

CONVENTIONAL MORALITY: A CONTEMPORARY
ETHICAL DEBATE SEEN IN PERSPECTIVE

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ETHICAL DEBATE SEEN IN PERSPECTIVE

By

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

The thesis deals with a contemporary debate between R.M. Hare and Philippa Foot, both of Oxford University, over the fact-value distinction. It centres on their dispute over the meaning of moral terms, the content of moral principles and argument, but attempts to place the debate in its historical context, thus drawing out the main reasons for its importance.

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FRONTISPIECE

"There are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena."

Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Part Four, Section 108, translated by Walter Kauffmann. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1966.

"People have no notion yet that from now onwards they exist on the mere pittance of inherited and decaying values."

Nietzsche, Gesammelte Werke, Munich: Musarian-Ausgabe, 1926-9, Vol.XIV, p.193.

"It is virtue which has need of justification....It is for moral reasons that good, one day, will cease to be done."

From Nietzsche, quoted in Albert Camus, The Rebel, New York: Vintage Books, 1956, p.68.

"A new rebellion is consecrated in the name of moderation and of life. We are at that extremity now. At the end of this tunnel of darkness, however, there is inevitably a light, which we already divine and for which we only have to fight to ensure its coming. All of us, among the ruins, are preparing a renaissance beyond the limits of nihilism. But few of us know it."

Camus, The Rebel, New York: Vintage Books, 1956, p.305.

INTRODUCTION

The problem with which I deal in this thesis falls within the scope of the far from hoarse chestnut of the relation between facts and values--more precisely, between statements of fact and statements of value. This dichotomy between the two types of statement was perhaps explicated most clearly by David Hume,¹ but its history runs much further back than Hume. In the discussion of the nature of justice between Thrasymachus and Socrates in the first book of The Republic, there can be seen the Socratic attempt to deny that justice is merely a function of human decision, varying at different times and different places according to the differing decisions of those who instigate it, the rulers. For Socrates a just society was not one whose rulers had managed to introduce laws by force, but whose laws were attuned to the natural order of the universe, which was both rational and independent of human volition. According to Greek concepts, justice is natural not conventional.

To understand this, it is necessary to understand first of all, that the very terms of the dichotomy, "fact" and "value" are modern in their conception, and, as Eric

¹A Treatise on Human Nature, Edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford University Press, 1888, III,i,1.

Voeglein so ably points out,¹ the term "value" is meaningless unless contrasted to the term "fact". Talk of "values" stems very much from the idea that man is able to "create" his own systems of value independently of, and indeed even in opposition to, nature, which is conceived no longer as a rationally ordered whole but as a chaos. This view is at the core of the doctrine of most moral and political philosophy since Machiavelli. Nature presents us only with facts no number of which can entail (i.e. logically entail) any statements of value. Value is not part of nature. As Wittgenstein put it:

"In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. In it there is no value--and if there were it would be of no value. If there is any value which is of value, it must lie outside all happening and being so. For all happening and being so is accidental."²

Thus, we have a yawning chasm, a logical gap, between any justification that can be given for statements of value in factual terms, and the statement of value itself which will always go beyond any factual consideration.

The view that is now presented of ethics is that the individual is not logically constrained by factual considerations in his choice of moral principles, or "values". He is free to choose the ethical code of his own making, based upon

¹The New Science of Politics, (University of Chicago Press, 1952), Introduction, passim.

²Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1923, 6.41.

those facts which he finds relevant to that code, but which will never logically oblige him to any particular moral decision. This is stated in somewhat different terms by Sartre when he speaks of man as "condemned to be free", and "rising up in the world to define himself." Faced with this gargantuan task man shies away and, in bad faith, adopts precepts which are commonly accepted (conventional rules), thus denying what is essential to himself--his freedom. It must be realised that in consistency with Sartre's whole view, any set of precepts which man slides back into adopting will be simply a result of human volition, and in that sense, arbitrary. That is, all values are relative to the choices of those that instigate them. Since Sartre has rejected the concept of human nature, along with the rationality of nature as a whole, there will be no common standard by which to measure the relative status of moral codes (and in any case such considerations would only be factual). It is interesting that there is agreement in this area between such positivists as Ayer and Sartre. Any ethical system, and any moral judgement, such as "Stealing is wrong," can now be reduced in Ayer's words to the following:

"It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false. Another man may disagree with me about the wrongness of stealing, in the sense that he may not have the same feelings about stealing as I have, and he may quarrel with me on account of my moral sentiments. But he cannot, strictly speaking, contradict me. For in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments. And the man who is ostensibly contradicting me is merely expressing his

moral sentiments. So that there is plainly no sense in asking which of us is in the right. For neither is asserting a genuine proposition."¹

Concerning the controversy covered in the following pages between Professor R. M. Hare and Mrs. Philippa Foot, it can be said that, as regards the fact-value distinction, Hare accepts it and Foot does not. But both of these assertions need qualification.

Whilst it is quite clear that Hare denies that an entailment relation exists between statements of fact and, in his terms, evaluative statements,² at the same time he sees the danger of ethical relativism and wishes to combat it. Through the work of the Positivists it seemed that moral discourse and moral argument was reduced to the realm of the irrational. Hare attempts to save it from this fate through the concept of "universalisability". Since the primary function of moral discourse is to guide actions, Hare believes that it, along with evaluative discourse in general, is prescriptive. Unlike commands however, moral language is, even if overtly particular, universal in nature. A particular moral judgement is an instance of a universal moral principle to which it can be referred if necessary. Acceptance of the moral judgement "It is wrong to do X" implies acceptance of the principle "It

¹Language, Truth and Logic, (2nd edition), Victor Gollance Ltd., London, 1936, pp.107-108. The relationship between the two traditions has been shown by C.D. MacNiven in "Analytic and Existential Ethics", Dialogue IX, June, 1970.

²The Language of Morals, (Oxford University Press, 1952), pp.28-31, 94 and passim.

is wrong to do anything of type X in such circumstances" and moreover entails (logically) the imperative "Do not do such as X!" which applies, most importantly, to myself. The concept of universalisability, however, as we shall see in Chapter II, does not measure up to the demands made of it in order to secure the rationality of moral discourse and argument. Ultimately, in the course of justifying moral judgements we shall be forced back to principles to which we adhere because of certain decisions or choices we have made in the ethical sphere.¹ Hare is clearly aware of this since he emphasizes the importance of personal decision in the course of adopting moral principles. At the same time he believes in having secured the rationality of morals.

Foot, on the other hand, believes that certain factual statements do entail evaluative statements. She uses the examples of "rude"² and "dangerous"³ but extends it to a far wider range of examples,⁴ and by implication to more clearly moral examples. To take but the first of the terms she considers--if certain conditions are fulfilled then someone's behaviour is called rude. These conditions, however, are

¹Ibid., pp.62, 71-73.

²"Moral Arguments", Mind, 67, (1958).

³"Moral Beliefs", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, (1958-59).

⁴"Goodness and Choice", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume XXV, 1961.

factual statements about the behaviour, and to call it rude is an evaluative statement. There is, therefore, at least one case where a set of factual statements logically entail an evaluative one. The logical gap appears to be bridged. The consequences of this bridge are explained in detail in the following chapters--the nature of moral argument is no different in principle from argument about factual matters: the criteria for the use of "good" are fixed both by the meaning of the nouns which it qualifies, and, in the case of moral issues, by the meaning of the term "moral". Moreover, the individual is not at will to choose just any set of moral principles. A penumbra of these are set by the nature of man. Concerning this last remark, it should be noticed, as I do at several points, that because she apparently connects the meaning of "morally good" with the principle of individual happiness¹ (or as she puts it, human welfare), Foot hovers in indecision between that path to which she is led by taking one side in the dispute about fact-value dichotomy, and the position of individual licence in moral matters which she is attacking. Whilst the Utilitarian, of course, prescribes as the greatest good the greatest happiness of the greatest number, he nevertheless has difficulty in aligning private or individual happiness with universal happiness. Bentham, for example, believed that society consisted merely of a collection of individuals whose individual good is a matter of happiness

¹"Moral Arguments", p.511.

and who are governed by two "sovereign masters", pleasure, and pain. What he needed to show was why nevertheless the individual should be altruistic. From a starting point such as his concerning the relation of the individual to society, it is difficult to see how this can be achieved without appeal to a further moral criterion, such as justice, not definable in utilitarian terms.¹ Because of her adherence to utilitarian precepts, Foot is unwilling at points to say that certain actions are absolutely wrong--wrong, that is, despite their possible compliance with individual happiness and any good consequences that might ensue.²

In this thesis, then, I try to place a contemporary ethical debate in a wider perspective that shows more clearly that the central issue involved is the place of the individual in society, and his ability to determine for himself a set of moral precepts. In connexion with this, the length of the section on Hobbes in Chapter Four must be accounted for. I feel that because of the crucial relationship Hobbes holds to the whole of modern political thought, and in particular to the liberalism manifest in Hare's thought, an understanding of Hobbes' position is essential to the understanding of the Hare-Foot debate. Hobbes' work is doubly important to the

¹Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, Macmillan, New York, 1966, pp.240-241.

²See below, Chapters 2 and 4, and R.W. Beardsmore, "Consequences and Moral Worth", Analysis, (1969).

debate (not to mention important in its own right) because the position which Foot holds overlaps in a strange but very definite way Hare's own individualism. During the course of this thesis, I wish to draw attention to the following characteristics in Foot's ethics:

- 1) That she is in no wise talking of morality in any absolute sense. Whilst she makes claims to combat relativism, to analyse moral and evaluative discourse in only its non-peculiar uses, and also to analyse morality in a non-conventional sense¹ she does not break through the cultural restrictions imposed on a morality by its historical and cultural position. This is so because she does not attempt to break out from these restrictions. The functionally descriptive language which she analyses can make no claims to absolute justification. Wittgenstein puts this so accurately:

"Every judgement of relative value is a mere statement of facts and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all the appearance of a judgement of value...although all judgements of relative value can be shown to be mere statements of facts, no statement of fact can ever be, or imply a judgement of absolute value."²

In this way, Foot is also preaching a form of individualism, or liberalism (i.e., another conventional form of morality).

- 2) The consequences of (1) above is that she ultimately adopts

¹"Moral Arguments", p. 512.

²Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics, Philosophical Review, 74, (1965), 5-6.

a form, albeit a strange form, of utilitarianism. As she herself says:

"A decision for, or against utilitarianism does not commit one to any particular position with regard to intuitionist, emotivist, or naturalistic theories of ethics, and similarly intuitionists, emotivists and naturalists are equally free to accept or reject the principle of utility."¹

But more cynically, we might say of both Hare and Foot:

"Just try scratching the surface of any up-to-the minute Oxford philosopher and you may find that he is nothing but a simple utilitarian underneath."²

Her position as a Utilitarian, adopting the same view of man as Hobbes as "nasty, vicious, brutish", is made clear by her view of justice.³ Attacking the Platonic conception of justice, she attempts to prove that man only submits to justice in so far as it pays for him in the long run to do so.⁴ Short-term benefits being sacrificed for long-term ones, the traditional utilitarian doctrine, comes to mind, as does Hobbes' compact formed out of mutual fear for the establishment of society.⁵

¹Theories of Ethics, p.15.

²Henry B. Veatch, Rational Man, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1962, p.189.

³This statement could be taken as implying that Hobbes was a Utilitarian. This is as may be. It is true that Hobbes' view of the end for man as self-preservation opened the door for John Locke's rights for man being based on "comfortable self-preservation." It is, moreover, Hobbes' emphasis on the rights of man that marks him as the instigator of liberalism--see Leo Strauss' Natural Right and History, Chapter 5.

⁴"Moral Beliefs", pp.99-104. This interpretation of Foot I have recently abandoned, although cf. D.Z. Phillips: "Does it Pay to be Good?", P.A.S., 1964-65.

⁵See Ibid., pp.102 and 103.

Finally, I should like to make a purely personal observation that having worked through the problems involved in this thesis I have come to realise that since questions of relative value bear no relation to those of absolute value, these latter remain quite untouched by anything that can be said either by me or by the greatest of philosophers. Indeed, by working through this thesis, I have come to understand more fully the following propositions from Wittgenstein's Tractatus.

- 6.52 We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left and this itself is the answer.
- 6.521 The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.
- 6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has used them--as steps--to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

(Is not this the reason why those who have found, after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them, have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?)

CHAPTER I

MORAL PRINCIPLES

Of moral principles Hare writes:

"If we were to ask of a person 'What are his moral principles?' the way in which we could be most sure of a true answer would be by studying what he did. He might, to be sure, profess in his conversation all sorts of moral principles, which in his actions he completely disregarded; but it would be when, knowing all the relevant facts of a situation, he was faced with choices or decisions between alternate answers to the question 'What shall I do?' that he would reveal in what principles of conduct he really believed. The reason why actions are in a peculiar way revelatory of moral principles is that the function of moral principles is to guide conduct."¹

Because moral discourse is prescriptive, i.e., its function is to guide conduct, those principles to which we adhere by acting upon them are universal prescriptions in a disguised form.

Because they are prescriptions they are intimately connected with action--obeying a command, for example, consists in acting upon it; disobeying a command consists in not acting upon it, or acting in contradiction to it. Unlike commands, however, moral principles are universal in character. By adhering to a moral principle, I am universalising that maxim to mankind in general; more precisely to those that find themselves in such circumstances:

¹The Language of Morals, p.1.

"To ask whether I ought to do A in these circumstances is (to borrow Kantian language with a small though important modification) to ask whether or not I will that the doing A in such circumstances should become a universal law."¹

Hare, however, has some difficulty in showing how evaluative judgements in general (including moral judgements) differ from those commands that prima facie would be considered as universal. He is required to distinguish between the two because he does not wish to be considered as reducing moral judgements to imperatives.² Hare states that it is

"almost impossible to frame a proper universal in the imperative mood."³

Yet it is not clear that such commands as "Render to no man evil for evil" or "Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother" are not in fact universal. If this were so the distinction between moral and evaluative judgements on the one hand and commands on the other would break down. Hare finds his way out of this by making it analytic that commands are not universal because unlike universal indicatives or evaluative judgements, we do not issue commands about the past. Whereas the indicative statement, "All mules are barren" is true of all mules, past, present and future, a command is only applicable to the future.⁴ Hare can now incorporate value-judgements into prescriptive language and at the same time distinguish between them and commands--a

¹Ibid., p.70.

²See Ibid., pp.172,73.

³Ibid., p.177.

⁴Ibid., p.187.

distinction which we make in ordinary language, and hence one which Hare must needs take into account.¹

To return to moral principles--they are used both as guides or imperatives to action and also as support or justification for evaluative judgements. All evaluative judgements, whilst overtly particular, make reference to a universal standard or principle for judging those objects that are being evaluated.² Thus a universal principle that answers the question "What shall I do?" also acts, in conjunction with a factual statement about the particular object being evaluated, as support for a moral judgement.

"If we take it that, as I shall show later, a piece of genuinely evaluative moral reasoning must have as its end-product an imperative of the form 'Do so-and-so, it follows that its principles must be of such a kind that we can deduce such particular imperatives from them, in conjunction with factual minor premises."³

Since Hare makes it analytic that a genuine evaluative judgement entails an imperative "Do so and so"⁴ and since

"No imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises which does not contain at least one imperative"⁵

it follows analytically that a universal moral principle is an imperative. It cannot be factual, since then it would not, when conjoined with a further statement of fact, entail an imperative. Nor can it be self-evident, since:

¹Ibid., pp.180-181.

²See Ibid., pp.129, 134-6.

³Ibid., p.39.

⁴See Ibid., pp.164, 168-70.

⁵Ibid., p.28.

