PHILOSOPHICAL LECTURE

TRUTH, INVENTION, AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

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Read 24 November 1976

EVEN now, in an age not given to mysticism, there are people who ask 'What is the meaning of life?' Many of the same people think that this question is intimately related with the question 'Can any judgement that this or that is worth while be *true*?' And they think that these two questions must be the central questions of moral philosophy.

The question of life's having a meaning and the question of truth are not at the centre of the subject as we now have it. The second is little discussed, and the first is under suspicion of belonging in the same class as 'What is the greatest good of the greatest number?' or 'What is the Will?' or 'What holds the world up?' This is the class of questions not in good order, or best not answered just as they stand.

If there is a semantical crux here, then all logical priority attaches to it; and no reasonable person could pretend that a perfectly straightforward sense attaches to the idea of life's meaning something. But logical priority is not everything; and, most notably, the order of logical priority is not always or necessarily the same as the order of discovery. Someone who was very perplexed or very persistent would be well within his rights to insist that where a question has been asked as often as this one has, a philosopher must make what he can of the problem: and that, if the sense is obscure, then he must find what significance the effort to frame an answer is apt to *force* upon the question.

In what follows, I explore the possibility that the questions of truth and the meaning of life really are the central questions of moral philosophy. The outcome of this attempt may suggest that, unless we really want to think of moral philosophy as the casuistry of emergencies, the question of meaning is a better focus for ethics and meta-ethics than the textbook problem

'What shall I do?' I have found that the question of meaning does, as the untheoretical suppose, lead straight into the question of truth; and that the attempt to answer either question leads into many other thickets. If mileage through thicket be any measure of progress towards the centre, then I shall have done something to demonstrate practically the reality of the possibility that these two questions are the central ones. I shall also claim to have uncovered the possibility that philosophy has put *happiness* in the place which should have been occupied in moral philosophy by *meaning*. This is a purely theoretical claim, but if it is correct it is not without consequences; and if (as some say) weariness and dissatisfaction have issued from the direct pursuit of happiness as such, then it is not without explanatory power.

I

I have spoken in favour of the direct approach, but it is impossible to reach out to the perplexity for which the question of meaning is felt to stand, without first recording the sense that, over the last two hundred years, there has been some shift in the way the question is seen, and in the kind of answer it is felt to require. Here is an answer made almost exactly two hundred years ago, two years before the death of Voltaire:

> We live in this world to compel ourselves industriously to enlighten one another by means of reasoning and to apply ourselves always to carrying forward the sciences and the arts. (W. A. Mozart to Padre Martini: letter of 4 December 1776.)[1]

What we envy here is the specificity, and the certainty. But, even as we feel envy, it is likely that we want to rejoice in our freedom to disbelieve in that which provided the contingent foundation of the specificity and certainty. I make this remark,

[1] Note again, one of the expressions chosen by the same composer to commemorate his father's birthday anniversary in 1777: 'I wish you as many years as are needed to have nothing left to do in music.'

Do people say such things now? Outside religious writings in the strict sense, the closest I know to a twentieth-century equivalent of Mozart's expressions is:

> 'As we grow older . . . we discover that the lives of most human beings are worthless except in so far as they contribute to the enrichment and emancipation of the human spirit. However attractive in our youth animal graces may be, if in our maturity they have not led us to emend one character in the corrupt text of existence then our time has been wasted.' [Cyril Connolly], Palinurus, *The Unquiet Grave* (Hamish Hamilton; London, 1945).

not because I think that we should believe in what Mozart and Padre Martini believed in, but in outright opposition to the hope that some relatively painless accommodation can be made between intellectual freedom and certainty of purpose. The foundation of what we envy was the now nearly unattainable conviction that there exists a God whose purpose ordains certain specific duties for all men, and appoints particular men to particular missions.

That conviction was not only fallible: there are many who would now say that it was also dangerous—and that the risk it carried was that, if the conviction was false, then one might prove to have thrown one's life away. In the cases we are considering, 'throwing one's life away' seems utterly the wrong thing to say of the risk carried by the conviction, and wrong even of those aspects of these lives which were intimately conditioned by the belief in God. But, if one doubts that God exists, then it is one form of the problem of meaning to justify not wanting to speak here of throwing a life away. It is a terrible thing to try to live a life without believing in *anything*. But surely that doesn't mean that just any old set of concerns and beliefs will do, provided one could live a life by them. Surely, if any old set would do, that is the same as life's being meaningless?

If we envy the certainty of the 1776 answer, then most likely this is only one of several differences which we see between our situation and the situation of the human beings who lived before the moment at which Darwin's theory of evolution so confined the scope of the religious imagination. History has not yet carried us to the point where it is impossible for a description of such differences to count as exaggerated. But they are formidable. And for the sake of the clarity of what is to come I must here express open dissent from two comments which might be made about them.

First, someone more interested in theory than in what it was like to be alive then and what it is like now may try to diminish the differences which we sense, by arguing from accessibility to both eighteenth and twentieth centuries of a core notion of God, a notion which he may say persists in the concept of God championed by modern theologians. To this use of their ideas I object that, whatever gap it is which lies between 1776 and 1976, such notions as *God as the ground of our being* cannot bridge it. For these exemplify a tendency towards an increasingly *a priori* conception of God which, even if the

eighteenth century had had it, most of the men of that age would have hastened to amplify with a more hazardous *a posteriori* conception, whether to believe or disbelieve in it. Faith in God conceived *a posteriori* was precisely the cost of the certainty and the definiteness which we envy.

The other thing someone might say is that, in at least one crucial respect, our situation is not different from a late Enlightenment situation, because there is a conceptually determined need in which the eighteenth century stood and in which we stand equally. This, it may be said, is the need for commitment—commitment being conceived as a cognitively undetermined extra. In the eighteenth-century case the alleged commitment was to submission to God's purpose. (We shall come later to what these theorists think it is in our case.)

How could a man get to the point of recognizing or even suspecting that it was God's purpose that he should be a composer, say, and yet be indifferent to that? Surely no extra commitment, over and above the suspicion that this or that is God's purpose, is required to create the concern we should expect to find already present in him. If this extra thing were supplied, however, then it would bring too much. For the commitment to submission excludes rebellion against God's purpose; and rebellion has never been excluded by the religious attitude as such.

What then are the similarities and the differences between the eighteenth-century orientation and our own orientation upon the meaning of life? It seems that the similarities which persist hold between the conceptual scheme with which they confronted the world of everyday experience and with which we, in spite of a thoroughgoing acceptance of natural science as applied to everything including ourselves, confront it: and that the dissimilarities relate to the specificity and the organization (or focus) of the various concerns in which their world-view involved them and our world-view involves us. For us there is less specificity and more disorganization. I fear that this is still a very dark statement. But it is surely not so dark as to obscure the relationship of the dissimilarity to a cognate dissimilarity, which must have been manifest the moment I prepared to approach the divide between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries by reference to the purposive or practical certainty of individual men.

Unless we are Marxists we are much more resistant in the second half of the twentieth century than eighteenth- or

nineteenth-century men knew how to be against all attempts to locate the meaning of human life or human history in mystical or metaphysical conceptions—in the emancipation of mankind, or progress, or the onward advance of Absolute Spirit. It is not that we have lost interest in emancipation or progress themselves; but, whether temporarily or permanently, we have more or less abandoned the idea that the importance of emancipation or progress (or a correct conception of spiritual advance) is that these are the marks by which our minute speck in the universe must distinguish itself as the spiritual focus of the cosmos. Perhaps that is what makes the question of the meaning we can find in life so difficult and so desolate for us.

With these bare and inadequate historical assertions, the time is come to go straight to a modern philosophical account of the matter. There are not very many to choose from.

II

The account I have taken is that given in Chapter 18 of Richard Taylor's book *Good and Evil*—an account rightly singled out for praise by the analytical philosopher who reviewed the book for the *Philosophical Review*.[1]

Taylor's approach to the question whether life has any meaning is first to 'bring to our minds a clear image of meaningless existence', and then determine what would need to be inserted into the meaningless existence so depicted in order to make it not meaningless. Taylor writes:

> A perfect image of meaninglessness of the kind we are seeking is found in the ancient myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus, it will be remembered, betrayed divine secrets to mortals, and for this he was condemned by the gods to roll a stone to the top of the hill, the stone then immediately to roll back down, again to be pushed to the top by Sisyphus, to roll down once more, and so on again and again, *forever*.

Two ways are then mentioned in which this meaninglessness could be alleviated or removed. First:

> . . . if we supposed that these stones . . . were assembled [by Sisyphus] at the top of the hill . . . in a beautiful and enduring temple, then . . . his labours would have a point, something would come of them all . . .

[1] See Richard Taylor, *Good and Evil* (Macmillan; New York, 1970). The review was by Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Philosophical Review*, lxxxi (1973), p. 113.

That is one way. But Taylor is not in the end disposed to place much reliance in this species of meaning, being more impressed by a second mode of enrichment.

> Suppose that the gods, as an afterthought, waxed perversely merciful by implanting in [Sisyphus] a strange and irrational impulse . . . to roll stones . . . To make this more graphic, suppose they accomplish this by implanting in him some substance that has this effect on his character and drives . . . This little afterthought of the gods . . . was . . . merciful. For they have by this device managed to give Sisyphus precisely what he wants—by making him want precisely what they inflict on him. However it may appear to us, Sisyphus' . . . life is now filled with mission and meaning, and he seems to himself to have been given an entry to heaven . . . The *only* thing that has happened is this: Sisyphus has been reconciled to [his existence] . . . He has been led to embrace it. Not, however, by reason or persuasion, but by nothing more rational than the potency of a new substance in his veins . . .

So much for meaninglessness, and two ways of alleviating it. Meaninglessness, Taylor says,

> is essentially endless pointlessness, and meaningfulness is therefore the opposite. Activity, and even long drawn out and repetitive activity, has a meaning if it has some significant culmination, some more or less lasting end that can be considered to have been the direction and purpose of the activity.

That is the temple-building option, of course.

> But the descriptions so far also provide something else; namely, the suggestion of how an existence that is objectively meaningless, in this sense, can nevertheless acquire a meaning for him whose existence it is.

This 'something else' is the option of implanting in Sisyphus the impulse to push what he has to push. Here Taylor turns aside to compare, in point of meaninglessness or meaningfulness, the condition of Sisyphus and the lives of various animals, working from the lower to the higher animals—cannibalistic blindworms, the cicada, migratory birds, and so on up to ourselves. His verdict is that the point of any living thing's life is evidently nothing but life itself.

> This life of the world thus presents itself to our eyes as a vast machine, feeding on itself, running on and on forever to nothing. And we are part of that life. To be sure, we are not just the same, but the differences are not so great as we like to think; many are merely invented and none really cancels meaninglessness . . . We are conscious of our activity. Our goals, whether in any significant sense we choose them or not, are things

of which we are at least partly aware and can . . . appraise . . . Men have a history, as other animals do not . . . Still . . . if we think that, unlike Sisyphus, [our] labours do have a point, that they culminate in something lasting and, independently of our own deep interests in them, very worthwhile, then we simply have not considered the thing closely enough . . . For [Sisyphus' temple] to make any difference it had to be a temple that would at least endure, adding beauty to the world for the remainder of time. Our achievements . . ., those that do . . . last, like the sand-swept pyramids, soon become mere curiosities, while around them the rest of mankind continues its perpetual toting of rocks, only to see them roll down . . .

