THE " GOOD REASONS APPROACH " AND " ONTOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATIONS " OF MORALITY*

In two earlier articles[1] I have attempted to argue for what Abraham Edel has well called the " good reasons approach " in ethics. Stephen Toulmin's *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* and P. H. Nowell-Smith's *Ethics*, along with the articles of Baier and Falk, might be taken as paradigmatic cases of this approach. In my analyses I particularly tried to develop, expand and correct Toulmin's approach. Here, with these analyses in mind, I would like to examine the rationale of certain allegedly ontological or metaphysical conceptions of ethics. I am particularly concerned with the strange claim made in some quarters that we can only discover a sure foundation for morality—and thus save ourselves from moral chaos—by an excursion into metaphysics and/or metaphysical theology. I think such a claim is thoroughly wrong and worse, upon examination, hardly intelligible, but I think it is also, in certain intellectual moods, quite natural. I am sure that I cannot free us forever from this ' riddling Sphinx ', but here I shall indicate part of the therapy needed so that we will see that it is not necessary to construct a *Process and Reality*[2] or an *Appearance and Reality* to make ' The Good Life ' intelligible and rationally coherent.

Some of Toulmin's critics (i.e., Paton and Sacksteder)[3] have taken much of Toulmin's analysis to be proper as far as it goes, but then have gone on to make the ontologist's claim that to ultimately justify moral reasoning we must give it a metaphysical foundation. I agree with them in their acceptance of much of Toulmin's analysis, but I disagree with their pitch for a further ontological remedy.

In section (I) I shall say a few words about the role of the paradigm

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*In speaking about the question of " ontological justifications of morality ", I do not mean to be speaking of those metaphysicians, like E. W. Hall, who develop philosophical analyses of what they call the ontology of value. Surely, they may give justifications of their so called ontologies of value. But a justification of an ontology of value is one thing and an ontological justification of morality is another. Hall, for example, makes it very clear that in analyzing the ontology of value he is leaving aside such questions as " how can value be known ? " and " how are normative sentences justified ? " See E. W. Hall, *What is Value ?*, p. 249. I rather have in mind here those traditional philosophers who tell us that to really justify our moral decisions we must find some " metaphysical or ontological basis for them ".

[1] Kai Nielsen, " The Functions of Moral Discourse ", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 7 (July, 1957), and " Justification and Moral Reasoning ", *Methodos*, Vol. 9 (1957).

[2] Arthur Murphy has brilliantly carried this therapy through for *Process and Reality*. See Arthur Murphy, " Whitehead and the Method of Speculative Philosophy ", in *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, P. A. Schilpp ed., pp. 353-80.

[3] H. J. Paton, " Review of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* ", *Philosophy*, vol. XXVII (January, 1952), pp. 81-84. William Sacksteder, " Review of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* ", *Ethics*, vol. LXII (April, 1952), pp. 217-9.

case method in philosophical analysis and then very briefly set forth my toulminian conception of the logic of justification in morals with what I fear will seem alarming (though unintended) dogmatism. Then in (II) I shall turn to an explication and placement of Toulmin's conception of " limiting questions " as an instrument for dissolving the ontologist's claims. In (III) I shall try to indicate why Toulmin's analysis, even with his conception of " limiting questions ", will not provide surcease from anxiety for the ontologist like Tillich, who would go beyond " the confusions of ordinary usage " to find—as Tillich mystifyingly puts it—" the ground of life ". I shall argue that the ontologist's basic puzzles here grow out of the peculiarities and limitations of the paradigm case method ; but, I shall argue that the recognition of these limitations need in nowise give rise to doubts about the rational foundations of morality.

<div align="center">I</div>

Without talking very much about it, Toulmin employs a technique that Urmson and Flew have dubbed an appeal to the *standard example* or *paradigm case*.[4] In any mode of reasoning, we can expose a philosophical doubt about whether X really is what it purports to be by showing that the expression ' X ' must be understood by reference to X if it is to be understood at all. Then, we can use the *method of challenge* and ask, " If this isn't a case of the kind you refer to, what would count as a case of that kind ? ". If (to use Flew's example)[5] a man, under no social compulsion, marries the girl he wants to marry, it *cannot* be right to say that he did not marry her of his own free will, for it is only with reference to this kind of an example that we can know what ' free-will ' means. It is with reference to applications like this, that the expression ' free-will ' has a meaning or use. It must mean this if it is to mean anything at all and, if we deny that it does mean anything at all, we will have to invent a new expression to describe the above kind of situation where we normally would employ ' free-will '. Similarly, if someone denies that moral appraisals can be valid or invalid, he can be refuted by merely giving him a standard example of moral reasoning, for this is just what is to count as moral reasoning.[6]

Let us take a simple example from completely non-ethical (non-valuational) context in which this paradigm case method works well in order to see a little more fully just how the argument works. Eddington, as a physicist with " philosophic obsessions ", noted the vast difference between everyday modes of reasoning and concepts and the modes of reasoning and concepts of physics. Unless the physicist discards the everyday notion of solidity, Eddington reasoned, he may believe mistakenly that nothing, " not even

[4]J. O. Urmson, " Some Questions Concerning Validity ", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, XXV (September, 1953), 217. Antony G. N. Flew, " Philosophy and Language ", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 5 (January, 1955), p. 35.

