SPEAKING OF MORALS

Kai Nielsen

THERE HAS OF LATE been an abundance of talk about morality
or values. From the Sunday Supplement to the technical
review, articles on this topic have, in one form or another,
issued from social scientists, psychologists, philosophers, theo-
logians, novelists, and even sports writers. Some of this talk
has been wild, some obscure, some excruciatingly technical,
and some even clarifying. People from different disciplines
have tried to communicate and understand each others' tech-
niques and discoveries. The principals themselves have not
always been free from confusion, particularly when they have
gone outside their professional niche to try to assimilate and
then utilize the work done elsewhere. And the concerned
reader, not too surprisingly, has been perplexed and uncon-
vinced. There is, of course, no royal road to clarity, but I
believe that attention to some frequently unnoticed and un-
considered distinctions among kinds of talk about morality
could make the way easier.

I

Twentieth-century analytic philosophers have frequently dif-
ferentiated the various activities that go on when morality is
discussed by distinguishing between morals or normative
ethics, on the one hand, and meta-ethics or analytic ethics,
on the other. Morals or normative ethics is morality *per se*.
Moral statements or normative ethical statements (from now
on I shall use them interchangeably) are actual moral claims
and moral prescriptions. A moral statement is literally a speci-

414

men of moral discourse. A normative ethic is an actual code or system of morality. A meta-ethical statement is a statement *about* the nature or uses of moral discourse or, more broadly, about the meanings of moral concepts.

The above distinctions can be made clearer by some examples. In their usual contexts, (*a*), (*b*), (*c*), and (*d*) below are examples of moral discourse.

(*a*) Fred, you ought not to abuse your privileges here.

(*b*) All men have the right to life, liberty, and security of person.

(*c*) There ought to be no appeal to intuition in making moral decisions.

(*d*) Pleasure is the only thing that the really wise man ought to seek.

The following are clear cases or paradigms of what philosophical analysts have called meta-ethical discourse:

(*e*) Moral utterances are cognitive and true or false.

(*f*) Moral utterances are non-descriptive and express attitudes.

(*g*) Good reasons in morals are always persuasive reasons.

(*h*) Moral discourse is practical discourse.

It should be clear that (*e*) through (*h*), though distinct from each other, are radically different from (*a*) through (*d*), though how to describe or characterize this difference may not be at all clear at first glance. But a difficulty in *saying how* they are distinct should not blind us to the fact that they are distinct and paradigmatic of what is meant by "moral discourse," on the one hand, and "meta-ethical discourse," on the other. We often know what something means or how it is distinct from something else without being able to *say* what it means or say exactly how it is distinct from something else. We know how to use certain words without being able to give the correct analysis of the meaning of these words. But it would not be possible to give an analysis of these words if we did not first know how to use them.

If, for example, we were to characterize in general the difference between those things we call chairs and those things we call sofas, we might have a similar difficulty, though we would have no difficulty at all in picking out examples of chairs and sofas. There would indeed be borderline cases, but there would also be clear cases that are definitive of what we mean by something's being a chair or a sofa. This inability to say exactly wherein chairs and sofas are distinct does not, of course, mean that the distinction between chairs and sofas is illusory. It means rather that the words "chair" and "sofa" and most of our ordinary words, unlike the words "triangle" and "rhomboid," do *not* signify a set of properties which are common to and distinctive of all the entities for which these words stand. But this does not prevent us from using them with perfect ease. Now, the distinction between moral discourse or normative ethical discourse and meta-ethical discourse is similar in the above indicated respect to the distinctions between chairs and sofas. There are borderline cases but there are also clear cases of each. (*a*) through (*d*) are clear cases of normative ethical discourse and (*e*) through (*h*) are clear cases of meta-ethical discourse.

A difficulty with this classification emerges when we realize that *some* meta-ethical statements can also be moral statements. This can best be seen from an example. If I say, "We *ought* not to use sentences like 'All men ought to be treated equally before the law', because such sentences look like scientific laws without being scientific laws," the sentence enclosed in double quotes is a normative ethical sentence. The use of "ought" tips us off here. I am saying that we ought not to use lawlike-sounding moral sentences. But it is also clearly meta-ethical in virtue of being about the use of the normative ethical sentence which is enclosed in single quotes, viz., 'All men ought to be treated equally before the law'. If someone persists in demanding an answer to the question whether the sentence is really meta-ethical or normative ethi-

cal, I can only point out that his question is absurd and that there is no answer to be had. The "or" in his question is not being used in an exclusive sense. In some respects the sentence mentioned above is meta-ethical (it is about a moral sentence), and in some respects it is normative ethical (it makes a moral claim itself). But the admission of such a class of sentences does not blur the distinction between normative ethical and meta-ethical sentences, for the distinction still remains between talking about the uses of moral discourse and making moral claims. Sentences like our example above do both jobs, but their distinguishable functions in the same sentence are evident. I shall call such sentences normative meta-ethical sentences and I mention them here only to put them aside. In this essay I shall be concerned only with those meta-ethical sentences that are themselves non-normative. For the sake of brevity I shall use the ellipsis "meta-ethical sentences," rather than "non-normative meta-ethical sentences."

Difficulties are not at an end, however. Not all discourse about moral discourse is meta-ethical discourse, and a good bit of the conceptual confusion that we fall into when we talk about morality or values arises from confusing kinds of talk about moral discourse. The activities marching under the flag "morality" are protean, and the ways of talking about morality are manifold.

II

To try to get clearer about these diverse activities and about the distinction between normative ethics and meta-ethics, I shall take a new tack. Note the following list of rather divergent activities that have frequently been subsumed under the label "ethics" or "morals." These different activities have at various times and for various people been regarded as a part of moral philosophy. I shall consider this list and then

try to show how the distinctive concerns of the normative ethicist and the meta-ethicist fit into these widely separated activities. I shall also indicate the correct logical cupboard for the generalizations about morality made by the biologist, psychologist, or social scientist.

My list is as follows:

1. The making of actual moral decisions.
2. Preaching, advising, or moralizing.
3. Searching for moral wisdom and ideals.
4. The attempt to justify or validate these ideals or ulti-mate standards.
5. The technology of the good life.
6. Descriptions and/or explanations of moral experience.
7. An examination of the logic of moral discourse.

Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 fall under what I have called normative ethics or morals. No. 5 is partly a matter of applied science and partly normative ethics. No. 6 is strictly a scientific mat-ter, a matter to be investigated by the sciences of man. *Only No. 7 is what philosophical analysts have called meta-ethics.* Presented in such a skeletal manner it probably will not be clear just what any of the above seven categories will include or exclude. I shall try to make my ideas clearer by looking more closely at these categories.

Let us start by considering what is characteristic of the first four categories taken together, that is to say, what is char-acteristic of that discourse we call "normative ethical dis-course" or "moral discourse."

Moral discourse is practical discourse. It functions directly or indirectly to guide action. Normative ethical utterances answer the question "What should I do?" or "What ought he have done?" or "What is my duty?". They recommend or advise, "Do so and so," or "You ought to have avoided such and such." They ask, "What is right?", or "What is good?". They do not serve in this context as meta-ethical questions directed toward the meaning or function of the words them-

selves but rather as practical utterances used primarily to al-
ter behavior and solicit guidance.[1]

It remains true, however, that the activities I have listed
from 1 to 4 are also distinctive activities with their own pe-
culiar uses. Let us observe how this is the case by looking at
them *seriatim*.

To explain what is meant by 1, let me set forth a clear
example that I shall also regard as a paradigm case.[2] Mrs.
Jones, deliberately and after careful reflection on the prob-
able consequences of her proposed action, decides that the
best thing to do under the circumstances is to divorce Mr.
Jones. She says to her husband, "Fred, I've thought about
this a lot and I think for our sake and for the sake of our
children we ought to get a divorce." She has considered the
relevant factors. She has taken her interests, her husband's
interests, and the interests of her children into account. She
may have an intense emotional reaction when she announces
her intention, or again she may not—she may be just too
damned tired of the whole affair; but, at any rate, she ex-
presses a reasoned conviction and announces a course of ac-
tion that she intends to follow. Both Fred and the neutral
spectator would be not only surprised but thoroughly baffled
as to what she could mean if after dropping her bombshell
she didn't attempt to initiate a divorce, or at least explain
in one way or another why her expressed intention was not
followed by getting a lawyer, making an official separation,
etc.

Mrs. Jones's announcement to her husband is a paradigm

[1] P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1954), pp. 11-22,
95-104. Kai Nielsen, "The Functions of Moral Discourse," *Philosophical
Quarterly*, VII (July, 1957), pp. 236-48, and "Justification and Moral Reason-
ing," *Methodos*, IX, No. 33-4 (1957), pp. 98-111.
[2] A. G. N. Flew, "Philosophy and Language," and J. O. Urmson, "Some
Remarks Concerning Validity," in A. G. N. Flew, ed., *Essays in Conceptual
Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1956). For a recent discussion and exemplifica-
tion of this "paradigm case" procedure see Max Black, "Making Something
Happen," in Sidney Hook, ed., *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of
Science* (New York: New York University Press, 1958), pp. 15-30.

case of someone making an actual moral decision. Hordes
of model examples are at hand. "Your continual use of tran-
quilizers is bad, for it makes you a dependent person not
fundamentally different from a dope fiend"; "That is a prom-
ise you must keep, since Marty would suffer greatly if you
didn't"—these are very like Mrs. Jones's judgment in this
respect. But sometimes our moral decisions are of a more gen-
eral order. "Dope peddlers ought to get the hot seat" and "So-
cial fraternities are infantilizing and ought to be abolished"
are examples of these more general moral decisions.

It is difficult to describe the criteria which characterize 1.
I do not think we can say there are criteria which are com-
mon to and distinctive of all these moral judgments. It is
clear that, directly or indirectly, they are concerned with rea-
sonably specific actions or kinds of action taken by moral
agents. And it is also clear that even the most specific and
direct moral decisions are open to reflection even if they are
not always the immediate product of deliberation. It should
also be noted that philosophers *qua* philosophers do not focus
their efforts on 1; even the normative ethicist or moralist
finds that his primary orientation is toward a greater gen-
erality. Nonetheless judgments of this type are scattered
throughout the works of most philosophers, and they are fre-
quently found (though often in a rather unconscious fashion)
in the works of psychologists and social scientists. The an-
thropologist, John Gillin, for example, after explaining that
"a cultural system which provides only capricious and inade-
quate satisfaction of the child's basic needs during the first
two years of life or so may produce a fundamental insecurity
and anxiety which is never completely overcome in later life,"
goes on to make a moral judgment and to moralize: "In our
own children, it is essential that we *should* provide a firm
basic security in the infant, that his bodily needs *should* be
satisfied consistently, his developing social needs receive sys-
tematic response, and that such social discipline as is required

be administered with regularity."[3] Now I am not objecting
to this bit of common sense, but merely point out that here in
the middle of a technical article on culture and personality,
a moral judgment is made and some rather mild (and right-
minded) preaching engaged in.

Let us now examine 2. The example just cited from Gillin
should make it plain that frequently there is overlap between
1 and 2. It is not that the sentences listed as examples of 2
are so different from 1 as it is that their use is different,
though not without overlap. We make moral decisions our-
selves but we also sometimes advise others, and some of us
sometimes (in one way or another) preach and moralize.
Again there are clear paradigms. A student comes to me and
says: "I don't know whether I ought to stay in school or not.
There is trouble at home, I have migraine headaches, I'm
three chapters behind in bio and I'm flunking English." We
talk. We look over the relevant factors and I may give him
advice if I feel that I can. This may culminate in a moral
decision of my own that is also a piece of advice: "In view
of your grades, the situation at home, etc., I think perhaps
you ought to drop out." Or I may moralize to a group of
freshmen at "rushing" time, "Remember your Montaigne
on the real worth of others' approval. Make up your own
mind about what to do about fraternities."

We abuse the conventions of moral usage, if we give ad-
vice or preach what we ourselves would not be willing to do
or abide by if we were similarly placed. To ignore this con-
vention in giving "advice" or in "moralizing" is not only im-
moral but it also flaunts our presuppositions about talk that
can count as "moral advice," "moral advocation," and the
like.