"Suppose that we were faced, for the first time with the question 'Shall I now say what is false?' and had no past decisions, either of our own or of other people, to guide us. How should we then decide the question? Not surely from a self-evident general principle, 'Never say what is false', for if we could not decide even whether to say what was false in these particular circumstances, how could we possibly decide whether to say what was false in innumerable circumstances whose details were totally unknown to us, save in this respect, that they were all cases of saying what was false?"¹

We now have a schema whereby a particular moral judgment entailing an imperative "Do X" is deduced (logically) from a universal moral principle, which is a disguised imperative, conjoined with a true factual statement about X. If questioned about the universal principle itself, I subsume it within a further universal principle (e.g., "Do X when Y") which, together with a further true statement about X, entails the original principle. It is in this way that such principles can be supported until we are finally forced back to an ultimate moral principle which we simply prescribe universally.

Foot's case against Hare on moral principles is that in general he supplies a model for such principles where no such general account can be given. Because those concepts with which a philosopher deals are peculiarly general, the criteria for which he is asked can be quite mistaken because he entertains an answer for the wrong type of question---the kind of question that is in place when a biologist is asked "What is a horse?"

¹Ibid., p.40.

or an art critic "What is tragedy?" but is not answerable in connexion with those concepts that are considered to be the domain of the philosopher:

"It seems that the philosopher is asked for criteria when it is a matter of something which is in a special way hard to get at. What I want to say is that this elusiveness is sometimes simply the result of asking 'What is X?' or some variant on it, and that in other cases (of which the question about moral principles is an example) the same kind of confusion is apt to creep into what can be a legitimate inquiry."¹

To which she adds:

"It is always possible that...some of our philosophical problems may arise because we keep before our eyes something general instead of something specific...we must...get rid of the artificial construction which has been put before us under this heading [of moral principles]."²

This is apparent, Foot holds, if we compare those expressions which we ordinarily make use of in connexion with moral principles like "I don't really know what his moral principles are" or "His moral principles are quite misguided" and Hare's account in the passage below:

"There are two factors which may be involved in the making of any decision to do something. Of these, the first may at any rate theoretically be absent; the second is always present to some degree. They correspond to the major and minor premises of the Aristotelian practical syllogism. The major premise is a principle of conduct; the minor premise is a statement, more or less full, of what we should in fact be doing if we did one or other of the alternatives open to us. Thus, if I decide not to say something because it is false, I

¹"When is a Principle a Moral Principle?", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume XXVIII, (1954), p.97.

²Ibid., pp.97,98.

am acting on a principle 'Never say what is false' and I must know that this, which I am wondering whether to say, is false."¹

Thus, Foot says:

"It is quite clear that this is not an account of a moral principle as the notion appeared in the examples which I quoted; there we were not speaking of this particular element or factor involved in decisions about what to do. When we said that it was a matter of moral principle that such and such should be done surely what we meant was simply that it was something that ought to be done. When we said that we did not know much about a man's moral principles we did not mean that we were unable to list his general rules, but simply that we were not able to say when he would think a thing right or wrong."²

By asking the general question "What is a moral principle?" Hare holds, as we have seen, that a principle is involved in the justification of a moral judgement. Foot, however, questions this:

"The notion of a principle as a general rule does not belong here, and seems to have been imported from other contexts, e.g., those in which a man is asked whether he subscribes to this or that moral principle."³

Since I deal at length with the nature of moral argument according to both Hare and Foot in Chapter Two, I do not wish to follow up what she says concerning the way in which she considers Hare's analysis distorts such argument here. Instead, what is of prime importance at this point is to understand what she says about the nature of moral principles themselves and why it is averse to Hare's account.

¹Hare, op.cit., p.56.

²Foot, "When is a Principle a Moral Principle", p.98.

³Ibid., p.101.

Instead of considering the general concept of a moral principle and forcing into that category a distorted version of what a moral principle is, Foot concentrates on particular instances of moral principles to try and understand what characterises these. She takes the extreme case where we might say that someone's moral principle was in some sense strange--for example, "It is wrong to walk on the lines in the pavement" or "It is wrong to wear brightly coloured clothes". These could be seen as moral principles:

"if we suppose a certain background. For instance, 'one should not wear bright colours' begins to look as if it might be a moral principle if we think of a man with a Quaker outlook, or simply of one who sees wearing bright colours as ostentation."¹

What she means by a "background" is not immediately obvious. It would seem, however, that in opposition to Hare she holds that moral principles are subsumed not within further, more general principles which result from the decisions or choices of the individual agent, but:

"it is so often a concept rather than a superior principle which turns some odd-sounding principle into something that we can understand enough to call it a moral principle. We are often right to feel that we do not really know what a man's moral principles are until we are supplied with a concept of this kind, and for this reason understanding what someone says about what is right and wrong is not like understanding an order."²

Thus, instead of a universal rule subsuming "Don't wear bright colours" within it, we have:

¹Ibid., p.105.

²Ibid., p.108.

"a description rather than a rule, and we may falsify the picture in trying to turn one into the other."¹

It is not that such a person brings the wearing of bright colours under the principle "Don't be ostentatious", but that he believes wearing bright colours is ostentatious. What Foot is attempting to show is that certain descriptions do entail evaluations. Whilst she would not deny, I think, that "ostentatious" is an evaluative word in Hare's sense,² she denies that in order for an evaluative term to occur in the conclusion of an argument it is necessary to have a prescription as one of the premises. Hence, she is implicitly attacking Hare's view that genuine evaluative judgements are only entailed by imperatives, which, we remember, Hare made analytically true. By doing so, it is quite possible that he misrepresents ordinary usage which he claims to be investigating. To be in a position to know whether Foot is successful in her attack on Hare, it is necessary to further explicate her notion of an "intelligible background".

Only if the "background" of beliefs supporting a moral principle is understandable, can a principle be called a moral principle. What precisely Foot means here is best understood by considering the reasons she gives for rejecting "It is wrong to walk on the lines on the pavement" as a candidate for a moral principle. She is at pains to say that it is not because such a principle is so very different from any that she holds.

¹Ibid., p.105.

²See Hare, op.cit., pp.116-21.

This would be simply to opt in favour of her own moral code.¹ According to Hare's analysis, of course, provided that the person holding the principle prescribed it (and any more general principle under which it was subsumed) then it would certainly qualify as a moral principle. Even Foot does not deny that it is logically possible for there to be a background, in her own sense, to such a principle--for example, the person could hold that short, sharp movements were to be made wherever possible. However, she holds that since such a remark would be unintelligible or meaningless, it would not justify "It is wrong to walk on the lines in the pavement" as a moral principle. That is, from the statement "Short, sharp movements are to be made wherever possible", we could not come to an understanding of how the person making the statement would then use the moral terms "right" and "wrong", and hence could not understand his conception of right and wrong. As such, any principles which he might adopt as a result of such a statement would be unintelligible for the same reasons--we should have no criteria for the way in which he was using the evaluative terms used in such a principle. This is not at all clear. After all, Hare would reply that we do have sufficient criteria for understanding a man's conceptions of right and wrong in this case, precisely because they are subsumed within a further universal principle "It is wrong to perform short, sharp movements" upon which he

¹Cf. "Moral Arguments", p.512.

is willing to act. Foot's reasons for rejecting Hare's account are fairly simple:

"It must be supposed, for instance, that if we describe a man as being for or against certain actions, bringing them under universal rules for himself and thinking himself bound to urge them on others, we shall be able to identify them as moral principles, whatever the content of the principle at which he stops."¹
(My italics)

To which she adds here:

"And yet when we try to build up an example, saying that the man who thought one should not walk on the lines said that short steps were good, as were short sharp movements and changeability in general, we get nowhere. However much we suppose that he recommends such movements we do not fill in the background we need in order to see the principle 'don't tread on the lines in the pavement' as a moral principle."²

The background we do need, Foot suggests, in such cases is one where there is a connexion between the uses of the terms in a moral principle and what are ordinarily called virtues and vices. There are however, two provisos placed on this statement by Foot:

"Words such as 'good' may always be extended in their application beyond any class of actions to which they have been attached, and yet the extension is not to be arbitrary. These two conditions together lead to a restriction on the range of applications which can give us moral principles."³

As a result:

¹Ibid., p.512.

²"When is a Principle a Moral Principle?", p.106.

³Ibid., pp.107,108.

"Only certain applications of 'good' can be admitted in moral contexts, because only these can be understood in the right way."¹

Clearly Foot does not wish to say that moral codes and the meaning of moral words cannot change; yet at the same time she wishes to deny that they can be changed at will, and with no regard for those concepts which are conventionally regarded as linked to moral words by their meaning, i.e., virtues and vices. No "background of intelligibility" is provided by the ordinary conceptions of right and wrong for such a principle as "It is wrong to walk on the lines in the pavement" or the statement "Short sharp movements are wicked", because from a combination of both the principle and the statement used to support it, it is not possible for us to know what other things an advocate would call "right" or "wrong". In Foot's terms, the following is not possible whereby

"we can go on from the examples he has given us, even if we would not ourselves call the same things good."²

How could a person advocating "It is wrong to walk on the lines in the pavement" support it in an intelligible (to us) way? Resorting, as Hare would have it, to a further universal principle like "Movements that are a strain on one's muscles ought to be avoided" are of little use, and would tend to show that the person had misunderstood what a moral principle was. It certainly may be wrong for a person to strain his muscles if, for example, he has a weak heart. But it is not

¹Ibid., p.107.

²Ibid.

morally wrong for him to do so. Alternatively, resorting to a statement like "By not walking on the lines in the pavement I am saving my mother's life" we have here a factual belief, which, if shown to be false would lead to the abandonment of the principle (assuming its advocate to be rational). However, as Foot shows in "Moral Beliefs", in such a case it is not the avoidance of the lines that he regards as morally virtuous, but the saving of life.¹ Thus, when pushed back far enough, the advocate of such a principle holds there to be a connexion between human well-being and what he is doing when acting upon the principle. We seem then to have provided a background to the principle "It is wrong to walk on the lines in the pavement" which will satisfy Foot's own criteria (i.e., that the person holding it regards there to be a connexion between the use of the evaluative terms within it and human well-being). Yet she herself says of the principle:

"we cannot see how [it]...could be a moral principle unless we can fill in the kind of background which allows us to understand the principle, and some examples defeat us."²

It, however, does not appear to be one of these.

This is not a contradiction in Foot's thought, for her talk of a "background" is merely a suggestion that unless we make certain assumptions about the way in which a man connects his use of moral terms with further concepts like

¹See below, in Chapter 3.

²"When is a Principle a Moral Principle?", p.110.

sincerity, ostentation, honesty, integrity,¹ etc., then we are unable to understand what he proclaims as "Moral principles". If it were shown that a man holding the principle "It is wrong to walk on the lines of the pavement" believed that he was saving someone's life by doing so, in the way suggested above, or was in some other way helping somebody else, then it would certainly qualify as a moral principle. Ordinarily, however, such a background is not one that we supply for this principle² unlike for example, "It is wrong to starve one's children." Moreover, it is not a particularly interesting case because we could show by rational means that its advocate was mistaken in believing that he was saving someone's life by acting upon it. Assuming he were rational, and we were able to show him that he was mistaken in holding such beliefs, he would no longer retain the principle as a moral principle.

What Foot has succeeded (to a point) in showing is that merely because someone makes certain choices, commends certain things or prescribes something universally, does not enable us to infer that he is thereby holding certain moral principles. For this to be true, he must subsume those principles within further beliefs about human welfare, harm, etc. As a result, only some putative principles can be called moral principles. This is a theme to which, as we shall see, Foot continually returns.³

¹See Ibid., p.108, and cf. "Moral Arguments", p.511.

²See Ibid., p.110.

³What distinguishes moral from other types of conventional rules is eloquently explained by Glenn Langford, "Rules, Moral Rules and the Subjects of Moral Predicates", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, (1968-69), especially pp.194-198.

CHAPTER 2

MORAL ARGUMENT

Hare's account of moral argument results directly from his view of moral principles, and the syllogistic nature of the justification of moral judgements. As such, it is intimately bound up with these views upon which I hope to have shed some light in the preceding chapter. In her article "Moral Arguments"¹, Foot attacks both Hare's account of moral argument and also that held by the emotivists, most particularly C.L. Stevenson. It is upon this attack that I wish to concentrate in this chapter, and to evaluate the strength of her arguments and the implications they themselves have upon the nature of moral argument. But first of all it is necessary to understand precisely what Foot is attacking.

What Hare's and Stevenson's views have in common is their assertion that a so-called "breakdown point" occurs in moral argument which does not occur in arguments of an empirical nature. Because no (set of) factual statements entail (a set of) evaluative statements, it is in the nature of moral argument that two disputants may reach a point where their two positions are irreconcilable because each has adopted different moral principles upon which the "evidence" of the other has no effect.

¹Mind, 67, (1958).

Indeed, as Foot says elsewhere, according to this theory, either of the following positions is possible:

- "(1) Some individual may, without logical error, base his beliefs about matters of value entirely on premises which no one else would recognise as giving any evidence at all [and]
 (2) that, given the kind of statement which other people count as evidence for an evaluative conclusion, he may refuse to draw the conclusion because this does not count as evidence for him."¹

Foot's aim is to question the assumptions upon which such theories of moral argument rest. Since, as we have noticed, Foot's theory of ethics is very much a reaction to Hare, I shall follow her in her concentration upon refutation of his arguments in particular.

For Stevenson, as a Positivist, moral language is emotive, and hence merely expresses, or evinces, the speaker's taste or preference. Unlike cruder forms of Positivism, such as Ayer's in the first edition of Language, Truth and Logic, Stevenson does not deny that value-judgements in general have descriptive content, or cognitive meaning, and hence rule them out of court as "meaningless", but asserts that:

"Their major use is not to indicate facts, but to create an influence....They recommend an interest in an object rather than state that the interest already exists."²

The emotive meaning of a word, which is contrasted to its cognitive meaning, is its tendency to produce affective responses

¹"Moral Beliefs", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (1958-59), p.84.

²Facts and Values, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963, p.16.

in the hearer, and to be used as a result of affective states in the speaker. It is because they express the speaker's attitudes or feelings, and attempt to change those of his audience that ethical words have a "dynamic influence". In contrast, cognitive or descriptive meaning expresses the speaker's beliefs. Moral discourse, therefore, is primarily not informative, but influential; it may modify beliefs incidentally, but attitudes primarily. As regards moral argument, although Stevenson speaks of "giving reasons" for a particular moral judgement, and of the "influence" made in moral argument, because there is a causal and not a logical relation between beliefs, expressing facts, and attitudes, evincing values

"Under the name of 'validity' he [a theorist] will be selecting those influences to which he is psychologically disposed to give assent and perhaps inducing others to give a similar assent to them."¹

The rules of "validity" of moral argument will be the effectiveness of the emotive words used--whether the causal relation between beliefs and attitudes, which exists on the speaker's side can be affected in those with whom he is disagreeing.² Because of the emotivist's view of moral discourse, any attempt at rationality in moral argument is impossible, since all value-judgements (i.e., expressions of taste) will be relative. There is no possible appeal to any "absolute" set of values

¹Ethics and Language, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1944, p.171.

²See particularly Facts and Values, Chapter III, "Persuasive Definitions".

since these will be simply one set of preferences among many.¹ All that is required for a breakdown in moral argument to occur is for the two disputants to have different attitudes casually connected to the same beliefs. Thus, because factual statements do not entail evaluative ones, even complete agreement in beliefs will not ensure agreement in attitude, since any evaluative conclusion whatsoever will be logically consistent with the agreed upon factual statements. Emotivism, indeed, does away with the possibility of rationality in moral argument, and even tries to do away with such argument altogether--Ayer asserts that moral arguments usually resort, except in the case above, to disagreement over the truth or relevance of certain factual statements. This is the attraction of Hare's account--that prima facie it retains the notion of rationality in moral argument.

