THE MEANING OF MORAL DISCOURSE

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by

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Abstract

Non-cognitivist theories of moral language are challenged on the ground that they put a misplaced emphasis on certain non-descriptive, as distinct from descriptive and universalizable, dimensions of a total linguistic situation, and that in this way they fail both to explain moral agreement and to make wider agreement possible. It is argued that on a broad definition of the meaning of a symbol in terms of a set of dispositions to be used in accordance with rules, the alleged logical distinction between the several dimensions of a linguistic situation or the uses of linguistic symbols breaks down. Moreover, appeal is made throughout the thesis to the actual practice of moral discourse and the analogies one may find between meaning and method in sciences on the one hand and in morals on the other. Just as in scientific, so in moral discourse freedom is embedded in rationality in the sense of concern for facts and for coherence and harmony among them. It is hoped that in general the thesis will contribute to the establishment of moral egalitarianism.

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To Elizabeth

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Many current writings on the language of morals are
individualistic; they offer analyses of the meaning or use of moral
language which make social consensus either accidental or a mere utopian
ideal, or at best some sort of externally imposed constraint on action,
not one which is reached and maintained autonomously or rationally. An
individualistic analysis paints a picture of society as a group of
individuals whose exclusive or primary concern is their own well-being,
whose motives are mainly selfish. But relations within such a group
would be precarious and likely to lead to unrestrained conflict, for the
mere calculation of self-interest, whether short-term or long-term, does
not seem sufficient to lead to agreements which safeguard those
interests or, once the agreements are made, to ensure that they are
kept. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the sources of this
inadequacy in certain philosophical writings on the language of morals
which are representative of the so-called non-cognitivist theories, and
to develop an alternative approach which would account for whatever
degree of genuine moral agreement there is, while at the same time
providing a theoretical ground for a global consensus.

It will be argued that attempts to attribute a <u>distinctive</u>
meaning to moral (more generally, "evaluative" or "practical" or
"normative") language, i.e., as distinct from scientific (more

generally, "descriptive") language, are wrongheaded because: (1) such attempts are paradoxical; they go against the analyst's claim that his analysis of the meaning of moral language is "neutral" and involves no or a relatively negligible element of evaluation. I will argue that all linguistic acts, and *eo ipso* the analyst's descriptive or "second order" (metaethical) statements about the meaning of moral language, are guided by interests, and that they direct attention to what is taken to be more important and what less important. In this sense, no inquiry (at least insofar as it depends on linguistic skills) is devoid of an evaluative or practical element. The way out of the paradox is to abandon the logical distinction between descriptive and normative discourses, and to offer an alternative account of the meaning of moral language. This brings us to the second problem (2) that each of the analyses of moral language in question gains its plausibility from the inadequacy of the others, because each fails to do justice to the complexity of moral discourse. The latter seems to be as complex as the totality of a linguistic situation; it combines the "expression", in the general sense of the word, of feelings, beliefs, and attitudes with physical actions, the ends or objects to which all of these are directed, as well as the use of other linguistic or non-linguistic "symbols". Moral language is not concerned primarily or especially with expressing and evoking personal attitudes (as Stevenson's emotivism has it) or with guiding action and choice (as Hare's and Mackie's prescriptivism suggest); it is not essentially or "formally" different from scientific language, and is therefore in principle (both logically and practically) universalizable. It is ultimately on this universal tendency in any (meaningful)

linguistic expression that consensus or harmony among beliefs, interests, and ends of all may be grounded.

The thesis consists mainly of two parts. The first part (Chs. 2, 3, & 4) is a criticism of emotivism and prescriptivism as attempts to discover a <u>distinctive</u> core of meaning or use for moral language, and in part a defense of universalizability as both a logical and a practical requirement of moral discourse. Throughout this part, appeal will be made to counter-examples to emotivism and prescriptivism, and particular attention will be paid to certain analogies between the concepts and methods employed in scientific and ordinary, "descriptive" language on the one hand and moral language on the other. The second part (Ch. 5) is an attempt to develop a concept of meaning which is claimed to be wider and more adequate than that invoked by or presupposed in the theories I have criticized, and to establish an intimate relation (formal identity) between moral and scientific discourses. These investigations will proceed against the study of the nature of language as a symbolic system and the related theory of speech acts.

The mainstream tradition of analytic moral theory draws a distinction between moral judgments and non-moral statements of fact and holds that from the latter the former cannot be deduced. A particular application of this view states that moral judgments are logically independent of and hence cannot be deduced from statements about the status or function of moral words and sentences. One of the most recent proponents of this view is J.L. Mackie who distinguishes between what he calls "first order" and "second order" ethical judgments, statements, or views. A first order moral or ethical statement, he writes, "may assert that some particular action is right or wrong; or that actions of

certain kinds are so; it may offer a distinction between good and bad characters or dispositions; or it may propound some broad principle from which many more detailed judgments of these sorts might be inferred." (*Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 9.) A second order ethical judgment or statement, by contrast, "would say what is going on when someone makes a first order statement, in particular, whether such a statement expresses a discovery or a decision, or it may make some point about how we think and reason about moral matters, or put forward a view about the meanings of various ethical terms." (*Ibid.*, 9.) An example of a first order ethical statement would be: "Everyone should promote (exclusively or primarily) his own interest." And "Moral judgments express and evoke attitudes" would be an example of a second order ethical statement. In general, we may say that first order ethical judgments make claims or raise questions about the "content" of ethics; second order ethical judgments concern the "status" of ethics. In Mackie's words, in uttering first order moral judgments or in adopting first order moral views we take "a certain practical, normative stand", and in uttering second order ethical judgments we express our views about "the status of moral values or the nature of moral valuing" (or, we may add, the meanings of various ethical terms). (*Ibid.*, 16. These remarks seem to apply not only to moral judgments, but to evaluative judgments in general. In this connection, see pp. 25-7. Mackie seems to be primarily concerned, however, with the distinction between first order and second order moral statements.)

For example, taking that subset of second order ethical statements which pertains to the ontological status of moral values, Mackie draws attention to a contrast between what he calls first order

and second order "moral scepticism". A second order "sceptic" is one who ascribes to moral views the subjective "ontological" status of attitudes and decisions. Given Mackie's definition of a second order ethical statement or view above, second order scepticism is a second order ontological thesis, as distinct from second order "linguistic" or "conceptual" theses about the meaning or use of moral terms or concepts. (Cf. especially *ibid.*, 19-20.) A first order moral sceptic is one who rejects all morality or, for the sake of consistency (for such a rejection would involve a moral judgment), only those views which are contained in the established or conventional morality of a particular society. Mackie points out:

> These first and second order views are not merely
> distinct but completely independent: one could be a
> second order moral sceptic without being a first
> order one, or again the other way round. A man could
> hold strong moral views, and indeed ones whose
> content was thoroughly conventional, while believing
> that they were simply attitudes and policies with
> regard to conduct that he and other people held.
> Conversely, a man could reject all established
> morality while believing it to be an objective truth
> that it was evil or corrupt." (*Ibid.*, 16.)

Now, according to Mackie, the distinction between second order and first order moral statements is a "logical" one in the sense that "first order judgments are not necessarily affected by the truth or falsity of a second order view." (*Ibid.*, 21-2.) First order and second order statements belong to two distinct classes of statements such that one may accept some second order statements without being necessarily committed to any particular first order one. (The opposite is, of course, also true.) Mackie's statement does not entail that no second order statement entails any first order one; a second order statement may restrict the range of the first order statements which are logically

consistent with it. For example, intuitionism as a second order
metaethical statement is logically incompatible with the judgment: "One
ought (morally) to do primarily or exclusively what one wishes to or
chooses regardless of one's moral intuitions." For the view that moral
terms refer to objective and intuitable values flies in the face of any
such judgment; if "ought" is used with its full moral force, the
judgment entails the self-contradiction that one ought to do what one
intuits as being right regardless of one's intuitions.

There is a sense, however, in which Mackie's logical distinction
seems to apply not only to _some_ first order and second order statements,
but to all. I take that sense to be suggested in the following passages
from _Ethics_. For example, "It is possible to recognize something as a
morality, and to record this in a second order descriptive statement,
and yet without inconsistency to disagree radically with it and to
condemn it in one's own first order judgments." (86.) Again, "A logical
or semantic truth is no real constraint on belief; nor, analogously, can
one be any real constraint on action or prescription or evaluation or
choice of policy." (98.)1 As we shall see, according to Mackie, first
order moral judgments or words have the "special logic" of guiding
decisions or choices of action. And there seems to be a relation
between this view and Mackie's logical distinction between first and
second order judgments. I will have more to say about this later. The
point of Mackie's distinction seems to be that it is possible to make a
second order moral statement or hold a second order moral view without
being committed to any particular first order statement or view, in the
sense that as a supposedly "semantic truth", a second order statement or
view does not commit one to the actual _use_ or application of any first

order statement or view with standard moral force or even part of that force.

So, first order moral views about right or wrong conduct (or principles thereof) or good or bad character, are, in the sense examined above, logically distinct from second order views about the ontological status of moral views or values or the meaning or standard force of moral statements. Now instead of the ontological type of second order views which was in question in Mackie's own example of "scepticism", we can, I think, take that type of second order moral statements which concerns the meaning or standard use of ethical terms and sentences and say that, according to Mackie, first order ethical judgments are in general distinct from these second order statements. For example, we may accept the second order moral "subjectivism" which claims that moral judgments are equivalent in meaning to reports of the speaker's own feelings or attitudes, or alternatively we may accept "prescriptivism", the second order thesis (held by Mackie himself, as we shall see) according to which ethical language has the status primarily of decisions, while failing to be committed to first order moral "subjectivism" which says "Everyone ought to do what he thinks right or proper". Indeed, if the above interpretation of Mackie's distinction between first order and second order moral or evaluative statements is correct, whether one holds to (or in holding to) "subjectivism" or "prescriptivism" as second order views, one can with complete consistency refrain from making any first order moral or evaluative judgment whatsoever.

The _logical_ or _formal_ distinction between first order and second order ethical statements is present in one form or another in many

philosophical writings on ethics. Although this distinction may be seen as a particular application of, not the same as, a more essential logical distinction between statements of fact and judgments of value, nevertheless even in this particular form it received special attention from the forerunners of the modern analytic philosophy, such as Ayer. In *Language, Truth and Logic* he writes: "A strictly philosophical treatise on ethics should therefore make no ethical pronouncements. But it should, by giving an analysis of ethical terms, show what is the category to which all such pronouncements belong." (103-4.) And this "should" receives no justification in Ayer's philosophy other than through the assumption that ethical judgments are neither "scientific" (more generally, empirical) propositions nor "definitions". The most serious development and employment of that formal distinction, however, came forward when non-cognitivists such as Stevenson and Hare attempted to clarify the meaning of ethical language and the methods used in "practical" discourse.