[5]Flew, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[6]Kurt Baier does this in a very simple and direct fashion in two articles in *Philosophical Studies*. See K. Baier, " Good Reasons ", *Philosophical Studies*, IV (January, 1953), 1-15 ; and K. Baier, " Proving a Moral Judgment ", *Philosophical Studies* IV (April, 1953), 33-43.

a beam of α rays, will go through " a table or chair. α rays, however, do go through chairs and tables. It must be, then, after all, that tables and chairs are not really solid. The ordinary conception of solidity is (after all) illusory. But, as Miss Stebbing and others were quick to note, if tables and chairs are not solid, then what is to count as solid in an everyday context ? In our everyday way of talking, ' being solid ' just means ' to be something like a table or a chair '. If they aren't solid, then what is ? All Eddington has done is to bring out, in a dramatic but esoteric fashion, a difference between scientific and everyday description. Eddington and Miss Stebbing are not differing in any substantial or material way. Miss Stebbing's re-marks are not intended as a denial of any of the experimental facts of physics (i.e., that α rays pass through tables, etc.) but only as a criticism of Edding-ton's whimsical notion " that the results of his experiments discredit the everyday concept of ' solidity ' ".[7]

Take another non-ethical application of the paradigm case method. In an extended section, Toulmin develops a theory about the nature of scientific reasoning and an analogy between reasoning in science and ethics. Science is a unique irreducible mode of reasoning. It has its own criteria of justifica-tion, relevance, truth, etc. Certain predictions can be justified in terms of certain scientific laws and these laws themselves can be justified by other criteria. But, according to Toulmin, it makes no sense to ask for a justifica-tion of science itself. Activities or forms of life like science are self-contained ; they are unique modes of reasoning that neither need nor can have any justification as a whole.[8] This does not mean that science, as an activity, explains everything, for each mode of reasoning imposes its own limitations ; but, it does mean that it does *not* make sense, once we understand the function of science, to ask if *any* scientific explanations *at all* are *ever* correct.[9] To say that scientific theories are all fictions or that scientific statements can never be justified, makes no more sense than to say tables really are not solid. A study of some paradigm cases of scientific reasoning will fully restore our confidence in the justifiability of scientific reasoning.

Now, the interesting question for our purposes is : can we make a similar argument for morals ? Is it as absurd to ask for a justification of ethics as it is to ask for a justification of science ? Is it as absurd to deny validity to moral appraisals as it is to deny that tables are really solid ?

Toulmin thinks we can apply this *paradigm case* method in morals with the same adequacy that we can apply it to non-valuational questiosn. Toulmin takes certain standard examples of moral reasoning and shows the criteria implicit in these paradigm cases. Stated concisely, Toulmin's criteria are as follows : in an unambiguous case where a moral appraisal needs to be made, make it in accordance with the moral rule current in one's community. Where there is a conflict of duties, choose between them on the basis of which duty or duties will probably result in the least pre-

[7]Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, p. 113, and Urmson, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-19.
[8]Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, pp. 98-101.
[9]*Ibid.*, p. 99.

ventable suffering. If there is a question of choosing between two moral codes as a whole, again choose according to the principle : preventable suffering is to be avoided. For Toulmin, the " overall principle " that preventable suffering ought to be avoided, is bound up with the very idea of ' duty ' and ' morality '. If this criterion is to be given up, we have abandoned the primary use (meaning) of ' duty ' and ' morality '.[10] Considering the purpose of moral rules, certain criteria are so natural that we could hardly understand ' duty ' without them.[11] In paradigm cases of moral reasoning, we use these *prima-facie* moral rules as a *justificans* for unambiguous particular obligations and, in turn, test these rules in terms of the principle of least suffering. It is by reference to such criteria that we can understand what is to count as a justification of a moral appraisal.

I have added that in situations where we are not clear as to the consequences of acting in accordance with one or another *prima facie* duty, or where we have no rule at all except the principle of least suffering and yet do not know how to apply that, we must act on the vaguer criterion of what a reasonable man would do. This criterion is vague but, as Hume and Westermark were well aware, being reasonable in moral contexts always involves acting impartially. Still this is only a necessary and not sufficient criterion, for one cannot fully specify what it is to be reasonable without appealing to the conative attitudes of the person who makes the judgment, ' x is reasonable '. Note the following extreme case : X is a man who has no desire to live, lacks concern for the desires of his fellow men, and does not expect them to respect his preferences. A man with this set of attitudes might in a quite impartial manner allow large segments of the population to starve without regarding it as unreasonable. You reply, " But that's a model of unreasonableness ". Quite so, but we say this because we human animals happen to have certain attitudes and not others. Yet in certain contexts we cannot avoid—I believe—this appeal to what a reasonable man would do. I have argued that to count as a ' moral rule ' a rule of conduct must conform to the following criteria : (1) It must be *universalisable* —that is to say, in a moral rule (as well as in a moral judgment) there can be no uniquely singular terms referring to persons or institutions, etc., that are not replaceable by general terms or a conjunction of general terms,[12] (2) It must be reasonable—in the sense explained above—and should be made with the intent that it can be judged in terms of the greatest general fecundity where that general fecundity is at all calculable, (3) It must be something toward which the moral agent has (in one way or another) a pro-attitude.[13]

[10]Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, pp. 159-60, 153-56, 133-35.

