by G. E. Moore, become relevant. Moore's most central argument has been dubbed the open-question argument.

A naturalist may, for example, try to define "intrinsic good" as "that which satisfies desire," or "moral good" as "that which promotes human survival." But we can intelligibly enough ask, "Is that which satisfies desire intrinsically good?" This is not a senseless question equivalent to asking, "Is that which satisfies desire that which satisfies desire?" We can also with perfect linguistic propriety ask if all those things which promote human survival under any circumstances, cannibalism or incest, for example, are morally permissible. But if the above naturalistic definitions were correct, we could not sensibly ask such questions any more than we can sensibly ask if a father is a male parent. More generally, the argument is this: for any proposed naturalistic definition x we can always, unless x itself contains some normative terms (and thus is not genuinely naturalistic), ask—without making a purely verbal mistake—if x is good, right, or obligatory. This shows that such moral terms are not equivalent to empirical terms. Furthermore, for whatever naturalistic value satisfies the variable x, to assert that x is good, right, or obligatory is not to assert a statement that cannot be denied without contradiction.

There are many counters to such antinaturalist arguments. One is to claim that moral terms have many contextually dependent meanings and that it is only this, and not the impossibility of naturalism, that the open-question argument shows. It is also argued that there may be a *covert* synonymity between terms, particularly where the

correct definition of a term is very complex. Consider this definition of "good": to say "*x* is good" is to say that if there were an omniscient, disinterested, and dispassionate observer, he would approve of *x*. If someone were to inquire whether it made sense to ask if what an omniscient, disinterested, and dispassionate observer would approve is good, we might not know, even after careful reflection, whether such a question is or is not a closed question. In short, a question actually may be closed when it appears to be open. The open-question argument is thus far from decisive.

The critic of naturalism could grant that the open-question argument is not decisive and still argue that nevertheless it counts heavily against naturalism. The criteria for a good woman, a good chisel, and a good horse differ significantly. In this way "good" is a context-dependent word, but as J. O. Urmson has remarked, "good" is not a punning homonym; it has a common use in all these contexts. Furthermore, we can significantly ask, using "good" in a more specific manner, "Is pleasure *intrinsically* good?" or "Is what one's society approves of and regards as having overriding social importance *morally* good?" Thus, even when the kind of normative concept is specified, the moral term in question still is not naturalistically definable. Finally, given the fact that naturalists are trying to define "good" in such a way that their definition, if correct, will show that there are some purely empirical terms that have the same meaning as "good," we must, to have good grounds for asserting such an equivalence, show that an ethical term and its proposed empirical equivalent cannot be used to form an open question. If, after careful reflection, it is possible for someone well acquainted with the language in question to assert that the question is open or even that he is unsure whether it is open or not, we are in no position to assert that the naturalistic definition works. (If the naturalist makes the equivalence a matter of stipulation, he has done something quite arbitrary.) We have very good grounds for believing that all simple naturalistic definitions allow open questions, and the more complex ones also appear to do so.

A more fundamental and perhaps more telling argument for naturalism consists in pointing out that the nonnaturalist assumes something that is quite questionable—that there are two distinct classes of terms: ethical terms and nonethical terms. But the nonnaturalist's distinction has little philosophic value, for no one has given a clear criterion for what counts as an ethical or "evaluative" term, as distinct from a nonethical term. This objection is a two-edged sword, for, if correct, we would have no basic naturalistic or empiricist language made up of terms, logical constants apart, standing for purely empirical realities; and thus we would have no way of knowing whether the naturalist's program could be carried out.

From the above it should be evident that naturalism has not been decisively refuted. If it were a correct metaethic, it would in nonsubjectivist forms show the objectivity and universality of moral discourse. What is, however, very questionable is whether naturalism can adequately account for the practical nature of moral discourse, and naturalism also denies the autonomy of moral claims.

Intuitionism. Intuitionists make negative points against naturalism, but they also develop positive contentions of their own. As much as they differ among themselves, they all agree that morality is autonomous: that there must be at least one primitive ethical term that is the vehicle for a nonnatural quality, relation, or concept. This primitive ethical term is indefinable, and the reality it stands for is an objective reality that we must cognize directly. We cannot prove that there is such a reality or confirm or disconfirm its existence by empirical observation. We are either directly aware of it or we are not. It is in this manner that we gain our fundamental knowledge of good and evil.