We have seen that Hare, like Stevenson, asserts there to be no logical relation between statements of fact and evaluative statements. For Hare also,

"Nothing is laid down in the meaning of 'good' to connect it with one piece of 'evidence' rather than another."²

However, unlike Stevenson, he escapes talking of "evidence" and "rules of validity" where no rules of inference exist by treating moral arguments as having a syllogistic nature.

¹See below, Chapter 3 of this thesis.

²Foot, "Moral Beliefs", p.84.

Moral judgements, whilst overtly particular ("He is a good man"), make reference to a more general standard which the objects being evaluated (in this case, men) are required to meet in order to be called "good".¹ Hare asserts that a particular evaluative judgement is a conclusion from a universal standard or principle for judging the object in question, conjoined with a statement of fact about the particular object being evaluated. Thus, to use a moral example, we have a practical syllogism of the following form:

Major Premise: All men who take care of their family are morally good.

Minor Premise: This man takes care of his family.

Conclusion: He is a morally good man.

Hare can therefore provide deductive rules for moral argument according to the Aristotelian practical syllogism.² This much has to be granted to him--that in the wake of the Positivist attack upon the possibility of the justification of moral judgements, he apparently provides for the rationality of moral argument. A particular moral judgement will only be logically entailed by a universal moral principle and a statement of fact.³ Because moral judgements, by their nature provide a reason for action, they must be prescriptive, as must the universal principle of which it is an instance.

¹The Language of Morals, pp.134-136.

²See Ibid., Chapter 3.

³Cf. P.H. Nowell-Smith, Ethics, Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954, p.309.

Difficulties arise, however, as Foot is quick to point out, when justification is required for the universal moral principle itself. When questioned, for example, about why morally good men take care of their families, a person need only supply another argument of the same form with a further exposed moral principle. The position that may finally be arrived at will be one where either one of the parties will be forced back to a universal moral principle which he will simply assert whilst the other party denies it (e.g. "The duty of all men is to look after the welfare of all of those with whom they are acquainted."). According to Hare's analysis, every moral argument contains such an undefended universal moral principle. Thus, a person cannot be accused of not giving reasons for the principle to which he is ultimately forced back, provided that he consistently opposes the arguments proffered by his opponents as based upon universal moral principles which he simply does not accept. Stemming from such unaccepted principles, their arguments will not be relevant to the position which he is defending.¹ We seem to have a position where a breakdown has occurred, despite the apparent rationality of moral argument. How is this so?

The concept of universalisability, whereby a particular moral judgement is related to a universal standard or principle is well explained in the words of Jonathon Bennett:

¹See also Nowell-Smith, ibid., pp.311-314.

"Hare clearly intends the thesis in this way--that anyone who makes a specific moral judgement shall under challenge be able to produce a universal principle which has the appropriate logical relations with the specific judgement and about which he can honestly claim (a) that he does now accept the principle and (b) that he does now regard the specific judgement as one which he makes only because he accepts the principle. We might sum this up by saying that the universalisability thesis does not demand that a system of moral judgements be reached by rational steps, but it does demand that any specific moral judgement be, at least in theory, rationalisable on demand."¹ (My italics)

The appropriate logical relation that a universal principle is to have with a particular moral judgement is, as we have seen, that the principle together with some true statement about the non-moral characteristics of the person or situation being judged logically entail the particular moral judgement. An example of this would be the practical syllogism above. Now, the quotation from Bennett's article makes it clear why Hare's account of moral argument, whilst it maintains that such argument is rational, at the same time allows for a breakdown to occur. The theory demands that a person give logically adequate reasons for a moral judgement, when challenged, but because no (set of) factual statements about an action or state of affairs entail an evaluative judgement, no party is logically obliged to accept one (set of) moral judgements (on) the situation, and a fortiori is not logically obliged to accept one specific universal moral principle. Whilst evaluative judgements are unlike expressions of taste in that we

¹"Moral Argument", Mind, 69, (1960).

can give logically adequate reasons for making them, nevertheless, the individual is able to choose¹ his own moral principles;² he is able "to commit his will" to those judgements which he himself regards as important--he is perfectly free to adopt any possible principle as his own, libero arbitrio.³ Thus, two parties agreed on the facts concerning a person's action--e.g. agreed that it was a case of stealing--may make the contrary judgements "He was right to steal" and "He was wrong to steal". However, we may ask, in what sense could such arguments be called "rational" when the agent is able to sift out whatever evidence appeals to him as justifying his particular moral judgement?

"What is it to be rational? It is a necessary condition of rationality that a man shall formulate his beliefs in such a way as to make clear what evidence would be evidence against them, and that he lay himself open to criticism and refutation in the light of any possible objection. But to foreclose on tolerance is precisely to cut oneself off from such criticism and refutation. It is to endanger one's own rationality gravely by not admitting one's own fallibility."⁴

But is this not precisely what a person is able to do in moral argument according to Hare? One is able, apparently, to reach an "invulnerable" position by simply adopting a "univer-

¹The Language of Morals, pp.62,71-2, 73; and P.H. Nowell Smith, op.cit., p.307.

²The relation between choice and one's use of evaluative words will be considered in Chapter 3.

³See R.M. Hare, "Universalisability", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, (1954-55), pp.303-304.

⁴Alasdair MacIntyre, Marcuse, London: Fontana, Collins, 1970, pp.90-91.

sal moral principle", which one consistently defends by refusing to accept "evidence" proffered by one's opponents, who have, as the basis of their "arguments" quite different "universal moral principles". Criticism, objections and refutation are simply not an integral part of moral argument. As Geoffrey Warnock puts it:

"For you to say that my view is wrong is to say only that your position excludes that view; for me to 'argue' that my view is right is to show only that my position includes it. And there is nothing else, on this view, that arguments can do; for there are no 'reasons' that either party can appeal to independently of , and so genuinely in support of, his own prescriptions. In this way it must inevitably appear to Hare that real argument can address itself only to the question of consistency."¹

Both Hare's and Stevenson's accounts assume that because there is no logical connection between factual and evaluative statements, a person is in a unique position in moral argument where he may choose what evidence he finds relevant to his own evaluation of an action or a state-of-affairs. In any other type of argument, for a man to be in a position where what he upholds is invulnerable in the sense that opponents cannot counter a judgement to which he has been forced back in the course of the argument, it is necessary that he fulfill the following conditions:

- 1) He has brought forward evidence where it is needed
- 2) He has disposed of any contrary evidence offered by opponents.

¹Contemporary Moral Philosophy, London: Macmillan, 1967, p.46.

That Stevenson does not make such requirements on moral argument is clear since evaluative statements are no more than expressions of taste. That Hare does not demand that the two conditions be satisfied is made clear in Bennett's article. According to Hare, when a man has produced an argument in support of a particular moral judgement (e.g. "Jack was wrong to do that"), it is open to his opponent, if he is in disagreement, to do one of two things--

- 1) He may disagree with the truth or relevance of the minor premise--e.g. disagree that Jack's action was a case of stealing. Let us suppose that both disputants are agreed that Jack did steal something.
- 2) He may dispute the universal moral principle (e.g. "Stealing is wrong") by providing a counter-example, where the person upholding the principle is agreed that someone was morally justified in stealing--e.g. to provide food for his dying mother. Of this second case, Bennett says:

"One important thing to note about this sort of argument is that I need never lose it. For in each step of the argument, I can adopt either one of two alternatives: I can deny that your would-be counter-instance, is a counter-instance, saying 'Yes, that would be wrong too'; or I can admit that you have found a counter-instance, and revise my rule accordingly. In applying my principle to what you thought was a counter-instance to it, I may surprise you, but you cannot 'falsify' any expanded universal principle which I may produce in the face of a genuine counter-instance."¹

¹Ibid., p.547.

There are however, two ways in which Bennett says one may be said to "lose" such an argument. In certain instances, one may be faced with choosing between the following:

- 1) One may accept a particular moral judgement of an action described in one of one's opponent's would-be counter-examples which it "embarrasses" one to accept. Thus, in order to hold onto one's original judgement (Jack was wrong to do that") one has to "jerry-build" one's structure of co-existing moral judgements, i.e., one has to declare as morally relevant the fact that Jack was not stealing for altruistic, but for selfish, motives. This will enable one to prevent the original judgement from leading one into a multitude of unwelcome judgements like "People who steal in order to provide food for dying dependents are evil". It is not that one can be said to have "lost" such an argument in this case, but it could be said where one has to declare some characteristic to be morally relevant which one does not honestly regard as morally relevant--e.g. in Jack's defence, the fact that it was Saturday night and he was drunk.
- 2) One may expand one's universal moral principle, when forced to do so in face of counter-examples, by adding to it a predicate which it "embarrasses" one to have to admit as morally relevant, e.g., "It is wrong for a black to steal in order to provide food for his dying dependents".¹

¹Such a principle transgresses the conditions for a

One's embarrassment arises from one's having to allow one's opponent's counter-example to stand as a counter-example ("How about the case of a black stealing for his mother?"), whilst at the same time admitting that one can see no qualitative difference between it and the original case, which one honestly regards as morally relevant (between Jack's case of stealing and that of a black). If this is the case and I am honest, I shall withdraw the original judgement, and something will have been learned in the course of the argument.

Unlike Hare, Foot holds that moral argument differs only in content and not in form from arguments of a factual nature, and hence that the two conditions listed above must be satisfied, not allowing the possibility of a person resorting to a universal moral principle without disposing of contrary evidence. To uphold this view, she has to suppose that a logical relation does hold between factual and evaluative statements. This relation, she says, could be either

1) That factual premises logically entail evaluative conclu-

genuine universal moral principle set out by Hare. Since all moral judgements are, to use E.A. Gellner's terminology, "type u" valuations, or applications of

"an open rule formulated with the help of only property words and variables, but of course no proper names...(i.e.,) a rule wholly devoid of any personal reference, a rule containing merely predicates (descriptions) and logical terms."

"Ethics and Logic", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, (1954-55), pp.161-163; thus reference to a "black in a principle is not allowed. This is an accurate representation of Hare. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "What Morality is Not", Philosophy, 1958.

sions. Despite the difficulties which have been found in such a view,¹ Foot denies that the "breakdown theories" have disproved the existence of such a relation. Or:

- 2) That factual premises count as evidence for evaluative conclusions, not in Hare's sense whereby a man may choose the evidence to support his evaluative conclusion, but in the sense that in virtue of the meaning of moral terms:

"Some things do, and some things do not, count in favour of a moral conclusion, and...a man can no more decide for himself what is evidence for rightness and wrongness than he can decide what is evidence for monetary inflation or a tumour on the brain."²

Foot claims to be more interested in the second, weaker thesis.³ It seems, however, that this thesis is inseparable from the former one since she talks of an "internal" or conceptual relationship between the meaning of "good" and certain pieces of evidence. What she means by this will be discussed in Chapter Three. From what is said there, I think it is clear that Foot is making a claim similar in nature to P.F. Strawson's claim that there is a conceptual relationship between the physical marks of a playing-card and the value which we ascribe to that card, a queen for example, given the conventions of the card-game.⁴ Thus, given the nature of language, there is a

¹See particularly The Language of Morals, pp.79,93.

²Foot, "Moral Arguments", p.504.

³Ibid.

⁴P.F. Strawson, "Persons", in V.C. Chappell (ed.), The Philosophy of Mind, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962.

relationship of meanings between the word "good" and certain pieces of evidence. What precisely these pieces of evidence are will be analysed later in this chapter.

Foot assumes for the sake of argument that the positivist is able to identify a characteristic *f*, essential to evaluative words (say the acceptance of an imperative or the expression of an attitude), distinguishing them radically from descriptive words.

"He is therefore justified in insisting that no word or statement which does not have the property *f* can be taken as equivalent to an evaluation and that no account of the use of an evaluative term can leave out *f* and yet be complete."¹

What is implied by this, asks Foot, concerning the relation between premises and conclusion in an argument where the conclusion is evaluative. The positivist will claim that it follows that no evaluative conclusion can be entailed by a set of descriptive premises. How is this to be shown? If he defines a descriptive premise as one which does not entail an evaluative conclusion the positivist assures himself correctness "at the price of becoming a bore". He is merely uttering a tautology. If, however, pointing to characteristic *f*, he asserts that no set of premises not entailing *f* can entail an evaluation, he is then similar to someone who says that a proposition, *P*, entailing a proposition about a dog, *Q*, must

¹Foot, "Moral Arguments", p.505.

also entail a further proposition, R, about an animal.

"He is telling us what to look out for in checking the entailment. What he is not so far telling us is that we can test for the entailment by looking to see whether the premise itself has the characteristic f. For all that has yet been shown it might be possible for a premise which is not f to entail a conclusion which is f."¹

She sets out to disprove the thesis that unless the premises of an argument taken collectively have characteristic f, it will be possible to deny a conclusion which has characteristic f, by showing it to be false with reference to arguments designed to show that a particular piece of behaviour is or is not rude. Elsewhere, she argues the same case for the terms "injury" and "dangerous",² and even for terms which are not so clearly evaluative in the positivist's sense.³ In general, her case is against those who hold that

"when a man uses a word such as 'good' in an 'evaluative' and not an 'inverted comma' sense, he is supposed to commit his will. From this it has seemed to follow inevitably that there is a logical gap between fact and value; for is it not one thing to say that a thing is so, and another to have a particular attitude towards its being so; one thing to say that certain effects will follow from a given action, and another to care."⁴

Foot considers it to be a necessary and sufficient condition for the correct application of the term "rude" to a piece of behaviour that it cause offence by indicating lack

¹Ibid., p.506.

²"Moral Beliefs", pp.87-92, 95-98.

³See below in Chapter 3.

⁴"Moral Beliefs", p.95.

of respect. Moreover, the term "rude" is evaluative in the positivistic sense since it expresses disapproval, etc. Her argument at this point is very simple--is it possible (i.e. logically possible) for someone to consider any piece of behaviour offensive, and hence rude? Could I call the behaviour of someone who walked on the cracks in the pavement, or who dug holes in the light of the moon offensive? Without subsuming this piece of behaviour within a further system of beliefs--e.g., that walking on the cracks in the pavement was a sign of disrespect to one's parents, in which case what causes offence is the disrespect shown and not the walking on the cracks eo ipso¹--it is clear that if I regarded such behaviour as causing offence I should not understand what "causes offence" means or should be using the term in an eccentric way. Is it possible then, Foot asks, for someone to accept that a certain piece of behaviour caused offence (proposition O, let us call it--a factual proposition) and yet deny proposition R, that the behaviour is rude (an evaluative proposition)? Foot denies the possibility because

"It is evident that with the usual criteria of rudeness he leaves behind the concept itself....Whether a man is speaking of behaviour as rude or not rude, he must use the same criteria as anyone else, and...since the criteria are satisfied if O is true, it is impossible for him to assert O while denying R. It follows that if it is a

¹This argument is mirrored in "Moral Beliefs" in connection with the possibility of calling someone who clasped his hands together three times an hour morally virtuous. See below in Chapter 3.

sufficient condition of P's entailing Q that the assertion of P is inconsistent with the denial of Q, we have an example of a non-evaluative premise from which an evaluative conclusion can be deduced."¹

What must be asked, however, with regard to Foot's case, is whether the premises are in fact non-evaluative. The term "offensive" is not strictly a non-evaluative one. What causes offence to one man may very well fail to do so to another one from a quite different cultural background, whereas the redness of an object (a descriptive property) would be evident to both. What Foot is trying to say is that if one wishes to use evaluative and moral words, one has to accept the established criteria for their use. In her own words:

"Anyone who uses moral terms at all, whether to assert or deny a moral proposition, must abide by the rules for their use, including the rule about what shall count as evidence for or against the moral judgement concerned....The only recourse of the man who refused to accept the things which counted in favour of a moral proposition, as giving him a reason to do certain things, or to take up a particular attitude, would be to leave the moral discussion and abjure altogether the use of moral terms."²

By not doing this, we run the risk either of uttering an unintelligible or meaningless statement (unless meaning is simply a function of individual choice), or of attempting to effect a change in the descriptive meaning of "rude", for

¹"Moral Arguments", p.508-509.