[11]This is vague and, as I shall show, indicates a possible difficulty in Toulmin's thought. It is well to note that Toulmin does not identify the *meaning* of a moral utterance with its criteria of application, though his talk at times certainly suggests that he does.

[12]See section IV of my " Justification and Moral Reasoning ", *Methodos*, vol. 9 (1957). See also R. M. Hare, " Universalizability ", *Aristotelian Society Proceedings*, vol. 55 (1954-5), pp. 295-312.

[13]The various ways in which this is so are well brought out in Chapter 12 of Nowell-Smith's *Ethics*.

Generally speaking, I have argued (following Toulmin) that the " scope of ethical reasoning is limited as well as defined by the framework of activities in which it plays its part ".[14] Once we clearly understand what the primary functions of moral discourse are, we will also understand why there are certain natural criteria in morals. Moral discourse is a form of practical discourse concerned with altering and guiding the attitudes and actions of people so that they can live together with the maximum amount of satisfaction of desire for the maximum number of people. It is concerned both with the extent of satisfaction of desire and with the equal and just distribution of these desires. I have summarized this conception of the primary functions of moral discourse in the following manner : " The characteristic functions of moral discourse are to guide conduct and alter behaviour so as to achieve the harmonious satisfaction of as many independent desires and wants as possible ".[15]

II

In the above brief explanation I have stuck to *literal answers* to the normative question, ' Why ought I do so and so ? '. But, there are some contexts, the contexts in which Toulmin speaks of " limiting questions ", in which we are not asking for any kind of a *literal* answer at all.

First, we must realize that here we are in a kind of " land of shadows " or in a " no-man's land " in which there is no definite informal logic of discourse, as we find in the moral mode of reasoning and the scientific mode of reasoning. Most of the *limiting questions*, relevant to ethics, occur at the boundaries between ethics proper and religion. The ontologist's questions, when they are not merely category blunders, are also questions of this type. Here, because the discourse is shiftier, we can expect no very definite criteria. Yet, with ' limiting questions ', in contrast with the kind of ' reasoning ' in the poetry of Blake, T. S. Eliot, or Dylan Thomas, where the ' reasoning ' is *clearly* ' extra-rational ' in form, the *surface grammar* of the ' limiting questions ' is very much like that of rational questions in our workday modes of reasoning.[16] Only when we note what Wittgenstein has called the *depth grammar* of utterances expressing limiting questions, do we see their oddity and feel the kind of cramps they engender. ' What holds the earth up ? ' is superficially like ' What holds the peach tree up ? ' ; but, the former, as a limiting question (in commonsensical contexts), has no definite criteria of application. Likewise, ' Why ought I do what is right ? ' and, ' Why ought I be kind to little children ? ' have the same superficial similarity ; but, only the latter is a moral question. The former, according to Toulmin, is a limiting question *disguised* as a rational question.

" Limiting questions " are " questions expressed in a form borrowed from a familiar mode of reasoning, but not doing the job which they normally do within that mode of reasoning ".[17] They have the following characteristics :

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[14]Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, p. 152.

[15]This conception is explained and defended in my " The Functions of Moral Discourse ", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 7 (July, 1957), pp. 236-249.

[16]Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, p. 206.

[17]*Ibid.*, p. 205.

1. A direct answer to the question that the surface grammar (the form of the question) seems to suggest, never satisfies the questioners. Like ' answers ' to the child's persistent ' Why ? ', ' answers ' to limiting questions only succeed in regenerating the same question. The person attempting to answer a limiting question finds that he is damned no matter which road he takes. Any direct answer only regenerates the question and a refusal to answer seems like an evasion.[18]

2. It is characteristic of these questions that only a small change, either in the questions themselves or in their context, is necessary in order to make them regular questions in their apparent mode of reasoning.[19]

3. There is no standard interpretation for limiting questions sanctioned in our usage. There is no call to or possibility of applying the paradigm case method in explicating them.[20]

4. Limiting questions do not present us with any genuine alternatives from which to choose.[21]

The first characteristic (the only one that is at all hard to understand) can be seen by returning to our first simple non-ethical example. In common sense (though not in scientific quarters) the " question ", ' what holds the earth up ? ', is a limiting question with no literal answer. Borrowing its apparent form from an unexceptional use, like ' What holds the pear tree up ? ', ' What holds the earth up ? ', seems to ask for some kind of literal answer. Yet, none is forthcoming within common sense and common usage. But, in ordinary contexts, this limiting question about what holds the earth up is easily generated by persisting in a quite ordinary question beyond a certain limit. If someone asks, ' What holds the pear tree up ?', it is naturally and completely intelligible, to answer, ' Why, the earth, of course ! '. Now, if our questioner then persists, in this practical context, and asks, ' What holds the earth up ? ', we have (unwittingly) got *out* of the everyday mode of reasoning and into an Alice-in-Wonderland context. For the ' question ', ' What holds the earth up ? ', there is no clear answer ; nor is it even very clear what our questioner is asking. Can we conceive of the earth falling down like we can a pear tree ? Can we conceive of anything holding it up ? What kind of application would we give the question ? If we answer, like Krishna, ' Three giant elephants ', and again, to the question, ' What holds them up ? ', answer, ' A great tortoise ! ', the natural question is ' What holds the tortoise up ? '. What we are being asked to answer is quite mystifying. But, we cannot refuse to answer by saying, ' Nothing ! ', for, then, our questioner will return, ' But something must hold the earth up ! '. Must we finally answer, ' An ontological something, I know not what ' ? And, if we do, using, in this final (admittedly mysterious) " ontological