Ethics and Language, says Stevenson, draws no conclusions within normative ethics as to what is right or wrong; this study "does not require the analyst, as such, to participate in the inquiry that he analyzes." (1.) It is (or so it purports to be) a "relatively neutral" investigation of what is involved in normative discourse; it is (or so it claims to be) not itself part of that discourse. Thus, for instance, Stevenson holds that decisions about what methods (rational or persuasive) are to be used in normative discourse are themselves normative questions and must as such be left open. And yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, he goes on to offer an analysis of normative discourse which regards persuasive method, i.e., a method which

"supports a judgment by means that go beyond the mediation of articulate beliefs" (*ibid.*, 144), as <u>typically</u> or <u>characteristically</u> normative. (Cf. *ibid.*, 2, 8 & 13 for the earliest occurrences of the terms "typical" and "characteristic". It is worth noting that Stevenson is prepared to extend his "ethical analysis" to cover all "evaluations". In this connection, see especially p. 92.)

In what follows I will outline an argument whose details will be filled out and developed in Chapter 2, namely that Stevenson's use of such terms as "typical" in the relevant contexts contains a "normative" element, in a sense of "normative" which, as will be seen in a moment, may not be unlike Stevenson's own. The terms "characteristic" and "typical" are, if any term is, normative or evaluative; they make suggestions about what the speaker singles out or focuses on as being primary and important to the subject-matter (or the "object" in general) and what he leaves in the background as relatively unimportant or secondary. If this is true, Stevenson's analysis of ethical language turns out, contrary to his claim, to be far from relatively neutral. In this way a paradox results, owing to the fact that the claim to neutrality is incompatible (though perhaps not strictly or logically inconsistent) with the actual non-neutral analysis offered. I suggest that the paradox can be escaped neither by abandoning the analysis of moral language altogether (for clarification of language and concepts are one of the primary functions of philosophy), nor by trying to make our analysis "pure" or "non-normative". What we should do instead is to abandon the premise on which the whole enterprise of finding the core, distinctive, or special meaning or use of moral language is founded, i.e., that descriptive and normative discourses are <u>logically</u> distinct

and that moral discourse has a special meaning or method of its own. However, it is to be noted that the denial of a formal distinction between these discourses does not commit us to the denial of all distinction between them. As I will suggest, there seems to be a difference in their <u>content</u>, the things to which they "refer", in the wide sense of "reference", or with which they are primarily concerned.

According to Stevenson, <u>a normative use</u> of such a term as "good" must be as such distinguished from <u>the analysis of its meaning</u>. Concerning the analysis of the meaning of ethical terms, he says at one point that "The object of the present study is not to devise, in arbitrary fashion, a sense for ethical terms that suits them to a limited, technical purpose; it is rather to free the language of everyday life from confusion." (*Ibid.*, 34.) Of course, as he goes on to say, ambiguity cannot so much be eliminated as disclosed by a study of its function (and perhaps also its origin) in language. For Stevenson, the question of ambiguity and vagueness is, as we shall see, related mainly to the descriptive aspect of ethical language, and descriptive meaning, being for the most part governed by rules, can be made more precise and its vagueness can be controlled or partially removed. The rules of ordinary discourse, however, are not, according to Stevenson, stipulated (in contrast to scientific discourse and mathematics) and some rules are occasionally stipulated but not regularly followed or observed. In such cases meanings must be <u>imparted</u> by the analyst, for there is too much vagueness in ordinary language to think that they can simply be discovered. (*Ibid.*, 86-7.) There is then a limit to the extent to which the meanings in question can be guided by ordinary

usage.   Beyond that the analyst is faced with the necessity of imparting meanings.

Now, as was noted, Stevenson designates persuasive method, a method which is used and is most effective in altering or redirecting attitudes and thereby resolving disagreements in attitude rather than in belief, as "characteristic" or "typical" of normative discourse.   This, I suggest, is not a matter of a relatively neutral analysis of ethical language, but rather a case of "imparting" meanings to ethical terms through the normative use of such normative terms as "typical" and "characteristic".   As such it seems to involve a practical or normative preoccupation which detracts from the alleged "neutrality" of Stevenson's analysis.   Of course, it does not follow from this that his analysis yields "arbitrary" results.   Nor is it mistaken because it is non-neutral.   The point is that we are presented with the paradox that the analyst seems to be engaging in a "practice" which he finds undesirable and improper to the task of "analysis".

But let us be clear about the nature of this normative element. Stevenson is quite prepared to grant that there is an evaluative or normative element in his inquiry into the meaning and method characteristic of ethical discourse which is of the same sort as that involved in the so-called "detached definitions", those definitions which are usually used in logic and scientific disciplines. (Cf. especially *ibid.*, 160-2.) Detached definitions, he says, are those which exert little more than "indirect" influence upon attitudes; and in this way they draw attention to what is judged important or worthy of pursuit "as a part of knowledge, not what is judged important or desirable in other respects." (*Ibid.*, 283.) The "other respects"

referred to here are presumably those concerning attempts to alter attitude <u>directly</u>. And it is this, according to Stevenson, which sets detached (or more generally, "rational" or "non-persuasive") definitions logically apart from "persuasive definitions" or methods. (As we shall see in further detail in Chapter 2, "persuasive definitions" are those definitions which select and recommend for approval a special sense from the range of descriptive meanings of a vague and emotively loaded term.)

I will argue that Stevenson's logical distinctions between "knowledge" (or "agreement in belief") and "agreement in attitude" and the parallel distinction between "detached" and "persuasive" definitions, valid as they may be, do not by themselves warrant the conclusion he draws, namely that what is primary or more important in ethical discourse is persuasive method and agreement in attitude. Nor is this conclusion a report based merely on the fact or the actual practice of moral discourse. Since it neither follows deductively from true premises nor is a purely factual statement, it is not a detached description of the nature of ethical discourse; it seems not unlike a persuasive definition which singles out a special sense and recommends it as the right meaning of ethical language. This is where, I think, Stevenson ceases to be an analyst and begins to exert a normative influence of his own analogous to what he thinks is paramount in morality.

It is worth stressing that I am not criticizing Stevenson for ceasing to be purely an analyst and offering a non-neutral analysis. What I am criticizing him for is the lack of recognition on his part that he is in fact doing so and for his claim that his analysis contains a relatively negligible normative element. Thus I will not be

criticizing Stevenson for singling out and recommending a particular use of language, but rather for (1) his claim that he is doing no such thing, and (2) for singling out the _persuasive_ use of language as such, and not, e.g., its _descriptive_ and universalizable use. The selection of the latter use, I will argue, can be justified by attending to the greater portion of the actual uses of moral language in order to _explain_ the agreement which we do find in our societies, _and_ to make a greater degree of rational consensus possible. I realize, of course, that this claim is based on the assumptions that, as far as such institutions as, e.g., law--where there are built in mechanisms for as much rational or impartial adjudication as possible--are concerned, we have genuine agreement _more often_ than not, we do desire as much uncoerced agreement as possible, and do not deliberately seek means of frustrating it. Again, _usually_ we do not deliberately harm others and have an ongoing, general agreement (in the sense of agreement in belief or harmony among attitudes) that doing so is wrong or undesirable. So, the assumptions of my argument do seem plausible to me.

As an example of what I take to be typical in moral discourse, consider the following brief dialogue.

A: Plagiarism ought to be discouraged by imposing strict penalties.

B: But why?

A: Because the primary goal of our institution is the advancement of scholarship and learning, and where learning is in question, we need and value intellectual honesty and integrity, as well as originality, not self-serving deception.

Here in the first judgment pronounced by A the term "ought" was

employed, and appropriately so, because, as we shall see, "ought" is, perhaps more than any other "value-term", action-guiding (although it is at least debatable whether it is <u>primarily</u> action-guiding). But in response to B's question, "ought" gave place to other "value-terms" which are more descriptively loaded, terms such as "learning", "honesty", "integrity", and "deception".2 Moreover, B's response served to bring out the <u>goal</u> of the academic institution. The dialogue begins and is likely to continue with particular emphasis on the <u>description</u> of or <u>beliefs</u> about <u>ends</u>, <u>needs</u>, <u>interests</u>, and in general certain <u>attitudes</u> taken toward the actions which promote the ends and interests in question as well as those those which tend to frustrate them.

Stevenson's analysis seems to involve more than the mere drawing of attention to certain neglected or underestimated features of ethical language, though this is no doubt what Stevenson intends and achieves; it seems to involve giving privileged status to certain aspects of a total linguistic situation, those which are concerned strictly with the expression and evocation of attitudes and feelings, as against its other aspects. I believe that even Stevenson's interest in <u>agreement</u> as an end towards which ethical discourse may aim does not exhaust the force of the normative or practical element in question. For agreement and disagreement may be in belief as well as in attitude. Stevenson, however, is interested primarily in agreement in <u>attitude</u>, not in belief. This is why, indeed, he takes "persuasive" or "non-rational" methods of resolving disagreements in attitude to be <u>central</u> in "ethical" discourse, and his very notion of "disagreement in attitude" includes in part a motive to alter or redirect attitudes, as distinct from a mere difference among them. (*Ibid.*, 3.)

The conclusion that moral language is geared primarily to persuasive methods and to influence upon attitudes <u>might</u> follow from the distinction between detached and persuasive definitions or methods and the parallel distinction between disagreement in belief and disagreement in attitude <u>if</u> we took moral language to be logically or formally distinct from scientific or descriptive language and supposed that formally there was something "special" about each. Even then it only <u>might</u>, for it could be argued, e.g., by a prescriptivist, that the core meaning or primary use of moral language is not expressing and influencing attitudes but guiding decisions. In any case, in the absence of further reasons to the contrary, the assumption that moral and scientific discourses are logically distinct and that moral language has a special meaning or function of its own can be questioned and then abandoned in the light of certain analogies between these discourses, as well as an inquiry into the nature of a linguistic situation in general. These will be explored and undertaken in the following chapters.