²Ibid., p.511.

example, by using the evaluative meaning to prescribe different pieces of behaviour as causing offence.¹ By denying that this latter course is possible, since with the usual criteria changed the concept "rude" is not changed but "left behind", Foot is denying Hare's thesis that the evaluative meaning of full blown evaluative terms is primary.² I wish to ask, in connection with this,--what happens, as does happen in the course of any change in the moral code of an individual or community, when a man refuses to accept the commonly accepted criteria for such terms as "rude" and "good"? Is he, in fact, led into a morass of meaninglessness or is he, as Hare holds, simply basing particular moral judgements upon a universal moral principle which possibly no one else accepts, but to which he is nevertheless entitled?

Considering the term "rude" first, a man who refuses to use the term according to commonly accepted criteria, can do so in the following way. He may accept proposition O, that the behaviour caused offence by indicating lack of respect but refuse to infer proposition R, that it was rude, because he did not wish to accept the whole theory of praise and blame being ascribed according to the usual standards of etiquette.

¹See The Language of Morals, p.119.

²Hare claims in Freedom and Reason (Oxford University Press, 1963), pp.187-191, that "rude" and "courageous" are not full blown evaluative terms. This claim, however, is far from convincing.

Intuitively, one might agree with Foot that if somebody pushed Jones in the back, and generally barged into him for no other reason than to annoy him, then we should have a case where the description of the agent's behaviour as causing offence entailed the judgement that it was rude, to anybody acquainted with the meaning of "caused offence" and "rude". However, it is not difficult to think of circumstances where such behaviour would not be rude. The following where:

- 1) a doctor pushes through a crowd to tend to an injured person,
- 2) I push someone hard to save them from an oncoming car,
- 3) the general pushing and shoving that takes place in a game of Rugby or Canadian Football,

are cases in point. What distinguished these from Foot's own counter-example to Hare are the intentions with which they are performed and the circumstances in which they take place. Any description of these actions will have to take such factors into consideration, presupposing a value-laden set of rules:

"The notion of offence is parasitic on the notion of a standard or norm, although these need not be formulated....It makes all the difference morally whether the grazed ankle is caused by barging in the line-out or by barging in the bus queue...in asserting that a kind of offence has been caused, a specific background and the standards inherent in it have already been involved."¹

Before turning from discussion of "rude" to moral evaluation,

¹D.Z. Phillips and H.O. Mounce, "On Philosophy's Having a Point", Philosophy, (1965), p.312.

we should notice that Foot's analysis of "rude" and any such terms of etiquette is not particularly illuminating to her discussion of moral discourse. This is simply because if the analogy between etiquette and morality is meant to be a close one, this would simply prove that morality, like etiquette, is conventional, and this is the very point that she wishes to disprove, viz:

"It is a fact about etiquette and law that they are both conventional as morality is not."¹

Of moral terms, she says the following:

"It is open to us to enquire whether moral terms do lose their meaning when divorced from the pleasure principle, or from some other set of criteria, as the word "rude" loses its meaning when the criterion of offensiveness is dropped. To me it seems that is clearly the case; I do not know what could be meant by saying that it was someone's duty to do something unless there was an attempt to show why it mattered if this sort of thing was not done. Is it even to be suggested that the harm done by a certain trait of character could be taken by some moral eccentric, to be just what made it a virtue? I suggest that such a man would not even be a moral eccentric, any more than the man who used the word "rude" of conventional behaviour was putting forward strange views about what was rude."²

Thus, Foot considers that:

"the concepts harm, advantage, benefit, importance, etc. are related to the different moral concepts, such as rightness, obligation, duty and virtue... and it follows that a man cannot make his own personal decision about the considerations which are to count as evidence."³

¹Foot, "Moral Arguments", p.513.

²Ibid., p.511

³Ibid., p.511.

This, however, is a very strong thesis--not merely are there criteria for moral words, which are to be strictly observed, but, furthermore, it is not possible for the individual to choose what is to count as harm, benefit, advantage, etc. He is not able to choose the criteria for moral terms. This thesis is very clearly opposed to Hare (and indeed any form of individualism). We are, according to Foot, unable to choose the descriptive meaning of moral terms which will logically entail certain evaluative judgements. The individual is presented with moral phenomena, and not with the possibility of giving a self-determined interpretation of phenomena from a moral point of view.

Would it ever be possible to settle the debate concerning the use of moral language and moral argument between Hare and Foot? Each is eager to provide counter-examples to the other's case and to deal with similar difficulties in his own without once questioning the correctness or plausibility of his own central position. Would not an appeal to the ways in which moral language is currently used provide a criterion for deciding which philosophical account is correct? One of the main aims of this thesis is to show that this philosophical debate is a reflection of two of the many different and indeed opposing ways in which moral terms are used in contemporary society. The debate reflects the different consciousness with which modern man uses, and also refuses to use, moral concepts. It shows also that philosophical enquiry into moral concepts is

not, despite Hare's confessions to the contrary, morally neutral. As a result we could not resolve the debate by appeal to ordinary language, since there is no one way in which moral concepts are used.

Unlike the polis described in Plato's Republic where the ends of both the city and of the individual member of the city are agreed upon and fully circumscribed, the roots of present-day Western society, and the influences that have moulded its language of "good" and "evil", "right" and "wrong" are many. Our society stems from a blend of Greek rationalism and Christian religion, from which have come:

"Aristotelianism, primitive Christian simplicity, the puritan ethic, the aristocratic ethic of consumption, and the traditions of democracy and socialism which have all left their mark upon our moral vocabulary. Within each of these moralities there is a proposed end or ends, a set of rules, a list of virtues. But the ends, the rules, the virtues differ....It follows that we are liable to find two kinds of people in our society: those who speak from within one of these surviving moralities, and those who stand outside all of them. Between the adherents of one morality and the adherents of none there exists no court of appeal, no impersonal neutral standard. For those who speak from within a given morality, the connection between fact and valuation is established in virtue of the meanings of the words they use. To those who speak from without, those who speak from within appear merely to be uttering imperatives which express their own liking and disliking and their private choices."¹

Appeals to the facts of human welfare and harm as the basis of morality are not appeals to phenomena which can be universally described in morally neutral terms. A person's

¹Alasdair MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, p.266.

conception of what it is to harm another person will depend on his other beliefs, particularly his moral beliefs. Similarly, when Foot talks of the avoidance of injury as "something a man has reason to want if he wants anything",¹ she is not appealing to a notion which can be used to show that one party's moral argument is both valid and acceptable, whilst another's is not. The gulf that separates the ends which a research physicist and a member of the F.L.Q. find noble is precisely the area in which moral debate arises, and it is clear from recent events that members of the F.L.Q. are willing to risk personal injury in the pursuit of what they consider a higher end. To use another example: in a dispute between a scientific rationalist and a Roman Catholic housewife over whether the housewife should have another child, we shall not be able to resolve the argument by making each party aware of all the facts relevant to the discussion unless each were to renounce those beliefs that are of greatest importance in determining their particular moral views. Because of their quite different moral beliefs--as to what constitutes the good for man etc.--the differing conceptual framework they bring to bear upon the analysis of the situation, their interpretation of the facts of the situation will be poles apart:

"It is misleading to speak of 'the facts of the situation' in such a way as to suggest that there must be a closed set of propositions which, once established, precisely determine the situation....The situations

¹"Moral Beliefs", p.96.

in which we must act or abstain from acting, are 'open' in the sense that they can be uniquely described and finally circumscribed. The situation is given, but not 'the facts of the situation'; to state the facts is to analyse and interpret the situation."¹

Are we now back where we started--that ultimate justification for a moral position is impossible, because the two criteria for rational argument which Foot so clearly stated are inapplicable to moral argument? I don't think that the prescriptivist and emotivist alternative is a consequence of the position I have just followed.

"The rationalist, the housewife, the pacifist or the militarist cannot say what they like. Their arguments are rooted in different moral traditions within which there are rules for what can and what cannot be said."²

If we are speaking from within a certain tradition then as MacIntyre and Foot have shown, our moral concepts are linked to the criteria for their use by an "internal relationship", i.e., by their meaning. The problem of a "free" or criterionless moral discourse becomes most pressing when we meet the second type of person MacIntyre mentioned, who stands outside any moral tradition, who professes to have no ultimate principles to guide his choices--such a man as the situationalist who makes every particular decision and moral judgement upon its own merits, divorcing it from any that he might have made in the past and any that he might make in

¹Stuart Hampshire, "Fallacies in Moral Philosophy", Mind, 58 (1949), p.476.

²D.Z. Phillips and H.O. Mounce, op.cit., p.318.

the future. Such a position I believe to be both logically and existentially impossible. It rests first of all upon a misunderstanding of the nature not only of moral discourse, but of language. If we suppose a man that on one occasion asserted that beating up old ladies was wrong, for no other reason than that he felt it was wrong, and upon a later occasion reversed his judgement, calling such behaviour right, we should naturally ask him why he had changed his mind. Being a true subjectivist he has recinded his judgement not because of any rational process, but because he now feels it to be right to beat up old ladies. To our continual questioning "why?" he is forced by his own logic to reply that he has no ultimate reason--he simply feels differently towards the question. Such a man places himself outside moral discussion because he is unwilling to use moral concepts consistently. We simply should not understand what he meant by "right" and "wrong" because he does not follow any rules when he uses them. It is of no use his stating that he is using moral concepts according to his own rules, which are quite random, since any rule must be open to discovery. As Wittgenstein has shown, it must be logically possible for me to discover any rule that another person is following.¹ But this is precisely what is ruled out by the subjectivist. You cannot

¹See P. Winch, The Idea of a Social Science, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, Chapter 1; and cf. R.M. Hare, "Universalisability", p.303.

be said to be following a rule if I cannot, at least in principle, discover what the rule is. Moreover, and this is no longer a logical point, each man has a social past which determines that he has some moral vocabulary with which to frame and make a particular choice. It is not possible for a man to divorce that choice from previous and future choices. If a man who was brought up as a Roman Catholic suddenly does a seeming about-face and becomes a Marxist committed to violent revolution, this will be because he no longer sees the ends of Catholicism as valuable. But this does not mean that his present and future decisions are pointless--he has simply decided probably for many psychological, social, and religious reasons that the ends of Marxism are more worthwhile. His moral language will not, however, be pointless and unguided by principles. If this were the case and he became a moral nihilist, we should say not that his talk of good and evil are pointless but rather that he has foregone the right to use such language.

To return to Foot, she provides criteria for our understanding those issues involved in moral argument and what it means to hold a moral principle. She provides no more than guide lines, but in doing so she overreaches Hare who merely provides a model for moral argument. She denies the fact-value distinction but she does not specify that "facts entail values", merely stating of the rules of use for moral judgements, that

"for anything that has yet been shown to the contrary these rules could be entailment rules, forbidding the assertion of factual propositions in conjunction with the denial of moral propositions."¹

Indeed, she only shows that the acceptance of certain factual statements (whether they be about someone's behaviour causing offence or his harming another person) is a necessary but never a sufficient condition for making an evaluative ("He was rude") or a moral ("He was wrong to...") judgement. Moral arguments, by their nature are not deductive, nor are they of the "Booh! Hurrah!" type.

"When people argue about what is right, good or obligatory, or whether a certain character trait is or is not a virtue...what is said may well be subtle or profound, and...much depends on experience and imagination. It is quite common for one man to be unable to see what the other is getting at, and this sort of misunderstanding will not always be resolvable by anything which could be called argument in the ordinary sense."²

¹"Moral Arguments", p.510.

²Ibid., p.513.

CHAPTER 3

GOODNESS, CRITERIA AND CHOICE

As we have seen, all of Hare's arguments in connexion with the term "good" are aimed at showing that its meaning cannot be equated with the criteria required in an object for it to be commended as "good" because the meaning of that term is evaluative. In this chapter I wish to explicate the nature of the relation of the use of the expression "a good X" to the speaker's choices. My main points of reference will be Chapters 6 to 8 in Hare's The Language of Morals and Foot's and Alan Montfiore's symposium "Goodness and Choice", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume XXV (1961), pp.45-80.

To show the close relationship between a speaker's choice and his use of the term "good", Hare uses the example of teaching a foreigner its meaning. This is achieved because in a certain situation the foreigner chooses, all other things being equal, an object X in preference to other objects of the same type Y, for certain reasons Z. Now we are able to say to him, "You think that X is the best Y because of Z"; and hence teach him the meaning of "best" and consequently of "good", using analogies with the superlatives of other adjectives.¹

¹Hare admits (Language of Morals, pp.183-185) that the

However, having correctly learned from the above case that the thought which he had when he chose object X¹ was correctly expressed by saying that it was the best Y because of Z, and, having learned from this the meaning of "good" as applied not merely to Y's but to any type of object, the foreigner might mistakenly believe that he had learned the criteria for applying the word "good". This is to equate meaning and criteria in a way which Hare considers mistaken. Because in this one case the foreigner knew the criteria for calling X a good Y does not imply that he knows the criteria required in other types of object, since these may be different. He has learned from the above case not the criteria for its use, but the meaning of the word. Because they are different, it would be possible for him to use "good" in full knowledge of its evaluative meaning, but, through ignorance of the criteria for its use (its descriptive meaning), apply it to the wrong objects. Conversely, it is quite possible for someone to know the right criteria for its use, and, say grade apples correctly, but not know the meaning of the word; not know that it was used to commend the apples.

We have seen that the meaning of "good" and "best" can be taught to somebody by reference to the choices he makes, and

meaning of "good" is far looser than its comparative and superlative forms. However, he defines "good man" in terms of "better man than" (p.186) and both in terms of "ought" (p. 184).

¹As Hare says (Ibid., p.108-9), it is not necessary to refer to thoughts etc. here, since "choose" may be understood in terms of preferential behaviour.

also that the primary function of these words is to commend. To commend, according to Hare, is, at least indirectly, to guide choices. Value judgements; in general, are closely related to choices. When one makes a full-blown value-judgement (i.e., not using the value-term in its "conventional" or "inverted commas" sense) one commits oneself to making certain choices:

"We only have standards for a class of objects, we only talk of the virtues of one specimen as against another, we only use value-words about them, when occasions are known to exist, or are conceivable, in which we, or someone else, would have to choose between specimens."¹

Clearly, the most useful standards, and hence the most useful value-judgements, will be those related to choices which we are likely to have to make. The logic of a value-word like "good" demands that I cannot apply it to one object (a car, for example) and yet refuse to apply it to another car which is in all respects similar to the first, except that it is not numerically identical with the first. This is so because, by commending an object, a standard is appealed to, which, if it is to be of use as a standard, will give us several criteria for making value-judgements on members of that class of object. By refusing to call objects which are exactly similar "good", two inconsistent standards are appealed to, and:

"the effect of such an utterance is similar to that of a contradiction: for in a contradiction I say two

¹ibid., p. 128. See also pp.107ff and 127.

inconsistent things and so the effect is that the hearer does not know what I am trying to say."¹

Presupposed in this account is Hare's thesis that every value-judgement, whilst it may be overtly particular, ("This is a good picture") makes reference to a more general standard which objects are required to meet in order to be called "good". This, in turn, relates to his belief in the syllogistic nature of moral justification and argument, which we considered in the first two chapters. Hare also finds agreement with Sir Karl Popper's statement that morality rests ultimately on human decision or choice. As such:

"decisions can never be derived from facts (or statements of facts) although they pertain to facts."²

Both Popper and Hare then, stand in line with Hume's bifurcation of the "ought" from the "is".