Here is a point which obsesses the author. Paragraph upon paragraph is devoted to describing the lamentable but undoubted impermanence (or futility *sub specie aeternitatis*) of the architectural or built monuments of human labour. It is not quite clear that the same effect could have been contrived if the gradual accumulation of scientific understanding or the multiplication (in a manner accessible to the living) of the sublime utterances of literature or music had been brought into the argument. What is clear, however, is that Taylor is committed to a strong preference for the second method of enriching Sisyphus' life—that is for the compulsion caused by the substance put into Sisyphus' veins. As for the first method, and temple-building for the sake of the temple,

Suppose . . . that after ages of dreadful toil, all directed at this final result [Sisyphus] did at last complete his temple, [so] that now he could say his work was done, and he could rest and forever enjoy the result. Now what? What picture now presents itself to our minds? It is precisely the picture of infinite boredom! Of Sisyphus doing nothing ever again, but contemplating what he has already wrought and can no longer add anything to, and contemplating it for eternity! Now in this picture we have a meaning for Sisyphus' existence, a point for his prodigious labour, because we have put it there; yet, at the same time, that which is really worthwhile seems to have slipped away entirely.

The final reckoning would appear to be this: (a) a lasting end or *telos* could constitute a purpose for the work; but (b) there is no permanence; and (c), even if there were such permanence, its point would be effectively negated by boredom with the outcome of the work. And so we are thrown inexorably in the arms of the other and second sort of meaning.

We can reintroduce what has been resolutely pushed aside in an effort to view our lives and human existence with objectivity; namely, our

own wills, our deep interest in what we find ourselves doing . . . Even the glow worms . . . whose cycles of existence over the millions of years seem so pointless when looked at by us, will seem utterly different to us if we can somehow try to view their existence from within. . . . If the philosopher is apt to see in this a pattern similar to the unending cycles of the existence of Sisyphus, and to despair, then it is indeed because the meaning and point he is seeking is not there—but mercifully so. The meaning of life is from within us, it is not bestowed from without, and it far exceeds in its beauty and permanence any heaven of which men have ever dreamed or yearned for.

III

Connoisseurs of twentieth-century ethical theory in most Anglo-Saxon and Continental variants will be quick to see the affinities of this account. Practitioners of the first kind are sometimes singled out for their failure to say anything about the meaning of life. But, if the affinities are as strong as I think (notwithstanding Taylor's philosophical distance from his contemporaries), then what we have just unearthed has a strong claim to be their secret doctrine of the meaning of life.

Consider first the sharp supposedly unproblematic distinction, which is reinforced by the myth as told and retold here, between what we discover already there in the world—the facts, including the gods' enforcement of their sentence—and what is invented or, by thinking or feeling or willing, somehow put *into* (or *on to*, like varnish) the factual world—namely the values.[1]

Here, at the point where the magic stuff is to be injected into the veins of Sisyphus, I shall digress for a moment to explain the deliberate way in which I shall everywhere use the word 'value'. I propose that we distinguish between valuations (typically recorded in verdicts of the form 'x is good', 'bad', 'beautiful', 'ugly', 'ignoble', 'brave', 'just', 'mischievous', 'malicious', 'worthy', 'honest', 'corrupt', 'disgusting', 'amusing', 'diverting', 'boring', etc.—no restrictions at all on the category of x) and *directives* or *deliberative* (or *practical*) *judgements* (e.g. 'I must ψ', 'I ought to ψ', 'it would be best, all things considered, for me to ψ', etc.). Between these there is an important no-man's-land (general judgements of the strongly deprecatory or commendatory kind about vices and virtues, and general or particular statements about actions which it is ignoble or

[1] On the differences between discovery and invention, and on some abuses of the distinction, see William Kneale, 'The Idea of Invention', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. lxi (1955).

inhuman or unspeakably wicked to do or not to do). That there is much in between pure valuations and pure directives, however, does nothing to obstruct the discrimination I seek to effect between the spurious fact–value distinction and the real is–ought distinction. The non-existence of any relevant or useful notion of 'factual' by which to make the first (see below, Sections V and IX) serves only to further our understanding of the second (whether we state that as the distinction between *is* and *ought*, or *is* and *must*, or *is* and *I'd better*). For, if we conceive of the distinction of *is* and *ought* as the distinction between appreciation and decision and also emancipate ourselves from a limited and absurd idea of what *is*, then there can be a new verisimilitude in our account of the appreciation which we have to contrast with decision.[1]

Let us return to Sisyphus. At one moment Sisyphus sees his task as utterly futile and degrading: at the next, supposedly without any change whatever in his factual or cognitive appreciation, we are told that he sees his whole life as infinitely rewarding. There is only one philosophy of value which can fully accommodate this possibility.

Consider now Taylor's account of the escape from meaninglessness, or from what he might equally well have followed the Existentialists and called *absurdity*. This escape is only a variant upon the modern philosopher's reaction to the perception of the real or supposed meaninglessness of human existence. As a proposal for escape it is co-ordinate with every other proposal, suicide (always one recognized way), scorn or defiance (Albert Camus), resignation or drift (certain orientally influenced positions), various kinds of commitment (R. M. Hare and J.-P. Sartre), and what may be the most recently enlisted member of this équipe, which is irony.[2]

Few readers of *Freedom and Reason* will fail to recognize in Sisyphus, after the injection of the gods' substance into his veins, a stone-rolling model (Mark I) of R. M. Hare's further elaborated rationally impregnable 'fanatic'.[3] As for the mysterious substance itself, surely this is some extra oomph, injected afterwards *ad libitum*, which will enable Sisyphus' factual

[1] Corresponding very roughly to the no-man's land between *is* and *ought* or valuation and directive, there is overall (or *practically focused*) appreciation, lying in between initial (or unweighted) appreciation and practical decision.

[2] See Thomas Nagel, 'Absurdity' in *Journal of Philosophy* (1971).

[3] R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford, 1963). I mean that Sisyphus is the *stuff* of which the fanatic is made.

judgements about bits of stone-rolling to take on 'evaluative meaning'.

Nor again has nineteenth- or twentieth-century Utilitarianism anything to fear from this style of fable-telling. For the *locus* or origin of all value has been firmly confined within the familiar area of psychological states.

Scarcely very tendentiously, I shall call Taylor's and all similar doctrines non-cognitive accounts of the meaning of life. For non-cognitivists have always resembled Taylor in striving for descriptions of the human condition by which will and intellect-cum-perception are kept separate and innocent of all dubious or inside transactions. The intellect supplies uncontaminated factual perception, deduction, and means–end reasoning. Ends are supplied (in this picture) by feeling or will, which are not conceived either as percipient or as determinants in any interesting way of perception.

I shall argue that, in spite of the well-tried familiarity of its ideas, the non-cognitive account depends for all its plausibility upon abandoning at the level of theory that inner perspective which it commends as the only possible perspective upon life's meaning. This is a kind of incoherence; and one which casts some doubt upon the whole distinction of the inside and the outside viewpoints. I believe that once we break down the supposed distinction of the inner or participative and the outer, supposedly objective, viewpoints, there is a way forward. At no point will this lead back to the intuitive certainty which we began by envying as enjoyed in an earlier age.

IV

Where the non-cognitive account essentially depends on the existence and availability of the inner view, it is a question of capital importance whether the account the non-cognitivist gives of the inner view makes such sense of our condition as from the inside it has for us.

The first ground for suspecting distortion is that, if the non-cognitive view is put in the way Taylor puts it, then it makes too little difference to the meaningfulness of life how well or badly our strivings are apt to turn out. Stone-rolling for its own sake, and stone-rolling for successful temple building, and stone-rolling for temple building which will be frustrated—all seem to come to much the same thing. I object that that is not how it feels to most people from inside. No doubt there are

'committed' individuals like William the Silent[1] or the doctor in Camus' *La Peste* who will constitute exceptions to my claim. But in general the larger the obstacles which nature or other men put in our way, and the more truly hopeless the prospect, the less point most of us will feel anything has. In the end point is partly dependent on expectation of outcome; and expectation is dependent on past outcomes. So point is not independent of outcome.

The non-cognitivist may make two replies here. The first is that, inasmuch as outcome is conceived by the agent as independent of the activity, the activity itself is merely instrumental and must lead back to other activities which are their own outcome. And these he will say are what matter. But I object to this first reply

(a) that I shall show in due course how activities which can be regarded as 'their own goals' typically depend on valuations which non-cognitivism makes bad sense of;[2]

(b) that I doubt that all activities which have a goal independent of the activity itself are perceived by their agents as only derivatively meaningful.[3]

Second, the non-cognitivist may protest, against the objection that he makes it matter too little how well or badly our strivings turn out, that the emptier and worse worlds where one imagines everything having even less point than it has now, are worlds where the will itself will falter. To this I reply: Yes, but there is nothing written yet into the non-cognitive account about what kinds of object will engage with the will as important. And it is still unclear at this stage how much room can be found within that account for the will's own distinctions between good and bad reasons for caring about anything as important. Objectively speaking (once 'we disengage our wills'), any reason is as good or as bad as any other reason, the non-cognitivist seems to say. For life is objectively meaningless on the non-cognitive account. And, by the non-cognitivist's lights, it seems that whatever the will chooses to treat as a good reason to engage itself is, for the will, a good reason. But the will itself, taking the inner view, picks and chooses, deliberates, weighs concerns. It craves objective reasons; and often it could not go forward unless it thought it had them. The extension of the concept *objective* is quite different on the inner view from the

[1] *Nul n'est besoin d'espérer pour entreprendre, ni de réussir pour persévérer.*

[2] See below, Section V.

[3] See below, Section XII.

extension assigned by the outer view. And the rationale for determining the extension is different also.

There is here an incoherence. To avoid it, the disagreement between the inner and the outer views must be softened somehow. The trouble is that, if we want to preserve any of the distinctive emphases of this particular non-cognitivism, then we will find that, for purposes of the validation of any human concern, the non-cognitive view must always readdress the problem to the inner perspective *without itself adopting that perspective*. It cannot adopt the inner perspective because, according to the picture which the non-cognitivist paints of these things, the inner view has to be unaware of the outer one, and has to enjoy essentially illusory notions of objectivity, importance, and significance: whereas what the outer view has to hold is that life is objectively meaningless. The non-cognitivist mitigates the outrageousness of so categorical a denial of meaning as the outer view issues by pointing to the availability of the participant perspective. But the most that he can do is to point. Otherwise the theorist will be engulfed by a view which he must maintain to be false.

So much for the first distortion I claim to find in Taylor's kind of non-cognitivism, and so much for certain inconclusive defences of that non-cognitivism. There is also a second distortion.

To us there seems to be an important difference between the life of the cannibalistic glow-worms which Taylor describes and the life of, say, a dolphin at play or a basking seal, creatures which are conscious, which can rest without sleeping, adjust the end to the means as well as the means to the end, and can take in much more about the world than they have the immediate or instrumental need to take in. There also seems to us to be a difference, a different difference, between the life of seals or dolphins and the life of human beings living in communities with a history. And there is even a third difference, which as participants we insist upon, between the life of a man who contributes something to a society with an ongoing history and a life lived on the plan of a Southern pig-breeder who (in the economics textbooks, if not in real life) buys more land to grow more corn to feed more hogs to buy more land, to grow more corn to feed more hogs . . . The practical concerns of this man are at once regressive and circular. And we are keenly interested, on the inner view, in the difference between these concerns and non-circular practical reasonings or life plans.

For the inner view, this difference undoubtedly exists. If the outside view is right to commend the inside view, then the outside view must pay some heed to the differences which the inner view perceives—if only to depreciate them. But it can accord them no importance which is commensurate with the weight which the non-cognitive theory of life's meaning thrusts upon the inner view. 'The differences are merely invented,' Taylor has to say, 'and none really cancels the kind of meaninglessness we found in Sisyphus.'

To the participant it may seem that it is much harder to explain what is so good about buying more land to raise more hogs to buy more land . . . than it is to explain what is good about digging a ditch with a man whom one likes, or helping the same man to talk or drink the sun down the sky. It might seem to a participant that the explanation of the second sort of thing, so far from having nowhere to go but round and round in circles, fans out into a whole arborescence of concerns; that, unlike any extant explanation of what is so good about breeding hogs to buy more land to breed more hogs . . ., it can be pursued backwards and outwards to take in all the concerns of a whole life. But on the non-cognitive view of the inner view there is no way to make these differences stick. They count for so little that it is a mystery that the non-cognitivist doesn't simply say: Life is meaningless: and that's all there is to it. If only he would say that, we should know where we were.