It should also be noted that discourse of this sort is sprin-

3 John Gillin, "Personality from the Comparative Cultural Point of View,"
in Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray, ed., Personality in Nature, Society
and Culture (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948), p. 170 (italics mine).

kled throughout all except the most severely analytical trea-
tises. The Viennese logical empiricist. Moritz Schlick, for
example, moralizes to us when he tells us in the middle of
an analytical discussion on the relation of "freedom" to "re-
sponsibility" and "punishment" that the "view still often
expressed that it [punishment] is a natural retaliation for past
wrong, ought no longer to be defended in cultivated society;
for the opinion that an increase in sorrow can be 'made good
again' by further sorrow is altogether barbarous."⁴ Again,
I am not criticizing Schlick's perfectly acceptable normative
ethical conclusion; I only wish to point out that it does occur
in a meta-ethical treatise.

The dividing line between 2 and 3 is not always clear. 3 is
tentative in a way that 2 often is not. In searching for moral
wisdom we usually seek those moral appraisals which are in
some sense fundamental to us as human beings. 3 is one char-
acteristic activity of the *literati*, and philosophers until re-
cently have just assumed that it was *a part* of their activity;
Montaigne even goes so far as to suggest that it is the only
worthwhile philosophical activity. Montaigne's own writing
and the writings of such diverse figures as Pascal and Una-
muno, Shaw and Voltaire, Hardy and Strindberg, Tolstoy
and Ghandi, and even Russell and Keynes (in their non-
technical writings) exhibit this search for moral wisdom.

Again, I can make clear what kind of an activity 3 is by ex-
amples. Sophocles, viewing sternly the human condition, con-
cludes that no man should count himself happy until he is
dead; Matthew Arnold tells us that we can discover such
security as there is to be found only in love and human fellow-
ship; and Montaigne exhibits as a settled conviction that it
is not the Sophoclean sort of thing but "it is living happily,
that constitutes human felicity." Yet in a world "so stacked
against you," D. H. Lawrence and Hemingway conclude, we

⁴ Moritz Schlick, *Problems of Ethics* (authorized translation by David Rynin,
New York, 1939), p. 152.

can hardly attain that elusive thing, human happiness. In-
stead, we can and ought to live intensely, concentratedly;
Hemingway tells us in dramatic terms to have courage and a
sense of self-sufficiency in this alien and hostile world; Law-
rence tells us to live fully, rejoicing in our basic animal na-
ture. In each instance there is a search for moral wisdom—a
search for the wisest way we human beings ought to live and
die. It is this kind of activity that is covered by 3.

It is hard to characterize exactly the difference between 3
and 4 and at times they do overlap. It is frequently thought
that real moral wisdom will involve an ability to justify or
validate one's basic moral beliefs or attitudes. The morally
wise man will know they need not be accepted as the capri-
cious fiat of an arbitrary authority or as unquestioned Divine
Revelations; nor need they be merely an expression of the
whims of mortal will. In seeking moral wisdom we try to
understand the place of reason in morality, and we will, in
discovering this, come to understand in what way our funda-
mental moral principles are justified or rational, if indeed
they are justified or rational. To the extent that searching
for moral wisdom and ideals necessarily culminates in the
attempt to give a rational justification of these ideals, the
search for moral wisdom will *ipso facto* involve the attempt
to justify or validate one's fundamental moral principles.
This attempt characteristically involves deliberation and ar-
gumentation. But sometimes the search for moral wisdom
does not take this form at all. Dante and Tolstoy do not so
much argue as paint a picture of life for us. They make us
see in concrete detail what it would be like to live in certain
ways: we sense the perplexities and insights, the agonies
and joys, the despairs and attainments of being a certain kind
of person placed in certain human situations. The impulse
of these writers is not toward greater generality but toward
presenting, in a certain way, life in its specific involvements.
For example, we read *Swann's Way* or *The Magic Mountain*

and for at least a moment see our familiar world in a differ-
ent way, just as we might gaze at the stars every night and
remain unaware of the Big Dipper or Orion until an imagi-
native friend pointed them out. In a closely parallel vein
Montaigne and Gide try to understand themselves fully and
then communicate that understanding with utter candor.
In expounding what they believe is a wise approach to life,
they lead us to a better understanding of the question, "What
is Man?," but neither Montaigne nor Gide thinks much of
the philosopher's or scientist's attempts to justify basic moral
principles and ways of life, though, to be sure, they do not
think these things are entirely a matter of "how you feel"
or "what you will place your trust in." It is true that Mon-
taigne deliberates and argues in his *Essays* in a way that is
hardly characteristic of Proust or Mann, and thus he comes
closer than these novelists to 4, although he still speaks to
us in concrete detail about the foibles, fantasies, and deep-
lying wishes of the human animal. Montaigne does not, how-
ever, have the drive for generality and the attempt at syste-
matic statement and justification that characterize 4. The
search for rationally justified fundamental principles marks
4, while any search for moral wisdom and understanding
marks 3.

Category 4 is more distinctively the province of the tradi-
tional moral philosopher, though surely not his exclusive
province. Plato, Epicurus, Epictetus, St. Augustine, Bentham,
Mill, James, Dewey, and Russell have turned with consider-
able care to these problems of justifying our basic moral
ideals and standards. They have all done meta-ethics, too,
but they have been deeply concerned with giving some ra-
tional justification (in some sense of "justification") of the
basic principles or norms of human conduct. Bentham, for
example, argues in a complicated way that we ought always
to approve or disapprove of "every action whatsoever, accord-
ing to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or

diminish the happiness of the party [an individual or the community or segment thereof] whose interest is in question." He argues for it by appealing to our psychological honesty. The only thing we really desire for its own sake is the avoidance of pain and the maximizing of pleasure. Morality is an instrumental good—a necessary social device—for attaining this aim. Principles which purport to be in conflict with the principle of utility are (1) really not principles at all, or (2) they covertly presuppose the principle of utility as a more ultimate principle, as religious orthodoxy does when it argues that we ought not to allow the spread of utilitarianism because it is dangerous to morality and the community at large.[5] St. Augustine's procedure in Chapter XIX of *The City of God* is also typical of category 4. He starts by stating baldly—note, though, that he is also preaching—his ultimate moral principle: "Life eternal is the supreme good and death eternal the supreme evil." We have not the power in ourselves to live rightly, but only with God's help can sinful man survive. All earthly Epicurean, Stoic, or utilitarian ideals are "marvellously shallow." Augustine argues for this by reminding us vividly of the "miseries of this life." He asks, "Is the body of the wise man exempt from any pain which may dispel pleasure, from any disquietude which may banish repose?" St. Augustine, Platonist that he is, ironically questions the Platonic ideal that finds the supreme good in the fullest development of distinctively human traits: "and what kind of sense is it that remains when a man becomes deaf and blind? Where are reason and intellect when disease makes a man delirious? . . . And what shall I say of those who suffer from demoniacal possession? Where is their own intelligence hidden and buried while the malignant spirit is using their body and soul according to his own will? And who is quite sure that no such thing can happen to the wise man in