Given the above considerations, it will become possible for moral discourse to strive toward what science takes to be most important and desirable, i.e., universal consensus about facts or, more accurately, consensus about the truth-value of the statements or descriptions of facts. This is so, because the boundary between moral and scientific discourses will turn out to be very fluid, as these discourses will be shown to be in principle (logically and practically) the same; their difference will consist, I suggest, in the kinds of facts with which they are primarily concerned: science with physical facts, morality with the mental facts of desire, interest, preference, and the like. (See the example given above, p. 13.)

Related to the above points is the further one that Stevenson's
analysis seems to rule out or at least underrate other aspects of the
totality of a linguistic situation, aspects which one may take to be
equally, if not more, important. Ethical language may express, in the
general sense of the word, not only attitudes and feelings, but also
beliefs; it may "evoke", in the general sense of producing or
activating, not only a disposition primarily to physical action and
feeling (this being what Stevenson means by an "attitude"), but also
dispositions to think and act in terms of linguistic or non-linguistic
symbols of various sorts. (The notion of "disposition" will be
explained in Chapters 2 and 5. Here we may only note that it is a
factor among a set of factors each of which contributes to the
functioning of the whole.) Indeed, as we shall see, the other non-
cognitivist theories about the meaning or use of ethical language as
distinct from descriptive language have in their turn focused on certain
other aspects or elements of a whole linguistic (or in general,
"symbolic") situation.

Stevenson's *Ethics and Language* is not the only paradoxical
document on normative discourse. Nor is it the only one which gives a
privileged status to certain features of a total linguistic situation.
In *The Language of Morals* Hare insists that an "imperative" conclusion
(which is meant to serve as an analogue of moral statements) cannot be
derived from purely indicative premises. For according to a principle
obtaining in all deductive inference, "nothing can appear in the
conclusion of a valid deductive inference which is not, from their very
meaning, implicit in the conjunction of the premises." (32, 47.) Hence
an imperative conclusion must come from some (universal) imperative

which would serve as the major premise in a "practical" syllogism with minor indicative premises. According to Hare, the function of this universal imperative is to guide decisions or choices, not to make a factual report or assert a truth of logic. It follows then that an attempt to derive an imperative conclusion from purely indicative premises leaves out of moral discourse its "commendatory" function, its action- or choice-guiding character.

In Hare's account this action-guiding function turns out to be related to the fact that we <u>decide</u> whether or not to act upon given moral principles or to make exceptions to them. (<u>Ibid.</u>, 54-5.) And the point about a decision of this sort or in fact any decision is that it makes a difference to what happens. It makes a difference because when faced with new situations or situations which contain features not met before, we <u>decide</u> whether this situation must be dealt with in accordance with the principle(s) already available or it merits a treatment involving an exception to the principle(s) and thereby their modification. The <u>typical</u> situations appealed to in Hare's account are those in which the agent is faced either <u>for the first time</u> with such questions as, e.g., "Shall I now say what is false?" or, more generally, "Ought I to do X?", having had no past experience of either making such a decision himself or receiving guidance from others, or there are enough factors in the situation he is faced with which make it a <u>new</u> situation deserving special considerations beyond those which the past experience has required and are covered by the available principle(s). This is why it is, in Hare's account, so important for the agent to make a <u>decision</u> of principle.

Again, according to Hare, though it is a logical feature of such a word as "good" that it can be applied to any new class of objects without any new lesson (as to its "evaluative meaning"), in an important respect the new application of the word does require a new lesson--in respect, that is, to the criteria of its application, those so-called descriptive characteristics in virtue of which something is called "good". (*The Language of Morals*, 96-7.) Likewise, it is taken to be a peculiar feature of "value-words" that their evaluative meaning can be retained while their "descriptive meaning" is altered. To allow for changes of descriptive meaning, the logic of value-words must be such that evaluative or "prescriptive" meaning is primary and descriptive meaning secondary. And this is indeed what, according to Hare, makes "good" different from such property words as "red". It is also the ground for Hare's attack on those views according to which goodness can be derived from, because it is entailed in, the descriptive properties of the objects of which it is predicated. Whereas in the case of "red" a new use of the word involves no new lesson but is an old lesson over again "with a different example", in the case of "good" every new use involves something new, i.e., new standard or criteria of application, and therefore a decision whether or not to impart a given standard and if not, what sort of modifications to introduce into it. (*Ibid.*, 96.) It is because of this difference between "good" and "red", Hare says, that "good" cannot be said to be the name of a property. And it is for the same reason that ethical terms are taken to have a "special" logic or function of their own and judgments of value in general to be independent of statements of fact.

The emphasis on decision and choice, however, seems implausible,
for it suggests that the typical moral situations are those in which the
agent abstracts from the habit of thinking or acting according to
standards or principles which are, as it were, internalized. To be
sure, there are cases in which the agent must decide or choose among two
or more principles or standards which, at least *prima facie*, make
equally strong demands or have equally strong appeal. Nor are cases of
this sort rare in moral life, but they do not seem to have a monopoly
over the whole of morality or even the central part of it. As Dewey has
remarked, in actuality thought or decision and habit are inseparable,
and the decision that confronts us in life is that between thoughtful or
intelligent habit and mere mechanical routine. (*Human Nature and
Conduct*, 71.)

These points serve to shift the focus from decision and choice to
"thoughtfulness" or "intelligence", what may be called "rationality".
By rationality, as will be further explained, we mean mainly consistency
or "universalizability" of the expressions of interests, desires, and
beliefs, and, closely related to universalizability, a concern for
facts, psychological or physical or institutional. "Rationality" in
this sense becomes central and the formal distinction between ethical
and descriptive discourses doubtful, once we attend to strong analogies
between scientific or in general descriptive language and the language
of morals. (To some extent Hare's own account will help identify and
develop those analogies.) For instance, Hare's point about deciding
whether a new case must be dealt with in accordance with an available
(universalizable) principle or that principle should be modified to
accommodate the new exceptional case, seems no less applicable to

science: it is not foreign to scientific practice to make <u>decisions</u>
whether to preserve an accepted scientific law or to reject or improve
it. In fact the analogy goes even deeper. Decisions to accept or
reject or modify a scientific law are not made during the periods which
Thomas Kuhn has called "normal science"; they concern the change of an
existing "paradigm". (See his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.)
In the same way, as was noted above, moral thought and action normally
proceed against the background of internalized habits and do not always
involve decisions of principle. As we shall see in Chapter 3; there are
also strong analogies between "good" and "red" as terms used in ordinary
language.

In connection with both action and thought, doing things and
reflecting on them, the natural question to ask is whether or not a
moral situation is <u>typically</u> one in which the use of a value-word
involves a decision of principle or a choice of standard. This question
would reveal the "practical" or "evaluative" preoccupation of the
analyst which is hidden under such locutions as "typical", "special",
and "primary". But Hare holds that statements about the logic of moral
language are by no means tied to any particular moral standpoint or
evaluative judgment of substance. (*Freedom and Reason*, Chapter 10.)
This generates the paradox that the alleged non-evaluative inquiry into
the logic of moral language turns out in fact to involve an evaluative
element. And it seems that the content of this evaluation is associated
with Hare's view as to what is more and what is less important in a
moral situation. (We need not speculate whether the form of this
evaluation itself is that of (Hare's) choice or decision or expression
of belief or what not. The point remains that it <u>is</u> an evaluation, and

one which has a specific content, one which privileges choice or decision as a central feature of moral language.)

The paradox referred to can be avoided by abandoning the claim as to a logical distinction between moral and scientific discourses and recognizing that second order statements put forward by Hare and others about the logic of moral discourse are tied to their particular standpoints. My contrary claim about formal or logical identity of those discourses may in turn be supported by evidence to the effect that "prescriptivity" is only one of the factors which go into making a linguistic situation whose various elements are closely connected with one another, and that therefore Hare's prescriptivism as a theory about the primary meaning or use of moral language involves privileging this factor. In a linguistic situation decisions or choices are intimately bound up with the more or less internalized dispositions or habits of thinking, believing and desiring, as well as acting according to certain universalizable principles, and using other symbols. Given this and certain analogies advanced in Chapter 3, and in the absence of further reasons to the contrary, the logical distinction between "good" and "red" or "ought" and "is" or in general evaluative and descriptive discourses breaks down. What we will have then is not a formal distinction between these discourses, one (primarily) describing "facts" and the other (primarily) prescribing choice or action, but perhaps a difference between the kinds of facts with which they are mainly "concerned" or to which they "refer" (in the general sense of "reference" which will be explored in Chapter 5): the so-called descriptive discourses referring mainly to the physical features of situations, evaluative discourse referring to mental states of belief,

feeling, and desire. In this respect indeed there is a close similarity between the contents of moral discourse and those of the science of psychology, and it is reasonable to expect that morality learn a great deal from psychology or *vice versa*.

The decision of principle or choice of standard bears upon two conditions which, according to Hare, are necessary and sufficient for a judgment to be characterized as moral (or evaluative in general). Moral judgments characteristically enable one to assent to or dissent from (depending on one's desires) certain singular prescriptions, and to treat the desires of others as if they were one's own. Again, ethical words, when used according to their standard function, express choices which one is prepared to extend to things which are similar in relevant respects. However, for reasons similar to the ones already suggested, it will be shown that "universalizability" is no less distinctive of ethical (or in general, evaluative) discourse than is "prescriptivity". I will argue that there is a universalizable tendency throughout a language insofar as there are generic terms in that language. Universalizability and prescriptivity, then, may be written into moral discourse, but no more or less than they are into scientific discourse. To think otherwise and without further argument is to draw an artificial boundary-line between these discourses.

Hare himself says that universalizability and prescriptivity constitute an "ideal" which we cannot but fall short of. As humans we are constantly faced with the phenomenon of moral weakness which makes us "backslide" from the rigor of this pure ideal. We often make exceptions in our own favor when our interests are in danger. (*Ibid.*, 53 & 76.) As Dewey has remarked, pleas for "isolation" (in the same sense

of a tendency to regard our own case as exceptional) and "secrecy" are "forces which operate in every passionate desire." (*Loc. cit.*, 247.) Nevertheless, Hare insists that even in cases of moral weakness moral language maintains its universalizability, though its original prescriptive force, entailing a "commitment", is replaced by "a mere *feeling*" of guilt which arises from the play of our conscience against our more powerful tendency to make exceptions in our own favor. Moral language maintains its universalizable aspect, because "it is characteristic of moral thought in general to accord equal weight to the interests of all persons; that is to say, that it makes no difference whether it is you or I that has the interest." (*Freedom and Reason*, 177.) In effect, moral language as such is in principle prescriptive and universalizable, even though it is flexible enough to allow shifts of meaning from, for instance, "ought" as entailing a commitment to "ought" as entailing a feeling. (*Ibid.*, 76-7.)