Moore took "good" as his primitive ethical term. Others have taken "right," "ought," or "fitting" as such a term. Still others have allowed two primitive terms, "right" and "good," but the fundamental point is that there must be at least one such term standing for a unique and unanalyzable object of thought that must simply be apprehended to be known.

There are different types of intuitionism—according to one variety, we intuit the intrinsic goodness of actions; according to another, what we intuit is the obligatory character of an act. Some intuitionists stress that we are directly aware of the rightness, goodness, or obligatoriness of specific actions or attitudes; others argue that we are directly aware only of the self-evidence of certain general, highly abstract principles of conduct. But they all agree that such truths are both necessary and synthetic and that to say we intuit their truth is to say we have a direct, nonsensory, cognitive awareness of the necessary truth of certain moral claims.

If someone reports that he is not aware, on honest reflection, of such a nonnatural characteristic when he judges something to be good or obligatory, but only of a feeling that so and so is good or a feeling that something is obligatory, it will not do for the intuitionist to reply that he must then be morally blind, for, unlike color blindness, there is no agreed-upon criterion for moral blindness. We have physical tests for tone deafness or color blindness, but not for moral blindness. The intuitionist claims to be aware of a nonnatural quality or relation—to see, in a way that is not literal observing, that so and so is good or ought to be done. But what counts as a nonnatural quality? To be told it is not an empirical quality or relation, directly or indirectly given as a sense constituent, is not to be told what it is. The intuitionist has not given us an intelligible description of what it is we must apprehend in order to apprehend a nonnatural quality or relation. His account has all the defects of the *via negativa*. If we are told we just see that it is wrong to kill little children, in the same way that we see that two plus two equals four, the reply must be that we do not see this to be so in a way analogous to our apprehension of logical or mathematical truths; "two plus two equals four," like all logicomathematical truths, is analytic, while the moral statement, as intuitionists are the first to insist, is synthetic.

There are, it is argued, two even more fundamental errors common to both naturalism and intuitionism. They both operate with a very inadequate conception of how language functions. According to both theories, a word,

logical constants apart, is meaningful if, and only if, it stands for something. Naturalists claim that a meaningful word stands for a natural characteristic(s) and intuitionists, noting that it does not seem to stand for a natural characteristic(s), conclude, since moral terms are obviously intelligible, that it *must* stand for a nonnatural characteristic. The mistake is to assume that, to be intelligible, a term must stand for something. Not all terms, not even all adjectives, are property-ascribing words. "Good" and "right" do not stand for properties at all or, more conservatively, do not simply stand for properties, natural or nonnatural; they have a different but distinctive role in that form of social intercourse we call language.

The second error (or alleged error) common to naturalism and intuitionism is that neither can account properly for the practical functions of moral discourse. To know that one ought to do something involves setting oneself to do it. Moral utterances guide conduct and alter behavior, but naturalism and intuitionism in effect treat moral utterances as property-ascribing theoretical utterances. To regard moral utterances in such a way is to miss their distinctive function. In using moral language we do not, at least typically, tell someone *that* something is the case; we tell someone *to make* something the case. If knowledge of good and evil were simply an apprehending that something is the case, then it would remain inexplicable why to know that one ought to do x is to know that one must, if one is a moral agent, *try* to do x.

Noncognitivism. When we consider the common difficulties in naturalism and intuitionism, some form of noncognitivism is likely to become an attractive possibility. ("Noncognitivism," although it has become a fairly standard label, is in a way an unfortunate one, for it suggests what few noncognitivists would affirm, namely that there is no knowledge of good and evil.) Noncognitivists deny that moral utterances are simply, or sometimes even at all, purely property-ascribing utterances, and they likewise deny that moral terms simply or at all stand for characteristics of any sort. We must not, noncognitivists argue, confuse fact-stating and normative discourse. What makes an utterance normative is precisely its dynamism, its trigger function; a normative utterance is an utterance that guides conduct and molds or alters attitudes.