In her article "Goodness and Choice" Foot presents the thesis that the criteria for the goodness of an object are laid down in the meaning of the word designating that object. She holds that this is true not only for "functional words" but for a far wider range of terms than has been supposed by Hare and others. Indeed she holds implicitly that these criteria are determined for all terms:

"My thesis is not, of course, that criteria for the goodness of each and every kind of thing are determined in the same way as they are determined for such

¹Ibid., p.134.

²The Open Society and Its Enemies, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1945, I, 62.

things as knives, but rather than they are always determined, and not a matter for decision."¹

In evaluating a knife as "a good knife":

"the man who uses these words must use them in conjunction with particular criteria of goodness: those which really are the criteria for the goodness of knives....I imagine that almost everyone would agree about this, saying that there are some cases in which the correct use of the expression "a good A" requires that one set of criteria rather than another should be used for judging the goodness of the things. But many people who would admit this think that in other cases any criteria of goodness would be logically possible, so that for some A's the individual calling an A a good A has to decide for himself which characteristics he will take as counting in favour of the goodness of A."²

Specifically, she is attacking the twin theses:

- 1) That the choices of a speaker are a sufficient condition for the use of the word "good"--for example, if a man called A's good A's merely because they were A's which he was thereafter willing to choose. On this view it is possible to defend a use of the term "good" by reference to the fact that one had committed oneself to a choice (See Hare's account above).
- 2) That a connexion with choices of the speaker is a necessary condition of the use of "good"--the thesis that evaluative terms are used fundamentally to guide or prescribe choices (cf. Hare).

Foot is thus making a full-scale attack on the foregoing account of Hare's by denying that there is any sort of

¹"Goodness and Choice", p.47.

²Ibid., p.46.

analytic or conceptual relationship between a speaker's choice and his use of evaluative language. Let us examine her argument and attempt to arrive at certain conclusions.

The classes of terms whose criteria of goodness are laid down by their meaning are as follows:

- 1) Most obviously, "functional terms"--in the strong sense of "functional", whereby such a term as knife:

"...names an object in respect of its function. This is not to say (simply) that it names an object which has a function, but also that the function is involved in the meaning of the word, and I shall call such words functional in the strong sense."¹

Thus, by definition, it will not be logically possible to say of a strong functional word that "It is a good A but does not fulfill its function well" (e.g. "This is a good knife but it does not cut well."). Such strong functional words, Foot considers, have their function intrinsically bound up with the concept (e.g. cutting is intrinsic to knives) because, if a people of a different culture had tools having the same physical characteristics as knives (blades, handle etc.) but which fulfilled a different function, then we should not translate this word into English as "knife". Similarly:

"...it is another matter to suppose that in a community which used knife-like objects only for the purpose of ornaments the word which names them would properly be translated as 'knife'."²

¹Ibid., p.47.

²Ibid., p.48.

Simply because the primary function--and hence the primary criterion of goodness--in knives is to cut, does not exclude that knives may be used for other purposes (e.g. stabbing), but that to be counted as a good knife, a bladed instrument must cut well. Thus, cutting well is a necessary condition of its being a good knife.

Other words which we can include in the class of strong functional words include pen, pencil, match, watch, etc. which are all manufactured for a specific purpose, as well as eye, lung, limb, etc. which are not.

"Moreover, words can be functional in the 'strong' sense without naming anything that we ourselves use of need."¹

For example, any part of a plant or animal which has a function--stem, root, leaf, leg, etc.

- 2) Functional terms in the weak sense. Foot is not very explicit about these. She cites the examples of discovering the function of an organ, like the appendix, which was previously believed not to have any function whilst still retaining the same name. Eventually, presumably, "appendix" would in this case become a functional word in the strong sense. Having no function, weak functional terms have no criteria of goodness. This supports Foot's case. For example, we don't say "good appendix", "good swamp" or "good weed".

¹Ibid., p.48.

3) A far wider range of words which are not functional in either the weak or strong sense, but which still allow one to derive the criteria of goodness from their meaning. None of the terms in the expressions "good farmer", "good rider" or "good liar" pick out a man by reference to his function although they name him in respect of a function.¹ It would be odd, in other words, to ask "What is the function of a farmer?" A reply of the type that he served the community would be in order. However, a good farmer is so because of his farming. Whilst what counts as good farming may vary from a poultry farmer to a dairy farmer, there are limits within which standards are used to judge it as farming, because farming is an activity which has a particular point. The expressions "good daughter", "good friend" and "good father" similarly have set criteria which will only differ, according to Foot, within certain limits from place to place.

"Being a good father must have something to do with bringing up children, and more specifically caring for them."²

Foot is somewhat vague here. What exactly is meant by "... must have something to do with..."? Clearly, she supposes there to be more than a contingent relationship between caring for children and being a good father. If, as she says, the statement:

¹That is, unlike strong functional words, the function is not explicitly involved in the meaning of the term.

²"Goodness and Truth", pp.50,51.

"'good knives cut well' must be held to be some kind of analytic statement"¹

(once again, she uses the vague term "some kind of"--what we are after is "what kind of?"), then, the statement "good fathers care for their children" must also be "some kind of analytic statement". Clearly, she holds there to be some kind of conceptual relation between "good father" and "caring for children".

I suggest that she means that caring for children is a criterion for being a good father in a stronger sense than that employed by Hare, since, according to him, these criteria can change fairly rapidly via shifts in the evaluative meaning of "good father".² Her sense of "criteria" seems closest to that used by Michael Slote,³ and ultimately to Wittgenstein's sense of the term "criteria".⁴

Slote, like Foot, holds that the criteria for value-terms are fixed. He makes use of a further notion, which he calls "important criteria". This also is helpful for understanding Foot's arguments. Both are defined as follows:

"Such terms as 'fish', 'city', and 'democracy' (and indeed one could include Foot's examples of 'father', 'friend', 'daughter', 'rider', 'liar', etc.) whose

¹Ibid., p.48.

²Language of Morals, see pp.111-126 and 148-150.

³"Value-Judgements and the Theory of Important Criteria", The Journal of Philosophy (1968), p.98 and passim.

⁴Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1963, p.354, where he shows that "X" is a criterion of Y" is a matter not of experience but of definition.

applicability is disputed in certain cases where one of their criteria is missing, I call cluster terms. Cluster terms can be defined in terms of their criteria. Where 'f' is a cluster term all of whose criteria are a, b, ..., n, 'p is low f' means 'p has whichever of a, b, ..., n are important'....As I define the key word 'important' a characteristic X counts as important if and only if knowing whether X is or is not present in any given S is important for any disinterested knowledge about our understanding of S, i.e., tell us a good deal about (the sort of thing) S (is), about what S is really like. A characteristic is important, in other words, just in case its presence or absence in any given thing S makes a good deal of (an important) difference to the kind of thing S is."¹

If we apply this to value-words, as Slote does, we can shed light on Foot's position.

"Certain value-terms have criteria. And they also resemble the sort of cluster terms described in "The Theory of Important Criteria" in that disputes about their application can arise in cases where one of their criteria is absent... 'fine person' ordinarily means something like: person having whichever of kindness, honesty, intelligence, humility, sensitivity etc. are important."²

Extended to other terms too:

"I think 'X is a good friend of Y', for example, means something like: X has whichever of loving Y, seeking Y's welfare, liking to be with Y, being willing to make sacrifices for Y, etc. are important."³

Now clearly, the notion of "importance" of criteria is an evaluative one (See Ibid., pp.102-103, especially footnote p.102.), but if we apply it to Foot's example of "good father" we can follow more closely the drift of her argument. For

¹Slote, "Value Judgements and the Theory of Important Criteria", p.98.

²Ibid., p.100.

³Ibid.

Foot, caring for his children is an important criterion of being a good father, and indeed a criterion over which there can be no disagreement if the concept of "father" is to remain the same.

"If, in a given community, a man were said to be a good A in so far as he offered his children up for sacrifice, 'A' could not be retranslated by our word 'father', but would be like 'citizen' again, or 'provider of children for the state'."¹

Caring for children is therefore a necessary condition of being a good father. Unfortunately for Foot, there have been societies in which sacrifice of one's eldest son was considered the duty of a father. In pre-Abrahamite Canaanite society, this was precisely the case. Does this mean that the name for male parent of children in this society would not be translated into English by the word "father"? Peter Winch, in distinguishing moral and scientific concepts, seems to support this idea:

"Modern scientific theories could be used to describe and explain natural phenomena occurring in the time of Abraham as well as they can be used for phenomena occurring now; but modern moral concepts could not be used to describe and explain the actions of Abraham and his contemporaries. The relation between moral ideas and human behaviour is different from that between scientific ideas and the behaviour of natural phenomena."²

In other words, an important criterion of being a good father in pre-Abrahamite Canaan was sacrifice of one's first-born son. This, however, does not destroy Foot's argument, since as a

¹Foot, "Goodness and Choice", p.51.

²"Nature and Convention", in Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (1959-60), p.233.

cluster term, the criteria by which "father" can be defined have changed, thus changing the meaning of the term. What this implies is that Foot is not incorrect in her account of moral terms.

It would take too long to go deeply into the relationship of Winch's (and ultimately Wittgenstein's) theory of rule-following and the application of concepts to (and hence the understanding of) different cultures,¹ but it is worth noting that both Winch and Foot are agreed that concepts like "father", "parent", "daughter", "friend", etc. are moral concepts and not to be understood in the same way as scientific ones:

"On investigation we might decide that 'father', 'daughter' and 'friend' should be called moral terms, especially if we thought that a wholly good man could not be bad in any of these aspects."²

Moreover, both are agreed that, although they are moral terms, they have a quite fixed and static meaning in the context of a particular society.³ Foot's explanation of the prima facie differences in their meaning from society to society is however different from Winch's.

In considering whether or not any type of action can be called "a good action" (in the usual sense of "good" and not merely in its prudential sense,⁴ for example), she asks whether

¹See P. Winch. The Idea of a Social Science. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, especially Chapters 1 and 2.

²Foot, "Goodness and Choice", p.51.

³On this point, notice particularly the frontispiece of Winch's book where he has a quote from Lessing.

⁴Foot does not claim to be able to precisely define what

in any society the clasping of one's hands three times an hour could be called a good action. To someone who claims that it is possible to find such an action virtuous, she replies:

"I think he will find that he has to cheat, and suppose that in the community concerned, the clasping of hands has been given some special significance or is thought to have some special effect....The difficulty is obviously connected with the fact that without a special background there is no possibility of answering the question 'What's the point?'....It is surely clear that moral virtues must be connected with human good and harm, and that it is quite impossible to call anything you like good or harm. Consider for instance, the suggestion that a man might say that he had been harmed because a bucket of water had been taken out of the sea. As usual, it would be possible to think up circumstances in which this remark would make sense: for instance, when coupled with a belief in magical influences; but then the harm could consist in what was done by the evil spirits, not in the taking of the water from the sea."¹

Thus, to continue using Slote's terminology, when "good" is used to qualify a term like "father", "liar" or "action" (in the moral sense of "good action") there are criteria of goodness laid down in the meaning of that term which limit the applicability of "good" to it--that a good father care for his children. Of these criteria there are "important criteria" which determine exactly how we understand the concept. If there is disagreement over these important criteria, this implies that there is disagreement over what

"the moral use of good" is, but assumes that despite the diversity of such a use (in connexion with duty, charity, courage, etc.) that all of them "raise moral issues" because they are connected with "moral virtues".

¹"Moral Beliefs" in Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, (1958-59), p.94.

constitutes an object A (Abraham, say) being subsumed within that concept (of father). Foot holds that these important criteria are limited by strict standards and are not, as Hare supposes, open to individual decision or choice. Only by subsuming an action like clasping one's hands together three times an hour, or running round trees anti-clockwise within a further hierarchy of beliefs--for example, that the point of such actions was to placate the gods, or to save one's mother from death by drowning--could they be described as good, in a moral sense. Such uses, however, could hardly be ordinary uses of "good" which Hare claims to be investigating.

So far, so good; but since the notion of an important criterion is itself an evaluative one, the obvious objection to Foot at this point is that, despite what she says, it is merely a matter of choice as to which criteria one counts as important.

To return to Slote, he admits that because "important criteria" is a value-term itself:

"this introduces some flexibility into attempts to show the applicability of the sort of terms that the 'Meta-ethical Theory of Important Criteria' (his own theory) deals with."¹

At the same time he denies that hand-in-hand with such flexibility goes a merely ad hoc attempt to define the criteria of value-terms. How is this so? Probably, it must be realised that both Foot and Slote are limiting their discussions to

¹"Value Judgements and the Theory of Important Criteria", p.98.

cases where "good" and other value-terms are used in conjunction with a common name (e.g. father). It is the meaning of this latter term which determines the criteria of goodness, for example, "good father". Neither Foot nor Slote therefore is concerned with uses of "good" such as the following: "Good for him!", "It would be good for John to go for a walk", "Good!", etc. Secondly, there are certain criteria which clearly do qualify as important criteria; i.e., which do make a greater difference than others by their presence or absence as to whether an object is to be called a father, and hence whether he is a good father. To use Slote's example in discussing the fineness of a person:

"Whether a man is kind or not makes a big, an important difference to the sort of person he is: if a man who is kind grows to be unkind (or vice-versa), a big change has taken place in him...other characteristics--are just as clearly unimportant. For example, whether a man is humble (or modest) about the athletic prowess of his children pretty clearly does not make much of a difference to the kind of person he is."¹

Whilst such disputes over the fineness of a person, unlike those over whether a whale is a fish² are incapable of being definitely resolved there is nevertheless a rationale to moral dispute rooted in the criteria for value-terms. As we saw in the chapter on moral arguments, both the prescriptivist and the emotivist hold that because there is an analytic or concep-

¹Ibid., p.103.

²See M. Slote, "The Theory of Important Criteria", The Journal of Philosophy, LXIII (1966), 219.

tual relationship between a speaker's choice and his use of evaluative language, no set of descriptive statements about an object can logically entail a (set of) evaluative statement(s). This means that an individual is not logically obliged to make a certain value-judgement upon having received certain factual information about an object. Their account is denied by Foot and Slote. In disagreements over whether a whale is a fish, agreement is reached by appeal to the authority of biologists to show the importance of such criteria as cold-bloodedness and ability to breathe water in the concept of fish-hood. In disputes of a value type, it is clear that there are no comparable available and reliable scientific procedures for showing whether or not humility for example is an important criterion of being a fine person, and hence to resolve dispute over whether A is a fine person. The different nature of this latter type of debate is shown by the fact that it may continue even where there is no disagreement over relevant empirical facts, but over the importance of a certain criterion which both parties agree is absent in the person under discussion. It is simply that one party considers humility as important in considering the fineness of persons--for example, because lack of humility tended to negate a man's other virtues--whilst the other party considers other qualities such as honesty, important. The difficulty of resolving such arguments lies, then, in the fact that there are no scientific procedures for determining the relative importance of criteria

for value-terms, and not in the fact that there is an aspect of the making of value-judgements inaccessible to rationality:

"Resolving disagreements about such questions as the importance of humility may involve getting people to see things differently, to notice and appreciate patterns and similarities that had previously gone unnoticed..."¹

In other words, that there is no scientific procedure for determining importance does not require one to deny that there is rationality of a different sort.

Hare asserts that there can be such an appeal to anyone setting himself up as an authority who can decide for himself what are to count as important criteria. He supposes a cactus-importer² who is the first to import cacti into a particular country. Other people do the same. They are all able apparently to set up rival standards of goodness in cacti of their own making. What Hare ignores, however, is that in setting up such standards there is a point in doing so, i.e., standards are set up for the purpose of making value-judgements about cacti as either ornaments, entries to horticultural shows, or as indoor plants, but not as writing implements or trench-diggers..