But it will not do merely to <u>insist</u>, as Hare does, on prescriptivity as one of the distinctive marks of moral discourse. (The above argument also seems to suggest the tendency in Hare to underrate the role of feelings and attitudes in the "logic" of moral discourse. But this is not the main point here, and more about it will be said later.) However, universalizability seems to be more interesting. Of course, it is not the <u>special</u> logic of moral language that it is universalizable, that there is an egalitarian principle built into any position deserving the name "moral". Nor, as was noted and will be further explained, is the requirement of universalizability—which, as Hare points out and correctly so, as we shall see, demands that the interests and desires of others be given as much weight as one's own—a

neutral condition, for "equality" is a value-word, if anything is; the connection between morality and universalizability is not a question of the meaning of ethical language <u>as distinct from scientific language</u>. It is a question of <u>principle</u> and the reflection of a "partiality for reason".3 But it is precisely this which makes universalizability defensible. As I shall try to show later, rationality in the sense of universalizability and "concern", in a wide sense, for psychological as well as physical facts is a tendency underlying <u>all</u> language (not just ethical language); it is manifested in the fact that anything properly called a "language" (or generally speaking, "symbolic activity") is governed by universalizable rules and implies "reference", however ambiguous and opaque that reference may be.

As was noted, the principle of universalizability demands that a judgment be regarded as moral only if it can be applied in all relevantly similar cases. (This seems to be what makes the move from universalizability to egalitarianism a plausible one. If moral language is universalizable, it follows that insofar as it is used with its full force, the speaker is prepared to apply the same judgment in all "relevantly" similar situations and from different viewpoints, so that the judgment is not the expression merely of his own "relevant" desires or interests, but also of other people's as well. Thus universalizability entails taking equal account of all relevant interests or desires. And in this sense it entails a harmony among desires and interests of all, which is involved in what I have referred to as a global rational consensus. But more about this will be said in Chapter 4, in particular in connection with the different stages or kinds of universalizability.) Now Mackie has drawn particular attention

to the words "relevantly similar" and suggested that they conceal a
normative preoccupation; they show that it is highly dubious that
constraints on what could count as a "moral" judgment are constraints
built into the "general meanings" of moral terms, that it is in virtue
of their general meanings that such terms as "good" and "ought" when
used in moral judgments can be supported by universalized reasons. For
it would not seem self-contradictory to use such words and at the same
time fail to universalize the judgments in which they figure. That such
judgments are sometimes supported by universalized reasons is contingent
upon a special use of moral language. That one should be prepared to
universalize one's moral judgments and act or think accordingly is "a
substantive practical principle. It is a demand for a certain sort of
fairness." (*Ibid.*, 88. See also pp. 97-8. It seems that Mackie is not
refuting universalizability as a logical thesis, he is simply expressing
doubts about it. I will say more about this in Chapter 4. I will be
arguing against the weaker claim that it is doubtful whether
universalizability is a logical thesis, whether it is part of the
meaning or standard force of moral terms that the judgments in which
they figure are universalizable.)

Mackie's criticism of universalizability will be discussed in
further detail in Chapter 4. There I will argue that his scepticism
about the principle of universalizability presupposes his artificial and
rigid distinction of what he calls a "special logic" of moral words
which entails a "substantive practical principle" from their "general
meanings", and that this distinction rests in turn on his rather narrow
conception of "practice". I suggest that on a wider notion of

"practice", even such abstract discourses as mathematics and logic and more obviously scientific discourse may be viewed as practical.

It is important to note that universalizability is no less "practical" or normative in science than it is in moral discourse. In understanding the world science projects or constructs a more or less well ordered and universalizable theoretical framework for reality. And just as theories or hypotheses are taken to be scientific insofar as they pass the test of as much empirical data as possible, so judgments may be said to be moral only if they withstand the "test" of all or as many desires and interests as possible. This test may be rather severe for moral language, but there is no reason to doubt or reject it either. I think that a case may be made for its acceptance as a matter of principle on the lines suggested above, namely by attending to the actual practice of moral language, as well as the universal tendencies in all language. This is not to say that there is no difference between scientific and moral discourses. But any difference would have to do not with their form but, as noted above, with the kind of "facts" with which each discourse is mainly concerned. This would also explain the comparative lack of consensus in morals, as distinct from sciences. Being concerned with (potentially) observable objects, scientific judgments enjoy a higher degree of "objectivity" in the sense of common assent. (It is the basis and motive of even mathematics to provide a clear and precise account of the observable world. But more about this in Chapter 5, where I will argue that even mathematical symbols "refer" to the world, in a wide sense of "reference".) The descriptive component of moral judgments, on the other hand, concerns desires, interests, or ends, facts which cannot be scrutinized in the same way as

physical facts can. If these points are correct, the hard and fast distinction on which Mackie's scepticism about the principle of universalizability as a part of the "logic" of moral discourse rests, i.e., the distinction between the meaning or standard force and the "practice" or use of moral discourse, can be resisted. Having done so, we may agree with Hare that universalizability is a logical feature of moral language, and with Mackie that it is a practical maxim, a demand for a fairness of a certain sort.

It is because Mackie insists on the independence of first order and second order moral judgments that, having questioned the (general) logical force of the principle of universalizability (as well, of course, as "objectivism" as an ontological thesis), he suggests that the main constraint on moral judgments comes from appeal to subjective elements which have "the logical status of a decision." (*Ibid.*, 100.) It is only speaking within the "institution" of morality that moral judgments may be universalizable. But this, says Mackie, does not mean that the institution is itself intrinsically authoritative, for there is no intrinsic necessity to "endorse" it. (*Ibid.*, 98-9.) No matter what one's moral upbringing, one can opt out of and into the moral language game as one wishes without committing a logical mistake.

The latter point ties in with Mackie's objections to Searle's argument for deriving "ought" from "is" through "institutional facts" such as "promising". The derivation, argues Mackie, holds only "within" the institution in question. I will argue that Mackie's criticism of Searle's argument presupposes a narrow conception of "ought" and thus an "obligation" or "commitment", a conception according to which a commitment is <u>primarily</u>, if not exclusively, a "decision". (This notion

is in fact concealed in the frequently used term "endorsing".) Mackie admits that words like "promise" or "courage" are neither purely descriptive nor purely "evaluative". (*Ibid.*, 73.) Nevertheless, in his account, the commitment to a future action (resulting from a promise) or to a certain way of thinking and acting in relation to someone (expressed in the use of "courage") is <u>primarily</u> a decision.

This claim seems to make it possible for the "I" to be a disembodied spirit or a solitary self severed from customs and institutions, from objective ties with its cultural environment. For this reason, the claim in question, as we shall see, also represents a tendency toward the individual (person, family, or nation) and away from the universal community of thinking and acting subjects. But this would be an implication of Mackie's view, not the view itself. At the moment, concentrating our attention on the latter, we can say that the commitment involved in a promise seems no more essentially endorsing or guiding the endorsement of the promising institution, than a certain way of thinking and acting toward a "cruel" practice (if it may be called a practice) is primarily a <u>decision</u> so to think and act by opting out of that practice. Nor does the word "promise", or more accurately, the sentences in which the word is used, have any more the peculiar logic of a decision than does the word "cruel", or the judgments employing this word. Promising <u>entails</u>, in the absence of overriding obligations, a commitment to act when the time comes, in the same way as calling a practice "cruel" just <u>means</u> that, everything else being equal, a certain kind of attitude or action is likely to be taken toward the practice. An attitude of disapproval, a feeling of repulsion, and a disposition to act in opposition and to speak unfavorably of one who we believe has

practiced cruelty in thought, in action, or in speech, are all parts of the force or "logic" of the judgment in which the word "cruel" figures. At least they may be as important a part of that force or logic as is "opting out" of the practice. The "logic" or "meaning" of "cruel" involves not only or even primarily decisions, but also commonly shared feelings, interests, desires, beliefs, aims. Likewise, the "logic" of promising, and hence the commitment that follows, in conjunction with the rules of the promising institution, from making a promise, involves not only or primarily a decision to act when the time of action comes, but perhaps more importantly a set of dispositions to think and act in harmony with one's own other thoughts and actions, as well as those of others.

It is due to the fact that the attitudes taken toward cruel practices (or persons engaging in them) or toward the promising institution are a descriptive part of the "logic" of "cruel" or "promise" that judgments in which these words figure are universalizable. Descriptivity is, of course, only the necessary condition of, not sufficient for, universalizability. To be universalizable, moral judgments (and for that matter, any other judgment), as we shall see, need to be such that their adherents are at least prepared to replace proper names and indexical terms with general descriptions. It remains, however, that unlike decisions to act or choices, beliefs and attitudes (wants, desires, or interests) have a generic characteristic such that it makes sense to speak of "similar" or shared beliefs or attitudes, but not of "similar" or shared decisions or choices. This difference seems to be reflected in the fact that we may have beliefs and interests, but make decisions or choices. For this

reason indeed, as Hare has observed, statements (or descriptions) tell someone <u>that</u> something is the case, whereas imperatives (which are geared to guiding decisions or choices) tell someone to <u>make</u> something the case. (See below, 3.1., p. 105.)

Consider the following dialogue.

A: The measures implemented by the government are cruel and inhumane.

B: I don't see why.

A: Don't you see that the livelihood and perhaps even the survival of a great number of underprivileged and impoverished people are being threatened?

In this example, as in the one given above, p. 13, the dialogue moves from the use of more general words, "cruel" and "inhumane", to the description of, beliefs about, or reference to wants, needs, feelings, and certain general attitudes taken toward measures which tend to satisfy or frustrate those needs and wants. The use of such words as "survival", "livelihood", "impoverished", and the like, attests to the need or desire for means of subsistence and the feelings of anger and depression accompanying their lack. And the term "threat" in part underlines, however obliquely, the attitude of disapproval taken towards the government's measures. Of course, the need, want, or attitude in question may be brought out more clearly as the dialogue proceeds.

Examples could be multiplied. I would generalize and conclude that the "logic" of "value-words" is such that when we utter them, the sense in which we would be primarily endorsing or invoking an institution fails to capture the complexity of such words and in particular underrates the importance of the descriptive and

universalizable dimension of a total linguistic situation. The logic of
these words is the logic of a whole way of life which can in principle
be led in harmony with oneself and with others.