[5] These arguments are clearly stated in the first two chapters of Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London, 1789).

this life?" Human goods and ultimate goals, whether pleasure or self-realization, are bound to be failures, deceitful as they are proud. If, as Augustine says in effect, we seek our ultimate good in this life, we cannot but suffer the fate of Dr. John Faustus. The only satisfactory ideal for the restless, questing human animal is "Life Eternal."

These philosophical reasonings of Bentham and St. Augustine may be taken as models of that kind of normative ethical discourse that deals with the validation of ultimate moral principles. Note that here there is reasoning, deliberation, and (frequently) argumentation over the very fundamental principles of conduct and over an overall policy concerning how we are to act and what attitudes we are to take. This procedure marks it off as distinctively philosophical in a traditional sense of "philosophical." In fact, 4 is so characteristic of the moral philosopher that many traditional philosophers would probably claim that 4 alone is the moral philosopher's "proper function."

III

Let us turn now from these characteristic normative ethical activities to category 5, which, as I have remarked, is an amalgam, and in terms of our overall strategy of classification an anomaly. Let us see how this is the case. No. 5 is primarily a scientific question. It is a matter of discovering which means will most efficiently serve certain basic aims. If the basic aim is that of promoting the general happiness, and if we know what is to count as "happiness," it is largely a scientific question of what means will contribute most efficiently to the furtherance of this aim. If we bring up our children very strictly, will they rebel or develop aggressive personalities which will tend to lower the general happiness; or, is it necessary to bring them up in such a fashion that they will have a sufficiently strong sense of duty to be concerned to promote the general happiness? Questions of this kind are scientific

questions and can—in principle, at least—be answered most accurately by child psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and similar professionally trained people.

Now, it might be objected that this is a rosy picture of our social sciences. In contrast to physics, our social sciences are still in a medieval state. There is no well-accepted, well-developed body of theory available in the social sciences; and questions of moral technology, when they are of the general order of the ones mentioned above, have not been answered in an adequate fashion. To guard against this I added the qualifying phrase *"in principle, at least."* It may be the case that these questions have not been answered, but, logically speaking, they are empirical questions, and if we are to have anything more than an educated hunch about their truth or falsity we must get the answer through this scientific means. There is clearly no methodological road-block that would keep science from answering these questions.[6] They are empirical verifiable statements, though there is a question whether at present we can verify them. However, quite apart from this matter of principle, I think that to say that we have no scientific answers about questions of this type is to take too jaundiced a view of the present state of the social sciences. We know a lot more about the human animal now than we did before, and our knowledge is rapidly expanding.[7] We know a good deal about the developmental capacities of children and the effect of moral suasion on them.

I would hesitate, however, to say that these questions are entirely scientific. Often when we discuss such problems of moral technology, hidden conflicts arise over aims. Science

6 I have discussed this topic more fully in an article, "Reason and the Social Sciences," in a forthcoming issue of *Phylon.*

7 A sense of the integration and rapid development of the social sciences is well conveyed in the following publications: David Riesman, "Some Observations on Social Science Research," in his *Individualism Reconsidered* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954), pp. 467-83; John C. McKinney, "Continuities and Change in Modern American Sociology," *Centennial Review of Arts and Science,* I, No. 3 (Summer, 1957), pp. 303-29; and Torgny Segerstedt, "The Uppsala School of Sociology," *Acta Sociologica,* I (1955), pp. 85-119.

tells us we ought not to bring up a child with too harsh a discipline *if* we want him to develop into a human being who is neither compulsive nor anxiety-ridden. Science tells us that children tend to be psychologically healthier if breast-fed than bottle-fed. But suppose the child or infant has a mother that is too nervous to stand the noise and stir of a less severely disciplined child; or suppose we have a mother who for deeply neurotic reasons cannot stand to nurse her child. Here questions over ends arise as well as questions over means. Distinctively moral questions may well come into play, so that it is not at all clear that our question about what to do in these contexts is fully answerable by scientific considerations alone. Thus 5 is not exclusively a matter of science as is 6.

Six is purely a scientific question.[8] Descriptions and explanations of moral behavior are just as much within the realm of the behavioral sciences as are descriptions and predictions of sexual behavior or voting behavior. A purely descriptive account of moral behavior would list the acts or attitudes that an individual or tribe (or portion, thereof) *called* good and bad, right and wrong, permissible and obligatory. But science tries, whenever it can, to get beyond mere description and to develop laws that will explain the causes of the phenomena people observe. We are puzzled that sticks sometimes look bent in the water. Snell's law explains why. Similarly, when Freud offers us his account of the origin of moral consciousness, or Svend Ranulf attempts to account for the moral indignation of the middle class, they are trying to develop a causal explanation of why these things happen so that the apparently inexplicable will become explicable and predictable. Alf Ross's theory of "social suggestion" is a good example of this kind of causal explanation.[9] A descriptive account of our moral attitudes elicits the fact that our sense

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[8] This, however, does not make it unimportant for the moralist.

[9] Alf Ross, *Kritik der sogenannten praktischen Erkenntniss* (Copenhagen, 1933).

of obligation seems so natural and so much a part of us that we are inclined to believe it must be inherent in our very nature; and since one feels an obligation to duty when a conflict arises between duty and self-interest, the *sense* of moral obligation takes on a strangely solemn, objective, and demanding character. We speak of the moral law within, and we stand before the moral law in reverence and awe. It is something there can be no doubt about, for people generally (if their conditioning has been usual) have an intense emotional investment in morality. "Whatever be the *theory* of it," H. J. Paton remarks at the end of his criticism of emotivism, "I am as certain that cruelty is wrong as I am that grass is green or that two and two make four. If this certainty is merely contingent, then my whole universe is shaken."[10] We feel that we have obligations quite apart from our feelings or wishes about obligatory acts and that this binding, exacting categorical character of moral law cannot possibly be something which is primarily external. Its origin then, people are tempted to conclude, must be in our reason—perhaps in our "practical reason."