But why do the differences just mentioned count for so little for the non-cognitivist? Because they all arise from anthropocentric considerations, and what is anthropocentric is not by the standards of the outer view objective. (Taylor insists that to determine whether something matters we have to view it 'independently of our own deep interests'.) I shall come back to this when I reconstruct the non-cognitive view; but let me point out immediately the *prima facie* implausibility of the idea that the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity (which appears to have to do with the existence of publicly accepted and rationally criticizable standards of argument, or of ratiocination towards truth) should coincide with the distinction between the anthropocentric and the non-anthropocentric (which concerns orientation towards human interests or a human point of view). The distinctions are not without conceptual links, but the *prima facie* appearance is that a matter which is anthropocentric may be either subjective or objective. It will seem so until we have an argument to prove rigorously

the mutual coincidence of two independently plausible accounts of the anthropocentric and the merely subjective.[1]

The third and last distortion of experience I find in Taylor's presentation of non-cognitivism I shall try to convey by an anecdote. Two or three years ago, when I went to see some film at the Academy Cinema, the second feature of that evening was one of those curious and appalling documentary films about creatures fathoms down on the ocean-bottom. When it was over, I turned to my companion and asked, 'What is it about these films that makes one feel so utterly desolate?' Her reply was: 'Apart from the fact that so much of the film was about sea monsters eating one another, the unnerving thing was that nothing down there ever seemed to *rest*.' And as for play, disinterested curiosity, or merely contemplating, she could have added, these seemed inconceivable.

At least about the film we had just seen, these were just the points she needed to make—untrammelled by all pseudo-philosophical inhibitions, which are irrelevant in any case to the 'inner' or participant perspective. The thought the film leads to is this. If we can project upon a form of life nothing but the pursuit of life itself, if we find there no non-instrumental concerns and no interest in the world considered as lasting longer than the animal in question will need the world to last to sustain the animal's own life; then the form of life must be to some considerable extent alien to us.[2] Any adequate description

[1] And the same goes for the several other distinctions which are in the offing here—the distinctions between the neutral and the committed, the neutral and the biased, the descriptive and the prescriptive, and descriptive and the evaluative, the quantifiable and the unquantifiable, the absolute and the relative, the scientific and the unscientific, the not essentially contestable and the essentially contestable, the verifiable or falsifiable and the neither verifiable nor falsifiable, the factual and the normative. . . . In common parlance, and I am afraid in sociology and economics—even in political science, which should know better—these distinctions are used almost interchangeably. But they are different, and they are separately interesting. Each of these contrasts seems to have its own rationale. A correct distinction of these distinctions, like all linguistic or philosophical analysis bent on the keen observation of the things which words denote, would be a philosophical contribution to life.

[2] Here, I think, or in this neighbourhood, lies the explanation of the profound unease that some people feel at the systematic and unrelenting exploitation of nature and animals which is represented by factory farming, by intensive livestock rearing, or by the mindless spoliation of non-renewable resources. This condemnation of evil will never be understood till it is distinguished by its detractors from its frequent, natural, but only contingent

of the point we can attach to our form of life must do more than treat our appetitive states in would-be isolation from their relation to the things they are directed at.

For purposes of his eventual philosophical destination, Taylor has had to forge an intimate and very direct link between contemplation, permanence, and boredom. But, at least on the inner view, the connection between these things is at once extremely complex and relatively indirect.[1] And, once one has seen the final destination towards which it is Taylor's design to move the whole discussion, then one sees in a new light his obsession with monuments. Surely these are his hostages for the objects of psychological states in general; and all such objects are due to be in some sense discredited. (Discredited on the outer view, or accorded a stultifyingly indiscriminate tolerance on the outer account of the inner view.) And one comprehends all too well Taylor's sour grapes insistence on the impermanence of monuments—as if by this he could reduce to nil the philosophical (as opposed, he might say, to subjective) importance of all the objects of psychological states, longings, lookings, reverings, contemplatings, or whatever.

V

Leaving much dangling, I shall conclude discussion of the outer account of the inner perspective with a general difficulty, and a suggestion.

There is a tendency, in Utilitarian writings and in the writings of economists,[2] to locate all ultimate or intrinsic

concomitant—the absolute prohibition of all killing which is not done in self-defence.

[1] On permanence, cf. F. P. Ramsey, 'Is there anything to discuss?', *Foundations of Mathematics and other Essays* (London, 1931):

> 'I apply my perspective not merely to space but also to time. In time the world will cool and everything will die; but that is a long time off still and its percent value at compound discount is almost nothing. Nor is the present less valuable because the future will be blank.'

[2] Cf. Wilfred Beckerman, *New Statesman*, 21 June 1974, p. 880.

> The second, and real question is: at what rate should we use up resources in order to maximise the welfare of human beings . . . Throughout existence man has made use of the environment, and the only valid question for those who attach—as I do (in accordance with God's first injunction to Adam)—*complete and absolute priority to human welfare* is what rate of use provides the maximum welfare for humans, including future generations.

I quote this relatively guarded specimen to illustrate the hazards of making

value in human appetitive states.[1] They are contrasted (as we also see Taylor contrasting them for his purposes) with everything else in the world. According to this sort of view, the value of anything which is not a psychological state derives from the psychological state or states for which it is an actual or potential object. See here what Bentham says in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*:

> Strictly speaking, nothing can be said to be good or bad, but either in itself; which is the case only with pain or pleasure; or on account of its effects; which is the case only with things that are the causes or preventives of pain and pleasure.

One has only to put the matter like this, however, to be troubled by a curious instability. Since nothing at all can count for the outer view as inherently or intrinsically good, the doctrine must belong to the inner or inside view. But, as experienced, the inner view too will reject this view of value. For, adopting that inner view,[2] and supposing with Bentham that certain conscious states are good in themselves, we must take these states as they appear to the inner view. But then one cannot say without radical misconception that these states are all that is intrinsically valuable. For (a) many of these conscious states have intentional objects; (b) many of the conscious states in which intrinsic value supposedly resides are strivings *after* objects which are not states, or are contemplations *of* objects which are not themselves states; and (c) it is of the essence of these conscious states, experienced as strivings or contemplations or whatever, to accord to their intentional objects a non-instrumental value. For from the inside of lived experience, and by the scale of

too facile a distinction between human welfare on the one side and the environment on the other. But it also illustrates the purely ornamental role which has devolved upon the Hebrew scriptures. They constitute matter for the literary decoration of sentiments formed and apprehended by quite different methods of divination. It is irrelevant for instance that the world-view given voice in the first chapters of *Genesis* is perceptibly more complicated than Beckerman's is.

[1] Or in the case of vegetarian utilitarian writings, an interesting hybrid, to locate all ultimate value in conscious animal appetitive states.

[2] Perhaps some one individual man's inner view. For here and only here could it be held to be perfectly or fully obvious that the special goodness in themselves of certain of his pleasurable states is something simply above or beyond argument for him. Beyond that point—notwithstanding utilitarian explanations of the superfluity of argument on something so allegedly evident—it is less obvious to him.

value which that imposes, the shape of an archway or the sound of the lapping of the sea against the shore at some place at some time may appear to be of an altogether different order of importance from the satisfaction which somebody else once had from his breakfast.[1]

The participant, with the going concepts of the objective and the worth while, descries certain external properties in things and states of affairs. And the presence there of these properties is what invests them with importance in his eyes. The one thing the properties cannot be, at least for him, is mere projections resulting from a certain kind of efficacy in the causation of satisfaction. For no appetitive or aesthetic or contemplative state can see its own object as having a value which is derivative in the way which is required by the thesis that all non-instrumental value resides in human states of satisfaction. But then the outer view cannot safely rely upon the meaning which the inner view perceives in something. To see itself and its object in the alien manner of the outer view, the state as experienced would have to be prepared to suppose that it, the state, could just as well have lighted on any other object (even any other kind of object), provided only that the requisite attitudes could have been induced. But in this conception of such states we are entitled to complain that nothing remains that we can recognize or which the inner perspective will not instantly disown.[2]

[1] This feature of experience is of course lamented by thinkers who seek to make moral philosophy out of (('formal value theory'+moral earnestness)+some values of the theorist's own, generalized and thereby tested)+applications. But the feature is part of what is given in the phenomenology of some of the very same 'satisfaction' experiences which are the starting-point of the utilitarians themselves. And there is nothing to take fright at in this feature of them, inconsistent though it is with absurd slogans of the literally absolute priority of human welfare.

[2] An example will make these claims clearer perhaps. A man comes at dead of night to a hotel in a place where he has never been before. In the morning he stumbles out from his darkened room and, following the scent of coffee out of doors, he finds a sunlit terrace looking out across a valley on to a range of blue mountains in the half-distance. The sight of them—a veritable vale of Tempe—entrances him. In marvelling at the valley and mountains he thinks only how overwhelmingly beautiful they are. The value of the state depends on the value attributed to the object. But the theory which I oppose says all non-instrumental value resides here in the man's own state, and in the like states of others who are actually so affected by the mountains. The more numerous such states are, the greater, presumably, the theory holds, is the 'realized' value of the mountains. The theory says that the whole actual value

I promised to conclude the critique of non-cognitivism with a suggestion about values. It is this: no attempt to make sense of the human condition can make sense of it if it treats the objects of psychological states as unequal partners or derivative elements in the conceptual structure of values and states and their objects. This is far worse than Aristotle's opposite error:

> We desire the object because it seems good to us, rather than the object's seeming good to us because we desire it. *Metaphysics*, 1072[a]29 (cf. *N.E.* 1175[a]).

Spinoza appears to have taken this sentence as it stood and deliberately negated it (*Ethics*, part III, proposition 9, note). But maybe it is the beginning of real wisdom to see that we may have to side against both Aristotle and Spinoza here and ask: 'Why should the *because* not hold both ways round?' Surely an adequate account of these matters will have to treat psychological states and their objects as equal and reciprocal partners, and is likely to need to see the identifications of the states and of the properties under which the states subsume their objects as interdependent. (If these interdependencies are fatal to the distinction of inner and outer, we are already in a position to be grateful for that.)

Surely it can be true both that we desire *x* because we think *x* good, and that *x* is good because we desire *x*. It does not count against the point I am making that the explanation of the 'because' is different in each direction. Nor does it count against the particular anti-non-cognitivism which I myself would defend that the second 'because' might have to be explained in some such way as this: such desiring by human beings directed in this way is one part of what is required for there to be such a thing as the perspective for which the non-instrumental goodness of *x* is there to be perceived.

There is an analogy for this suggestion. We may see a pillar-box as red because it is red. But also pillar-boxes, painted as they are, count as red only because there actually exists a perceptual apparatus (e.g. our own) which discriminates, and

of the beauty of the valley and mountains is dependent upon arranging for the full exploitation of the capacity of these things to produce such states in human beings. (Exploitation now begun and duly recorded in Paul Jennings's Wordsworthian emendation: 'I wandered lonely as a crowd.') What I am saying about the theory is simply that it is untrue to the actual experience of the object-directed states which are the starting-point of that theory.

learns on the direct basis of experience to group together, all and only the *de facto* red things. Not every sentient animal which sees a red postbox sees it as red. Few or none of them do. But this in no way impugns the idea that redness is an external, monadic property of a postbox. 'Red postbox' is not short for 'red to human beings postbox'. Red is not a relational property. (It is certainly not relational in the way in which 'father of' is relational, or 'moves' is relational on a Leibniz–Mach view of space.) All the same, it is in one interesting sense a *relative* property. For the category of colour is an anthropocentric category. The category corresponds to an interest which can only take root in creatures with something approaching our own sensory apparatus.