[18]*Ibid.*, pp. 205-07.
[19]*Ibid.*, p. 205.
[20]*Ibid.*
[21]*Ibid.*, pp. 205-06.

justification ", and ' ontological mode of explanation ', are we any wiser than before ? What kind of literal justification does this " ontological justification " give us ? Or, how does " ontology " further " justify " the literal moral justification of a given act or moral rule ?[22] How does " ontology " serve to " justify " ' Why ought I do what is right ? ' ?

Limiting questions are asked for two main reasons. First, the limiting question may signify only that a *category mistake* has been made. Now, if the questioner, in asking a limiting question, has *merely* made a category mistake, pointing out to him that he is simply confusing logical cupboards will suffice. Secondly, a limiting question actually may express a " personal predicament ".[23] A limiting question may express a " hysterical apprehensiveness about the future " ;[24] or, the person who insists on pressing the question, ' Why ought I do what is right ? ', after the category mistake has been shown up, may be expressing obliquely, in a pseudo-rational form, his rebellious *id* which does not want to accept the imperatives of his *superego*. Or, the person who really finds all ordinary valuations arbitrary and seeks an Absolute ' ontological justification of morals ', may just be expressing his own insecurity.[25] We may show this man that his promise to Jones can be unambiguously subsumed under a moral rule and the moral rule in turn justified in terms of social utility ; but, if he continues to ask for a more certain ' Absolute Reason ' for keeping his promise to Jones, Toulmin remarks that " the only type of reasoning likely to make any impression on him would be psychoanalytic reasoning ".[26]

Limiting questions have no fixed literal meaning.[27] As a result there are no fixed literal ways of answering them. These points are extremely important to note for they indicate the kind of ' reasoning ' that is appropriate to limiting questions. They have no definite style of functioning. We are not here dealing with questions for which we can find answers which are, in turn, based on justifying reasons. Often, ' reasons ' given as an answer to a limiting question are just any " *exciting* reasons " which will do the trick. There is no definite mode of discourse in which certain justificatory reasons are good reasons by virtue of being in accordance with certain quite definite evaluative rules of inference.

Metaphysical beliefs and religious beliefs are frequently paradigms of limiting questions. There are genres of perplexities that are partly moral and partly religious and/or metaphysical.[28] These strange perplexities are

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[22]*Ibid.*, pp. 206-07.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 205.

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 207.

[25]For astute psychological remarks on this, see David Riesman, *Individualism Reconsidered* (Glencoe, Illinois : 1954), p. 17. Note Weston LaBarre's remark (*The Human Animal* [Chicago : 1954], p. 229) : " Values must from emotional necessity be viewed as absolute by those who use values as compulsive defenses against reality, rather than properly as tools for the exploration of reality ".

[26]Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, p. 207.

[27]*Ibid.*, p. 208.

[28] Toulmin, " Contemporary Scientific Mythology ", in *Metaphysical Beliefs*, ed. by MacIntyre, p. 65.

frequently felt with an anxiety-arousing sense of urgency.[29] When the Copernican theory first replaced or even challenged the Ptolemaic theory " the new theory aroused more than astronomical objections. It aroused also fear. . . ."[30] Whitehead's ontology is a good example of their kind of *Weltanschauung* perplexity transfigured into vast cosmological speculation. Puzzled by the kind of picture of the world we supposedly inherited from Newtonian science, Whitehead felt he needed an ontology to set everything aright. Ultimate reality—" actual entities "—has, as analytically distinguishable but not actually separable, constituents, feelings or " prehensions ".[31] Values are the very " web of the real " and thus are not in any sense illusory. There is no dichotomy of fact and value for they are only distinguishable when viewed abstractly. But, Toulmin argues, these sorts of " answers " are really " mythical ", " spiritual " or " figurative " answers —the only answers appropriate to limiting questions.[32] Suppose ultimate reality is really of the nature of feelings and suppose values are such feelings, how will this help us justify the principle of least suffering or prove that we ought to keep our promises ? What kind of a support could this possibly give us ? Is not just this just as fanciful as Krishna's talk about the broad-backed tortoise ? These answers are figurative or ritualistic answers designed to help us accept the world just as scientific answers help us to understand it. Their scientific *sound* frequently obscures this.

The strands of the moral mode of reasoning lead very naturally, in certain contexts, to these limiting questions. In some instances, as in the obligation to keep a promise where there are no conflicting duties, we may *feel* the *need* of some further ' justification ' after we have made the judgment in accordance with the appropriate moral rule. As Huxley's character Anthony Beavis or as Mitya or as Dostoevsky's partly autobiographical "hero ' in *The Gambler*, we often clearly recognize intellectually what we ought to do ; but, our hearts are not in it and we frequently need some further *motive* to do what we know we ought to do.[33] In this context, the figurative *ritual*-answer of religion and sometimes even of metaphysics comes in and helps us resign ourselves to our duty by making us *feel* like accepting it.[34] However, while the motivating answer the religious mode of reasoning gives to our limiting question may be called " justification " of a sort, it cannot invalidate or add a justification to the good reasons for making the moral judgment. " Ethics provides the *reasons* for choosing the ' right ' course : religion helps us to put our *hearts* into it ".[35] But, literal ethical justification comes to an end in the mode of ethical reasoning. Religion and metaphysics give us no farther, surer foundation for morality.[36]

[29]This is shown very nicely by Falk with primary references to the existentialists. See W. D. Falk, " Moral Perplexity ", *Ethics*, (January, 1956), pp. 123-131.