"It is true that in such cases a man who is in a special position can lay down standards quite arbitrarily, but he must be in the position of setting the competition, so that when he says 'This is the mark of a good X' he means 'This is the target you are to try to hit.' In one sense the man who is

¹Slote, "Value Judgements and the Theory of Important Criteria", p.104.

²Hare, Language of Morals, p.96-97.

allowed to choose the target decides 'what shall be the criteria of a good shot', but in another sense he does not; the criterion of a good shot is that it should hit the target, and he merely chooses what the target shall be."

In the case of each:

"If they are to be used as ornaments, then good cacti must possess the kind of shape and colour that one finds pleasing or curious, and the criteria of goodness are determined by the interest which we have in the things, and not by any standard set up by the importer."¹

In other words, even in cases where prima facie it seems as if we are free to choose our own standards to evaluate objects, there is nevertheless a purpose in choosing such standards. This purpose is related both to the nature of the object and to the types of things we expect from such an object. Thus a good X is one which fulfills the function (or in Aristotle's language, "the work") of an X and not one which fulfills the purpose which an individual evaluator can choose to impose on that X. The function of an object is not the function the individual imposes on it, but the function imposed on it by most or all, as a result of the object's nature.

"That most men must have a reason to choose good pens depends on the purposes which we take for granted in talking about good and bad pens at all: we cannot suppose that the standard case is that of wanting pens for the creation of blots or undecipherable marks without dissociating pens from writing and changing the concept 'pen'. The necessary connexion lies here, and not in some convention about what the individual speaker must be ready to choose if he uses the word 'good'."²
(My italics)

¹Foot, "Goodness and Choice", pp.54-55.

²Ibid., p.57.

Thus, there is a conceptual relationship not between an individual's choice and his use of evaluative language, but between that language and the meaning of the term designating the object which is being evaluated (more precisely, the criteria which an object is expected to meet).

In "Goodness and Choice", Foot frames her argument in terms of:

"the relations between the choices of the speaker and his use of the word 'good', but it is clear that this is not a matter of any and every such use. Mrs. Foot is interested in the use of the word in what she refers to as 'its proper evaluative sense,' (that which it bears throughout all of its normal colloquial use). This means that though her discussions turn about the particular issues of the criteria of goodness, her crucial problem is in effect of the relationship between any sort of evaluation and the individual decision or choice of the valuer."¹

This much is clear, that if the meaning of evaluative terms in general, is fixed by common agreement about the worth of the objects designated by the terms referring to them, then the decision of the individual to abandon the commonly accepted criteria will not be pertinent to our understanding what "a good piece of coal", for example, is. Given that there is a common social preference and a consensus as to what counts as "a good X" then it is not a matter of choice for the individual to opt for that X which suits his own particular

¹Montefiore, "Goodness and Choice", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume XXXV, (1961), p.68-9.

purposes and then call it "a good X". As we saw in the previous chapter and from Hare's example of the cactus importer, he believes it possible for:

"someone (to) seize on anything he likes as the criteria of goodness and badness, justifying his use of the word 'good' by pointing to his own choices."¹

As Foot and Montefiore point out, his account is incorrect because:

"Within each society the goodness of coal is settled by the purposes for which coal is used, while outside such a context it is not clear how anyone could talk about coal as good or bad at all....Just as we cannot consider the question 'Is this coal?' without taking into account the use which we have for coal, so we cannot consider the criteria for goodness in books and pictures without noticing the part which literature and art play in a civilization such as ours."²

This is not to deny that in a different culture coal might be used for different purposes, like ornamentation, nor that people might have different interests in works of art (regarding them rather as we regard wallpaper), but that if this were so, evaluations of these objects would be made with respect to these further purposes or interests, and not to any which a particular individual might think of. Only within the context of the purposes expected of a piece of coal (in our society that it is economical and burns well) or of a work of art (that it has certain aesthetic qualities), is it meaningful to evaluate such objects.

¹Ibid., p.53.

²Ibid., p.52.

The most obvious objection to Foot's denial of the thesis that a speaker's choices are either a necessary or a sufficient condition for his use of "good" or "bad" is that one may say--"This is a good A for my purposes"--when these purposes are quite at odds with the commonly accepted ones for good A's. A fully-fledged individualist or liberal will find such statements far from extraordinary. As was stated in the section on moral argument, it is far from clear that such a thorough-going view of the individual as able to use moral discourse according to his self-made rules is even a conceptual possibility. Many people claim to do this--to use moral terms, and hence to act, in a completely free manner, but when pushed back far enough they will probably fall back on such a principle as "everyone is entitled to do his own thing", or they will be using evaluative terms in a non-moral sense. Neither of these positions, I think, qualifies as a moral position. This is indeed the case, I think, with both emotivism and prescriptivism--that what they refer to as moral evaluation is no such thing, but is so emptied of content that it is far from recognisable as moral discourse:

"the emotivists and the prescriptivists...give us a false account of what authentic moral discourse was, but a true account of the impoverished meanings which evaluative expressions have come to have in a society where a moral vocabulary is increasingly emptied of content."¹

¹Alasdair MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, p.267.

Does Foot wish to imply that there is no relation between a person's preferences and his use of moral discourse?

Clearly not

"the reason why someone choosing an A may 'be expected' to choose good A's rather than bad A's is that our criteria of goodness for any class of things are related to certain interests that someone (or most men) has in these things. When someone shares these interests he will have reason to choose the good A's; otherwise not."¹

What Foot succeeds in showing in "Goodness and Choice" is that when "good" is used to qualify functional terms of varying strength, the functions of these terms determine the meaning that "good" has when used in such a context. As such, it is a quite unambitious thesis when used to explicate the meaning of "good knife", "good bean", "good root", "good city", etc., but talk of "the functions" of a friend, a father, a daughter or a man, suggests a conceptual scheme viewing such people as mere automata fulfilling or failing to fulfill their roles or functions, rather as clocks are expected to keep time. We are reminded of Sartre's waiter in the cafe, acting in bad faith by accepting his role as waiter, but not as an individual human being. We do not indeed, ordinarily talk of the functions of friends, fathers, or even of farmers, lawyers, or waiters, though we may talk of their duties. This brings me back to a point concerning Foot's discussion of the meaning of "good father".

¹Foot, Theories of Ethics, (Oxford University Press, 1967) p.9.

Implied in her account of "good father" is a distinction which Foot does not herself make between the biological and cultural sense of being a father. Clearly, there is a strictly defined blood-relationship between a father and his children, which can be scientifically verified. However, in precisely those cases where such a test is needed and, let us say, established in a paternity suit, we should wish to withhold judgement that a man who had left the mother before the birth of their child was a good father. This is precisely because being a father has certain duties in our society-- that he look after the welfare of both his wife and children. If he fails to fulfill these duties he will not be a good father. Indeed, of such a man we might use the colloquial expression "He is no father to his children". Moreover, it is clear, as Winch points out, that the duties attached to fatherhood are historically and culturally relative--if a present-day father were to sacrifice his first-born son, we would lock him up--although caring for his children seems always to have been one of the duties ascribed to fatherhood, viz. Jehovah and the "children of Israel". It is in this cultural sense that "father" could be called a moral term, since it requires value-laden standards to determine whether someone falls within the category of father (and hence "good father"). Although these standards are value-laden, it is not too difficult to differentiate between good and bad fathers despite the vagueness of the concept "caring for one's children." We all do know what types of actions this involves.

However, I believe that caring for one's children is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being a good father unless it becomes such a vague notion that it encompasses all other duties that a father has.

By grounding her theory of evaluation outside the choices of the individual, Foot is attacking any form of individualism in ethics like Hare's. The nature of such individualism, which I shall call liberalism, is explicated in the next chapter. This type of theory is threatened

"even by one which ventures no further afield than those of his (the individual's) own preferential attitudes which are beyond the individual's control and which he must account as facts among the other facts of his world. It is certainly threatened by any objectivist theory, even by one for which the worth of the individual as such is high on its list of objective values, for already his evaluative choice is thereby restricted. And it is threatened in what is perhaps the clearest way of all by theories which see the bases of some of even perhaps of all values in common social preference and purpose. This... is in effect the threat presented by Mrs. Foot."¹

For the individualist to be able to defend his position against Foot's onslaught, it is clear that there are two basic conditions which he must satisfy.

- 1) He must be able to report any range of facts about pens and fathers etc. without becoming entangled in functionally descriptive language in, at least, Foot's strong sense. Such language necessarily involves him in certain evaluations as we have seen above. It must, in other words, be

¹Alan Montefiore, op.cit., pp.68-69.

possible to replace every use of a functional word with a non-functional one, thus enabling one:

"to establish that the standpoint of common evaluation is...always a merely contingent standpoint, one from which he is in principle free to disassociate himself at will."¹

Hare² cites the case of a charger which, as a horse, sees no reason to take upon himself the functions which he has as a charger. Similarly, as a man, one may wish to discharge those duties which are part of being a father or a farmer. Now it is clear that one's preferences, purposes and attitudes may conflict and one may prefer to discard those obligations with which one, as a horse or a man, is usually attributed. However, because in the case of the charger it is possible to define the term "charger" in a non-functional way as "a solid-hoofed perissodactyl quadruped, having a flowing mane and tail", this does not imply that such hypothetical replacement of functional terms is in fact possible in all cases. It seems unlikely that one could use language in as many and diverse ways without the use of functional terms. It would be to beg the question on Foot's behalf to say that from the expression "a good X" (where X is a functional term) the criteria of the goodness of an X could not now be inferred from the

¹Ibid., p.77.

²"Geach: Good and Evil", Analysis, Vol 17, No.5, p.111.

meaning of a non-functional term designating X, thus showing that the uses of language are diminished in number by using non-functional definitions. Nevertheless, Hare is, by advocating replacement of actual functional terms with non-functional ones, not making an enquiry into how language is ordinarily used, which is his claim.

- 2) "This second requirement is more general, for it relates also to those cases in which the socially accepted standards are yet not established in common descriptive concepts."¹

He has to show that a system of language and of common value exists in which individualism is already entrenched as a social possibility. Alan Montefiore claims that the second condition is closely related to the distinction between preference and value. It is clear that any new member of society is taught to distinguish between his own individual preferences, purposes and attitudes, and those which confront him as external to these, coming "from the outside world", whether these be from social agreement or from a higher realm.

"...we teach him the use of the terms in presenting him with standards of value as if we were presenting him with facts. Values, the approval and disapproval which most matter and which claim his recognition as his own, are distinguished from his own personal preferences and purposes both by their source and by their superior importance...The situation is compli-

¹Montefiore, op.cit., p.76.

cated, however, if highest among the values of his society is a respect for the individual as such. There is now a new lesson to be learnt: that in certain circumstances at any rate the preferences and purposes of the individual have their own evaluative worth."¹

I hope to have shown in Chapter Two that fully fledged situationalist ethics is a self-contradictory doctrine.

In one sense, however, to accuse the individualist of inconsistency is to ignore the fact that it is because of his regard for the individual as having a worth beyond all others

"a fully vigorous version of the doctrine of no 'ought' from an 'is' becomes an essential feature of any such thorough-going individualism. Its acceptance is the only guarantee that there can be no observation of fact by which the individual values might be committed one way or another, not even the observation of his own standing dispositions, for values, so the doctrine ensures, not only permit, but effectively demand a freshly chosen endorsement, modification or renunciation for every new evaluation. It is thus destructive of any concept of decisive authority in the matter of evaluation; it alone secures the individual as the master of his own evaluative fate. When the individualist incorporates it as a principle of the very logic of his language, he rules out any would-be-non-individualist system of values as strictly unintelligible as such."²

As a principle of logic, the individualist's no "ought" from an "is" ensures that this is neutral as regards anything which might count as a value-judgement. For the individualist, therefore, his position is not merely one evaluative perspective amongst many, but is the only intelligible one possible. However, it is based upon one particular view of man and his position in the world. As Montefiore puts it:

¹Ibid., p.76-77.

²Ibid., p.69.

"The individualist who understands the nature of his position will understand that its maintenance as even a conceptual possibility depends on the maintenance of a certain type of society. This is a type of evaluation that at any rate presupposes a certain situation of fact."¹

Despite its dubious character individualism has wormed itself into the rotting timbers of Western culture, and therefore it is important to give it fuller shrift than I have until now granted it.

¹ibid., p.79.

CHAPTER 4

THE ROOTS OF ETHICAL INDIVIDUALISM

In "Goodness and Choice", as in all of her writings to date, Foot employs arguments that are levelled at a form of liberalism in ethics. According to her, moral evaluation and the way we use both evaluative and moral concepts, does not rest ultimately on the choice of the individual who is making the evaluation. Moral discourse, like all other types of language, has strict rules of use, which, if transgressed, result not in a new but a mis-use of that language. Hare, in particular, stresses the dynamic nature of moral language, showing how such expressions as "eligible bachelor" cease to be used evaluatively when used according to a strict convention or where the evaluative meaning of a word like "good" or "right" is used to bring about a change in the descriptive meaning of such expressions as "good house", or "good strawberry". In this way, by commending different properties of houses and strawberries, different criteria come to be used in making such evaluations. Implicit in this account is the view that moral language is essentially dynamic and is capable of change as a result of the least change in the desires and purposes of the individual evaluator.

In general, Foot's case is one

"against those for whom all evaluation is essentially dependent on the preferential choices of the individual valuer, thus against what is, as far as values are concerned, an extreme form of individualism."¹

Hare, then, by making a radical distinction between the evaluative and descriptive meaning of an evaluative word already implies that the individual can choose to use its evaluative meaning according to those desires and preferences which he himself counts as important, to effect a change in the descriptive meaning, thus changing both the standards of evaluation and the descriptive meaning of an evaluative term according to his own self-chosen preferences. What exactly does such a view imply and from where does it stem?

Hare is interested, as are most of the present-day-Oxford school of philosophers, in the ordinary language of the man in the street as helpful in the solution of philosophical problems. Whatever may be the complex reasons for such a philosophical study² it must be realised that, by concentrating their analytical tools upon "ordinary language", the conclusions reached by philosophers will necessarily reflect the standards and conceptual scheme embedded in this language. They will, therefore, be conventional (i.e., reflecting the

¹Alan Montefiore, "Goodness and Choice", p.68.

²See particularly J.L. Austin, "The Meaning of a Word", and Gilbert Ryle, "Ordinary Language" and "The Theory of Meaning", in C.E. Caton (ed.) Philosophy and Ordinary Language, Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1963. It seems intuitively clear to me that an activity such as Hare's which claims to be a "morally neutral" analysis of (ordinary) moral language will simply report the values embedded in such language.

linguistic atmosphere of the period). If the task of ethics is conceived as:

"...the logical study of the language of morals"¹ and this language is the one spoken by "everyman", then the conclusions reached by moral philosophers will be of the type of which everyman would approve:

"I don't accuse the Oxford Moralists of believing that it is good to have a law like the one by which certain proceedings of local authorities can't be challenged on grounds of fraud on their part or any of those things. I say that they teach a philosophy which is in keeping with a time of which such things are characteristic. Someone believing their philosophy is at liberty to justify such things, and no one believing their philosophy can hold that there is any solid certainty as to their badness."²

Elsewhere the same author leads an all-out attack on Oxford Moral Philosophy because, in the wake of those such as Mill, it, like conventional moralities, places too heavy an emphasis upon the consequences rather than the nature of an action.

"Thus, both in the university and outside, people are surely getting rid of the merely legalistic and unphilosophical notion of the 'nature and quality of an act'."³

Moreover, ...

"It is a necessary feature of consequentialism that it be a shallow philosophy. For there are always borderline cases in ethics. Now if you are an Aristotelian, or a believer in divine law, you will deal

¹Hare, Language of Morals, Preface, p.i.