The stress on decisions goes along with a particular use of the
distinction between "internal" and "external" perspectives on an
institution. But that stress seems to be useful only in some contexts:
when, for instance, ethical words refer to practices and concepts which
we do not usually engage in or share with others. In such contexts we
opt into such practices. In other cases opting into a practice requires
opting out of another. But such cases already point to the difference
between "slipping" into and out of acting in accordance with the rules
of an institution and "opting for", "endorsing", or "withdrawing" from
an institution. Often, though for better or worse, not always, we do
the former, not the latter. In fact, the decision to opt into and out
of an institution when there is a conflict between the demands made by
different institutions requires that we stand within some institution or
another. In emphasizing decisions to opt into or out of a moral
institution as central to the force of moral words, Mackie suggests that
normally we are either outside an institution and decide whether to opt
into it, or inside it and decide whether to remain in it. It seems to
me, on the other hand, that these are not the usual or normal cases; the
normal cases are those where we think and act in accordance with the
requirements of an institution or practice, such as law, promising,
truth-telling, or where we think and act (again, in the sense of having
certain ongoing and habitual modes of belief, attitude and action)
against a practice, such as cruelty, dishonesty, arrogance, and the
like. Therefore, the emphasis on decision (to act) or choice as the

only logical constraint on the use of moral judgments or as the (distinctive) "core" of their meaning (*ibid.*, 51-2) calls for further justification and argument. But Mackie does not offer these.

The foregoing account suggests that Mackie is committed to a view about the meaning of moral language very much analogous to Hare's prescriptivism. I will have more to say in Chapter 4 by way of an attempt to justify giving the label of "prescriptivism" to Mackie's overall position on the logic of moral discourse. Such a justification is called for especially because, as we shall see, in his general definitions of "ought" and "good" Mackie pays considerable attention to descriptive elements. For the time being we can say that his view seems open to the same objections raised above against Hare's prescriptivism, namely that it gives rise to the paradox of bringing normative considerations into what is allegedly a neutral statement about meaning, and that it fails to recognize that decisions to opt into or out of the "institution" of morality, though important in some cases, are by no means the core of or central to moral discourse. The fact that we are often confronted with the so-called "tragic" or critical situations where we have to choose between equally desirable courses of action or virtues is evidence that we usually think and act in accordance with some institutional rule. Of course, our social environment is not uniform, but complex. For instance, we may be called upon to weigh the claims of loyalty, love, or friendship on the one hand and justice or truthfulness on the other. Fidelity may conflict with the necessities of subsistence. But such conflicts do not seem typical or central to morality. To say that the main constraint on moral judgments comes from the fact that they are expressions of <u>decision</u> to

opt into or out of the institution of morality is to have fastened upon one dimension of a linguistic situation at the cost of the others. If we are to privilege certain aspects of a linguistic situation, there is no reason, in the absence of further argument by prescriptivists, why we should not single out the descriptive and universalizable aspects. That we should do so may be supported by the analogies between scientific and moral discourses to which I referred above, pp. 19-20 and 26, and which will be developed further.

One does not need to accept "objective", intrinsic values in order for one's use of "promise" or "ought" to have the force that it has. Values are no doubt "subjective", if anything is. They are located in our heads rather than in the external world. Hence, there are always subjective elements like desires, interests and ends in the use of moral words. But this "ontological" point, as Mackie would agree, does not bear logically on the conceptual or linguistic issue of the meaning of moral concepts or words. Indeed, there seems to be no logical connection in Mackie's philosophy between prescriptivism (as a linguistic theory) and scepticism (as an ontological theory). I will say more about this in Chapter 4. The point to stress is that prescriptivism by no means disappears as we move from Hare's to Mackie's account of the core meaning of value-words or language, though, of course, it was not meant to disappear. The difference, a very important one for our purpose, between these two accounts is that whereas Hare has (correctly) included universalizability in his analysis of the logic of moral language, Mackie's (mistaken) scepticism about the thesis of universalization has left him with the hard core of prescriptivism, a thesis which for the reasons mentioned above is questionable.

So far I have been trying to show briefly that some of the most important writings on the language of morals turn out upon examination to be paradoxical, for they betray a normative or practical preoccupation on the part of the analyst, contrary to their professed neutrality. I suggested that in order to resolve the paradox, we need not give up analysis or try to make our analysis as "pure" or "non-normative" as possible. Instead we need to abandon those presuppositions which generated the paradox, mainly the hard and fast distinction between first order and second order moral statements and the correlative search for the <u>distinctive</u> core of meaning or use of ethical language. However, I suggested that we will also need to consider certain strong analogies between scientific and moral discourses, as well as a general theory about the nature of language as a symbolic system and the speech act theory, in an attempt to show that a "referential" or "descriptive" element is ubiquitous throughout various linguistic usages. Given the presence of this element and generic terms, one may argue for a universalizable disposition in all language and hence the acceptance of universalizability as both a logical and a practical requirement of moral discourse.

Such a view would bring science and ethics closer to one another and make scientific method essential in ethical discourse. It would also render the talk of the distinctive logic of "moral" discourse as well as the distinctive domain of "moral" action or agency idle (though our concern here is mainly with moral discourse, not directly with action or agency). It will become the main function of ethical language to address the facts (primarily mental facts of desire, interest, and end) of the situation and aspire to the same universality which is aimed

at in science; it would be only by bringing the universalizable dispositions of our linguistic concepts to bear upon practice and by developing them to the fullest possible extent that we may achieve what we tacitly aspire to in our language, i.e., rational consensus.

It would seem that on the recognition of universalizability in moral discourse we can ground the possibility of a global consensus. Ruling universalizability out of the "logic" of moral discourse or even being sceptical about its force, predisposes us to, though it does not strictly entail, embracing emotivism or prescriptivism. But by taking the primary meaning or the standard use of ethical language to be expressing and influencing attitudes, emotivism leaves itself vulnerable to the possibility of, though it does not _entail_, coercion and manipulation of attitudes, as distinct from autonomous will-formation. On the other hand, the prescriptivist assimilation of the meaning or use of ethical language primarily to decision to act or choice renders consensus an accidental matter, not one which is reached rationally. On prescriptivist premises, in ethical discourse as such there is a relatively insignificant rational bond tying individual decisions and choices together, and on emotivist premises, there is a relatively insignificant rational inertia against the pitfalls of rhetoric and propaganda. There is no guarantee that a society governed on prescriptivist or emotivist assumptions will not disintegrate into a conglomeration of conflicting individual wills each seeking its own ends, though of course there is no logical necessity that it will. There is, at any rate, a tendency in that direction, a tendency which seems to run opposite to the rational potential inherent in all language and symbolic activities. (This opposition, as we shall see in further

detail, is indeed what accounts for a tension in Hare's philosophy between his prescriptivism and universalizability, the former pointing in the direction of the individual and the latter in the direction of community.)

But why is the emphasis on rationality in the sense of concern for facts and universalizability most plausible? Among modern writings on ethical theory there is that of MacIntyre which may be seen as a challenge to the thesis offered here. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre argues that the erosion of the teleological view of man and the loss of the sense of community which was present in traditional societies led to the failure of the Enlightenment project of maintaining objectivity and rationality in morals and subsequently to the fragmentation and disorder of the scheme of modern moral beliefs and language. Modernity lacks the context which is necessary for the meaningfulness or consistency of moral beliefs and for rational criteria for settling moral disputes. The almost unanimous rejection of the teleological view of human nature by the Enlightenment thinkers left reason impotent for grasping human ends and for effecting a transition from the actual state of affairs to a level where human nature has realized its *telos*. We are consequently faced with, for instance, Hume's scepticism as to any connection between "is" and "ought" and Kant's later separation of the "hypothetical" and "categorical" maxims. Such gaps did not exist where to call something "good" (evaluation) meant that it performed its function well (a fact about the thing in question), or where moral judgments were considered as reports of divine laws or the laws laid down by hierarchical secular authorities. Regarding the satisfaction of desires and passions as the basis of conventional moral rules, Hume was faced with the problem that

desire cannot by itself arbitrate between the claims of rival desires. Kant, on the other hand, offers the purely formal principle of reason, which does not succeed in bridging that gap either. For, as MacIntyre observes, there is no formal inconsistency in willing a universe of egoists. (45-7. See also Mackie, p. 25.) According to MacIntyre, Kant's successor, Kierkegaard, having denied reason and passion proper place in the ethical way of life, leaves the choice of moral principles open. Here we have reached the limits of rational justification and our moral arguments tend to become as arbitrary as our moral concepts.

Against this historical background, MacIntyre discerns a central paradox in our moral discourse: "we simultaneously and inconsistently treat moral arguments as an exercise of our rational powers and as mere expressive assertions." (*Ibid.*, 11.) Despite their personal character—that they are expressions of the speaker's will and attitudes—and the fact that the context of their utterance is particular as distinct from universal, moral judgments "purport to be *impersonal*", for they use a language which embodies reference to apparently objective standards of the right and the good. (*Ibid.*, 8-9.) "Subjectivist" theories such as emotivism, says MacIntyre, ignore the paradox when they equate evaluative expressions with expressions of personal preferences. What assists this ignorance is in part the claim that the expression and evocation of attitudes is the <u>meaning</u> of moral judgments, instead of their <u>use</u> on specific occasions. (*Ibid.*, 12-14.) Emotivism ignores not only the historical character of moral theory and practice, but conceals, with the help of the alleged objectivity implied in the notion of "meaning", the true status of moral judgments—their being particular <u>uses</u> of language as an instrument for the expression of one's own

desires and purposes. In effect, MacIntyre seems to suggest that emotivism replaces one paradox with another by maintaining one side of the original paradox—moral language as a mere expression and evocation of attitudes—and by substituting for the other side of it—claims to objectivity or rationality—claims about the meaning of moral language. As long as they remain unchallenged, both paradoxes perform a masking function by employing the apparent objectivity of moral assertions (one side of the paradoxes) in order to mask, or such that it masks, the expression of personal attitudes and the attempt to evoke the same in others (the other side of both paradoxes).