Philosophers have dwelt frequently upon the difference between 'good' and 'red' or 'yellow'. I have long marvelled at this.[1] For there resides in the combined objectivity and anthropocentricity of G. E. Moore's favourite colour yellow a striking analogy to illuminate not only the externality which human beings attribute to the properties by whose ascription they evaluate things, people, and actions, but also the fashion in which the quality *by* which the thing qualifies as good and the desire *for* the thing are equals and 'made for one another'. Compare the way in which the quality by which a thing counts as funny and the mental set which is presupposed to being amused by it are made for one another.

[1] Without of course wishing to deny the difference that good is 'attributive' to a marked degree, whereas colour words are scarcely attributive at all. I think that, in these familiar discussions, philosophers have misdescribed the undoubted fact that, because there is no standing interest to which yellowness answers, 'yellow' is not such as to be *cut out* (by virtue of standing for what it stands for) to commend a thing or evaluate it favourably. But, surely, if there were such a standing interest, 'yellow' would be at least as well suited to commend as 'sharp' or 'beautiful' or even 'just' are.

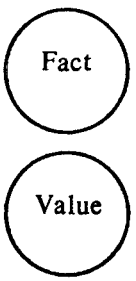
Against the suggestion that axiological predicates are a species of predicate not clearly marked off from the factual, there is a trick which the non-cognitivist always plays, and which he ought not to be allowed to play. He picks himself a 'central case' of a descriptive predicate, and a 'central case' of a valuational predicate. Then he remarks how very different the predicates he has picked are. But what on earth can that show? Nobody thinks you could prove a bat was not an animal by contrasting some bat (a paradigm case of a bat) with some elephant (a paradigm case of an animal). Nothing can come clear from such procedures in advance of explanation of the point of the contrast. In the present case the point of the factual/non-factual distinction has not been explained; and it has to be explained without begging the question in favour of the non-cognitivist, who picked the quarrel in the first place. What was the nature or rationale of the difference which was by these means

VI

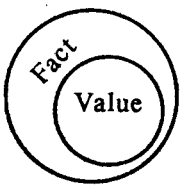
The time has come to sort out the non-cognitive theory to accommodate these findings and expel contradiction. But it is just possible that I have not convinced you that sorting out is necessary, and that you found more coherent than I have allowed it to be the non-cognitivist's use of the idea of perspective, and of different and incompatible perspectives.

Perspective is not a form of illusion, distortion, or delusion.

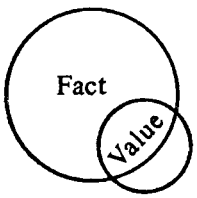
to have been demonstrated? Till it is explained there must remain all of the following possibilities



1. prescriptivism and existentialism



2. naturalism and anti-non-cognitivism



3. an as yet unclaimed position by which 2 might be amended to accommodate value predicates which are (as a special case) subjective and/or nearly meaningless (e.g. 'nice' in some usages), and place them outside the realm of the factual.

It would be unfair to say there have been no attempts at all to elucidate the point of the fact–value contrast. Wittgenstein tried (quite unsuccessfully, I think) to explain it in his 'Lecture on Ethics', *Philosophical Review*, lxxiv (1965), p. 6. And prescriptivists explain it by reference to the link which they allege holds between evaluation and action. But, although there is some such link between deliberative judgement and action, the required link does not hold between evaluation and action. That was one part of the point of the contrast I proposed at the beginning of Section III.

All the different perspectives of a single array of objects are perfectly consistent with one another. Given a set of perspectives, we can recover, if only they be reliably collected, a unified true account of the shape, spatial relations, and relative dimensions of the objects in the array. If we forget these platitudes then we may think it is much more harmless than it really is that the so-called outer and inner perspectives should straightforwardly contradict one another. But there is nothing whatever in the idea of a perspective to license this scandalous idea—no more than the truism that two perspectives may include or exclude different aspects will create the licence to think that the participant and external views, as the non-cognitivist has described them, may unproblematically conflict over whether a certain concern is objectively worth while or not.[1]

The non-cognitivist theory must be redeployed, then, if any truth is to be salvaged from it. The traditional twentieth-century way of civilizing it into self-consistency would have been *meta-ethics*, conceived as an axiologically neutral branch of 'logic'. Metaethics is not as neutral as was supposed. But it is still the best way for us to understand ourselves better.

Let us take the language of practice or morals as an object language. Call it L. The theorist's duty is then to discover, and to explain in the meta-language which is his own language, both a *formal theory* and a more discursive *informal theory* of L-utterances, not least L-utterances concerning what is worth while or a good thing to do with one's life. What does this involve?

First, and this is the humble formal task which is presupposed to his more distinctively ethical aspirations, the theorist needs to be able to say what each of the sentences of the object language means. To achieve this what will have been needed was a procedure for parsing L-sentences into their primitive semantic components, and a semantical postulate for each primitive component descriptive of its particular contribution to assertion conditions. Then, given any L-sentence *s*, *s* can be

[1] Still less does the language of perspective license the supposition that the philosopher who answers the question of the meaning of life could make a virtue out of committing himself to neither, or neither and both perspectives. Where on earth is *he* looking at things from? Or does he think of himself as a god who mysteriously somehow looks at everything from no perspective at all? For the closest approximation he could coherently conceive of attaining to this aspiration, see Section IX.

paired with an assertion condition stated in the metalanguage by a theorem in the form:

s is assertible if and only if p.

The discursive or informal comments which the moral theorist will hope to make about the status of this, that, or the other judgement in L must presuppose that at least this much has been done, or could readily be done, for each sentence of L. For these assertion conditions give the meaning of the judgements he wants to comment upon; and if he has no principled understanding of what they mean then (whatever other treasures he possesses) he has not got the first thing.[1]

I speak of *assertion* conditions as that by which we fix the meaning, and not yet of *truth* conditions, because within this meta-ethical framework the non-cognitivist's most distinctive non-formal thesis is likely to be the denial that the assertibility of a value judgement or of a deliberative judgement amounts to anything as objective as we suppose truth to be. The aim must be then to leave undecided *pro tempore*—as Dummett in one way and McDowell in another have shown to be possible—the relationship of truth and assertibility.[2] In this way we arrange matters so that it can turn out—as it does for empirical or scientific utterances—that truth is a special case of assertibility; and it is not theoretically excluded that, for certain classes of

[1] Tempers will be inflamed at the idea that formal semantics have anything to do with ethics. But the writings of moral philosophers are replete with claims about meaning. And formal semantics are our only hope for a theory of meaning. What is being proposed here is not that moral philosophers have a duty to occupy themselves with formal semantics; only that, if they prefer to delegate the formal semantic task, then they still ought to adjust the claims they make about meaning to the requirements and framework of a decent theory of meaning. What I claim (see below, VIII), is that the meta-ethical framework, correctly conceived, will determine a better form for a large class of moral philosophical claims. In the place of 'analysis'—scarcely a successful form—let us have the informal elucidation of the assertibility predicate in its various applications to various types of moral judgement.

[2] See M. A. E. Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (Duckworth; London, 1973) and John McDowell, 'Bivalence and Verificationism' in *Truth and Meaning: Essays in Semantics* (Oxford, 1972), edited by Gareth Evans and John McDowell. McDowell shows how we can build up an independent account of what a semantical predicate F will have to be like if the sentences of an object language are to be interpreted by means of equivalences which will say what the object language sentences mean. His way of showing that it can be a *discovery*, so to speak, that it is the truth predicate which fulfils the requirements on F is prefigured at p. 210 of Donald Davidson, 'Truth and Meaning', *Synthèse*, 1967, p. 210.

judgements, assertibility should fall short of truth. The matter is left open, and it is for the informal theory which is built upon the formal theory to close it.

Adapting Tarski's so-called 'Convention T' to the purposes of the formal theory we may say now that the meta-language has a materially adequate definition of the predicate 'assertible' just in case it has as consequences all sentences which are obtained from the schema '*s* is assertible if and only if p' by substituting for '*s*' a name of any sentence of L and substituting for 'p' the expression which is the translation or interpretation of this sentence in the meta-language.[1]

If the ethical theorist is to erect a theory of objectivity, subjectivity, relativism, or whatever upon these foundations, then we need to say more now about how the theory of assertibility must be constrained in order to ensure that the sentence used on the right-hand side of any particular equivalence, which is entailed by the theory of assertibility, does indeed translate the sentence mentioned on the left. What is *translation* in this context? If we can supply this constraint then, as a bonus, we shall understand far better the respective roles of participant and theorist.

It seems obvious that the only way to by-pass Tarski's explicit use of the word 'translation' is by reference to what Davidson has called radical interpretation.[2] A promising proposal is this: rewrite Convention T to state that the meta-

[1] See p. 187 of A. Tarski, 'The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages', in *Logic, Semantics and Metamathematics* (Oxford, 1956). If it became fully evident that assertibility really would in some cases diverge from truth, the question would arise: What is the relation of satisfaction (in terms of which truth is defined) to the counterpart of satisfaction (in terms of which assertibility is defined)? There are three or four different possibilities (including the most obvious one—that truth implies assertibility, that assertibility is the basic notion, and truth is a special case of assertibility for one large class of utterances). But, where there is room for manœuvre in any case, the inquiry is premature before a convincing proof is given of the divergence of truth and assertibility.

[2] See D. Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation', *Dialectica*, 1973. The original problem is of course Quine's. See W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (M.I.T.; Cambridge, Mass., 1960). Davidson's own conception has been progressively refined by many philosophers, notably by Richard Grandy and Donald Davidson in the U.S.A. and C. A. B. Peacocke, G. Evans, and J. H. McDowell (to whom I am here particularly indebted) in England. Amongst recent published works see Evans and McDowell's introduction to *Truth and Meaning: Essays in Semantics* (op. cit., note 21), and Peacocke's 'Truth Definitions and Actual Languages', ibid.

language possesses an empirically correct definition of 'assertible' just in case the semantical postulates, in terms of which the definition of assertibility is given, all taken together, entail a set Σ of equivalences '*s* is assertible just in case p', one equivalence for each sentence of L, with the following overall property: a theorist who employs the condition p with which each sentence *s* is mated in a Σ-equivalence, and who employs the equivalence to interpret utterances of *s*, is in the best position he can be to make the *best possible overall sense* there is to be made of L-speakers. This goal sets a real constraint—witness the fact that the theorist may test his theory, try it out as a way of making sense of his subjects, even as he constructs it. By 'making sense of them' would be meant ascribing to the speakers of L, on the strength of their linguistic and other actions, an intelligible collection of beliefs, needs, and concerns. That is a collection which diminishes to the bare minimum the need (given the truth) to ascribe inexplicable error or inexplicable irrationality to them.[1] And by 'interpreting an utterance of *s*' is meant simply saying what *s* says.

This general description is intended to pass muster for the interpretation of a totally alien language. But now suppose that we envisage the object-language and meta-language both being English. Then we can turn radical interpretation to advantage in order to envisage ourselves as occupying simultaneously the roles of theorist or interpreter and subject or participant. That will be to envisage ourselves as engaged in an attempt to understand ourselves.

[1] Cf. McDowell, 'Bivalence and Verificationism', op. cit., note 21. The latter requirement is a precondition of trying to project any interpretation at all upon alien speakers. It was phrased by Davidson in another way, and called by him the requirement of charity. The replacement given here is closer to what has been dubbed by Richard Grandy the requirement of *humanity*. The further alterations reflect my belief that philosophy must desist from the systematic destruction of the sense of the word 'want', and that what Davidson calls 'primary reasons' must be diversified to embrace a wider and more diverse class of states than *desire*.

Note that, even though we must for purposes of radical interpretation project upon L-speakers our own notions of rationality (and there is no proof they are the sole possible), and even though we take all the advantage we can of the fact that the speakers of the object-language are like us in being men, there is no guarantee that there must be a unique best theory of the assertibility conditions of their utterances. It has not been excluded that there might be significant disagreement between interpreters who have made equally good overall sense of the shared life of speakers of L, but at some points rejected one another's interpretations of L.