²G.E.M. Anscombe, "Letters to the editor", The Listener, (Feb.28, 1957), p.349.

³G.E.M. Anscombe, "Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt the Youth?", The Listener (Feb.14, 1957), p.267.

with borderline cases by considering whether doing such and such in such and such circumstances is, say murder, or is an act of injustice; and according as you decide it is or it isn't, you judge it to be a thing to do or not. This would be the method of casuistry, and while it may lead you to stretch a point at the circumference, it will not permit you to destroy the centre. But...the consequentialist, in order to be imagining borderline cases at all has of course to assume a sort of law or standard according to which this is a borderline case. Where then does he get this standard from? In practice, the answer invariably is, from the standards current in his society or his circle."¹

Anscombe's criticism then, is that contemporary moral philosophy in the form taken by Hare especially, merely reflects rather than influences or criticises present-day values. Hare and others by allowing constant modification of principles so as:

"to effect the ends you choose to pursue"²

preach "a way of life" which amounts to no more than conformity to the world. While they would deny that their aim was to preach "a way of life" at all, but merely to investigate the logical character of evaluative discourse, an acceptance of "ordinary language" as the norm to be studied is an implied acceptance of the values subsumed in such language. If Anscombe's criticisms are well-founded, as I believe they are, then to understand better what Foot and she are attacking, I shall attempt to investigate the nature of contemporary values in Western society. It is possible that then we shall see more clearly the differences between the views held by Hare

¹G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", Philosophy, 33, (1958), 11.

²Hare, Language of Morals, p.62. See also pp.74-75.

and Stevenson on the one side, and those of Foot and Anscombe on the other.

I have described Foot's article "Goodness and Choice" as an attack upon liberalism in ethics. What exactly does this mean? By "liberalism" I mean:

"a set of beliefs which proceed from the central assumption that the essence of man is his freedom and therefore that what chiefly concerns man in this life is to shape the world as we want it."¹

As such, the doctrine is the most commonly accepted in contemporary western capitalist society, and most particularly in North America. The principles of liberalism are those of the vast majority and particularly, and most importantly, of those with control in these societies. It reveals itself in such statements as the following, published by the governors of Columbia University, New York City:

"Through such a study of our past, values emerge; that we live in a free society...and that in a climate of experimental science, technology and liberal-capitalist institutions, man seeks to shape his world to achieve welfare for himself and for constantly growing members of the human race."²

Liberalism stems from a line of thought that can truly be called "modern" because all of the thinkers in that line were agreed upon their rejection of the classical view of man. It is not possible to give a complete history of liberalism in the context of this thesis, but to understand how and whence

¹George Grant, Technology and Empire, Toronto: Anansi, 1969, p.114 n.

²From Columbia University's report on its new course on Western Civilization, 1917, quoted in Old Mole, a Radical Bi-Weekly (Sept. 26 - Oct. 9, 1969).

the doctrine arose is essential in understanding contemporary reactions to it like Foot's: I shall identify the start of modernity with the philosophical writings of Thomas Hobbes, not by an arbitrary fiat but because contained in his work is a conscious rejection of classical political and scientific thought which, coupled together, produced a new view of man and his position in the universe. To view him as the founder of liberalism may seem strange since he is usually associated with the doctrine of absolute monarchy. This is so. However, his work is distinctly "modern" in that Hobbes in his analysis of society placed the emphasis on the individual's natural rights and not on his duties with which the classical political philosophers were so concerned.¹

The tradition which Hobbes attacked held there to be an order in the universe and that the right or correct action consists in attuning itself to that order. Human reason, the tradition held, is able to discover the order in the universe because the order is rational. In choosing their purposes, human beings must recognise that if these purposes are to be the right ones, they must comply to the place mankind as a whole holds within the framework of universal law. This law is quite independent of human beings. Two sets of assumptions are implied in this theory: firstly, about the universe in

¹See Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953, Chapter 5.

general, and secondly, about man and the way he should live.

The tradition held, as we have seen, that the universe is a cosmos rather than a chaos--that it is held in being by reason. This view of the universe as a chain of beings held together by a mind, must be understood in order to see that the moral theory of transcendental natural law arises from it. Aristotle, for example, held that belief in such a moral law depends ultimately on how we interpret the movements of the stars. That is to say that if we deny that the planets in their movement have a final cause, or an ultimate purpose, we shall also deny that there is any purpose or law governing human life. Thus, natural law, as the basis of human morality, rests on certain metaphysical knowledge of such things as "the nature of man", "the order of the universe" and "final causality". If, and only if, there is an end or ultimate purpose to the universe and hence to man as part of the universe, can there be natural law in the pre-Hobbesian sense.

The assumption about human beings is that there is a human nature common to all men. The distinguishing feature of man's nature is his reason. As Aristotle tersely put it, man is the "zoon echon logon", the animal possessing reason (or speech). With regard to human actions, man has the power to determine for himself the ends which are right for him. The supreme good for man is to live according to his nature, which will be to live according to the dictates of reason. Man's nature is also social; that is, he is so constituted that he

cannot live except in a community. Man's sociability, however, stems not from a calculation of the pleasures which he expects to derive from associating with other humans, but from the mere pleasure of association, since the perfection of his nature includes perfection of the social virtue, justice.

Hobbes' assumptions about man, nature and society were quite different from those of his predecessors. Living in an age in which the new physical science of Galileo, Copernicus, Huyghens and Harvey were in the process of rejecting Aristotelian teleological science, Hobbes was clearly influenced by the resolute-compositive method which was at the heart of this new science. This method enabled the scientist to start with an observable phenomenon, resolve this into its distinctive and qualifiable characteristics, and then deduce, in an analytic manner, the consequences of the mathematical relations holding between these elements. By using the resolute-compositive method, the scientist begins with a phenomenon known via the senses which he transforms from a confused set of unknowns and non-self-evident causes into an intelligible and coherent system of mathematical relations. In this way the scientist axiomatises his subject matter.

Whether or not the resolute-compositive method determined Hobbes' political and moral science is a point of contention.¹

¹In opposition to Leo Strauss who holds that: "Hobbes' political philosophy is really, as its originator claims, based on a knowledge of men which is deepened and corroborated by the knowledge and self-examination of the individual and not on a general scientific or metaphysical theory." The Political

That he made use of it is not. In the Preface to De Cive, he says:

"Concerning my method...I took my beginning from the very walks of civil government and thence proceeded to its generation and form, and the first beginning of justice; for everything is best understood by its constituent causes. For as in a watch or some such small engine, the matter, figure and motion of the wheels cannot well be known, except it be taken in sunder and viewed in parts: so as to make a more curious search into the rights of states, and duties of subjects, it is necessary ...that they be so considered as if they were dissolved." (My italics)

Hobbes thus resolves civil society into its physical parts-- solitary individuals drawn together not by their social nature but by their fear of death and their desire for power over others. He imagines away the factors of authority and justice, which in fact exist, thus "idealising" the human situation in just the same way as Galileo imagined away the factor of friction in his work on bodies. This, then, is his state of nature without the shelter of authority existent in society, which lulls men into forgetting the evils which would accompany the disappearance of that authority. In the state of nature, which is a state of war:

"the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."¹

By reminding men

Philosophy of Hobbes, trans. Elsa M. Sindaier, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936, p.29. J.W.N. Watkins advances the thesis that it was so determined. See "Politics and Philosophy in Hobbes", Philosophical Quarterly, 1955.

²Leviathan, Vol.III of Sir William Molesworth, ed., The English Works of Thomas Hobbes, p.63.

"of what they know already, or may know by their own experience"¹

Hobbes prods them into realising that the state which he describes in Leviathan is the just one.

His next task after resolving civil society into its component elements (individual wills) is to reconstitute civil society in terms of those elements. The universal principles which govern human behaviour provide the sole premises from which the right state or Leviathan, governed by a single ruler with absolute power, is subsequently reconstructed. Whereas Aristotle had seen virtue as the primary motive of all human action, Hobbes saw the passions as the overruling arbiter of human action. Of these, the two strongest are vanity, which is the source of man's striving after power, and fear of violent death, such as takes place in the state of nature, which he considered the sufficient motive for all right behaviour,² and the source of all morality. These principles of behaviour are the reconstructive causes of the state. The conception of natural law which is present in Hobbes' work is in keeping with the method. He defines natural law as:

"A general precept or rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same."³

¹Elements of Law, Vol.I of Molesworth, op.cit., p.2

²See L. Strauss, op.cit., Chapter VII, esp. pp.110-115.

³Leviathan, Vol.III of Molesworth, op.cit., Chap.14.

Unlike the Greek conception of natural law or natural order, this is not a transcendental law to which man must attune himself by the use of his reason, because Hobbes' method will not permit an appeal to such norms, but requires that psychological axioms alone provide the premises for a rational reconstruction of the state. Men are not by nature social, but are made so by their fear of violent death. Only if coupled with this fear, will reason be able to discover such natural laws. If they are not to be transcendental, but are some kind of imperative which is both prior to political authority and found out by reason, and if psychological axioms are the only permissible principles, then natural laws must be hypothetical imperatives deduced from psychological principles, instructing us what we must do if we are to be consistent with our own nature.¹ Since all men shun unnatural or violent death

"by a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward."

the laws of nature dictate

"those duties they are necessarily to perform towards others in order to preserve their own preservation."²

¹Even if the resolute-compositive method did not determine the form of Hobbes' political science in this way, his conception of civil society is still built upon his psychology. Strauss claims that:

"It was Machiavelli, that greater Columbus, who had discovered the continent on which Hobbes could erect his structure." (Natural Right and History, p.177)

Machiavelli, says Strauss, rejected classical political philosophy which conceived the correct way of answering the question of the right order of society to be in terms of how men ought to live, replacing it with how men actually live.

²De Cive, Vol.II of Molesworth, op.cit, p.2

Thus, these natural laws will be analogous to the conception of natural law in Galilean natural science, since they describe hypothetical facts: what men would do (and, in fact, do) if they appreciate what is good for them and act accordingly. It should be noticed that while he rejected the classical conception of natural law, Hobbes retained the notion of a common human nature from which could be deduced natural law. The belief of liberalism that man is free to make himself what he himself wills has not yet been reached in Hobbes, but the way to it has been paved by his rejection of the classical notion of man's static place within an ordered cosmos.

We can see that Hobbes' fundamental natural law--that of self-preservation:

"that every man ought to endeavour peace, so far as he has hope of obtaining it, and when he cannot obtain it that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war."

is a right which every man has, and any duties which he may be obliged to perform--to the sovereign, for example--will be conditional upon the existence of that natural right. Hence, in the state of nature (the condition of mutual fear) where no such right is secured, no such duties are imposed upon man, and he has a right to everything--every action is permissible.¹

¹This point is somewhat contentious. Professor H. Warrender claims that there were, for Hobbes moral duties for man in the state of nature. I think this is just a mis-interpretation. Even, however, if Warrender's point is accepted, I think he would be wrong to conclude from it that Hobbes is much more of a political moralist than he is usually taken for.

This orientation on rights also accounts for Hobbes' statement that when called upon to fight for the state:

"there is allowance for natural timourousness."

It is this emphasis upon the individual as the founding element upon which society is built, and the ensuing rights which, as such an element, every individual has, that marks Hobbes as the initiator of liberal democracy. Not only is the individual free within certain limits (i.e., not threatening the rights of other individuals) to be what he wants in civil society, it is society's task to protect him if his natural self-preservation is threatened. That this emphasis on the importance of the safety and well-being of the individual is a rejection of Aristotelianism can be seen from a statement of Aristotle's:

"And that end, in politics as well as in ethics can only be the good for man. For even if the good of the community coincides with that of the individual, the good of the community is clearly a greater and more perfect good both to get and to keep. This is not to deny that the good of the individual is worthwhile. But what is good for a nation or a city has a higher, a diviner quality."¹

Whereas, in talking of the position which Foot is attacking, we read:

"It is natural that those for whom the individual being presents a worth beyond all others should be led to treat him as the source not only of preferences but of values themselves. To face him with values that were given to him as facts would be to restrict his freedom on the issues that were most important to him; it would be

¹The Ethics, trans. J.A.K. Thomson, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953, Book I, p.27.

self-defeating to concede that what is of supreme importance is in some instances at least after all above and beyond the creative control of individuals as such."¹

Only by asserting that the individual is prior to civil society could Hobbes assert the primacy of natural rights. The reason for this shift from man's duties to his rights can be seen as his wish to base analysis of the right social order upon how men actually behave. Since the right to self preservation expresses something that everyone actually desires, his account of the social order, defined in terms of the rights of man, is "realistic", i.e., scientific. The implications of this shift however, run much deeper.

The presupposition for Hobbes' concept of the state of nature is that man is exposed to the forces of nature, which are not ordered or ordering; thus, order is not innate in nature but is produced only by human volition. Only by changing the state of nature can man establish civil society--the state of nature is a condition of both mutual fear between men, and their common fear of chaotic nature. Because there is no superhuman order in the universe--human well-being is dependent solely upon man's will--man can only bring order to the world by asserting himself in this ordering activity. Man's place in the universe is no longer set in a static position, but he has to make that place for himself, and, as a result, it can be broken, since there is no final purpose, or end, or "Good" for man, as

¹Alan Montefiore, "Goodness and Choice", p.69.

Plato and Aristotle had supposed, in cultivating his reason. Instead of occupying himself with contemplation of an ordered nature by the use of reason, it is more fitting for man to utilise and cultivate nature. As Strauss puts it, man:

"has to live not in gratitude, but in the serious and oppressive consciousness of his freedom, of himself as a free being, of his capacity to free himself...man can assert himself only by increasing and improving nature's deceptive and niggardly gifts by his labour and exercise and the more he makes himself independent of nature by his labour, the further he draws away from nature, and makes the gifts of nature disappear behind his own free activity, the more highly is his labour to be valued."¹

How this is consistent with Hobbes' mechanistic-materialistic determinism is shown by the fact that there are two senses of "freedom" in one sense only of which Hobbes believed mankind to be free. Firstly, there is man's ability to self-determination, or in modern post-Kantian terms, man's freedom of the will. For those such as Aristotle such freedom was assumed in their discussion of ethics without even needing defence.² Hobbes' determinism denies any possibility of such freedom on the same grounds as the modern stimulus-response theories of behaviourism. However, what he does not deny is political and social freedom. To be free in this sense, man has to rid himself of the shackles which an indifferent nature has chained to him.

¹The Political Philosophy of Hobbes, p.125.

²See The Ethics, Book III, especially pp.77-82

"It is better and more becoming to the situation of man to deny that freedom (in the first sense) theoretically by mechanistic physical science, and to assert it practically by the conquest of nature and particularly of human nature, with the help of that science."¹

Coupled with, and indeed part of this wish to overcome nature, is the rejection by the new physical sciences of the notion of final cause, which enables man to tamper with nature without fear of upsetting the order of the universe, which beset Greek science. Because everything is corporeal or body, there can be no telos or goal to the universe. Since the universe operates like a gigantic machine, the concept of a purpose becomes redundant. By studying the new mechanistic physical science, Hobbes was made aware of its antithetical nature to Aristotelian teleological science. Whether or not its method determined his moral and political science,² Hobbes was influenced in specific ways by it. For example, Galileo's discovery of the Law of Inertia was clearly the source of his statement that all change was a change in matter. As Richard Peters puts it:

"The importance of Hobbes principle that 'there can be no causes of motion except in a body contiguous and moved' in its application to man as well as nature, cannot be over-emphasised."³

The Aristotelian view that everything moved towards its natural

¹Strauss, op.cit., p.125.

²Strauss concedes (Ibid., p.136) that Hobbes' break with traditional political philosophy was "doubtless the result" of his interest in mathematical and natural science.