Noncognitivists differ greatly among themselves. Some model moral utterances on imperatives; others model them on decisions of principle, resolutions, or declarations of intention; still others believe that what marks an utterance as moral or normative is that it expresses the attitudes of the speaker and tends to evoke or invite similar attitudes in the hearer. Noncognitivists with greater philosophical sophistication contend that moral utterances are multifunctional. Some function in one way and some in another, but the sophisticated noncognitivists continue to contend that all the various primary functions of moral utterances are always, directly or indirectly, action-guiding.

Some, including A. J. Ayer, maintain that it is misleading to say that statements made by using moral utterances are true or false, for they are not factual statements; others, including C. L. Stevenson, maintain that in virtue of their declarative form and in virtue of the fact that "true" and "false" are typically used to back up or warrant declarative statements of various types, it is perfectly proper to follow everyday usage and say of such moral statements that they are true or false. But all noncognitivists agree that fundamental moral judgments cannot be verified (confirmed or disconfirmed) and that we can never have an a priori or purely conceptual warrant for claiming that fundamental moral conflicts can be resolved by empirical methods alone. It will always remain at least a logical possibility that we might agree about all the facts and still disagree about what we ought to do or about what is good or worth having for its own sake. On these issues the noncognitivists side with the intuitionists against the naturalists. But like the naturalists they deny that we have any intuitive knowledge of good and evil. Fundamental moral claims are not matters of knowledge but expressions of attitude, decisions of principle, or declarations of intention. Hence the label noncognitivist. The intent of moral language is not simply to describe what is the case but to prescribe that something be done or to evaluate something that is, has been, or may be the case.

Since not all noncognitivist views are the same, different difficulties will apply to different views. If the noncognitivist is an emotivist and contends that to be a moral utterance, an utterance must be attitude-expressing and attitude-evoking, a question immediately arises about the logical status of this claim. Presumably it must be analytic. (If it were empirical, it would not show what makes an utterance a moral utterance.) The statement "His attitudes and emotional reactions are those of a segregationist, but he knows segregation to be wrong" does not appear to be self-contradictory, and as children we are not taught any rule of language to the effect that an utterance must be attitude-expressing to be moral. We know that there is a close link between attitudes ("the passions") and morality, but this is perfectly compatible with a cognitivist metaethic. How, then, do we know that moral utterances must be attitude-expressing? We are tempted to say that moral dispute is at an end when, and only when, we attain agreement in attitude; but this does not appear always to be so. Two people may have the same attitudes concerning the white power structure vis-à-vis Harlem; they both, let us say, disapprove of the behavior of the city officials, yet they still disagree morally about the issue because they have different reasons for their disapproval of the city officials. And it is not the case that any consideration that leads the hearer to share the expressed attitude of the speaker will *ipso facto* count, as the emotivists claim it will, as a morally relevant reason for adopting that attitude. Emotional appeals and nonrational persuasion are irrelevant in moral reasoning. What motivates one to act in a certain way or to adopt a certain attitude may or may not justify one in so acting, and what justifies one in doing it may or may not so motivate one to do it.

Other noncognitivists, such as Hare, argue that moral utterances are much more like imperatives than expressions of attitude. It is their primary logical function to tell us to do something, to guide our actions; whether or not they actually succeed in persuading us or goading us into so acting, they still remain perfectly intelligible moral

utterances. But there are also difficulties in such an imperativist view. Imperativists claim that all moral utterances entail imperatives, but while "You ought to vote Socialist" functions very like an imperative and entails "Vote Socialist," no imperative is entailed by "He ought to have voted Socialist" or "He will come to appreciate that he ought to vote Socialist." Furthermore, the contradictories of moral utterances entailing imperatives do not themselves entail imperatives, although surely the moral terms in both utterances have the same meaning.

Besides, whether we liken moral utterances to imperatives, resolutions, declarations of intention, or decisions of principle, it remains the case that the "ought" in the antecedent clause of conditional sentences does not have any of the above noncognitive functions. The "ought" in "If he ought to be told, he should be told now" has the same meaning as the "ought" in "He ought to be told," but the "conditional ought" clearly does not entail an imperative, declare an intention, or express a resolution. Thus, the "ought" in the latter sentence cannot have as an essential part of its meaning any such function.