Whether we think of things in this way or not, it is very important to note how essentially similar are the positions of the linguistic theorist and his subjects. The role of the theorist is only to *supplement*, for theoretical purposes, the existing semantical understanding of L-speakers. It is true that, subject to the constraint upon which the whole exercise of interpretation itself rests—namely sufficient agreement in beliefs, concerns, and conceptions of what is rational and what is not—the theorist need not have exactly the same beliefs as his subjects. But the terms of description of the world which are available to him are essentially the same as those which are available to his subjects. He uses the very same sort of sentence to describe the conditions under which *s* is assertible as the sentence *s* itself: and the meta-language gives no descriptive distance of the kind the traditional meta-ethicist desiderated from the object-language. If the theorist believes his own theory, then he is committed to be ready to put his mind where his mouth is at least once for each sentence *s* of the object-language, in a statement of assertion conditions for *s* in which he himself uses either *s* or a faithful translation of *s*. It follows that the possibility simply does not exist for the theorist to stand off from the language of the subjects, or from the viewpoint which gives it its sense. He has the same potentially infinite commitment as its ordinary speakers to any world view enshrined in the terms of the object-language.

VII

Even if this is a disappointment to those who supposed that the theorist of value could avoid getting his hands dirty, it faces us in the right direction for the reconstitution of the non-cognitive theory. And the non-cognitivist is in no way prevented from making his point. He can do so in at least two different ways. The first accepts, and the second requires, the interpretive framework set up in Section VI.

First, using the language of his subjects but thinking (as a moralist like a Swift or Aristophanes should, and as any theorist may) a bit harder than the generality of his subjects, he may try to make them look at themselves; and he may try to make them see their own pursuits and concerns in unaccustomed ways. There is an optical metaphor which is much more useful here than perspective. Staying within the participant perspective, what the theorist may do is *lower the level of optical resolution.* Suppressing irrelevancies and trivialities he may perceive, and then persuade others to perceive, what Aurel Kolnai called

'the incongruities of ordinary practice'.[1] Here Kolnai alluded to the irremovable disproportion between how heroic is the effort which it is biologically instinct in us to put into the pursuit of certain of our concerns, and how 'finite, limited, transient, perishable, tiny, tenuous' we ourselves and our goods and satisfactions all are. To lower the level of resolution, not down to the point where human concerns themselves are invisible—we shall come to that—but to the point where both the disproportion and its terms are manifest, is perhaps a precondition of human (as opposed to merely animal) resilience, of humour, of sense of proportion, of sanity even. It is the traditional function of the moralist who is a participant and of the satirist (who may want not to be). But this way of seeing is not the seeing of the total meaninglessness which Taylor talked of. Nor, in the existentialist philosopher's highly technical sense, is it the perception of absurdity. For the participant perspective can contain together both the perception of incongruity and a nice appreciation of the limited but not necessarily infinitesimal importance of this or that particular object or concern. It is not perfectly plain what Kolnai thought about the affinity of existentialist absurdity and incongruity—and his manuscript is unrevised—but, if Kolnai had doubted the compatibility of the perceptions of incongruity and importance, I think I could have convinced him by a very Kolnaistic point. The disproportion between our effort and our transience is diminished the moment one is properly impressed by it. It is only to us or our kind that our own past and future efforts can seem heroic.

So much then for the non-cognitivist's first way. It will lead to nothing radical enough for him. The second way to make his point is to abstract it from the long sequence of preposterous attempts at traditional 'philosophical analysis' of *good*, *ought*, *right*, etc. in terms of pleasure or feeling or approval . . ., and to transform it into an informal observation concerning the similarity or difference between the status of assertibility enjoyed by evaluative judgements and practical judgements, on the one hand, and the status of regular, paradigmatic, or canonical truth enjoyed by (for example) historical or geographical judgements on the other hand.[2] For purposes of the

[1] 'The Utopian Mind' (unpublished typescript), p. 77.

[2] If the former status derives from something about feelings or emotions, as some non-cognitivists have maintained, then there is room here to say so, and a clear relevance for it. Compare especially truism (3) below. Obviously this is the ideal framework in which to make sense of Emotivism.

comparison we can characterize regular truth as that species of assertibility which is determined by what I shall call the truisms of regular truth. These truisms I take to be (1) the compatibility of every regular truth with every other regular truth, (2) the answerability of regular truth to evidenced argument which will under favourable conditions converge upon agreement, and (3) the independence of regular truth both from our will and from our own limited means of recognizing the presence or absence of the property in a statement. (2) and (3) together suggest the truism (4) that every regular truth is true in virtue of something. Finally, a putative further truism (5) requires the complete determinacy of the possession (or non-possession) of regular truth by every judgement which is a regular truth (falsehood).

Within the new framework we can give the non-cognitivist thesis an orderly and natural statement. The question of the factuality or unfactuality of evaluative judgements and deliberative judgements can now be pressed from a point which is within reach. We do not for these purposes need to pretend to be outside our own conceptual scheme, or at a point which would be both inaccessible and unthinkable. We can pursue the non-cognitivist's question by working with informal elucidations of truth and assertibility which are strictly collateral with the formal definition of 'true' or 'assertible'.[1] And as regards the apparent incoherence of Taylor's non-cognitivism, we can supersede the separate outer and inner perspectives by one common perspective accessible to both theorist and participant. Suppose it is asserted that this, that, or the other thing is worth doing, and that the assertion is made on the best sort of grounds known to participant or theorist. Or suppose that a man dies declaring that his life has been marvellously worth while. The non-cognitive theory is first and foremost a theory not about the meaning but about the *status* of those remarks: that their assertibility is not regular truth, and reflects no fact of the matter. And this is precisely the suspicion which may trouble and perplex the untheoretical participant. Nor is it clear that he is wrong to be troubled.

[1] Compare the manner in which we could ascertain from within the space which we occupy certain of the geometrical properties of that very space: e.g. discover whether all equilateral triangles we encounter, of whatever size, are in fact similar triangles. If not, then the space is non-Euclidean. For the hazards of the notion of a conceptual scheme and of the idea of what lies outside one, see Donald Davidson, Presidential Address, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* (1973).

I shall examine the non-cognitivist's claim first as it applies to value judgements in general (Section VIII) and then as it applies to practical judgements in general (Section X).

VIII

For the non-cognitive critique of the assertibility predicate applied to value judgements I propose to employ a formulation given by Bernard Williams in 'The Truth in Relativism', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1974–5).

Relativism will be true, William says, just in case there are or can be systems of beliefs S_1 and S_2 such that:

(1) S_1 and S_2 are distinct and to some extent self-contained;
(2) Adherents of S_1 can understand adherents of S_2;
(3) S_1 and S_2 exclude one another—by (a) being comparable and (b) returning divergent yes/no answers to at least one question identifying some action or object type which is the locus of disagreement under some agreed description;
(4) S_1 and S_2 do not (for us here now, say) stand in real confrontation because, whichever of S_1 and S_2 is ours, the question of whether the other one is right lacks the relation to our concerns 'which alone gives any point or substance to appraisal: the only real questions of appraisal [being] about real options' (p. 255). 'For we recognize that there can be many systems S which have insufficient relation to our concerns for our [own] judgements to have any grip on them.'

If this is right then the critique of the assertibility concept comes to this. Assertibility lacks one of the would-be truistic properties of regular truth: that public argument is expected under favourable conditions to converge towards agreement (cf. truism (2) of VII). Again, there is nothing in the assertibility property itself to guarantee that all one by one assertible judgements are *jointly* assertible (cf. truism (1)). Nor is it clear that where there is disagreement there is always something or other at issue (cf. truism (4)). For regular truth on the other hand we expect and demand all of this.

The participant will find this disturbing, even discouraging. And we have no means as yet to show that that is an irrational reaction. But is Williams right about the compatibility of his four conditions?[1] He mentions amongst other things

[1] Both for Williams's purposes and for ours—which is the status of the assertibility concept as it applies to value judgements, and then as it applies

undifferentiated judgements of 'right' and 'wrong', 'ought' and 'ought not'. Here, where the point of agreement or disagreements or opting one way or another lies close to action, and radical interpretation is correspondingly less problematical, I think he is on strong ground. We can make good sense of conditions (2) and (3) being satisfied together. We can easily imagine condition (4) being satisfied. But for valuations in the strict and delimited sense, such as 'brave', 'dishonest', 'ignoble', 'just', 'malicious', 'priggish', there is a real difficulty. The comparability condition (3) requires that radical interpretation be possible. But radical interpretation requires the projection by one man upon an alien man of a collection of beliefs, desires, and concerns which differ from the interpreter's own only in a fashion which the interpreter can describe and, to some extent, explain: and the remoter the link between the word which is to be interpreted and action, and (what is different) the more special the flavour of the word, the more detailed and delicate the projection which has to be possible to anchor interpretation. Evaluations raise both of these problems at once. (And one of the several factors which make the link between strict valuations and action so remote is something which Williams himself has prominently insisted upon in other connections—the plurality, mutual irreducibility, and incommensurability of goods.) The more feasible interpretation is here, the smaller must be the distance between the concerns of interpreter and subject.[1] But then the harder condition (4) is to satisfy.

In the theoretical framework of radical interpretation we shall suddenly see the point of Wittgenstein's dictum (*Philosophical Investigations*, § 242). 'If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions

(X below) to deliberative or practical judgements—we have to be able to convert a relativism such as this, concerning as it does overall systems S_1 and S_2, into a relativism concerning this or that particular judgement or class of judgements identifiable and reidentifiable across S_1 and S_2. Williams requires this in order that disagreement shall be focused. I require it in order to see whether it is possible to distinguish judgements in S_1 or S_2 whose assertibility conditions coincide with regular truth from other judgements where this is dubious.

[1] There are valuations which are so specific, and so special in their point, that interpretation requires interpreter and subject to have in some area of concern the very same interests and the same precise focus. But specificity is only one part of the problem. Cf. the difficulties which Colin Turnbull has in rendering exactly the sense of the predicate 'marangik' (? 'good') in *The Mountain People* (Jonathan Cape; London, 1973).

but, queer as this may sound, agreement in judgements also.'[1]

IX

The difficulty the non-cognitivist is having at this point is scarcely a straightforward vindication of anti-non-cognitivism. If the case for the coincidence of regular truth and assertibility in evaluative judgements is made in the terms of Section VIII, then regular truth itself becomes a pretty parochial thing in the process. It is strange to be driven to the conclusion that the more idiosyncratic the customs of a people, the more private their form of life, and the more uninterpretable their language, the smaller the problem of the truth status of their evaluations.

It would be natural for a participant who was perplexed by the question of meaning to insist at this point that we shall not have not succeeded in discovering in evaluative and deliberative judgements the objectivity which is both required by and presupposed to the idea that individual lives have meaning unless we link meaning with rationality, and discover the standard of rationality to which meaningful human lives conform and which every rational creature everywhere respects to the extent that he is rational. He will say that the threat of relativism does not depend on Williams's condition (3) in Section VIII being satisfied. The threat is rather that each culture, and each generation in each culture, confronts and reacts to the world in thought and action in a manner which it is hard to find reason to think every other creature ought in the name of rationality to adopt; hard even to excogitate overwhelming reasons why every man everywhere, regardless of history or circumstances and memory of these, should adopt.[2] But then what reasons are veritably good reasons?

[1] Cf. § 241 and the rest of § 242. Cf. also p. 223 (*passim*): 'If a lion could talk, we couldn't understand him.'