But simultaneously we feel that this objective basis is not altogether evident. Some of us even feel that it is mysterious or elusive. It would be the task of a normative ethicist to defend and articulate this "objective base" or to attack it. It would be the task of a meta-ethicist to explain what is meant by "practical reason" and what is meant by "objective basis" in a moral context.[11] But the job of a scientist trying to give a causal explanation of why people do in fact have these moral attitudes would be quite different. Alf Ross does just that. He points out that as a member of a social group an individual is subject to "social suggestion." When

[10] H. J. Paton, *In Defense of Reason* (London, New York: Hutchinson House, 1951), p. 212 (italics mine).

[11] P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics*, pp. 11-22, and Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), pp. 56-7, do this well for the former; and Paul Edwards, *The Logic of Moral Discourse* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1955), pp. 29-36, does this well for the latter distinction.

he is a child his parents, other adults, and older children around him try to create non-interested (non-selfish) secondary drives in addition to his own primary drives. They also try to create drives which inhibit some of the actions which his primary drives cause. This social suggestion is effected largely through the use of moral language. In one way or another children are bombarded with statements like, "Freddy, it was naughty of you to hurt little sister," "No, you must get dressed now!", "That hurt Mommie! You really shouldn't do it." Secondary drives are gradually developed. Children gradually learn to tell the truth even when they don't want to. They slowly develop genuine non-interested impulses. On good Pavlovian principles the impulse to tell a lie or to grab the last biscuit elicits the conflicting non-interested moral impulse not to. Once the conditioning has taken place, the original social suggestion is no longer necessary. People don't gobble the last biscuit when no one is looking, or if they do, they normally feel guilty about it. A conditioned response has been built up directly motivating us not to steal, not to ignore the interests of others, etc.

Alf Ross's explanation is one causal explanation for the origin of our *sense* of moral obligation and of a portion of our moral behavior. It is the behavioral sciences that can, in principle, most adequately furnish us with better and more systematically inclusive explanatory hypotheses of the type just mentioned. To develop reliable and systematic causal laws is surely one of the basic aims of science. The description and explanation of moral experience or behavior is clearly a scientific matter, and is distinct from both normative ethics and meta-ethics.

IV

It remains to characterize more adequately what is meant by meta-ethics or by 7 (viz., an examination of the logic of moral discourse). I need to make clear the nature of meta-

ethical talk about morality. Normative ethics is moral talk, and meta-ethical discourse speaks about the *uses* of moral talk. Yet some statements about moral talk are not meta-ethical statements. If I say, "Most people in the United States no longer use the phrase 'guilty party' or 'harmed party' with respect to a large number of divorced persons," my statement is about moral discourse but it is not a meta-ethical statement. Rather, it is a descriptive sociological statement about moral *talk*. It says that people do not use the phrases "guilty party" and "harmed party" in their descriptions of divorce as frequently as they once did. This kind of empirical generalization about moral language is very different from the generalization of the meta-ethicist when he says, for example, "The word 'guilty' doesn't denote or refer to some entity but expresses and evokes feelings." Accordingly, we must be careful to remember that not all talk about moral talk is meta-ethics, lest psychological and sociological descriptions and explanatory hypotheses be thought to be a part of meta-ethics. Meta-ethical statements, as all meta-linguistic statements, refer to the uses or meanings of the terms employed in the appropriate area of discourse. An examination of the uses of terms and statements has become a characteristic philosophic enterprise among analytic philosophers, and it was in effect practiced—though sometimes unwittingly—by most of the great classical philosophers.

Characteristically, scientific statements are statements about the world. A good scientist seeks to make true and important statements about atomic fission, cell structure, learning capacity, social mobility, and the like. He may even wish to make generalizations about the moral codes of the Yakut, Madison Avenue, or a college community. But he seeks to make true statements about the phenomena he is discussing. Philosophical analysis, on the other hand, examines the meaning of these and other (including non-scientific) statements. It wants to discover and analyze what makes certain statements meaningful and others meaningless. This kind of concern was

given great impetus by Bertrand Russell's work in logic and
the philosophy of mathematics. We learned that grammatic-
ally well-made sentences, utilizing quite ordinary vocabulary,
might *not* say anything that was either true or false in any
sense. They did not express commands, propositions, atti-
tudes, or anything intelligible at all. Russell's famous non-
sense sentence, "Quadruplicity drinks procrastination," comes
readily to mind. Thus, in addition to the dichotomy which
exists between "X is true" or "X is false," a new philosophi-
cally significant logical dichotomy was elicited between "X is
true-or-false (significant)" or "X is nonsensical." If we are
concerned with questions arising from this last dichotomy,
we are asking a meta-question. But, if I ask, "Is Otago Uni-
versity really in New Zealand or is it in Australia?" or "Does
excessive smoking really tend to cause cancer?" I am asking,
respectively, a common-sense and a scientific question. The
answer, "Otago is in Dunedin, New Zealand" and "There is
reasonable evidence that excessive smoking sometimes causes
cancer" are true statements making verifiable claims about
our world. Statements of this sort, even if they are as general
as, "The universe is expanding" or "Human beings fre-
quently rationalize" are not meta-statements, and it is not the
concern of philosophical analysts as analysts to make such
statements. Their function is to try to say why it is that such
statements are meaningful; and also to say why a string of
words like, "Snowing it is preposition the table desk," or a
grammatically well-made sentence like, "It is the raking pot
for all our sins," are absurdities. Meta-linguistic talk, whether
meta-ethical or otherwise, is talk about the uses or style of
functioning of linguistic expressions.

In the above examples, there is no real puzzle about which
kind of statement we are making or what kind of question
we are entertaining, but if I state the distinction in terms of a
live philosophical dilemma, both the distinction and the
problem about some matters of analysis may be apparent.

Both in and out of philosophy we worry about the place of

reason in morality. What is a good reason for a moral action? Or, are there any? And, if there are, what would one look like? When is a reason, Y, a good reason for a moral action, X? (And do not, in a Kierkegaardian vein, be put off by my X's and Y's—I am asking the very general and haunting question or apparent question: what is the nature of a good reason, any good reason, for a moral action, any moral action?)