[30]Toulmin, " Contemporary Scientific Mythology ", in *Metaphysical Beliefs*, pp. 77-8.

[31]Whitehead's murky conception of actual entities is very clearly stated by John Blyth in his *Whitehead's Theory of Knowledge*, Chapters II and III.

[32]Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics*, pp. 211-12.

[33]*Ibid.*, p. 218.

[34]*Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.

[35]*Ibid.*, p. 219.

[36]Toulmin, " Contemporary Scientific Mythology ", in *Metaphysical Beliefs*, pp. 79-80.

III

If we pursue moral questions beyond a certain natural limit, we only raise " limiting questions " with their purely supererogatory ' whys '. Yet, many ontologists maintain that, just at this point the " real philosophical problems arise ".[37] The really crucial philosophic problems arise precisely where we attempt to give a *proof of* rather than a *proof in* a moral system. The former question is the " fundamental problem of morality ". It is *at* this level, if Professor Hall's interpretation of Bentham and Mill is correct, that the classical utilitarians could only use *persuasive* arguments appealing to the " intellectual honesty of reasonable men ".[38] At least some philosophers have wanted to ask of a principle like Toulmin's least suffering principle : ' How does he justify that ? ' Can he only exhort us to reason in accord with it or appeal persuasively to our sentiments as " reasonable men " ? ' Philosophers asking questions about the ' justification of ultimate principles ' have wanted Toulmin to give ' some account ' of these ultimate principles for which, as Paton puts it, it is impossible to give any more reasons, but principles which are nonetheless universally binding on all men insofar as they are rational.[39]

Toulmin has, I believe, indicated the literal limits of moral justification. The principle of least suffering is the basic normative criterion for the justification of moral appraisals in ethics. (Let us use ' (J) ' to denote the principle of least suffering.) Further, if my defence and modification of Toulmin's argument is correct and the " scope of ethical reasoning is limited by its function ", it does not make sense to ask for a moral proof of (J) itself. Rather, if we are reasoning morally (J) just is the ultimate principle to which we must appeal. If the request for a ' proof of ' (J) is taken as a request for a *moral* proof of (J), it is impossible to satisfy even in principle, for one can only challenge (J) or prove (J) from outside the moral mode of reasoning.[40] It is not, if my interpretation of the role of (J) is correct, just a matter of giving a *proof of* a determinate moral code rather than giving a *proof in* that system ; for, (J) is quite different in its function than the basic principles of morality in, for example, a Catholic or Humanist or Hindu moral code. (J), rather, sets the limits of the kinds of considerations which could, in principle, count as moral considerations. There cannot then be any further moral considerations, assuming morality continues to have the primary functions it does have, which would rebut (J). But the ontologist's compulsion remains strong to give some ultimate moral justification of (J) that is more certain than any of the common sense arguments we have brought up. Yet why should " The Need for Roots " push us into such a " strange no-man's land " and what further moral justification could be given for morality

[37]Sacksteder, " Review of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* ", *Ethics*, LXII (April, 1952), 219, and Paton, " Review of *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* ", *Philosophy*, XXVII (January, 1952), 83.

[38]E. W. Hall, " The ' Proof ' of Utility in Bentham and Mill ", *Ethics*, LX (October, 1949), 8.

[39]Paton, *loc. cit.*, p. 83.

[40]I have argued, as against Toulmin and others, that it is perfectly sensible to ask for a non-moral justification of morality. See Kai Neilsen, " Is ' Why Should I be Moral ? ' an Absurdity ? " *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, May 1958.

than that which we have given ?

Toulmin's talk about limiting questions and the role of the religious mode of reasoning gives us part of this explanation ; but, I believe that a meta-ethics which takes into account the non-descriptive functions of evaluative discourse can explain this aspect more neatly and satisfactorily.

Considerations here turn on how far and in what manner we can apply the standard example or paradigm case method in explicating valuational problems. The trouble comes from the systematic ambiguity in the following types of utterance : ' What are good reasons in ethics ? ' and ' Which " good reasons " really are good reasons in ethics ? ' Depending upon how they are employed, these questions may require sociological, normative ethical, or meta-ethical answers. As *sociological* questions they ask, ' What do people take to be good reasons in ethics ? ' and ' What reasons do people take to be good reasons for their ordinary criteria for moral appraisals ? '. As *normative ethical* questions they ask, ' What reasons (everything else being equal) ought to be accepted in making moral judgments or appraisals ? ', or (as in the second utterance) ' Which of the " good reasons " offered for moral judgments really ought to be accepted as criteria for moral judgments ? '. As *meta-ethical* questions, our two initial systematically ambiguous questions ask, ' What do we *mean* by " good reasons " for moral appraisals ? ', or (as in the second utterance), ' What do we *mean* by " good reasons " for good reasons in ethics ? '. Apart from being employed in a *specific* context, ' What reasons are good reasons in ethics ? ' and ' Which " good reasons " really are good reasons in ethics ? ' admit of any of the above interpretations. Not meeting them on the job, we cannot say which way they are being used.