[2] As so often in this troublesome area, the thesis needs a more careful and thorough statement. For as it stands it does not manifestly exclude an uncritical objectivism which exploits to the full the variability of the historical and economic circumstances of human life. Consider here the language used by a present-day field anthropologist Colin Turnbull: '. . . the reader will be tempted to say "how primitive . . . how savage . . . how disgusting" and, above all, "how inhuman" . . . The judgements are typical of the kind of ethno- and ego-centrism from which we can never escape, however much we try, and are little more than reaffirmations of *standards that are different in circumstances that are different*' (*The Mountain People*, p. 11, my italics. Cf. 219 ff.)

Is Turnbull an out-and-out relativist, or a concealed objectivist—or

But suppose this relativism were right. What would it show about our own judgements of significance or importance? After all there is no such thing as a rational creature of no particular neuro-physiological formation or a rational man of no particular historical formation. And even if, inconceivably, there were such, why should we care about what this creature would find compelling? It is not in this make-believe context that we are called upon to mount a critique of our own conceptions of the objective, the true, and the worth while.

So much seems to hang on this, and the reply comes so close to repeating simply the words of the relativist whom it is meant to challenge, that there is no alternative but to illustrate what happens when we do try to think of rationality in the absolutely impersonal or cosmic fashion which is required.

It is interesting that for rationality in belief it is by no means impossible for us to conceive of thinking in this impersonal way. Suppose we take a Peircean view of Science as discovering that which, the world being what it is, is destined to be ultimately agreed by all who investigate.[1] Let 'all' mean 'all actual or possible intelligent beings competent, whatever their conceptual scheme, to look for the fundamental explanatory principles of the world'. Then think of all these theories gradually converging through isomorphism towards identity. Cosmic rationality in belief will then consist in conforming one's beliefs so far as

perhaps a moderate and critical objectivist? I think he is probably the last of these things, but from the words quoted it is not obvious. One way of seeing the difference between the view implicit in the italicized sentence and the precritical objectivist and innatist positions (cf. e.g. Leibniz, *New Essays*, 1.2. 3–4) is as a disagreement about *how much* is constant between circumstances that are different. It is worth adding that the material circumstances of Turnbull's Ik are also *extreme*—and the critical innatist objectivist would be within his rights to qualify his thesis (in a way which falls well short of trivializing it) to except them.

[1] Cf. C. S. Peirce: 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear', *Popular Science Monthly*, xii (1878), 286–302.

> Different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigations carries them by a force outside themselves to one and the same conclusion. This activity of thought by which we are carried, not where we wish but to a foreordained goal, is like the operation of destiny. No modification of the point of view taken, no selection of other facts for study, no natural bent of mind even, can enable a man to escape the predestinate opinion. This great law is embodied in the conception of truth and reality. The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality.

possible to the truths which are destined to survive in this process of convergence.[1]

Perhaps this is all make-believe. (Actually I think it isn't.) But the important thing is that, if we identify properties across all theories which converge upon what are destined to be agreed upon (by us or any other determined tribe of natural researchers) as the fundamental principles of nature, then the only non-logical, non-mathematical predicates which we shall not discard from the language of rational belief are those which, in one guise or another, will always pull their weight in all explanatorily adequate theories of the world. As a result, and corresponding to predicates fit and not fit so to survive, we shall have a wonderful contrast between the primary qualities of nature and all other qualities. We can then make for ourselves a fact–value distinction which has a real and definite point. We can say that no value predicate stands for any real primary quality, and that the real properties of the world, the properties which inhere in the world *however it is viewed*, are the primary qualities.[2]

This is a very stark view. It expresses what was an important element of truth in the 'external' perspective. Seeing the world *so* one sees no meaning in anything.[3] But it is evidently absurd to try to reduce the sharpness of the viewpoint by saying that meaning can be introduced into the world so seen by the

[1] Inasmuch as there is a reality which dictates the way a scientific theory has to be in order that what happens in the world be explained by the theory, the difficulties of radical interpretation, attempted against the background of the truth about the world and the unwaveringly constant desire of speakers of the language to understand the material world, are at their slightest.

[2] One should talk here also of the fundamental physical constants. Cf. B. A. W. Russell, *Human Knowledge* (London, 1948), p. 41:

> These constants appear in the fundamental equations of physics . . . it should be observed that we are much more certain of the importance of these constants than we are of this or that interpretation of them. Planck's constant, in its brief history since 1900, has been represented in various ways, but its numerical value has not been affected . . . Electrons may disappear completely from modern physics but *e* [charge] and *m* [mass] are pretty certain to survive. In a sense it may be said that the discovery and measurement of these constants is what is most solid in modern physics.

[3] Cf. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Penguin, p. 820: '[Levin was] stricken with horror not so much at death as at life, without the least conception of its origin, its purpose, its reason, its nature. The organism, its decay, the indestructibility of matter, the law of the conservation of energy, evolution were the terms that had superseded those of his early faith.' This is a description of what might pass as one stage in the transition we have envisaged as completed.

addition of human commitment. Commitment to what? This Peircean conceptual scheme *articulates* nothing which it is humanly possible to care about. It does not even have the expressive resources to pick out the extensions of 'red', 'chair', 'earthquake', 'person', 'famine' . . . For none of these has any claim to be a factual predicate by the scientific criterion. The distinction of fact and value we reach here, at the very limit of our understanding of scientific understanding, cannot be congruent with what the non-cognitivists intended as their distinction. It is as dubious as ever that there is anything which they intended. Starting out with the idea that value properties are mental projections, they have discovered that if value properties are mental projections then, except for the primary qualities, all properties are mental projections.

We come now to practical rationality for all conceivable rational agents. (Cosmically valid practical rationality.) The idea here would be, I suppose, that to be serious about objective reasons, or why anything matters, one must take up the viewpoint of an impersonal intelligence;[1] and that the properties of such an intelligence should be determinable *a priori*. A great deal of time and effort has been channelled into this effort. It might have been expected that the outcome would be the transformation of the bareness of our conception of an impersonal intelligence into the conception of an impersonal intelligence of great bareness. What was not so plainly to be expected was that the most elementary part of the subject should immediately collide—as it has—with a simple and (within the discipline as *a priori* conceived) unanswerable paradox—the so-called 'Prisoner's Dilemma'.[2] What underlies

[1] Or of a human being surveying, Nagel, op. cit., p. 720, 'with that detached amazement which comes from watching an ant struggle up a heap of sand'. Cf. p. 722, 'the philosophical judgement [of absurdity] contrasts the pretensions of life with a larger context in which *no* standards can be discovered, rather than with a context from which alternative overriding standards may be applied'.

[2] Cf. R. C. Jeffrey, *The Logic of Decision* (McGraw-Hill; New York, 1965), pp. 11–12. I take this as a 'paradox' in the following sense: a general principle of decision-theoretic prudence, generalizable to any agent whatever caught in the relevant circumstances, will lead in a wide variety of applications to what must be agreed by everybody to be a situation which is worse than it might have been for each participant if he had not acted on the generalizable principle—or if there had been another generalizable decision-theoretic principle to recommend (which there is not).

It would be a perverse misunderstanding of what I am saying to read me as claiming in the text to have 'solved the paradox'. It cannot be 'solved'. But it

the paradox (or the idea that there *is* here some paradox) is the supposition that it is simply obvious that an *a priori* theory of rational action ought to be possible—that some cosmic peg must exist on which we can fasten a set of concerns clearly and unproblematically identified *independently* of all ideals of agency and rationality themselves. First you have a set of concerns; then you think of a way that they might be best brought about. That was the picture. But, in a new guise, it was nothing other than the manifestly absurd idea that all deliberation is really of means.[1]

X

I conclude then that there is no such thing as a pure *a priori* theory of rationality: and that even if there were such, it would always have been irrelevant to the problem of finding a meaning in life, or seeing anything as worth while. What we need is to restate non-cognitivist relativism in a way which is innocent of all dependence on a contrast between our rationality and some other rationality.

It now says: Perhaps all strict valuations of the more specific and interesting kind have the interesting property that the interpretation of the value predicate itself presupposes a shared viewpoint, and a set of concerns common between interpreter and subject. Let it be admitted that this does the fact–value distinction no good. If someone insists, then there is nothing to prevent him from exploiting the collapse of that distinction in order to redescribe in terms of a shift or wandering of the 'value-focus' all the profound changes in valuation that have

could only be accounted a paradox or an affront to reason, if there were some antecedent grounds to suppose that it *should* have been possible to construct an *a priori* theory of rationality or prudence such that 'rational (A)' is incompatible with 'rational (not-A)', and such that that rationality is definable both independently of morality and ideals of agency and in such a way as to have independent leverage in these ancient disputes. (Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 445ª.)

For an illuminating account of some of the asymmetries it is rational to expect between an *a priori* theory of belief and an *a priori* theory of practical reasonableness, see Ronald de Sousa, 'The Good and the True', *Mind*, 1974.

[1] That practically all interesting deliberation relates to ends and their practical specification in the light of actually or potentially available constituents, and that the place of means–ends reasoning is subordinate in practical reason, is argued by A. T. Kolnai, 'Deliberation is of Ends', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1962), and in my 'Deliberation and Practical Reason', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1975), being a divergent interpretation of Aristotle's thought on this point, but an account similar to Kolnai's of the problem itself.

occurred in history, when the Greek world became the Christian world, or the Christian world the Renaissance world. He may elect to say with Nicolai Hartmann, as John Findlay reports him, that these changes were all by-products of an intense consciousness of new values, whose swimming into the focus pushed out the old: that such newly apprehended values were not really new, only hitherto ignored.[1]

All this the non-cognitivist may let pass as harmless, however eccentrically expressed; and may in less colourful language himself assert. He may even allow *totidem verbis* that, just as the world cannot be prised by us away from our manner of conceiving it, so our manner of conceiving it cannot be prised apart from our concerns themselves.[2] It is also open to him to assert the compatibility of anthropocentricity with the only thing which there is for us to mean by objectivity, and to concede that the differences between higher and lower forms of life are not fictitious. They are even objective, he will say, if you use the word 'objective' like that. But here he will stick. Where he will not back down from Taylor's original position is in the claim that the differences are invented. Not only are some of them invented in the strictest and most straightforward sense. All of them depend for their significance upon a framework which is invented.

Here at last we approach the distinctive nucleus of non-cognitivism (married, without the consent of either, to Williams's relativism). What the new position will say is that, in as much as anything matters, and in as much as human life has the meaning we think it has, that possibility is rooted in a species of invention which is none the less arbitrary, contingent,

[1] See J. N. Findlay, *Axiological Ethics* (Macmillan; London, 1970). Cf. William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology; and to Students on some of life's ideals* (Longman, Green & Co., 1899), p. 299.

> In this solid and tridimensional sense, so to call it, those philosophers are right who contend that the world is a standing thing with no progress, no real history. The changing conditions of history touch only the surface of the show. The altered equilibriums and redistributions only diversify our opportunities and open chances to us for new ideals. But, with each new ideal that comes into life, the chance for a life based on some old ideal will vanish; and he would needs be a presumptuous calculator who should with confidence say that the total sum of significance is positively and absolutely greater at any one epoch than at any other of the world.

[2] Cf. A. J. Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (Macmillan; London, 1974), p. 235: 'we have seen that the world cannot be prised away from our manner of conceiving it'.

and (taken as one whole) objectively indefensible for having been gradual, unconscious, and communal. Our form of life—or that in our form of life which gives individual lives a meaning—is not something which as a species we strictly speaking discovered, or can regulate or adjust by reference to what is true or correct. And, even within the going enterprise of our existing concerns and deliberative judgements, it is only an illusion that the assertibility of such judgements is truth.

The doctrine which we are now reconstructing from the assets of bankrupted or naïve non-cognitivism I shall call the doctrine of 'cognitive underdetermination'. The doctrine does not contradict itself. It is consistent with its own rationale. And it can be explained without entering at all into the difficulties and ineffabilities of cultural relativism.