To bring out how the meta-ethicists look at this problem, take the following formulation: "Y is a morally good reason for X." Now this formulation is systematically ambiguous, and can mean three characteristic things: (1) in itself, it can be a normative ethical statement; (2) it can be a sociological or factual statement of a non-moral variety—a part of category 6; or (3) it can be a meta-ethical statement. If it is used by a moral agent, critic, or adviser to make a moral claim, it is clearly a normative ethical statement, as when a moral adviser says, "You promised you would return the book today, so you really ought to do so." But the same phrase, "Y is a morally good reason for X," is frequently used in some discussions of morality simply to mean "Most people *say* Y is a morally good reason for X," as when a psychologist reports, "Most people say masturbation is harmful to a child's health, and thus, they conclude, it ought to be prohibited." This statement is true or false, and its truth or falsity can be discovered simply from what people *say*. In this respect (as well as in others), it differs very much from the normative ethical use of "Y is a morally good reason for X." But a meta-ethical use of "Y is a morally good reason for X" is altogether different from the sociological use or the normative ethical use, since a meta-ethicist asks this question in a different spirit from the sociologist or moralist. The meta-ethicist wants to know the *analysis* of "Y is a morally good reason for X." He is puzzled by the question, "What do we *mean* by a 'good reason' in ethics?" He may be perfectly satisfied that both as a matter of fact and as a matter of morals Y *is* a good reason for

X. Nevertheless, he can still be *philosophically* perplexed about the logic of the *expression* "Y is a good reason for X." He wants to know, "How is it a significant expression?" He is here asking a meta-ethical question about the significance of an utterance or, more accurately, of a type of utterance. "What are good reasons in ethics?" or "Is Y really a morally good reason for X?" is translatable, in his use, into "What is meant by 'good reasons' in 'ethics'?" or "Is 'Y' really a 'good reason' for 'X'?". He is trying to get clear about the implicit, unscheduled rules of use for such questions. His concern is with their meaning or function. He wants to know what is meant by "a morally good reason" in this context, and this is a very different question from questions of empirical science or practical moral or prudential deliberation and argument.

Both in this more philosophically exciting example and in the previously mentioned unexciting examples the same linguistic distinction holds. There are questions of truth and falsity or acceptability and non-acceptability, on the one hand, and there are questions about the meaning or sense of the expressions used, on the other. When the latter type of question is directed to moral discourse, I have called it a meta-ethical question, and statements about the *sense* of moral discourse I have called meta-ethical statements.

Though Russell saw no more than a local importance to the above distinction, Wittgenstein, in the period of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London, 1922), and the logical empiricists found in the above distinction the *leitmotif* for a distinction between philosophy and science.[12] As Ryle puts it:

> But Wittgenstein, as I construe him, and the Vienna Circle
> saw in this dichotomy the general clue that they require for
> the difference between science and philosophy. Science pro-

12 Joergen Joergensen, "The Development of Logical Empiricism," *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, II, No. 9 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 61.

duces true (and sometimes false) statements about the world;
philosophy examines the rules or reasons that make some state-
ments (like those of good scientists) true-or-false, and others
(like metaphysician's statements) nonsensical. Science is con-
cerned with what makes (significant) statements true or else
false; philosophy is concerned with what makes them signifi-
cant or nonsensical. So science talks about the world, while
philosophy talks about talk about the world.[13]

Scientific and common-sense talk are primarily about the
world, and philosophical analysis is talk about the uses or
meanings of this common-sense or scientific talk.[14] When the
common-sense talk is about morality, an examination of the
sense or meaning of it is meta-ethical talk.

V

There are two relatively obvious difficulties with what I have
said in sections I and IV. First, it may be objected that the
meta-linguistic task I have marked as the most distinctive
enterprise of philosophical analysis is or ought to be a part
of empirical linguistics. Secondly, it will be claimed by many
philosophers that their distinctive and essential business is not
meta-ethics at all but normative ethics, and that the current
fascination with meta-ethics is just a kind of complicated
fiddling while Rome burns.

The first objection might run: If meta-ethics is to be more
than mere speculation, it ought to be done by empirical
linguists in a systematic and scientific manner. Statements
about the uses of moral discourse remain empirical claims.
For a correct analysis of them we need to abandon the high
a priori road and utilize the descriptive procedures of anthro-
pological linguistics and (ideally) the hypothetico-deductive
procedures of the more advanced sciences. We need the spe-

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13 Gilbert Ryle, "Logic and Professor Anderson," *The Australasian Journal
of Philosophy*, XXVIII (December, 1950), pp. 150-1.
14 We now recognize, in a way the logical empiricists did not, that there
can be many very different ways of talking about the world.

cialist in linguistics—a Sapir, Whorf, Jespersen, or Bloomfield. Again the philosopher is supererogatory.

I would agree that meta-ethical statements are empirical statements about the functions of language. The critic, however, fails to note that they have a very different function than ordinary empirical statements about language. And the philosophical analyst's task is of a radically different nature than that of the specialist in linguistics. The meta-ethicist is not trying to map precisely and accurately the rugged terrain of moral discourse. His concern with moral discourse is therapeutic. As Hampshire puts it: "The painstaking description of actual, contemporary English or German idiom has so far had a largely negative and destructive purpose: to upset philosophical preconceptions about the necessary forms and functions of language."[15] For Wittgenstein this is the function of philosophy; philosophy is an *activity* devoted to the dispelling of conceptual confusions that arise from a failure to understand the workings of our language. Meta-ethics is concerned to untangle conceptual paradoxes arising from confusions about the functions of moral discourse. Hampshire has rightly emphasized that the philosophical analyst (and this includes the meta-ethicist) is not "concerned with a systematic classification of the different grammatical forms of language; the interest of contemporary philosophers in forms of speech neither is, nor should be, scientific or systematic."[16] Both philosophers and linguists make empirical generalizations, but for different reasons. Their jobs need not conflict, and may in fact complement each other; but they remain distinct tasks nonetheless. I shall now try to make this distinction clearer.