Claims to objectivity are of two kinds, those which appeal to allegedly objective entities residing somewhere in the empirical or the "supersensible" world and those which are concerned with rationality. MacIntyre, however, seems to run these two kinds of objectivity together. I suggested earlier that while claims of the first sort usually entail and are accompanied by claims of the second kind, the converse does not hold. To think, as I do contrary to MacIntyre, that moral arguments are not conceptually "incommensurable", that they are open to rational settlement, does not necessarily entail belief in objective entities such as the "faculty" of reason or the "telos of human nature". Such a belief was Plato's solution to the puzzle put forward by Socrates, that thought, despite its subjective and personal character, is capable of arriving at universal principles. To account for this, Plato, and after him Aristotle, ascribed objectivity of the first kind to "reason" as a faculty of human soul and to the grasp of universal principles of reason as the end of human life. But the loss of teleology and the belief in a rational faculty seems consistent with

the faith in the power of reason not as a faculty but as a disposition or structural property which is inseparable from social circumstances, though it can help modify or redirect those circumstances. Reason may be seen as a mental disposition, practical or theoretical, which is highly variable from one human being to another as well as throughout the course of a single human life. As Mary Midgley has noted, "Altogether, in ordinary speech, "having reason" or "being rational" is not a yes-or-no business like having a hammer. It is much more like having insight or energy or initiative or imagination--things that can be possessed in varying degrees and also in very different forms." (*Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*, 213-14.)

If this view of rationality is correct and if it should be kept apart from that which implies the first sort of objectivity noted above, then the paradox of which MacIntyre speaks does not seem to be a real one. There is no inconsistency in treating moral language as an expression of personal preferences (though not merely so) and at the same time as an exercise of our rational disposition. As we have seen, the error of emotivism and prescriptivism (Stevenson and Mackie) could be described as consisting not so much in the ignorance of the paradox referred to above (for there is none), as in their insistence on one aspect of moral language at the cost of underrating its other aspects, especially descriptive ones. In Hare, this prescriptivism does not so much underrate universalizability (for Hare does draw particular attention to it) as come into tension with descriptivity and universalizability. On the other hand, Kant's universalism (ignoring for the moment the fact that Kant's concern is with first order moral views, not with second order "metaethical" considerations) could be seen

as committing the opposite error of opting for the rational as distinct from the personal dimension of moral discourse. The (second order) "subjectivist's" task of formulating a theory about the meaning of "moral" language does not really "mask" personal preferences, for these are exactly what emotivism and prescriptivism in effect stress, sometimes implicitly, at other times explicitly, by identifying "meaning" with "use"; it ignores and implicitly denies the universalizable tendency underlying all language. It is ultimately for this reason that "non-cognitivism" becomes objectionable. And it is for the same reason that it runs the risk of, though it does not logically entail, turning consensus or moral agreement into "accidental" harmony among preferences and actions (prescriptivism), or into a "harmony" among attitudes in general which results from "influencing" and manipulating them (emotivism). Universalizability, on the other hand, is the necessary and sufficient condition of any genuine, as opposed both to accidental and to externally imposed, consensus.

If MacIntyre's paradox is not real, the Enlightenment's project of vindicating morality by grounding it on a rational foundation need not be considered as a hopeless one. It may be true that, as MacIntyre points out, the Enlightenment's project, prompted as a historical sequel to the rejection of the Aristotelian tradition of virtues and its teleological presuppositions, failed due to the restrictions imposed by the Protestants and Jansenists on the power of reason to grasp human ends and specifically a single, overriding and fundamental *telos*. But grasping a single *telos* of human life may not be the primary function of reason. It was not for Kant in the first and second *Critiques*. In a different respect then that project need not have failed; it is indeed

questionable whether it did fail. Regardless of whether or not the bulk of modern moral theory and practice is individualistic, it is neither logically impossible nor impractical and unrealistic to try to carry out the Enlightenment's partiality for reason to its logical conclusions. Attention to present troubles and possibilities and a continual readjustment and redirection of ends, purposes, and wants in the light of the principle that accords equal weight to the interests of all persons may be what moral discourse is all about.

I will argue that the rationality characteristic of moral thought and language is nothing but their disposition to avoid the inertia of withdrawing into the self and instead to reach out to establish unity with others. The less the individual shuts himself off, divides, and suppresses, the more the measure of morality. The self need not be annihilated in order to become moral. Nor does moral language need to abstract from desires and interests. For, as we shall see later, language seems to take root precisely in the projection of interests into the world. Reasoning about what ought to be done or what is good need not proceed against "neutrality" and apathy in order to be moral. Indeed it often proceeds against too many competing desires and attitudes. MacIntyre's paradox discussed above echoes the old controversy between the claims of desire and reason. But instead of placing it against desire, reason may be viewed as a commitment to the task of discovering and acknowledging desires and the forms of life they foster as well as acting in the interest of a harmony among them. The opposition with which moral discourse needs to come to terms is not between personal preferences and rationality, but between thoughtless projection of preferences (hence, chaos) and their thoughtful and

balanced execution. The choice confronting moral discourse, I will argue, is not that between desire and reason, or between opting into and out of the institution of morality, but between more or less rational and coherent institutions of language, science, art, law, economy, and the like, all the so-called "symbolic activities" which go into making a "civilization".

Moral considerations then are, throughout their course, in potential or actual relation with the environment. Non-cognitivism seems to capitalize on the occasions when that relation is temporarily suspended and when a change in the "objective" world is to be effected by the agent, and then calls those occasions the "typically" moral. Of course, moral attitudes and practical wisdom cannot be fully explained by past training and experience or simply in terms of traditions. If there were no spontaneity, if no decisions were made by the agent about matters of importance in the course of his "moral" upbringing, his character and sentiments would be very weak and his decisions abstruse indeed. But spontaneity and decision-making in vital matters are not a peculiar feature of "moral" or "evaluative" discourse. They have an important place in all departments of life, from making a move in a game of backgammon to building and developing nuclear weapons. Emotivism and prescriptivism then seem by no means satisfactory accounts of moral discourse, for they rest on an artificial distinction of logic of the moral standpoint from the standpoint of the "knowledge" of facts. Moral language and thought concern the experimental inquiry into and the continual readjustment of desires and habits in the light of the universal principle of equality among all.

Chapter 2

Stevenson's Emotivism

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that the thesis of the logical independence of first and second order moral statements is a particular application of the view held by many philosophers that moral judgments are distinguishable from and independent of statements of fact. Non-cognitivism has been the most thoroughgoing advocate of this view. In this chapter I wish to examine one of the accounts of the way in which the view in question is related to the thesis of the independence of first and second order ethical statements—the account, that is, given by Stevenson in *Ethics and Language*. It is best to start with his theory and then to proceed to the others which, as I will try to show, share Stevenson's basic presupposition, not only because Stevenson's is one of the first and most comprehensive treatments of the topic, but because due to its complexity and freshness of thought, his development of the topic, in spite of some difficulties, yields useful insights into the nature and function of ethical discourse. His book combines analytic precision with much caution and sensitivity to the facts of practice. I will focus on those aspects of Stevenson's theory which, I hope, serve to show that despite that caution, more weight should have been placed on the complexity of moral language instead of insisting on an account of the core meaning of ethical language as distinct from scientific language. Such insistence, I will argue,

amounts to the paradox of introducing normative views into what is supposedly a statement about the fact of moral language, and to an abstraction from the actual function of moral language. Stevenson's account, I will attempt to show, underestimates the significance of universalizability in moral discourse by drawing a logical distinction between "emotive" and "descriptive" meanings and by taking emotive meaning to be primary. This underestimation together with Stevenson's view as to the primary function of ethical language, i.e., persuasion or expressing and influencing attitudes, turn ethical agreement into a state of affairs which may result not so much, or not primarily, from reasons, but one which is as such, i.e., as an ethical agreement, imposed externally. In this sense, on emotivist premises, ethical discourse is left open to the possibility of coercion and manipulation, though these are not entailed in it.

2.1. The Two Kinds of Disagreement

Stevenson thinks it is important for the study of the function of ethical terms and the methods of reaching ethical agreement to realize that ethical discourse typically and almost always involves both "disagreement in attitude" and "disagreement in belief". (Ethics and Language, 11. Unless mentioned otherwise, all references to Stevenson's views are from this book.) Disagreement in belief, he says, involves cases where "one man believes that p is the answer and another that not-p, or some proposition incompatible with p, is the answer; and in the course of discussion each tries to give some manner of proof for his

view, or revise it in the light of further information." (2.)

Disagreement in belief is disagreement about any proposition which can be true or false. Its subject-matter, therefore, may be attitudes, i.e., "purposes, aspirations, wants, preferences, desires, and so on." (3.) Thus Stevenson warns us against confusing disagreement about attitudes with disagreement in attitudes. The former is a species of disagreement in belief. More precisely, it is disagreement in belief about attitudes; it implies an opposition of beliefs whose objects or referents are attitudes. As such, disagreement about attitudes does not imply opposition of attitudes, but rather of beliefs. Disagreement in attitude, on the other hand, does imply such opposition of attitudes: "Two men will be said to disagree in attitude when they have opposed attitudes to the same object—one approving of it, for instance, and the other disapproving of it—and when at least one of them has a motive for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other." (3.) You and I may disagree (in belief) about the attitude of the majority of Americans toward communism, without ourselves disagreeing in attitude toward communism (and consequently any motive for altering each other's attitude). Our disagreement may involve a degree of uncertainty and a mutual effort to acquire further information about the nature as well as the personal and historical origins of the views involved in communism, and their relationship with the American ethos and history. As such it would be a disagreement in belief, a disagreement about "how matters are truthfully to be described and explained"; it would not be a disagreement in attitude, a disagreement about how matters "are to be favored or disfavored." (4.) It can be resolved "cognitively", without

any change in our attitudes. As we shall see, disagreement in attitude as such, according to Stevenson, is not open to cognitive settlement.

For our purposes a few points of explanation seem to be called for regarding the two sorts of disagreement and their relationship. First, the definition of disagreement in attitude suggests that for two people to disagree in attitude it is not enough that they have opposed or different attitudes toward a certain object or subject-matter; disagreement in attitude as such involves a motive on the part of at least one of the parties in disagreement to change or call into question the attitude of the other. It is to make room for this effort to redirect or alter attitudes that Stevenson's "working models" for the analysis of ethical judgments include not only a descriptive component but also an imperative one. (For example, "This is wrong" means roughly "I disapprove of this; do so as well." (21-2.)) Secondly, the party seeking to alter another's attitude may well be prepared to change his own attitude in the course of discussion, but this is not a necessary condition of having a disagreement in attitude. Thirdly, disagreement in attitude may be accompanied by a "latent" disagreement in belief, and this is in fact true of most actual cases. Attitudes and beliefs often affect and influence one another and are as such closely related. Discussion and consequent resolution of a disagreement in belief may bring about a change in attitudes such that a disagreement in attitude is terminated. Stevenson acknowledges that the separation of these two kinds of disagreement may be "artificial". (3, n.2.) It remains that disagreement in belief is not, according to Stevenson, necessarily involved in cases of disagreement in attitude. The two kinds of

disagreement are "logically" distinct, even though they may be factually or contingently related.