Suppose someone says: 'For me it is neither here nor there that I cannot prise my way of seeing the world apart from my concerns. This does nothing to answer my complaint that there is not *enough* meaning in the world. My life doesn't add up. Nothing matters sufficiently to me. My concerns themselves are too unimportant, too scattered, and too disparate.' Equally devastatingly to the naïve cognitivism which the doctrine of cognitive underdetermination bids us abandon, another man may say he finds that the objects of his concern beckon to him too insistently, too cruelly beguilingly from too many different directions. 'I have learned that I cannot strive after all of these objects, or minister even to most of the concerns which stand behind them. To follow more than a minute subset, is to be doomed to be frustrated in all. The mere validity—if it were valid—of the total set from which I am to choose one subset would provide no guarantee that any subset I can actually have will *add up* to anything that means anything to me.'

It is the non-cognitivist's continuing role to comment here that things can never add up for the complainant who finds too frustratingly much, or for the complainant who finds too inanely little, unless each man supplies something extra, some conception of his own, to make sense of things *for himself*.

The problem of living a life, he may say, is to realize or respect a long and incomplete or open-ended list of concerns which are always at the limit conflicting. The claims of all true beliefs (about how the world is) are reconcilable. Everything true must be consistent with everything else that is true (cf. truism (1) of Section VII). But not all the claims of all rational concerns or even of all moral concerns (that the world

be thus or so) need be actually reconcilable. When we judge that this is what we must do now,[1] or that that is what we'd better do, or that our life must now take one direction rather than another direction, we are not fitting truths (or even probabilities) into a pattern where any discrepancy proves that we have mistaken a falsehood for a truth.[2] Often we have to make a practical choice which another rational agent might understand through and through, not fault or even disagree with, but (as Winch has stressed)[3] make differently himself; whereas, if there is disagreement over what is factually true and two rational men have come to different conclusions, then we think it has to be theoretically possible to uncover some discrepancy in their respective views of the evidence. In matters of fact we suppose that, if two opposing answers to a yes/no question are equally good, then they might as well have been equally bad. But in matters of practice we are grateful for the existence of alternative answers. The choice between them is then up to us. Here is our freedom. But here too is the bareness of the world we inhabit. If there were practical truth it would violate the third truism of truth. In living a life there is no truth, and there is nothing *like* regular truth, for us to aim at. Anybody who supposes that the assertibility of 'I must do this' or the assertibility of 'This is the way for me to live, not that' coincides with truth is simply deluded.

Aristotle wrote (*N.E.* 1094ª23): 'Will not knowledge of the good have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers

[1] 'Must', I have put, because *must* and *must not*, unlike *ought* and *ought not*, are genuine contraries.

[2] See B. A. O. Williams, 'Consistency and Realism', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Supplementary Volume, 1966) and cf. J. N. Findlay, op. cit., pp. 74–5.

> What is good [Hartmann tells us] necessarily lies in a large number of incompatible directions, and it is intrinsically impossible that all of these should be followed out into realisation. One cannot, for example, achieve pure simplicity and variegated richness in the same thing or occasion, and yet both incontestably make claims upon us . . . in practice we sacrifice one good to another, or we make compromises and accommodations . . . such practical accommodations necessarily override the claims of certain values and everywhere consummate something that in some respect [ideally] ought not to be . . . a man [ideally should] be as wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove, but that does not mean that . . . it is *possible* for him to be both of them.

[3] Peter Winch, 'The Universalizability of Moral Judgements', *Monist* (1965).

who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon the right thing?' But in reality there is no such thing as *The Good*, no such thing as knowledge of it, and nothing fixed independently of ourselves to aim at. Or so runs the thesis of cognitive underdetermination.

XI

If there is any common ground to be discovered in modern literature and one broad stream of modern philosophy it is here. What philosophers, even philosophers of objectivist formation, have constantly stressed is the absence of the unique solutions and the unique determinations of the practical which naïve cognitivism would have predicted.[1] They have thus supplied the theoretical basis for what modern writers (not excluding modern writers who have believed in God) have felt rather as a void in our experience of the apprehension of value, and have expressed not so much in terms of the plurality and mutual irreducibility of goods as in terms of the need for an organizing focus or meaning or purpose which we ourselves *bring* to life. The mind is not only a receptor: it is a projector.[2]

At the end of *Anna Karenina* Levin says to himself: 'I shall still lose my temper with Ivan the coachman, I shall still embark on useless discussions and expressing my opinions inopportunely; there will still be the same wall between the sanctuary of my inmost soul and other people, even my wife . . . but my life now, my whole life, independently of anything that can happen to me, every minute of it is no longer meaningless as it was before, but has a positive meaning of goodness with which I have the power to invest it.'

This is pretty remote from the language of the non-cognitivist philosopher (cf., though, Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.521). But the need for making or for the autonomous investing of which Levin speaks is one part of what, at least in my presentation of

[1] The plurality and mutual irreducibility of things good has been stressed by F. Brentano (*Origins of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, see especially para. 32); by N. Hartmann (see J. Findlay, op. cit.); by Isaiah Berlin, see, for instance, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969), Introduction p. xlix; by A. T. Kolnai and B. A. O. Williams (opp. cit.).

[2] For the seed of this idea in Plotinus' theory of cognition and for its transplantation and subsequent growth, see M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (O.U.P., 1953), Plotinus, *Ennead*, IV. 6.2–3: 'The mind affirms something not contained within impression: this is the characteristic of a power—within its allotted sphere to act.' 'The mind gives radiance to the objects of sense out of its own store.'

him, this philosopher means by cognitive underdetermination. The familiar idea is that we do not discover a meaning for life; we invent one. And what the non-cognitivist adds is that whereas discovery is answerable to truth, what involves invention is not. From this he concludes that a limited and low-grade objectivity is the very best that the products of such invention can aspire to.[1]

The non-cognitivist takes two steps here and the assessment of the second step concerning objectivity depends markedly on the notion of truth which is employed at the first. What is this notion, we need to know, and to what extent does the non-cognitivist's position depend upon a naïve and precritical understanding of it? Give or take a little—subtract, for instance, subjunctive conditionals—the precritical notion of truth covers empirical judgements fairly well. But it consorts very ill with all other conceptions, most notably the notions of truth or assertibility defended in mathematics by mathematical intuitionists or mathematical constructivists. It is also to be remarked that for someone who wanted to combine objectivity with non-cognitivism, or cognitive underdetermination, there could be no better model than Wittgenstein's normative conception of the objectivity of mathematics; and no better exemplar than Wittgenstein's extended description of how an ongoing cumulative making can reflect the creation of a shared form of life which is constitutive of rationality itself, can yield proofs which are not compulsions but procedures that guide our conceptions,[2] and can still explain our sense that sometimes we have no alternative but to infer this from that.

[1] For a remarkable expression of the non-cognitivist's principal point and some others see Aldous Huxley, *Do As You Will* (London, 1929), p. 101.

> The purpose of life, outside the mere continuance of living (already a most noble and beautiful end), is the purpose we put into it. Its meaning is whatever we may choose to call the meaning. Life is not a crossword puzzle, with an answer settled in advance and a prize for the ingenious person who noses it out. The riddle of the universe has as many answers as the universe has living inhabitants. Each answer is a working hypothesis, in terms of which the answerer experiments with reality. The best answers are those which permit the answerer to live most fully, the worst are those which condemn him to partial or complete death . . . Every man has an inalienable right to the major premiss of his philosophy of life.

If anything need be added to this it is only that, concerning what 'living most fully' is for each man, the final authority must be the man himself.

[2] Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics* (Blackwell; Oxford, 1956), III–30.

Perhaps this is a million miles from ethics. Or perhaps Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics is completely unsuccessful. But if the subject-matter of moral philosophy were anything like the subject-matter Wittgenstein thought he was treating, then the issue whether the assertibility of practical judgements was regular truth, and did or did not sufficiently approximate to the regular truth of statements universally agreed to be factual, might become relatively unimportant.[1] We could measure the distance, assess its importance, and think how to live with it. (Is there an independent case for tampering in certain ways with the received truisms of regular truth? Or should we leave them to define an ideal which practical judgement must fall far short of? How important really is the shortfall?)

Of course, if practical judgements were true, then what made them true, unlike valuations,[2] could not be the world itself, whatever that is.[3] But, saying what they say, the world

[1] There is a cheap victory to be won even here of course. For it has proved much easier to achieve convergence or reflective equilibrium within our culture about the value of, say, civil liberty than about how exactly printing extra bank-notes will act upon conditions of economic recession. But this is not the point I am making.

[2] *N.B.* The distinction proposed at Section III between evaluation and practical judgement is observed here and throughout. We are not concerned here with evaluations, where no argument has been found for distinguishing truth and assertibility.

[3] Everything would be the wrong way round. Cf. B. A. O. Williams, 'Consistency and Realism' (op. cit., n. 2), p. 19:

> the line on one side of which consistency plays its peculiarly significant role is the line between the theoretical and the practical, the line between discourse which (to use a now familiar formula) has to fit the world, and discourse which the world must fit. With discourse that is practical in these terms, we can see why . . . consistency . . . should admit of exception and should be connected with coherence notions of a less logical character.

This whole passage suggests something important, not only about statements of what ideally should be, but also about practical or deliberative judgements; that the exigencies of having to decide what to believe are markedly dissimilar from the exigencies of having to decide how to act. But what the argument I have quoted does not show is that the only truth there could be in what a practical judgement says is a peculiar truth which transposes the onus of match on to the world. (Still less that, if one rejects that idea, then the onus of match would be from the sentence or its annexed action to an *ideal* world.) Williams has illuminatingly glossed (1) precisely why truth in a practical judgement would not be like that; (2) the reasons why 'Ought (A)' and 'Ought (not-A)' are actually consistent; and (3) why 'must (A)' (which *is* inconsistent with 'must (not-A)') is only strictly assertible or true if A is the unique thing you must here do.

is not what they purport to characterize. (Compare what Wittgenstein, whether rightly or wrongly, wanted to say about statements of arithmetic.) In the assertibility (or truth,[1] perhaps it matters little which you say) of mathematical statements we see what perhaps we can never see in the assertibility of empirical (such as geographical or historical) statements: the compossibility of objectivity, discovery, *and* invention.

If we combine Wittgenstein's conception of mathematics with the constructivist or intuitionist views which are its cousins, then we find an illuminating similarity. One cannot get more out of the enterprise of making than one has one way or another put into it. ('What if someone were to reply to a question: "So far there is no such thing as an answer to this question"?' *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, IV. 9.) And at any given moment one will have put less than everything into it. However many determinations have been made, we can have no reason to think we have reached some point where no more decisions or determinations will be needed. It follows that no general or unrestricted affirmation is possible of the law of excluded middle. But then anyone who wishes to defend the truth status for practical judgements is released from claiming that every practical question has an answer. Truism (5) of Section VII will not stand, and for reasons both independent of the practical and helpful to its pretensions.

I shall break off from these large questions with two points of comparison and contrast.

(i) It seems that in the sphere of the practical we may know for certain that there exist absolutely undecidable questions—e.g. cases where the situation is so appalling or the choices are so gruesome that nothing could count as the reasonable practical answer. In mathematics, on the other hand, it appears to be an undecidable question even how much sense attaches to the idea of an *absolutely* undecidable question. This is a potentially important discrepancy between the two subject matters. If we insist upon the actuality of some absolute undecidability in the practical sphere, then we shall burst the bounds of regular truth. To *negate* the law of excluded middle is to import a

[1] For the view, which has conditioned some aspects of this paragraph and its predecessors, that the realism *versus* anti-realism dispute has been misdescribed; and that intuitionism can illuminatingly be seen, not as attacking truth and replacing it by assertibility, but as a critique of the classical concept of truth, followed by a revision of that concept—a revision best defended as the recovery of what 'true' should mean; see John McDowell, op. cit.

contradiction into the intuitionist logic which our comparison makes the natural choice for practical judgements. The denial of ((A would be right) ∨ (¬ (A would be right))) contradicts the Heyting derivation of ¬¬ (p ∨ (¬ p)).