Part of the malaise of modern man (though not only of modern man) is conceptual, and it is here that the philosopher

[15] Stuart Hampshire, "Interpretations of Language: Words and Concepts," in C. A. Mace, ed., *British Philosophy in the Mid-Century* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 267.
[16] *Loc. cit.*

(including, of course, the meta-ethicist) can dispel or at least relieve these troubles. Human freedom and moral responsibility, for example, present a problem for many people. On the one hand, it seems clear to them that there are some objective obligations and that there are at least some acts for which we are sometimes responsible. To say that we are responsible for them means that in some sense we could have done otherwise than in fact we did do. On the other hand, if these people have read their Marx, Freud, or even their Watson and Skinner, or, if they have dipped deeply into Montaigne or Schopenhauer, or if they have been exercised by O'Neill or Strindberg, they may come to feel (occasionally, at least) the force of O'Neill's words: "None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be." [17] We can hardly be responsible for the formation of our characters, and if we have enough strength to alter our characters for the better, that is a matter of our good *fortune;* the poor fellow who can't was just unfortunate in his "family laboratory" and/or in his genetic inheritance. But then how can we rationally blame him or hold him responsible for what he does? How can we reasonably say that he could have done otherwise? If he *couldn't* have done otherwise, what meaning or what force is there to saying that he *ought* to have done otherwise? But, on the other hand, there are certain things we clearly ought to do. At least in some cases where a normal man cheats his business partner or runs off with his best friend's wife, we can hold him responsible and blameworthy.

This problem of human freedom and moral responsibility is one of the thickest and most perennial, most resistant philosophical problems. Meta-ethicists attack it by examining the sense of "freedom" or "he could have done otherwise" rele-

17 Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p. 53.

vant in moral contexts, and by examining what is meant by
"determinism" and what its limits are. They proceed by
examining the uses of these words in their habitual contexts,
noting particularly the mutual relations of these frequently
grouped words. The so-called Hume-Mill theory is one tradi-
tional way of curing the conceptual illness of the man who
feels that moral responsibility and determinism are both cor-
rect and incompatible.[18] The basic strategy consists in show-
ing that the opposite of "being free" is "being compelled" or
"being constrained," not "being determined." Though all the
acts of a man may be determined (unconsciously or other-
wise) he can still be free (in the relevant sense of "free"), they
argue, if he does what he wants because he wants to and not
because he is being compelled to do it. My point here is not
to enter into this thicket but only to illustrate what the meta-
ethicist is trying to do. He is trying to break or relieve a
certain conceptual dilemma or pressure, by reminding the
conceptually-bewildered and perhaps personally-bedevilled
man of the specific purposes toward which his language is di-
rected. His examination of the uses of moral discourse is al-
ways directed toward this practical end, while the empirical
linguist is concerned with a systematic and scientific classifica-
tion of our linguistic forms for their own sake.

At this point, someone might push the first general objec-
tion in a slightly different direction: granted that meta-
ethicists generalize about the uses of moral language for dif-
ferent purposes, would not a true science of grammar give
us a systematic and scientific way of blocking the odd philo-
sophical puzzles that arise from a misunderstanding of moral
discourse? Perhaps it would. It is hard to tell ahead of time.
Perhaps there will come a happier day when this kind of

18 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London, 1739), Book II, Part
III, sections 1 and 2, and John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic* (London, 1843),
Book VI, Chapter II. For a brief but able treatment of Marx and Freud in
the light of the Hume-Mill theory, see Richard Peters, "Freud, Marx, and
Responsibility," *The Listener,* LVII (No. 1474, June 27, 1957), 1031-2; LVIII
(No. 1475, July 4, 1957), 16-7; and LVIII (No. 1476, July 11, 1957), 54-6.

analysis is no longer a part of philosophy, and meta-ethics of
the kind I have described need no longer exist. Psychology
and symbolic logic have flown the coop, and some day lin-
guistic analysis may, as well—though that day is hardly here
as yet. In this context I think I can scarcely do better than
quote from a recent brilliant lecture by J. L. Austin. Follow-
ing an astute meta-ethical analysis, Austin remarks:

> Reflecting on the arguments in this lecture, we may well ask
> ourselves whether they might not be as well assigned to gram-
> mar as to philosophy: and this, I think, is a salutary question
> to end on. There are constant references in contemporary phi-
> losophy, which notoriously is much concerned with language,
> to a "logical grammar" and a "logical syntax" as though these
> were things distinct from ordinary grammarian's grammar and
> syntax: and certainly they do seem, whatever exactly they may
> be, different from traditional grammar. But grammar today
> is itself in a state of flux; for fifty years or more it has been
> questioned on all hands and counts whether what Dionysius
> Thrax once thought was the truth about Greek is the truth
> and the whole truth about all language and all languages. Do
> we know, then, that there will prove to be any ultimate bound-
> ary between "logical grammar" and a revised and enlarged
> Grammar? In the history of human inquiry, philosophy has
> the place of the initial central sun, seminal and tumultous;
> from time to time it throws off some portion of itself to take
> station as a science, a planet, cool and well regulated, progress-
> ing steadily towards a distant final state. This happened long
> ago at the birth of mathematics, and again at the birth of
> physics: only in the last century we have witnessed the same
> process once again, slow and at the time almost imperceptible,
> in the birth of the science of mathematical logic, through the
> joint labours of philosophers and mathematicians. Is it not
> possible that the next century may see the birth, through the
> joint labours of philosophers, grammarians, and numerous
> other students of language, of a true and comprehensive
> *science of language?* Then we shall have rid ourselves of one
> more part of philosophy (there will still be plenty left) in the
> only way we can get rid of philosophy, by kicking it upstairs.[19]

[19] J. L. Austin, "Ifs and Cans," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XLII
(1956), pp. 131-2.