Lastly, any form of noncognitivism would in effect undermine the objectivity of moral judgments. (This should not be taken to mean that noncognitivists do not have moral principles they are willing to stand by or that they advocate that everything be permitted. To take the remark in this way is to confuse metaethical claims with normative ethical ones.) We have seen that the minimal requirement for the objectivity of a judgment is that it can be interpersonally validated; in the case of moral judgments, this means that an objective moral judgment is a judgment that every rational agent will accept if he reasons disinterestedly, is apprised of the nonmoral facts, and takes the matter to heart. But if moral utterances are essentially resolutions to act in a certain way, declarations of intention, expressions of attitude, or decisions of principle, it follows that moral utterances do not, given such a logical form, require such interpersonal agreement. A man may resolve or decide, even as a matter of principle, to do what no one else does or would resolve or decide to do after careful reflection, and yet there would be nothing logically inappropriate about his decision or resolution.

MORAL REASONING

Those philosophers who tried to bridge the "is/ought gap" were trying, although perhaps in a mistaken way, to do something that is very important. It is a fact of moral reasoning that certain facts are good reasons for moral judgments. Without at all committing oneself to ethical naturalism, and without denying the insight of the noncognitivists that one cannot demonstratively prove or inductively establish fundamental moral claims, it remains the case that we do conclude from "He is my father" that "He has a right to special consideration from me" or from "He promised to return" that "He is under an obligation to return." It is an obvious fact of moral discourse that we give reasons for moral claims, that these reasons are typically statements of fact, and that sometimes we can conclude that if a given factual statement, F, is true, then a certain moral conclusion, E, follows.

It does not, however, follow from this that there is no logical gap between facts and norms. Such ethical conclusions hold only in virtue of certain canons of relevance; when these canons of relevance are explicitly stated, they will be found to invoke normative principles. Moreover, there must be some normative principles used in our judgments of relevance that will not be derived from, or even made in accordance with, other higher-order normative principles.

Such neonaturalists as Philippa Foot and A. I. Melden are perfectly right in claiming that certain matters of fact constitute good and sometimes even conclusive reasons for acting in a certain way, *given* the assumption of the conceptual structures constitutive of our ordinary moral reasoning. But in accepting these we accept a structure that has as constitutive elements certain normative principles, such as "Similar cases are to be treated similarly," "In deciding what is to be done, every person concerned has a right to equal consideration," and "There can be no arbitrary inequalities." It is in virtue of certain very general but still normative principles that we can derive certain moral conclusions from certain factual premises and that certain factual statements become good reasons for certain moral conclusions.

It is also crucial to see, as such philosophers as Stephen Toulmin, Kurt Baier, and Marcus Singer have stressed, that in morality, as in science, we have a limited but distinctive mode of reasoning with its own pragmatic point. If we are ever to understand the nature of moral reasoning, we must not simply fix our attention on the meaning of moral terms or expressions taken in isolation; we must seek to grasp the over-all point or rationale of the discourse in question. Subservient to the over-all purposes for which we have the discourse, each mode of discourse has its distinctive procedures, and in accordance with these procedures we judge whether something is or is not good evidence for or a good reason for a certain claim. Without such ground rules we cannot correctly speak of the evidence or reasons for or against any contention.

If we examine actual moral discourse when it is being conducted, we will come to see that there is a complicated network of procedural rules connected with morality that limit and partially specify what can count as good reasons for a moral claim. Furthermore, if we reflect on why we have a morality, any morality at all, moral discourse and moral action will be seen to have a point; and the procedural rules that help define morality will be found to be instrumental to the continuance of this activity.

Moral discourse is a form of practical discourse. Moral questions are fundamentally questions about what we are to do. The primary intent of moral utterances is not to assert that so and so is the case, but to advise, admonish, suggest, proclaim, or protest that so and so be done. Moral knowledge is knowledge about what to do or about what attitude to take toward what has been done, is being done, or is intended. In pointing out that moral judgments do not assert something to be the case and thus are not confirmable, Ayer and the emotivists in effect are showing that moral utterances are not theoretical statements about what is the case but are bits of practical discourse about what to *make* the case. As we want and need to know

what is the case, so we want and need to know what to do. Indeed, we could not know what to do if we did not know something about what is the case—something about how the world goes—but we also need to know what to do. There are no grounds for assuming that questions about what we should do are more subjective than factual questions or that moral language is more untrustworthy than theoretical discourse. It is just different. In life we need both these activities and the diverse uses of language embedded in them.