But, either for a sociological description or for a meta-ethical analysis of the uses of moral reasoning, the following problem arises about justification : would not a traditionalist like Paton be inclined to feel that where the sociologist's and/or meta-ethicist's task has ended, his task has just begun ; for, once we have analyzed what we mean by our moral terms and even what counts as ' justification ' in ethics, would not a philosopher like Paton want to say, ' Yes, I see this is what is meant by " good reasons " and this is what justification in ethics means ; but, *why* should I accept these good reasons or why should I accept this justification ? '

We can see what an impossible ' question ' the above sort is when we try to see what alternatives a Paton might bring forth. If, in the above question, we tried to make ' why should I accept these good reasons ? ' clearer by adding immediately after it ' rather than some other good reasons ', we begin to see the impossibility of the ' question ' ; for, we cannot add ' rather than some other good reasons ' because the reasons already elicited by the meta-ethicist (and accepted *as such* by our ontologists), are *just the reasons that are to count as ' good reasons '* in this context. The same argument could be made for the above use of ' justification '. Our traditional philosopher speaks as if he had some alternative in mind ; but, when we examine his ' question ' we discover there is no literal alternative. Yet, somehow, in some moods, we all want to be able to ask the Paton-type question. We feel cheated by so direct an application of the *paradigm case method*.

What does Paton's worry come to ? Why do we feel cheated ? I think the basic consideration involved comes to just this : neither *standard examples* nor any other examples of moral reasoning will ever in themselves establish any appraisal simply because an appraisal is never equivalent to the criteria of its application. In addition to the descriptive aspect of an appraisal, there is always its non-descriptive aspect.[41] As these last remarks so compactly put may not be entirely clear, I shall explain a little more fully what I mean by them by a simple example. I further hope in the pages that follow gradually to make my above idea clearer. We normally mean by a good easy chair, a chair that is comfortable, durable, attractive, etc. X might say to Y, as he points out a chair in a furniture store, ' That's a good one. It's comfortable, attractive, durable. And, I think it will match the room '. Now, while the question here is odd, Y can quite meaningfully ask, even after accepting X's description as true, ' But, is it a good chair, really ? ' And if X supplies some more reasons Y can always, as Moore has shown, challenge them. An appraisal or an evaluation is never equivalent to its descriptive criteria. Besides its criteria there is always a commendatory force to an evaluative word, unless that word is being used in an ' inverted comma ' sense. No matter how standard the grading criteria may be the same logical considerations apply and these logical features of evaluatives limit the application of the paradigm case method in value theory. Flew has precisely indicated the limits of the paradigm case method : " one cannot *derive* any sort of value proposition : from either a factual proposition about what people value : or from definitions however disguised of the value terms which people as a matter of fact employ ".[42]

Yet, neither Flew nor Urmson (Urmson, particularly, makes this very clear)[43] rejects the standard example method *in toto* or, even. in the main. They only wish to point out (as above) its limitations. By the paradigm case method, we can determine what *in fact* are good reasons in ethics in the sociological sense of ' what are good reasons '. Further, ordinary usage is the final check for the correctness of our meta-ethical analyses.[44] What we *cannot* determine by this method is *why* we use the criteria for good reasons which we do in fact use. By his method, Toulmin can determine what are the good reasons we in fact do use and what, in fact, are the criteria for the good reasons ; but, he cannot (so the Urmson-Flew type of argument would run) determine *why* we use the sort of criteria we do use to determine which reasons are good reasons. *If* we push this question up one step and point out what *in fact* are the criteria for the criteria we have, we can again make the same challenge as above for these criteria for criteria and so on indefinitely. But, remaining at the level of questioning the justifiability of criteria for ordinary moral appraisals, Urmson points out we may ask this question about standards in two quite different spirits :

[41]See R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, part II.

[42]Antony G. N. Flew, " Philosophy and Language ", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 5 (January, 1955), 35.

[43]J. O. Urmson, " Some Questions Concerning Validity ", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 25 (September, 1953), 217-8, 225, 228-9.

[44]This is not directly asserted by Urmson, but is my interpolation.

We may ask in a spirit of genuine doubt whether there are any good reasons for doing so, or we may be quite happy in the employment of these standards but ask why we employ them in a spirit of philosophical enquiry.[45]
Urmson contrasts a " genuine doubt " about why we should accept the standards we do with both " bogus doubts " stated by misleading philosophical analyses and with questions (he does not say doubts) about validity or about good reasons for a given criterion asked in the spirit of " methodical philosophical research ".[46]

But what would these philosophical " questions " about good reasons in ethics come to ? In this spirit of " methodical philosophical research ", Urmson, with his critique of Toulmin's kind of application of the *paradigm case* method, has made two major points : (1) evaluative utterances of any kind can never be *derived* from factual statements, and (2) there is always a *commendatory non-descriptive* force to moral appraisals. Toulmin also asserts (1) and I would claim that Toulmin was wrong in not making room for (2) in his meta-ethical scheme. But, I would also assert that we can ignore (2) in setting forth the literal limits of moral justification. Both (1) and (2) are crucial in considering the ontologist's dissatisfaction with a toulminian explanation of the limits of moral reasoning. In dissolving their worries I need to establish three points : (1) the correctness of my belief that in setting forth the kinds of justification it is possible to give in morals, we can exclude non-descriptive factors, though not the fact that pro-attitudes are involved in moral appraisal ; (2) it is these non-descriptive factors that *cause* us to ask for a " deeper justification " after all literal justification has been given ; (3) If (1) and (2) are true then there can be no problem of an ' ontological justification ' for ethics.