In other words, it is logically possible to have one without the other: to disagree in attitude without disagreeing in belief or *vice versa*. Including the two other possibilities, i.e., both sorts of disagreement occurring together, or neither of them occurring at all, the logical distinction between disagreement in belief and disagreement in attitude generates four possible combinations. Which of these is realized in a particular situation is a question of fact. "But experience clearly shows", says Stevenson, "that the cases which involve both sorts of disagreement (or agreement) are extremely numerous." (7.) Given this and the fact that the cases which involve disagreement, though less numerous than those which involve agreement, "present instances where methods of reasoning are more overtly employed, and more readily available for illustration and study" (5)—given these two premises, it seems appropriate to focus on cases involving <u>both</u> kinds of <u>disagreement</u>, as opposed to those which either involve agreement or, though involve disagreement, exclude one or the other sort of disagreement. It is important to emphasize this point because, as we shall see in a moment, Stevenson wants to regard (I think, mistakenly) disagreement in attitude, not in belief, as "characteristic" of an ethical dispute, thus giving the former a privileged status. (I will first grant him the point that stressing disagreement as opposed to agreement may be more helpful for the purpose of characterizing the methods whereby ethical judgments can be supported, but later in an attempt to give <u>further</u> support to my argument I will suggest, as in the previous chapter, that it is not characteristic of moral discourse that

efforts are made to settle conflicts or disagreements; we agree more often than not.)

This privileging of disagreement in attitude is suggested in his attempt to show that in typical and standard cases of moral dispute, reasons (which invoke and alter beliefs by describing the nature of the situation and the likely consequences of acting in certain ways) support ethical judgments "psychologically", not "logically". This in turn is anticipated in the following points made early in the development of his theory. So, I will draw upon and elucidate those points as evidence for my suggestion that Stevenson privileges disagreement in attitude (and hence persuasive methods of settling it), and that he does not provide argument for giving more weight to this kind of disagreement rather than disagreement in belief. The pattern of my argument in this chapter is this: in the absence of an argument to the contrary and given the complexity of the notion of "meaning", the alternative of privileging disagreement in belief and hence rational methods of reaching agreement is left open and gains more force than Stevenson's emotivism is prepared to grant it. And this alternative becomes more compelling given the assumption (I believe, a true one) that agreement is more prominent in moral discourse than disagreement.

"It is disagreement in attitude," says Stevenson, "which imposes a characteristic type or organization on the beliefs that may serve indirectly to resolve it, that chiefly distinguishes ethical issues from those of pure science." (13. See also p. 17, where he says, "Agreement and disagreement in attitude are so characteristic of ethics that their presence is felt even when judgments are relatively isolated, and do not lead to any overt discussion.") Although disagreement in attitude may

itself be guided in its development and resolution by beliefs, the selection, examination, and development of beliefs proceed according to a "characteristic type or organization" which disagreement in attitude imposes on beliefs. Attitudes are directed toward certain objects or situations, beliefs about which are "preparatory to guiding or redirecting attitudes." (13.) But the nature of attitudes is a guide for isolating those beliefs whose validation or refutation may serve directly or indirectly to resolve the disagreement in attitude. Of course, whether they do serve to alter attitudes and resolve the dispute is a question which need not concern us. The important point is that, according to Stevenson, in an ethical dispute, "Disagreement in attitude is the factor which gives the argument its fundamental unity and motivation." (14.)

It is not only in determining (i) what beliefs are relevant (the "scope" of the problem), but also in determining (ii) when the argument will terminate (the "conditions for resolution" of the problem), that disagreement in attitude is "fundamental" to or "characteristic" of an ethical dispute. In the context of the example of two men who disagree as to whether it is better to provide hospital facilities for the poor or to support universities with an available fund, Stevenson says, concerning (i), that "only those beliefs [about, e.g., the present state of the poor and the financial state of the universities] which are likely to have a bearing on either party's attitudes will be à propos. Any others, however interesting they may be in themselves, will be foreign to the ethical point in question." (14.) Concerning (ii), he adds, "If the men come to agree in belief about all the factual matters they have considered, and if they continue to have divergent aims in

spite of this—one still favoring the hospitals and the other the
universities—they will still have an ethical issue that is unresolved."
(14.) The dispute, as an <u>ethical</u> dispute, will be directed by
disagreement in attitude and will persist until the disagreement in
attitude comes to an end, whether or not all relevant beliefs are
brought to convergence. (14.) The typically, peculiarly,
characteristically, or distinctively ethical (or in general,
"evaluative") use of language is one which is geared to expressing and
evoking attitudes. "Moral judgments", says Stevenson,

> are concerned with *recommending* something for
> approval or disapproval; and this involves something
> more than a disinterested description, or a cold
> debate about whether it is already approved, or when
> it spontaneously will be. That a moralist is often a
> reformer is scarcely an accident. His judgments
> plead and advise, and open the way to counteradvice.
> In this way moral judgments go beyond cognition,
> speaking to the conative-affective nature of men.
> (13.)

This is why reasons are only indirectly conducive to agreement in
attitude or ethical agreement. They do not necessarily lead to ethical
agreement; they have no "logical compulsion". (30.)

The distinction between the two sorts of disagreement presupposes
a parallel distinction between attitudes and beliefs. In making this
distinction, Stevenson warns us against "hypostatizing" attitudes and
beliefs as parts of a mental furniture, as products of distinct
"faculties" each performing its own separate function. Beliefs and
attitudes should instead be taken as different types of disposition to
action, because they are normally distinguished for "practical"
purposes. (7.) To show that we do make such a distinction between
attitudes and beliefs, Stevenson uses the example of a chess-player who

uses an opening which appears very weak; it is not clear to an onlooker whether he does so because he <u>believes</u> that the opening moves are strong, or because (in order to test a novice, out of charity to him, or in order to try out a new strategy, and the like) he does not <u>want</u> to use a strong opening. With a constant belief about the opening, he may make the moves or not in accordance with his changing desire, aim or want. Alternatively, his belief about the strength of the moves may change without his aim changing at all. (7.) Thus, what makes us distinguish attitudes from beliefs is that in practice they can vary independently; one may be constant while the other changes. In other words, if there were no (logical) distinction between belief and attitude, every change (or opposition) in one would be accompanied by or involve a change (or opposition) in the other. But this does not always occur, though such cases are, as was pointed out, numerous. Therefore, attitude and belief must be distinguished in the way just noted.

The distinction between belief and attitude seems plausible in itself. But in spite of the fact that Stevenson stresses that beliefs have no less substantial role in ethics than attitudes have (24), nevertheless the distinction between attitude and belief (plausible in itself) sets the stage for his later assignment (I will argue, an implausible one) of "emotive meaning" as distinctive of "ethical" (or "evaluative") terms and a corresponding "persuasive method" as a special method for reaching agreement in distinctively "ethical" discourse. (See in particular p. 96 and its footnote.) This point will be clarified in the next section, though it seems already evident in part in Stevenson's suggestion that disagreement in attitude is, in ethical discourse, prior to disagreement in belief. In the rest of this chapter Stevenson's

account of the core meaning of ethical terms and "persuasive definition", and the role of reasoning in ethical discourse will respectively be discussed in an attempt to show that his analysis (i) introduces normative or practical considerations in the form of a claim about the distinctive core of meaning or the typical use of ethical terms or the characteristic or special way in which reasons support ethical judgments, considerations which, given Stevenson's insistence that emotivism is a "neutral" theory, make his position paradoxical, and (ii) abstracts from the totality of a linguistic situation and underrates its universalistic tendencies.

Before ending this section, however, it should be emphasized that the normative or practical element in question does not seem to me to consist merely in drawing attention to certain aspects of normative discourse which may have been neglected or underrated by others; it is not merely an antidote for possible exclusions or misunderstandings, though this is no doubt part of Stevenson's purpose. Nor does Stevenson's desire for agreement (which seems to be presupposed and reflected in his attempt to provide a theoretical account for the resolution of ethical disagreements) exhaust the normative dimension of his allegedly "neutral" analysis of ethical discourse. For agreement and disagreement (the latter not in Stevenson's sense which includes efforts to change attitudes, but simply a difference among them) may be between beliefs or between attitudes, and both agreement in belief and in attitude seem to be significant parts of moral discourse. If my interpretation of the text is correct, the normative consideration introduced by Stevenson is stronger than these points suggest; it consists in giving more weight to disagreement in attitude than in

belief, and since part of Stevenson's conception of disagreement in attitude involves a motive or effort to alter or redirect attitudes, not merely an opposition or difference among them, the normative preoccupation seems also reflected in Stevenson's contention that "persuasive" methods of reaching agreement play a primary role in the distinctively ethical discourse. So, I will proceed first with the discussion of his general account of meaning as well as his analysis of the specifically ethical meaning. The question of ethical methodology will be taken up in the subsequent sections in connection with persuasive definitions and methods and the relation between reasons and ethical judgments.

2.2. Meaning and Its Two Kinds

Concerning the question of meaning, Stevenson says that any definition of an ethical term in terms of some scientific or descriptive term "will lead to only a half-picture, at best, of the situations in which the ethical terms are actually used." (20.) The suggestion here is that an account of the "meaning" of an ethical term must ultimately conform to its actual "use", and that the actual use of ethical terms is not (or, as the passage seems to suggest, never) scientific or purely descriptive. But Stevenson goes on to say that although it may be possible in some cases to say that ethical terms are used exclusively in a scientific way, i.e. purely descriptively, in most cases ethical terms perform an additional, "extrascientific" function, and the presence of the latter cases forces us to recognize a sort of meaning for ethical

terms different from their descriptive meaning. "It may well be", he says, "that at *some* times *all* of the effective meaning of ethical terms is scientific, and that at *all* times *some* of it is; but there remains multitudes of familiar cases in which ethical terms are used in a way that is *not exclusively* scientific, and we must recognize a meaning which suits them to their additional function." (20.)