Many might concede that morality has its distinctive procedural rules and still object that this does not give it the required objectivity. It has been argued that while the procedural rules connected with the making of factual judgments are cross-culturally valid, the procedural rules connected with moral discourse are purely conventional.

Moral rules, such a conventionalist or metaethical relativist will argue, are rationalizations of custom. Morality is constituted by certain social rules and the actions and attitudes appropriate to those rules. Any attempt to appraise these rules as sound or unsound will at best be question-begging.

In challenging metaethical relativism, we must show how it is possible to assert correctly and objectively that certain social practices either are or are not morally justifiable; and in a like manner we must show how it is possible to assert correctly that the whole moral order either does or does not have a rational claim to our assent.

The metaethical relativist is indeed on solid ground when he points out that morality is a rule-governed activity that guides conduct and molds and alters actions and attitudes. In determining the content and structure of a strange tribe's morality, we would have to discover the social practices to which that tribe was most deeply committed and elicit the rules defining these social practices. We would have to know much more as well, but we would have to know at least that.

Morality necessarily involves a cluster of practices. "Practices" here refers to social activities that contain a set of rules which specify rights and duties, permissible and impermissible steps. The rules that so define a practice we may call procedural rules. Games and ceremonies are good examples of practices. If in playing baseball I hit into center field, I cannot wonder if I really must go to first before I go to second, but I can deliberate about whether to hold up at first or try for second. That a runner must go to first before going to second is a rule of procedure which helps define the practice of baseball. Although not so strictly codified, moral behavior is also a rule-governed activity, a complex cluster of practices with procedural rules that define those practices.

Promising is one such practice. It involves public rules of procedure, rules that are readily taught. We can say that a person has made a promise only when he acts in accordance with certain procedural rules. If I have promised to meet a friend, it is not open to me to excuse my failure to meet him simply on the ground that I had subsequently thought it through and decided that slightly more good would be served by not meeting him. I cannot offer that excuse and still act in accordance with the practice of promise-keeping, any more than I can have three strikes and still be at bat. We could, of course, deliberately change the practice, but given the practice and given the fact that I accept the practice, there are some things I must do. My failure to do these things would, exceptional circumstances apart, show that I either did not really accept the practice or did not properly understand it. There are, of course, legitimate excuses, but the very rules of the practice itself specify what is to count as a legitimate excuse for not acting in accordance with the practice. There are, for example, conditions that excuse fulfilling a promise, but they are built into the very practice of promise-keeping.

If my action falls under an existing practice that I accept, and if my action does not also fall under a conflicting practice that I also accept, then I have no moral alternative, while accepting the practice, but to try to act in accordance with it. In a contrasting situation where conflicting practices are involved, I must see if there are any principles which I accept that give some moral priority to one or another of the conflicting practices. Where there is such priority, I must acknowledge it and try to act in accordance with it. There are indeed moral questions that cannot without strain and ambiguity be answered by subsumption under any procedural rule, but this does not disconfirm the claim that there are practices which specify and limit how we are to act while acting as moral agents.

What has been said so far might be taken as giving aid and comfort to metaethical relativism, but so far only a very partial account of moral reasoning has been given. The justification of moral beliefs does not terminate in the statement of rules that partially codify our social practices; we can reason about and ask for a justification of the practices themselves. There is a whole battery of objective tests for evaluating social practices, and they are clearly recognizable as a part of our first-order moral discourse. Understanding what morality is involves knowing how to use these procedures for appraising social practices.

Morality has developed in such a way that it is now correct to say that in morality we are concerned with the reasoned pursuit of the interests of all rational agents. That is to say, from the moral point of view, we are concerned with the most extensive welfare of all concerned. When, as with the Nazis or the segregationists, there is both an overriding of some individuals' rights and a pretension to moral rectitude, this oppression is accompanied by rationalization. The victims are thought of in such a way that they are not regarded as fully human, that is, they are not regarded as rational agents capable of the sensibilities of moral agents. That even Nazis and segregationists are committed to act in accordance with such a conception of morality is evidenced by the fact that they must depersonalize their victims in order to justify to themselves their treatment of them. From the moral point of view, we are concerned with the most extensive welfare of all persons concerned. In theory, such racists do not reject such a principle but through rationalization convince themselves that Jews or Negroes are not fully human.