³Hobbes, Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961, p.84.

end, or final cause, or law of development was destroyed by his simple statement that:

"A final cause has no place but in such things as have sense and will; and this also I shall prove to be an efficient cause."¹

Because Hobbes saw the chance to make his moral and political science truly scientific by using the method of this newly developed physical science, the study of man and how he should act now made the self-same assumptions as that science. Man is to prescribe for himself what is just and virtuous according to his nature (i.e., what he wills) and is not to regard himself as part of an independent order. The results of this turn to the new science as a viable method in ethics is not too difficult to gauge.² Modernity, which in western capitalist society is identifiable as liberal democracy, is characterised by the fact that modern western man no longer believes that he can know what is good or bad, right or wrong. This insecurity Eric Voegelin sees as follows:

"The death of the spirit is the price of progress."³

Strauss holds this to be a comparatively recent phenomenon, resulting from modern man's belief in the impossibility of doing political philosophy, in the classical (pre-Hobbesian)

¹De Corpore: Thomas Hobbes, *Malmesburiensis, Opera Philosophica*, edited by Sir Willian Molesworth, London, 1839-45, Vol.II, p.132.

²See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952, esp. pp.4-13, and *passim*; and also R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945, pp.174-177.

³Voegelin, *op.cit.*, p.131.

sense. Whether this belief is held explicitly by the majority of men is unlikely, but it is at the core of liberal ideology which governs both the nature and direction of western Capitalist society. The belief reveals itself in two forms:

- 1) Because all knowledge which deserves that name is scientific knowledge, value-judgements cannot be validated by science which concerns itself only with factual judgements. If the study of politics is to be scientific then it must, by definition, not pass value-judgements upon its subject-matter, but must merely record and analyse "political facts". As we saw in the preceding chapter, with reference to Hare especially in the light of Hume's dichotomy between the "is" and the "ought", modern moral philosophy also denies the possibility of passing logically from factual to value-judgements.¹

Classical political philosophy presupposes precisely what Positivism denies--that value-judgements can be rationally validated.

- 2) A more sophisticated view which denies such a radical distinction between fact and value, but asserts that the principles of evaluation are not transcendent, but vary from age to age. According to historicism not only is the philosopher the son of his time, and the code of ethics which he advocates historically relative, but so likewise are the values of any society.

¹See Hare, Language of Morals, pp.28-29, and 94.

Foot and Anscombe's attack is levelled at a combination of these two views--that there is no logical relation between statements of fact and statements of value, and that any moral principle whatsoever (e.g., "The judicial killing of innocent people is right") can be rationally upheld. Liberalism in ethics, by holding the individual to be the source of all values, allows him any licence to determine his own set of values. Man, the potential conquerer of nature, is also "the master of his own evaluative fate". According to Sartre:

"If a man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills.... Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.... Thus the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders.... For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism [in the second sense, mentioned above]--man is free, man is freedom.... Furthermore, I can pronounce a moral judgement. For I declare that freedom, in respect of concrete circumstances, can have no other end or aim but itself; and when once a man has seen that values depend upon himself, in that state of forsakenness he can will only one thing, and that is freedom as the foundation of all values."¹

Thus, we find striking similarities between otherwise antithetical Oxford philosophy, in the form of prescriptivism and Continental non-rationalism. The individual is alone respon-

¹Existentialism and Humanism, trans. P. Mairet, London: Methuen and Co, 1958, pp.28, 29, 34, and 51.

sible and free to choose his self-made value-system. As man progresses toward the complete conquest of nature, his moral code will inevitably change too. This is as it should be.¹

With what are Foot and Anscombe replacing this liberalism? Because man is not "infinitely malleable", a limit has to be set upon his perpetual and progressive drive to freedom, or at least it must be halted whilst he considers the purposes for which the conquest of nature by technique is being undertaken, and indeed, successfully completed. Such questions, however, cannot be answered by modern science because it denies the viability of the concept of purpose within its own domain. Once Hobbes had turned to the new physical science and held up its method as applicable to ethics and man, he denied the possibility of its answering such questions as "freedom from what?" and "Freedom for what?" Since man just is freedom, he must continually act as a free being, to assert his own freedom for no other purpose than itself.²

It is clear that both Foot and Anscombe, in opposition to both individualism and any Utilitarian theory of virtue hold there to be certain actions that are wrong in any circumstances whatever their consequences. Of these, Foot says:

¹See Hare, Language of Morals, especially, pp.74-78.

²George Grant, op.cit., p.137-143.

"It is reasonable to say that there are certain actions that no good consequences could justify, e.g. torture or the judicial condemnation of the innocent, and even those that say in some circumstances even these things can be justified usually jib at the idea that we would have the right secretly to fake up a trial and then hang an innocent man, if by doing so we could save the lives of two."¹

Anscombe, likewise, says:

"If a procedure is one of judicially punishing a man for what he is clearly understood not to have done, there can be absolutely no argument about the description of this as unjust. No circumstances, and no expected consequences, which do not modify the description of the procedure as one of judicially punishing a man for what he is known not to have done can modify the description of it as unjust."²

Foot's ethical theory, whilst explicitly opposed to Hare's and any of a similar nature that afford the individual the highest status in his choice of moral codes, verges towards Utilitarianism in its emphasis on the importance of individual and common welfare as a criterion of moral goodness. How this is consistent with her belief that certain actions are necessarily wrong can best be explained by contrasting how she, and Anscombe would support such a view. To do this, it is necessary, in turn, to refer to a distinction that was made in connection with the discussion of Hobbes' natural law.

Hobbes managed to turn the conception of natural law on its head by shifting the emphasis from the duties imposed on the individual by such a law to the rights which the indi-

¹ Theories of Ethics, p.13.

² "Modern Moral Philosophy", p.16

vidual, as a member of society was to enjoy. Foot, it is clear, would agree with Hobbes that support for the existence of social norms and the place of the individual in society should come not from a higher realm, as the Greeks had supposed, but from considerations of a secular nature, such as human welfare, freedom and happiness.¹ Thus, Foot advocates a system of ethics that is based upon a view of human nature that regards certain needs, wants and desires as essential to man as man. Only if human nature remains constant, however, will those things that count as injury or harm to the individual, or infringing upon his rights remain constant likewise. As an example of the absolute injustice of killing the innocent, Foot holds up the commonly held principle that it is wrong to kill mental defectives for the purpose of medical research.² However, if man's conception of himself changes in the future towards that of a being having a certain minimum intelligence, then mental defectives will no longer enjoy their present rights but will be used for those purposes that man sees fit. What once appeared wrong in an absolute sense, will be part of man's history.³ As man evolves, so will any code based upon such a conception of himself, as Foot's.

¹See Foot, Theories of Ethics, pp.9, 12.

²Ibid., p.13.

³Cf. Alan Montefiore, A Modern Introduction to Moral Philosophy, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, p.53.

Anscombe, however, is not in this same difficulty. As a Roman Catholic, she is a believer in a transcendental natural law of the type which Hobbes rejects. This law originates not in man, but in the will of God. Belief in this type of natural law assumes that there is an order to the universe, and man is to live in that order which places limits on his actions. There are certain actions, therefore, that are categorically wrong, which he knows to be wrong a priori. Only if this is so can the idea of natural law be pertinent to the justification of the absolutely evil nature of such an action as the judicial condemnation of the innocent. If it is held that such an action is wrong, not because it may lead to the disrepute of any positive laws of society, but because it is an image of the absolute and should not be brought into disrepute in the heart of even one person, then the natural law is thought of as an absolute, and justification for the necessarily wrong nature of the particular act must rely on a justification of the existence of natural law in general. This is a task for the greatest of philosophers and theologians. But only in this way does it seem possible to give an absolute justification for an action being necessarily wrong.

AFTERWORD

It is clear that underlying the previous chapters is a conception of morality of my own that takes issue both with Foot's and Hare's account of the values of moral judgement and most particularly with the basis upon which moral judgements rest. It is this conception that I wish to clarify in the "Afterword".

Unlike Hare, Foot sees the bedrock foundation of morality in those needs and wants that are most basic to man. It is upon these needs that moral concepts rest, even if the relationship between the two is not manifestly clear:

"How exactly the concepts of harm, advantage, benefit, importance, etc. are related to the different moral concepts, such as rightness, obligation, duty and virtue is something that needs the most patient investigation, but that they are so related seems undeniable."¹

From this Foot draws the conclusion that one is not free to adopt any set of precepts as moral principles in the way that Hare suggests. She denies the fact-value distinction because she sees the basis of morality in the essential needs of man. In "Moral Beliefs", Foot talks of a shock which caused mental derangement as dangerous "because a man needs such things as intelligence, memory, and concentration as he needs sight or hearing or the use of hands" and further on

¹Moral Arguments, loc. cit., pp. 512-513.

" . . . the proper use of his limbs is something a man has reason to want if he wants anything.

I do not know just what someone who desires this proposition could have in mind. Perhaps he is thinking of changing the facts of human existence . . ." (my italics).¹

The facts of human existence, indeed, are such that, according to Foot, it is in a man's long term interests to act morally because moral virtues will satisfy the essential needs of man.²

It is clear then then that Foot's account of morality will rule out as moral those sets of codes that do not take into account and respect the basic needs of man qua man,³ as well as meta-ethical theories like Hare's that make no reference to the needs of human nature in their analysis of moral concepts. It is, according to Foot, because morality is not conventional in the way that etiquette and law are⁴ that the needs of human nature form a firm foundation of morality because they, in turn, are not facts that are culture-bound. They are "facts of human existence", that is facts about man that are true of him irrespective of the culture or

¹Moral Beliefs, loc. cit., pp. 91, 196.

²See Moral Beliefs, pp. 96-104. The one virtue which she is not sure will satisfy such needs is justice -- cf. her "Morality and Art", Proceedings of the British Academy, and D. Z. Phillips, "Does It Pay to be Good?", P.A.S. (1964-65).

³See "Moral Arguments", pp. 511-513.

⁴Ibid., p. 512.

society in which he finds himself. Hence those rules for which a person offers a defence other than in terms of the needs of mankind, (and not just of himself) are not moral needs.

"If this suggestion is right, the difference between ourselves and the people who have these rules is not to be described as a difference of moral outlook, but rather as a difference between a moral and a non-moral point of view."¹

Unless conceptual analyses such as those conducted by Foot and Hare take into account this necessary element of moral judgements -- that they rest upon the needs of man -- such analyses are not of moral judgements but of judgements of a different type, probably of prudential language, or of the language of etiquette. That is, the analysis will simply reflect the conventional nature of a particular group or a particular society. Hence it will be an analysis of a non-moral area of discourse.

Both Foot and Hare claim that their respective analyses are accurate in so far as they reflect the ways in which moral terms are ordinarily used.² In a sense both claims are true, but only because ordinary language can be used to support both types of analysis -- those in terms of human needs and those in terms of universal prescriptively.

¹"Moral Arguments", p. 511.

²See Ibid., pp. 510-511 and The Language of Morals, passim.

Alasdair MacIntyre has shown this most clearly.¹ In a pluralist society such as ours we are likely to run into people that use moral language as if it were contentless and simply a matter of prescribing universally for mankind, or into those that see such language stemming from the nature of man's needs, as well as into many others. Thus, whilst both Foot and Hare may be correct about the ways in which one section of present-day society uses moral terms, their meta-ethical theories may be true only of this small section of the community. There are many other ordinary language users for whom their accounts may be less correct -- Fascists, Marxists or Roman Catholics, for example. To the extent, then, that both views depend on parts of ordinary language both are inadequate because they leave out an element essential to moral discourse. Hare leaves out reference to human nature and needs,² which must be taken into account in any comprehensive explication of morality; whilst Foot forgets the diversity of conceptions of these needs which may lead moral philosophers into holding quite different meta-ethical and normative theories. This latter point requires further explication.

¹See pp. 45-48 of this thesis and MacIntyre's "Against Utilitarianism" in T. H. B. Hollins: The Aims of Education (Manchester University Press, 1963).

²Moral Arguments, p. 513.

Foot's attempt to show that the grounding of moral judgements must be in terms of human needs is unsuccessful, it seems to me, because she does not take into account, although she is aware of, the divergent conceptions of human nature which philosophers have taken to support their theories of ethics. She makes reference to Nietzsche, indeed he seems to be at the back of her mind as a very serious objection to her theory which indeed he is. She does not wish to discount Nietzsche as a moralist. as many have done, for a very good reason -- in an important sense Nietzsche is in agreement with Foot against such people as Hare and Kant, that theories of ethics, both normative and conceptual, must make reference to human nature, most particularly the natural desires of human beings.

"We recognise Nietzsche as a moralist because he tries to justify an increase in suffering by connecting it with strength as opposed to weakness, and individualism as opposed to conformity. That strength is a good thing can only be denied by someone who can show that the strong man overreaches himself, or in some other way brings harm to himself or other people. That individuality is a good thing is something that has to be shown, but in a vague way we connect it with originality, and with courage, and hence there is no difficulty in conceiving Nietzsche as a moralist when he appeals to such a thing."¹

According to Foot, because Nietzsche sees the natural needs of mankind as the basis for morality, and because he

¹Moral Arguments, p. 513.

connects these needs with such "cardinal virtues" as courage and strength of character, he is clearly a moralist. Because of his reference to courage, etc., Foot sees Nietzsche's theory as essentially compatible with her own. This I take to be a misinterpretation of Nietzsche on Foot's part due to her wish not to legislate against "alien moral codes" like Nietzsche's that do satisfy her criteria for a moral judgment, i.e. a reference to human needs. Because his conception of human nature differs, however. Nietzsche's list of "cardinal virtues" differs from Foot's also. Where the two lists do overlap -- at courage, for example -- the conceptions each has of courage will be quite different. For Foot, courage will be the mid-point between cowardice and foolhardiness, whilst for Nietzsche it will be strength in face of the theory of the Eternal Recurrence. Thus the moral codes which each holds will be different because the conceptions of what it is to be human, and hence what it is to act rightly, will be different. This is important because it indicates, once again, that appeal to language alone cannot show, as Foot believes it can, that morality has a constant or necessary content: to this extent it is not absolute, but conventional. However, if we take some reference to human nature to be a necessary constitutive element of morality -- and with this I am in complete agreement with Foot -- then Hare's account is inadequate because the concept of morality cannot be specified entirely formally (i.e. in terms of

universalisability and prescriptivity). Morality must (i.e. logically must) have a content, although as a matter of empirical fact different moral codes have various contents (e.g. utilitarian, Roman Catholic etc.). To deal with Nietzsche, however, we need to extend Foot's thesis somewhat.

If we are to reject Nietzsche's view, as I wish to do, we can do so only by asserting that there is a human nature which endures and which must be respected, independently of various conceptions of it. This assumption is necessary for there to be any absolute moral principles. Foot wishes to assert that there are such principles forbidding such acts as operating on mental defectives for the purposes of medical research,¹ but because she is unable to escape the conventional nature of her theory is unsuccessful in providing a lasting ground for such principles. Since I wish to make a claim to absoluteness a second necessary condition for a judgement's being a moral judgement, I consider Anscombe's view of morality to be more accurate than Foot's.² If we wish to say that certain actions are categorically wrong then we are only able to do so by grounding morality on a belief in a human nature

¹See particularly her introduction to Theories of Ethics.

²See above pp. 99-101.

which is part of a teleological universe in general. Because of the divergence of moral codes it is impossible to know what the end for man is. Since knowledge of the end for man is a presupposition for knowing that we are acting rightly, if we do not know what this end is, we cannot know what it is to act rightly. Thus Ethics, in the sense that it can provide answers to this question is impossible. The divergence of moral codes makes the solving of moral problems difficult, and moreover makes Ethics, in the absolute sense, impossible.

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