The following considerations are offered in support of my first point. When there is any *literal* doubt about the legitimacy of passing, in moral reasoning, from a factual statement to a moral conclusion, what further justificatory, general reasons could we conceivably give for making this move than those Toulmin has described ? Doesn't Urmson tip us off that he does not really believe there are any " further considerations " when he calls the ordinary *first order* sceptical questions the " genuine doubts " (= df. " literal doubts ") ? Urmson insists on the autonomy of *first order* questions.[47] To settle such questions we do not have to raise *second order* questions at all. At one point, he contrasts the genuine doubt engendered at a *first order level* with a bogus doubt arising on a *second order level*. But, then, in speaking of this further *why* asked at a *second order level* when we ask questions about why we use the criteria we do, Urmson *seems* to imply that a genuine doubt can also arise on this *second order* level. But, this is puzzling : a doubt about what ? What kind of a doubt is this philosophical doubt ? Do we actually doubt if our normative ethical principles (the principle of least suffering, etc.) are justified ? Toulmin has explained *why*

[45]Urmson, " Some Questions Concerning Validity ", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 25 (September, 1953), 226.

[46]*Ibid.*, pp. 226-9.

[47]Urmson, " Some Questions Concerning Validity ", *Essays in Conceptual Analysis* (Macmillan, 1956).

we use the moral grading criteria we do in terms of the kind of job they do. Is there any conceivable alternative to the principle of least suffering ?

Beyond Toulmin's kind of consideration, Urmson has only shown us, in effect, that we can have real doubts about the *analysis* of our criteria of validity. But it is important to note *the respect* in which we can have doubts about the analysis of the criteria. Urmson has *not* shown that Toulmin is wrong in his analysis of the sort of criteria that can count as moral criteria. Rather, Urmson has brought out that any *grading* criterion always has a commendatory or non-descriptive aspect. If we say of anything that it is a good reason we always *grade* it as well as *classify* it. This applies to the criteria themselves when we say they are *good* grading criteria. As Moore's *open-question* and *non-contradiction* argument in effect show, we can always challenge any grading criterion no matter how stable. We can always ask of the criterion : ' But is it a good one ? ' ' Good ' always has a non-descriptive or commendatory force, unless it is being used in a purely conventional sense. It is never identical with its descriptive criteria. Toulmin's analysis was, indeed, faulty in not noting this. But, the *crucial point* I wish to make is that the recognition of this non-descriptive aspect makes *no* difference to the criteria that *can* count as moral grading criteria. Surely, because of this non-descriptive force of evaluative words, we can always challenge any grading criteria ; but it is crucial to note the peculiar sense in which this is so. And, it is also true that we can only ask for a justifying reason for something when we can, in principle, specify what could count as a reason for or against it. But, Urmson's kind of argument does not at all show *what it would be like* to give justifying reasons for a principle like (J). Rather, all his argument shows is that we can always ask of *any grading* principle whatsoever : ' Is it a good one ? ' But this shows *too much* ; for, this would always be true and we would just push along for a reason for a reason for a reason *ad infinitum*. We *could not* in principle specify what would count as an ultimate criterion or an ultimate justification of moral judgments. One might say of (J) then that it will do as an ultimate criterion until this ultimate criterion which cannot in principle be specified, comes along. Does not Urmson's question here seem suspiciously like one of Toulmin's limiting questions with their purely supererogatory ' whys ? ' Urmson has, indeed, accounted for a logical feature of evaluatives in a simpler manner than has Toulmin ; for, with a logical analysis of their commendatory force, Urmson has explained the same feature that Toulmin only more vaguely accounts for with his talk about " limiting questions " and with his talk about *gerundives*. Yet, it remains the case that Urmson has not at all indicated with his questions concerning validity that there might be some further criteria for moral judgments than those that Toulmin has described. Urmson's analysis does not at all upset Toulmin's analysis of the ' logic of justification ' in ethics.

There is one further closely related feature that needs to be noted. The feature I have in mind is the necessary appeal to decisions or commitments in morals and the claim that all moral rules, even a principle like the principle of least suffering, are *defeasible* and *open-textured*. It is the sort of feature