Terms such as "human welfare" and "well-being" are not so vague that certain states of affairs could not be said to be incompatible with them. Social practices that drastically frustrate our need for sleep, food, sex, drink, or elimination; or practices that pointlessly diminish self-esteem,

the appreciation of and concern for others, creative employment and diversion; or practices that seek to destroy our tendencies to prize integrity, conscientiousness, knowledge, and the contemplation of beautiful things are practices which must be said to be morally inferior to social practices which do not so frustrate us. This is not to deny the obvious, namely that there are sharp disagreements over the value of some things and that there is even considerable disagreement about the moral priority of those very things we universally prize, approve of, or admire. But even with our less than exact conception of human welfare, we can still show that there are many sets of social practices both imaginable and actual that intelligent and correctly informed people judge without equivocation to be morally inferior to comparable sets of practices. As our knowledge of man develops and as our superstitions—particularly our religious superstitions—diminish, it is reasonable to expect that moral deliberation will enable us to achieve a greater understanding of and agreement about those attitudes and styles of behavior that are taken to be desirable or admirable.

There is a further procedural rule to be considered. In a moral situation we cannot be concerned only with the maximum welfare; we must also be concerned with the welfare of everyone involved. Quite independently of what we judge human welfare to be, these distinctively human values must, from a moral point of view, be distributed as equitably as possible to all the people involved. If I decide I have a right to do x, I must, if I am reasoning morally, be prepared to grant that others relevantly like me and similarly situated have a right to do x as well. As Marcus Singer has shown in his *Generalization in Ethics* (1961), what count as "relevantly like me" and as "similarly situated" cannot be specified apart from a determinate context. Too much depends on who I am and what I am doing, but in determinate contexts there frequently are criteria for an objective determination of these matters.

It is also a procedural rule of morality that the moral agent (as well as the moral critic) must, in making moral judgments, try to assume the viewpoint of an impartial but sympathetic observer. *Ideally*, moral judgments are made in the light of full knowledge and appreciation of the relevant facts; and they *must* be made in the light of the facts that the moral agent can be reasonably expected to have in his possession when he makes the judgment. In making moral judgments we must attempt to make impartial judgments in the light of the relevant facts, using the relevant consideration-making beliefs; but to gain the moral insight that mature morality requires, we should also, before rendering judgment, vividly imagine and emphatically rehearse and review what we know. We should strive to enter unreservedly into the feelings and attitudes of the persons involved in the action; we should seek to see the situation as they see it. After this exercise in imagination, we should then make our moral appraisals as impartial but understanding observers. The attempt to view the situation impartially is a minimum requirement for correct moral appraisal, but mature moral thinking requires sympathy and imagination as well. In utilizing these methods, we have additional checks on our moral beliefs. Any man who will take the trouble to attend carefully to moral discourse will find procedures for its critical appraisal and correction built into its very use.

We have tried to show that while morality involves reasoning in accordance with certain practices, there remain generally acknowledged ways of appraising these practices. This being so, metaethical relativism or subjectivism cannot be true.

The metaethical relativist or subjectivist may well claim by way of rebuttal that all these tests are conventional and that the rationality of the whole moral enterprise is spurious. Only our conditioned virtue—our psychological involvement with morality—blinds us to the fact that it is merely a matter of convention or arbitrary decision whether we accept the requirements of the moral order or become nonmoral rational egoists.

Against the conventionalist claim one can point out that there are good Hobbesian reasons for rational and self-interested people to accept the moral point of view. A rational egoist will naturally desire the most extensive liberty compatible with his own self-interest, but he will also see that this is most fully achievable in a context of community life where the moral point of view prevails. Thus, in a quite nonmoralistic sense of "reasonable," it is reasonable for men, even self-interested men, to acknowledge that it is better for people to behave morally than amorally or immorally.