(ii) If a man makes an arithmetical mistake he may collide with a brick wall or miss a train. He may bankrupt himself. For each calculation there is some risk, and for each risk a clear mark of the worst's having befallen us. There is nothing so definite with practical judgements. But surely it is begging the question to require it. It is begging the question equally to shrug this off without another word.

XII

Let us review what little has been achieved, and try to go further.

1. Whether practical judgements can attain to truth or not, and whatever is the extent and importance of cognitive underdetermination, we have found no overwhelming reason to deny practical judgements objectivity. That practical questions often have more than one answer (which is something we can signal by preferring the judgement 'I'd better A' to the judgement 'I must A'), and that there is not always an ordering of better or worse answers, is no reason to conclude that good and bad answers cannot be argumentatively distinguished.

2. It is either false or senseless to deny that what valuational predicates stand for are properties in a world. It is neither here nor there that these value properties are not primary qualities, provided only that they be objectively discriminable and can impinge upon practical appreciation and judgement. No extant argument shows that they cannot.

3. Individual human lives can have more point or less point in a manner partially dependent upon the disposition in the world of these value properties. The naïve non-cognitivist has sometimes given the impression that the way we give point to our lives is as if by blindfolding ourselves and attaching to something—anything—some free floating commitment, a commitment which is itself sustained by the mere fact of our animal life. But that was a mistake. There is no question here of blindfolding. And that is not what is said or implied by the reconstructed doctrine of cognitive underdetermination.

4. Inasmuch as invention and discovery are distinguishable (and Kneale has drawn attention here to some hazards), and

inasmuch as either of these ideas properly belongs here, life's having a point may depend as much upon something invented (not necessarily *arbitrarily*), or upon something contributed by the liver of the life, as it depends upon something discovered. Or it may depend upon what the liver of the life brings to the world in order to see the world in such a way as to discover meaning. This cannot happen unless world and person are to some great extent reciprocally suited. *And unluckily they often are not, all claims of human adaptability notwithstanding.*

To get beyond here, something now needs to be said about the connection of meaning and happiness. In most moral philosophy the requirement to treat meaning is commuted into the requirement to specify the end; and the end is usually identified with happiness. One thing which makes this identification *prima facie* plausible is the apparent correctness of the claim that happiness is the state of one's life having a point or meaning. But on any natural account of the relation of point and end, this claim is actually inconsistent with the equation 'Happiness = The End'. (Unless happiness can consist in simply having happiness as one's end.) It is also worth observing that, in the very special cases where it is straightforward to say what the point of someone's life is, we may say what he stands for, or may describe his life's work. (I choose these cases not because I think they are specially central but because they are specially clear.) The remarkable thing is that these specifications are not even categorially of a piece with happiness. That does not prove that happiness is *never* the point. The works of practical moralists are replete, however, with warnings of the difficulty or futility of making happiness the aim. If they are right then, by the same token, it would be futile to make it the point.

The misidentification—if misidentification it is—of happiness and end has had a long history. The first fully systematic equation of the end, the good for man, and happiness is presumably Aristotle's. The lamentable and occasionally comical effects of this are very considerably palliated by the close observation and the good sense which Aristotle carried to the *specification* of happiness. And it may be said in Aristotle's defence that the charge of misidentification of happiness and the good for man is captious, because his detailed specification of *eudaimonia* can perfectly well stand in—if this be what is required —as a description of the point of human existence: also that Aristotle meant by *eudaimonia* not exactly happiness but a certain kind of success. But that is too quick. Unless we want

to walk the primrose path to the trite and solemn conclusion that a meaningful life is just a sum (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097^b17) of activities worth while in themselves, or self-complete (in the sense of *Metaphysics*, 1048^b17), the question is worth taking some trouble over. Not only is this proposition trite and solemn. Read in the way Aristotle intended it is absurd.

Out of good nature a man helps his neighbour dig a drainage ditch.[1] The soil is hard but not impossibly intractable, and together the two of them succeed in digging the ditch. The man who offers to help sees what he is doing in helping dig the ditch as worth while. Inasmuch as meaning is an issue for him, he may see the episode as all of a piece with a life which has meaning. He would not see it so, and he would not have taken on the task, if it were impossible. In the case as we imagine it, the progress of the project is integral to his pleasure in it. But so equally is the fact that he likes his neighbour and enjoys working with him (provided the project be one which it is within their joint powers to complete).

Shall we say here that the man's helping dig the ditch is instrumental and has the meaning or importance it has for the helper only derivatively? Derivatively from what on the non-cognitivist view? Or shall we say that the ditch-digging is worth while in itself? But it isn't; it is end-directed. If we cannot say either of these things, can we cut the Gordian knot by saying both? In truth the embracing of the end depends on the man's feeling for the task of helping someone he likes. But his feeling for the project of helping equally depends on the existence and attainability of the end of digging the ditch.

This is not to deny that Aristotle's doctrine can be restored to plausibility if we allow the meaning of the particular life which accommodates the activity to *confer* intrinsic worth upon the activity. But this is to reverse Aristotle's procedure (which is the only procedure available to a pure cognitivist). And I doubt we have to choose (cf. Section V). At its modest and most plausible best the doctrine of cognitive underdetermination can say that we need to be able to think in both directions, down from point to the human activities which answer to it,

[1] The sort of good nature defined as follows in Fielding's *Tom Jones*:

> Good Nature is that benevolent and amiable Temper of Mind which disposes us to feel the Misfortunes and enjoy the Happiness of others, and consequently pushes us on to promote the latter . . . without any contemplation of the Beauty of Virtue and without the Allurement or Terrors of Religion.

with Pyrrhonism. The first and fourth are very careful and, in the promotion of formal or second-order goods such as equality, tolerance, and consistency, rather earnest. But it is also misleading not to see these positions together.

Suppose that, when pleasure and absence of pain give place in an ethical theory to unspecified merely determinable satisfaction (and when the last drop of mentality is squeezed from the revealed preference theory which is the economic parallel of philosophical Utilitarianism) a man looks to modern Utilitarianism for meaning or happiness. The theory points him towards the greatest satisfaction (usually but not invariably glossed as the greatest satisfaction of the greatest number). He might embrace that end, if he could understand what that satisfaction consisted in. He might if he could see from his own case what satisfaction consisted in. But that is very likely where he started—unless, more wisely, he started closer to the real issue and was asking himself where he should look to find a point for his life. But so far as either question is concerned the theory has crossed out the infantile proposal[1] 'pleasure and lack of pain', and distorted and degraded (in description if not in fact) the complexity of the structure within which a man might have improved upon the childish answer for himself. For all questions of ends, all problems about what constitutes the attainment of given human ends, and all perplexities of meaning, have been studiously but fallaciously transposed by this theory into questions of instrumental means. But means to what? The theory is appreciably further than the nineteenth-century theory was from a conceptual appreciation of the structure of values and focused unfrustrated concerns presupposed to a man's finding a point in his life; and of the need to locate correctly happiness, pleasure, and a man's conception of his own unfolding life within that structure.

If we look to existentialism we find something curiously similar. Going back to the formation of some of these ideas I found André Maurois's description in *Call No Man Happy* (trans. Lindley: Cape; London, 1943, p. 43) of his teacher Alain (Emile-Auguste Chartier):

> what I cannot convey by words is the enthusiasm inspired in us by this search, boldly pursued with such a guide; the excitement of those classes which are entered with the persistent hope of discovering, that

[1] For the thought that this might be literally infantile, I am indebted indirectly to Bradley and directly to Richard Wollheim, 'The Good Self and the Bad Self', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1975.

very morning, the secret of life, and from which one departed with the joy of having understood that perhaps there was no such secret but that nevertheless it was possible to be a human being and to be so with dignity and nobility. When I read in *Kim* the story of the Lama who sought so piously for the River of the Arrow, I thought of *our* search.

What happens here—and remember that Alain was the teacher not only of Maurois but also of Sartre—goes wrong even in the question 'What is *the* meaning of life?' We bewitch ourselves to think that we are looking for some one thing like the Garden of the Hesperides, the Holy Grail . . . Then finding nothing like that in the world, no one thing from which all values can be derived and no one focus by which all other concerns can be organized, we console ourselves by looking inwards, but again for some one substitute thing, one thing in us now instead of the world. Of course if the search is conducted in this way it is more or less inevitable that the one consolation will be *dignity* or *nobility* or *commitment*: or more spectatorially *irony*, *resignation*, *scorn* . . . But, warm though its proper place is for each of these things—important though each of them is in its own non-substitutive capacity—it would be better to go back to the 'the' in the original question; and to interest ourselves afresh in what everybody knows about—the set of concerns he actually has, their objects, and the focus he has formed or seeks to bring to bear upon these: also the prospects of purifying, redeploying or extending this set.[1]

Having brought the matter back to this place, how can a theorist go on? I think he must continue from the point where I myself ought to have begun if philosophy and incapacity had not obstructed the way. Working within an intuitionism or moral phenomenology[2] as tolerant of low-grade non-

[1] Cf. Williams, 'Persons, Character and Morality' (pp. 208 ff.), in Amelie Rorty (ed.), *The Identities of Persons* (University of California Press, 1976):

> The categorical desires which propel one forward do not have to be even very evident to consciousness, let alone grand or large; one good testimony to one's existence having a point is that the question of its point does not arise, and the propelling concerns may be of a relatively everyday kind such as certainly provide the ground of many sorts of happiness (cf. 209).

[2] By intuitionism or moral phenomenology I do not mean a dogmatic and unhelpful doctrine of cognition, or the theory which almost all of its critics have envisaged; nor again some quietist doctrine of the kind which Tolstoy portrays Levin preparing to embrace. Nor do I mean any doctrine of the foundations of morality. (Where mathematical knowledge and all other knowledge can stand without foundations, why cannot ethics?) It will be typical both of the theory and of the philosophical practice of the intuitionist

behavioural evidence as is literature (but more obsessively elaborative of the commonplace and more theoretical, in the interpretive sense, than literature), he has to appreciate and describe the quotidian complexity of what is experientially involved in a man's seeing a point in living. It is no use to take a going moral theory—Utilitarianism or whatever it is—and paste on to it such *postscripta* as the Millian insight 'It really is of importance not only what men do, but what manner of men they are that do it': or the insight that to see a point in living a man has to be such that he can like himself: or to try to superimpose upon the theory the structure which we have complained that Utilitarianism degrades. If life's having a point is at all central to moral theory then room must be made for these things right from the very beginning. The phenomenological account I advocate would accommodate all these things in conjunction with (1) ordinary anthropocentric objectivity, (2) the elements of value-focus and discovery, and (3) the element of invention which it is the non-cognitivist's conspicuous distinction to have imported into the argument.

Let us not underestimate what would have been done if this work were realized. But ought the theorist to be able to do more? Reluctant though I am to draw any limits to the potentiality or enterprise of discursive reason, I see no reason why he should. Having tamed non-cognitivism into a doctrine of cognitive underdetermination, which allows the world to impinge upon but not to determine the point possessed by individual lives, and which sees value properties not as created but as *lit up* by the focus which the man who lives the life brings to the world; and, having described what finding meaning is, it will not be for the theorist as such to intrude himself further. As Bradley says in *Appearance and Reality* (450):

> If to show theoretical interest in morality and religion is taken as setting oneself up as a teacher or preacher, I would rather leave these subjects to whoever feels that such a character suits him.

to doubt altogether the need for any one thing to ground everything he is concerned with, and to affirm the multiplicity and complexity in feeling and perception of the many sources of practical and value judgement. I would only add that the intuitionist is as well placed as anyone else to hold that when inner feelings collide with outside facts, or one person's with another's concerns, we have by an effort of the imagination both to elucidate to ourselves, and to some extent remake, not only our feelings and perceptions but also the construal which we put upon reality.