that Antony Flew brings out by his remark that " in our limitlessly complicated and permanently changing world, there will always be situations which provide exceptions to even the best of ethical rules ".[48] In any particular case, where we have a moral dilemma, we must decide whether the rule applies in this case or whether, by a decision of principle, to make a new rule or a modification of the old rule. Flew quite rightly remarks that " *in the end* every man has to make not merely deductions from or applications of the already given rules, but fresh decisions as to what is right ; each man deciding for himself ".[49] As I have interpreted the least suffering principle, this very requirement is built into Toulmin's basic principle and into its alternative formulation in (J). We speak of ' preventable suffering ' (i.e., suffering which ought to be prevented) or of the ' harmonious satisfaction of as many wants and desires *as possible* ' where the ' as possible ' is governed by the same basic ought requirement as ' preventable ' in the least suffering principle.[50] Both with ' preventable ' and with ' as possible ' we apply the test of *universalisability*. But, the conception of *universalisability* itself is closely tied to these ineradicable factors of decision. A asks himself if he should tell a certain unpleasant truth to B. Certainly his telling the truth to B will cause B to suffer, but not telling it may cause B greater suffering later. The consequences in terms of the amount of suffering, at present at least, are vague and A must make a decision. He must decide, in the ethically relevant sense of ' preventable ', which suffering is preventable. He applies the *universalisability* principle : what would he have B do to him if he were in B's position ? But, *what would he have him do* ? He knows nothing more about what he would have him do than that whatever it is he would have him do it must be *universalisable* and something towards which he (the advisor) has a pro-attitude in one way or another. It is clear that in the end he must himself note how he would have things ; he must weigh the considerations and then *finally* decide. Further, in an evaluative situation no one can, as a matter of logic, make the decision for him, for if he decides to appeal to someone as a moral authority for what he should do, he still *decides*. In morals there cannot be a system of " air-tight rules ",[51] that would make this final appeal to a decision unnecessary. I would only demur at Flew's remark that this " decisional factor " makes it true that " there will always be situations which provide exceptions to even the best of ethical rules ".[52] The above factors do not function as exceptions to the principle of least suffering. This principle is always the ultimate criterion that we must appeal to in making moral appraisals, but it does not uniquely determine for us what we ought to do. No moral principle or evaluative

[48] Antony G. N. Flew, " Conscious Use of Models in Ethical Analysis ", *ETC : A Review of General Semantics*, XI (Summer, 1954), 288-9.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 289, italics mine.

[50] We must not just satisfy those desires and wants that can be desired but we must satisfy those desires and wants that can *justly* be desired (e.g., can meet the requirements of the *universalisability* principle).

[51] Note Nowell-Smith's brief, but suggestive, remarks here. P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (London : 1954), pp. 19-20.

[52] Flew, " Conscious Use of Models in Ethical Analysis ", *ETC : A Review of General Semantics*, XI (Summer, 1954), 288-9.

rule of inference can do that. The notion of ' preventable ' in the principle itself allows for this quite necessary " decisional factor ". In a moral situation we must *finally* just decide if the suffering involved is indeed to count as ' preventable suffering '. But, this does *not* prove that there is, or can be, a more ultimate principle than Toulmin's.

What is the relevance of my above arguments that there is an irreducible non-descriptive and decisional feature to moral discourse to the question of some ' ontological justification of morality ' ? It is just the followi g. It is this non-descriptive force and decisional factor which harasses us when we consider the problem of justification in ethics. If we are unaware of the above logical features of moral discourse, all sorts of logical conflicts arise to worry us when we regard moral discourse. We seemed forced to postulate odd ' moral entities ' and then we worry about them.[53] Such logical conflicts can well cause us to believe there is some peculiar " ontic realm of value "[54] in addition to the " natural realm ". But, then we worry about how we could ever know there was such a ' realm ' or how we could prove to others that there was. Yet, this peculiar ' value realm ', in some never very clear sense, is supposed to give us some further more ultimate ' ontological justification of morality ' beyond the ' mere subjective maxims ' which Toulmin has offered. But, is not this search for some ' realm of value ' caused merely by the logical peculiarities of evaluative discourse (i.e., that evaluatives have an irreducible non-descriptive function) ? Even Toulmin has his *gerundives* (" our old friend ' fittingness ' in disguise ") and the ' preventable ' in his least suffering principle has an irreducible ought bound up within it. If we do not recognize these logical features of evaluative discourse for what they are we may well go off, like Tillich, Vivas and Jordan (not to mention Plato and Kant) in search of some ' ontological justification of morality '. But, if we note that, in addition to the descriptive criteria of evaluatives, there is always this non-descriptive and decisional feature, we will realize that there is no need to engage in this further quite puzzling quest for justification. We show what can possibly count as ' good reasons ' in ethics when we exhibit the descriptive criteria a moral judgment can have.

These criteria—as Urmson, Hare and Edwards have brought brilliantly to our attention—are both varied and context-dependent, *perhaps* far more than Toulmin and I believe them to be. Yet, the reasons for moral appraisals are always (1) other moral appraisals, or (2) factual statements ; and where they are other moral appraisals, these moral appraisals are always either directly or indirectly justified by factual statements.[55] There is never any need to appeal to ontology at all, but only a need to recognize that in addition to having descriptive meaning, moral utterances express commitment.

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[53]One, of course, can be an " Objectivist " in value (accept one indefinable value term) without taking any such stand at all on the *locus* of value. See E. W. Hall, *What is Value?* , pp. 1-3.
[54]Lest I be thought to be creating a straw man, I appeal to the kind of arguments about " a realm of value " in the moral philosophies of Eliseo Vivas and E. Jordan. See E. Vivas, *The Moral Life and the Ethical Life*, and E. Jordan, *The Good Life*.
[55]Paul Edwards has developed this aspect nicely in his *The Logic of Moral Discourse*.