The second major objection (an objection that might well be voiced by both Deweyian and existentialist philosophers) is that meta-ethics is not the most distinctive office of philosophy vis-a-vis morality. Philosophy should be normative; it ought not to lose sight of its Socratic function as a critic of human conduct. There may be a place for meta-ethics, but the crucial concern of the philosopher should be with normative ethical problems. He is (or should be) particularly concerned with the normative ethical problems I have listed under category 3 (the search for moral wisdom) and category 4 (the attempt to justify fundamental moral standards) in Section II. A Deweyian would probably go on to urge that the most crucial problem for the contemporary moral philosopher should be with the relation of category 6 (explanations of moral experience) to categories 3 and 4. More generally, we should seek to give a solid scientific backing to our moral appraisals. Real moral perplexities emerge in specific contexts. In these contexts, ends and means are never totally divorced. Scientific knowledge of the nature of human nature can revitalize and even transform our moral goals, and moral goals in turn direct scientific inquiry in certain general ways. Generally, questions of human conduct and ideals are a part of a contextualistic means-ends continuum that never need be broken. Such a situation gives us the conditions for a truly scientific control of moral appraisal.[20]

I have nothing at all polemical to say about this objection. It is not really in conflict with what I have already said, though it is necessary to point out that we cannot say that philosophy *only* talks about talk about the world and still make the above Deweyian claim. We cannot hold the strict claim that a philosopher *qua* philosopher only examines the uses of language in its various areas and still admit that the philosopher can do normative ethics. But we need not, and I

[20] Dewey, himself, takes this point of view in his chapter on morality in his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York, 1920).

do not, say that linguistic analysis or conceptual analysis is the only thing a philosopher can do. I have only claimed that it is a very characteristic and crucial function of philosophy and an activity that should be carefully distinguished from science, on the one hand, and normative ethics on the other. I personally believe that by analyzing the uses of our language in order to relieve "conceptual bewitchment," the philosopher (at present, at least) can be of the utmost value to the intellectual community at large. And, as Henry Aiken and Paul Taylor have convincingly argued,[21] it is in this way that the philosopher can most effectively, though somewhat indirectly, serve as a critic of our morality and social institutions. In clarifying the terms in which our ideals and obligations are articulated, we often clarify the ideals themselves.

"Mr. Ordinary Man" (and he is Everyman) uses moral language meaningfully, and it is to his usage at the scene of its actual operation that we must finally turn. But he usually also has some strange and usually rather unsophisticated beliefs about his moral language. As Aiken remarks,

> As any teacher of ethics soon discovers, a great part of the difficulty of instruction arises from the fact that his pupils are usually already possessed of theories—or prejudices—of their own which they have acquired in the home or school or church. ... To one student so-called Protagorean relativism seems virtually self-evident; to another, brought up perhaps in a parochial school, the view that moral "truths" are laws of nature or divine commandments needs little argument; to still another, morality itself is a form of prejudice to be replaced by hygiene and social engineering. In short, there abound in the popular consciousness a great many pre-analytic theories of morals, nearly all of which unfortunately, involve profound misconceptions both as to the character of moral judgment and as to the possibilities of moral justification. And these, unhap-

[21] Henry Aiken, "Moral Philosophy and Education," in Israel Scheffler, ed., *Philosophy and Education*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1958), p. 66. Paul Taylor, "The Normative Function of Metaethics," *Philosophical Review*, LXII, No. 1 (January, 1958), pp. 16-33.

pily, deeply interpenetrate the whole moral consciousness of those afflicted with them.[22]

The meta-ethicist—if he is able—can bring out what is true and what is false in these pre-analytic and quasi-meta-ethical theories. He can give the student and "Mr. Ordinary Man" a better grasp of the interconnections between the various concepts in his moral discourse and thus free him from obscure and ancient myths and obsessions. If, for example, the traditional Hume-Mill meta-ethical analysis is correct and there is no incompatibility between moral freedom and complete determinism, a whole family of normative ethical harrassments will be relieved. My general points here are: (1) that there is no need to say that philosophers *qua* philosophers cannot engage in normative ethics, and (2) that meta-ethical analyses, while distinct from normative ethical claims, can have great pertinence to a fundamental normative critique of man and his works.

VI

I would like to add a further final note about normative ethics and the philosophic enterprise. If philosophers, social scientists, psychoanalysts, and the like do not concern themselves with the questions posed by my hypothetical Deweyian critic, I shudder to think who will. We can only achieve intelligent control over moral action by bringing scientific intelligence and general scientific procedures to bear on normative ethical problems, though it does not follow from this that moral judgments are hypotheses or any other sort of factual statements. It is my considered conviction that in general we can now learn more from social scientists about normative ethical problems than we can from philosophers. If we are concerned to answer questions about how we are to act in order to act reasonably, or about how we are to live and die,

[22] Henry Aiken, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

we can learn more from *The Lonely Crowd, The Human Animal,* and *The American Dilemma* than we can from *Principia Ethica, Ethics and Language,* and the *Language of Morals.*

Philosophers, like other specialists, frequently develop rather narrow interests, and they are most typically concerned —sometimes almost to the point of obsession—with purely conceptual or (in a broad sense) logical issues. Even in doing normative ethics their drive for generality makes them frequently miss aspects about our moral life that perceptive novelists like Jane Austen or Dostoyevsky catch, or that astute social scientists like Riesman or Labarre make us aware of. Riesman, for example, helps us to understand the subtle undertones of our own cultural life far better than we did before, and Labarre gives us an acute sense of both the variability and the fundamental unity of the human animal. We see from studying *The Human Animal* what is most parochial and self-destructive in our culture, and we get a good sense of the cultural choices open to us if we wish to alter our culture. This sort of insight, crucial to the moral life, is not something we can or should obtain from a meta-ethicist, and a philosopher doing normative ethics is usually ill-equipped to give us this kind of insight. But there is another side to the story, as well. The man who is bewildered about the logical status of evaluatives, a confusion that in certain moods can lead to normative ethical harassment,[23] will find enlightenment in a book like R. M. Hare's *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: 1952), whereas *The Lonely Crowd, The Human Animal,* or even Fromm's *Man For Himself,* will not prove illuminating.

In this essay, I have tried to distinguish the different approaches we take in talking about morality. I have not said that philosophers cannot concern themselves with normative

[23] John Wisdom brings this out well in his "Things and Persons," in his *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), pp. 217-28.

ethical problems and I have not said that normative ethical problems are unimportant. I have claimed, however, that they are distinct from both scientific and meta-ethical problems, and that philosophers are and should be particularly concerned with the problems I have called meta-ethical. In sum, let me make it quite clear that I do not want to set boundaries to what activities people can properly engage in: I do not wish to prohibit philosophers from doing normative ethics or anthropologists from doing meta-ethics. My proposal is merely to call attention to these different activities so that when we talk about morals we may be a little clearer about what we are doing, whatever it is that we may choose to do.[24]