It is not the case that there is no logical limit to what could count as a valid moral judgment. If what we have claimed is correct, there are unequivocal material procedural rules that help define morality. They limit the scope of what counts as a moral judgment, and they have a rational point. Thus, under certain conditions certain moral judgments are objectively true and others are false. That is to say, there are certain moral truths that do not at all depend on the personal idiosyncrasies or cultural perspective of anyone but would be affirmed by any rational agent apprised of the relevant facts. If this is so, neither metaethical relativism nor any form of subjectivism can be an adequate account of moral reasoning. Although moral utterances express attitudes and have a moving appeal, moral reasoning remains a rule-governed activity with an objective rationale.

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KAI NIELSEN

ETHICS, TELEOLOGICAL. See TELEOLOGICAL ETHICS.

ETHICS AND ECONOMICS. See ECONOMICS AND ETHICAL NEUTRALITY.

ETHICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY. See EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS, PARALLEL BETWEEN.

ETHICS AND RELIGION. See RELIGION AND MORALITY.

EUCKEN, RUDOLF CHRISTOPH (1846–1926), German philosopher of life, was born in Aurich, East Friesland. He studied philology and philosophy at the University of Göttingen; after attaining his doctoral degree, he taught several years at Frankfurt Gymnasium. In 1871 he became professor of philosophy at the University of Basel, and in 1874 at Jena, where he remained until his death. In 1908 he received the Nobel prize in literature.

Eucken was not a systematic philosopher. He began with life as man experiences it. Life inevitably tends to organize into "systems of life" that are organic or institutional. The function of philosophy is to make the meaning of each system explicit and, by explicating each, to raise the question, Which is to be preferred? But philosophy does not merely explicate; it also helps to transform existing life systems. Men assess these explications practically, in terms of their fruitfulness for life or for a particular life system. Each man chooses a life system, but he does not choose one simply for himself. Every act of such choosing inevitably involves other men. There is no escape for any man from this social involvement.

Life is a process, an evolution; it cannot be contained within the boundaries of any philosophy or life system. The strains and stresses created when life breaks its established boundaries raises the deep need for a new philosophy or new philosophies, and inevitably men develop them. Eucken believed that every significant new philosophy is more comprehensive and clearly defined than any past philosophy.

The elaboration of new philosophies comes only through action (i.e., activism), through man's relentless affirmation of life—an affirmation which recognizes both the good and evil inherent in life. No significant philosophy is ever purely intellectualistic, for life is more than an idea or a theory. At its best, life is creative energy bursting into expression and molding past and present experience into a higher, more spiritual unity and order. For Eucken, life is neither noological nor psychological nor cosmological; its basis and meaning are to be found in man.

Life in man is self-conscious; as such, it goes beyond the subjective individual to bind together all conscious beings. Through this transcendence, it becomes the "independent spiritual life," or man reaching through action toward the absolute truth, beauty, and goodness. This "independent spiritual life" is attained only as personality is developed, but it is never a final achievement, since it is always a process that evolves as history. It is not rooted in the external world but in the soul, and it manifests itself more and more completely as the soul becomes independent of this world, self-willed yet subordinate to the ultimate trinity of truth, beauty, and goodness. These ultimates are not theoretical abstractions; they are concrete human experiences that push man beyond cosmic nature to something transcendentally spiritual.

Man has his beginning in nature, but through his soul evolves beyond it. His soul raises questions such as "Why?" and "Whence?" and opposes nature at all points. His soul seeks to become timeless and above nature, even as it feels helpless in the grasp of nature. In spite of this feeling of helplessness, it continues to seek freedom—a freedom realized through the creation of a consistent philosophy that makes possible man's physical and spiritual survival. For Eucken, thought is not something intrinsic to itself but a means, or organ, of life itself.

The need for a new philosophy, Eucken felt, arises from two social conditions—modern man's drive for a "broader, freer, cleaner life, a life of greater independence and spiritual spontaneity" and his drive for a "naturalistic culture . . . which limits all its activity to the world around us" (*Can We Still Be Christians?*, p. 51).

The first drive provides modern man with a basis for radically transforming classical Christianity. Man's new problems, created by science, transcend the theological and ritualistic solutions that Christianity offered for millenniums. The eternal contribution of Christianity is its religious affirmation of universal redemption. But redemption must be combined with new elements of faith (science as the true complement of religion; religious democracy, or the political equality of all religions before man; complete