Before proceeding with the question of meaning, a comment may help put Stevenson's theory in perspective and anticipate some future points of importance. Whether it is necessary to recognize a (kind of) meaning for each (kind of) function or use of ethical term, and whether doing so contributes at all to the clarification of the nature of ethical discourse is not self-evident and needs to be supported by argument. I do not find such an argument in Stevenson. But the terminology of "meaning" would help if ethical terms had a "characteristic" property in virtue of which they could perform certain functions or could be used for certain purposes more effectively than for others. And this indeed is Stevenson's contention, as we shall see. For instance, if instead of the imperative "Do X" we say "I want you to do X", we may or may not produce the desired effect of obedience in the hearer. One might argue that this is because "I want you to do X" may be taken as a mere description of the speaker's want, communicated for conveying information rather than for securing obedience. Hence in such a situation, though the term "want" may be used for the purpose of ordering or commanding, it would be nevertheless misleading or open to misinterpretation, precisely because, the argument goes, its descriptive meaning is more closely attached to it than any other kind of meaning it might have, whatever that might be. (Note that whether or not all

ethical judgments can, even roughly, be assimilated to imperatives is a

question whose answer does not affect the point at issue here. It

remains that some of them can be so assimilated, for they are used at

times, analogously to imperatives, to encourage and alter people's aims

and conduct, rather than simply describing them. The problem is that,

as we shall see, Stevenson wants to hold that moral judgments typically

perform a role more analogous to this role than to any other. (See p.

21.)) The terminology of "meaning" (or "standard" or "characteristic"

use) may be helpful here. But whether it is helpful in connection with

the so-called ethical terms such as "cruel" and "brave" is questionable.

For it is not a foregone conclusion that such words have a

characteristic property in virtue of which some of their uses are more

closely attached to them than others. Given the assumption that ethical

terms are a special kind of terms and have a characteristic use,

logically distinct from the use of descriptive terms, it then becomes

possible to formulate an "additional" kind of meaning for ethical terms.

But that assumption must be grounded in the study of the general

tendencies as well as the actual function of language. However, as we

shall see, such a study allows neither for kinds of terms nor for kinds

of meaning. We may, it seems, classify kinds of use (see below, Chapter

5), but these are too diverse to be reducible to two broad classes of

"descriptive" and "ethical" (and perhaps even less so to "descriptive"

and "evaluative" categories). I will argue later that the diversity of

use renders the evaluative/ descriptive dichotomy (and the parallel

dichotomy between ethical and scientific discourses) dubious, in the

sense that in the absence of reasons to the contrary, the boundary

between these two kinds of discourse becomes more fluid than it has been usually taken to be.

Stevenson's distinction between two kinds or species or specific senses of meaning goes along with his contention that one of them, namely "emotive meaning", is primary and the other, "descriptive meaning", is secondary to ethical discourse. Of course, being very cautious, Stevenson is at pains to leave as much room for descriptive meaning or for the related factor of reasoning in ethics as possible. But for him descriptive meaning and, as we shall see in a later section, reasoning, are not in the end the primary, "logical" determinants of moral discourse, for, as we saw in the previous section, it is disagreement in <u>attitude</u> that gives to an ethical dispute its fundamental scope and conditions of resolution. It is time to examine in some detail Stevenson's views about meaning and its kinds and their place in the analysis of the language of morals. For as I have suggested his account of meaning is intimately related to his analysis of ethical discourse, and the problems which may be discerned in the latter can be traced to those in the former.

The meaning (in the generic sense) of a sign, says Stevenson, cannot be equated with "that *to which* people *refer* when they use the sign", because some words have no referent, but have a kind of meaning. Thus "hurrah" has "emotive meaning", but no referent in the sense of an "object" or a "quality" belonging to an object. (42.) The notion of a "referent" is very important indeed and deserves particular attention (see below, Chapter 5). When we come to examine that notion and the related one of "ostensive definitions", it will become evident that there is a sense, and not an uncommon one, in which "hurrah" and other

similar "emotive words" do have an "object" as "referent". If someone pronounces this word when there is no thing, state of affairs, or subject-matter to attend to or be concerned about, an "object" which would complete the specific context for the utterance of the word—in other words, if someone uses the word arbitrarily—then our natural response is a puzzlement expressed in such questions as, e.g., "What are you so enthusiastic about?" Likewise, if someone said "Ouch!" in a situation where it was not clear from the context why he did so, we might reasonably ask "What caused you pain?" or some such question. It is not stretching ordinary language to say that the object of "Hurrah!" is that toward which people respond with enthusiasm, and the object of "Ouch!" is that which causes a pain marked perhaps by the special quality of sharpness and suddenness. The problem with the "reference theory" of meaning is not that there may be nothing to which people "refer" when they use a certain sign, but that, as Stevenson himself remarks, the theory "identifies" meaning with referent. A sign may have a referent, without that referent exhausting the sign's meaning, or without the sign's meaning being located in its referent. Later I will argue that on a broad conception of "referent" and a complex notion of "meaning", all linguistic signs can be said to have a referent.

An alternative theory of meaning, the "psychological theory", defines the meaning of a sign as "the psychological reactions of those who use the sign." (42.) The problem with this theory, says Stevenson, is that it does not satisfy one of the requirements which must be satisfied by any definition (however rough and approximate) of meaning: despite some variations which would account for the complexities of practice or usage and avoid the fallacious view according to which

meaning can be identified with subsistent entities of some sort, meaning must be relatively constant across the contexts in which the sign is used. (43.) Psychological reactions, however, are not constant, they vary not only in intensity but also in kind. To use Stevenson's own example, "hurrah" may express vigorous emotions in a football game, but very faint ones in other contexts. And "Connecticut" may cause one kind of psychological reaction in one who assorts mail, the reaction expressed in "a toss of the hand", but a quite different psychological reaction, "a train of reminiscences", in an old resident. This is not to say that signs have meaning independently of the psychological habits of those who use them. Even those words which are neither vague nor ambiguous, e.g. the proper term "Asia", must be attended in their use by characteristic psychological responses, or else they would become "devoid of any referent, no more interesting than any other complex noise." (43.) But although psychological states do attend the use of a sign, they are by no means constant across various uses. And this is enough to refute the psychological theory of meaning.

It is perhaps worth noting that it is not self-evident that psychological states must necessarily accompany every use of a particular sign. The assumption that they must has been questioned by Wittgenstein on the ground that it is not even clear what "psychological" reactions could possibly mean. (This I take to be one of the themes of Wittgenstein's *The Blue Book*.) Stevenson's "dispositional" analysis of meaning, and my later development of it in Chapter 5, will, I think, throw some light on this question. For the moment, Stevenson's objection to the psychological account of meaning remains in full force. For it could be said, against that account, that even if all uses of a

sign were attended by psychological states, those states would be too variable to match the relative constancy of meaning.

Meaning might be defined not in terms of the immediate psychological responses produced by the use of a sign, but in terms of psychological "associations". But until it is clarified which associations are in question in a living context, the definition is bound to remain unsatisfactory. If it is said that the associations in question are those which attend the word out of its living context, two problems arise, according to Stevenson. First, this would reduce, particularly in connection with "emotive terms", the "emotive meaning" of many words to a minimum or a slight level. Secondly, it seems to suggest that the associations in question contribute to the emotional tone of the living situations in a purely "additive" manner, as "extra units" of emotion. But this is not true; introspection at any rate does not reveal units of emotion. (44.)

Meaning-situations, holds Stevenson, are complicated causal situations; they involve many variables each of which plays a part in the functioning of the whole situation. Moreover, as we saw, compared to the psychological reactions to or associations of a sign, its meaning is relatively unchanging, and yet that meaning must be defined in terms of psychological states. For these reasons, Stevenson says that in dealing with meaning-situations it is best to employ the term "disposition". (46.) To say that a sign (or an object in general) has a disposition to so-and-so is to refer to a causal relationship between factors each of which contributes to the effect or response produced by the sign. Thus even though the effect in question may not be constant, the disposition may be relatively fixed. The change in the effect may

in such cases be attributed to the "attendant circumstances" (46-7) or the "stimulus" (48-9). For example, water has a disposition to boil (response) at a temperature of 100 C. (stimulus) at the general pressure range at sea level (attendant circumstances). It may still "have" this disposition at a given time in an unrealized form, as it were, even if the stimulus and response do not occur at that time. A fixed disposition is present as long as the correlation between stimulus and response varies in a lawful and predictable manner with variations in the attendant circumstances.

Stevenson also speaks of the "basis" of a disposition as one of the factors in the above causal situation. The basis of a disposition is "The most immediate set of factors, varying when and only when the disposition is said to vary." (50.) The basis of the disposition of water to boil is the nature of the atoms constituting water molecules and the way these atoms are structurally related within a molecule of water. The basis of coffee's disposition as a stimulant is the amount of caffeine present in it. Note that although the notion of disposition is explained in terms of a correlation between stimulus, response, attendant circumstances, and basis, the basis may remain unknown without the term "disposition" losing its explanatory usefulness. (50.) This fact, however, should not lead us to identify the basis of a disposition with the disposition itself. For even if a great deal is known about the basis, knowing about the disposition depends heavily on knowing about its correlation with the stimulus, response, and attendant circumstances. (51-2.)

Applying these remarks to "meaning", Stevenson defines it as follows. "[From the point of view of the hearer of a sign,] the meaning

of a sign, in the psychological sense required, is not some specific psychological process that attends the sign at any one time. It is a dispositional property of the sign, where the response, varying with varying attendant circumstances, consists of psychological processes in a hearer, and where the stimulus is his hearing the sign." (54.) The sign's meaning then can be said to be relatively constant, while its psychological effects vary, though the test for determining whether or not meaning has changed is not precise. This test is imprecise, says Stevenson, especially in connection with "emotive", in contrast with "descriptive" meaning. I will return to this last point later.

It is important to note that in defining meaning the disposition in question is ascribed not to the people who may be affected by the sign, but to the sign itself. Although the alternative of saying that people have a disposition to respond to a sign may be left open, it is, Stevenson believes, more consistent with the ordinary usage to ascribe the disposition to the sign: "We usually ascribe meaning to a sign, not a person." (56.) One might object that though we usually ascribe meaning to signs, the "basis" of meaning is in the people who use the sign. To this Stevenson's reply is in effect that we may locate meaning or disposition in any one factor among the several factors involved in a sign-situation, as long as we can infer from the correlation of the factors involved to the presence of some relatively constant basis. The relative indifference as to where we locate the basis is, nevertheless, not reflected clearly in language. We do say "So-and-so has a meaning or means such-and-such", implying thereby that the meaning is located in the sign, though, of course, such phrases are elliptical and must often be expanded as "This sign has a meaning for people of [the] sort K." (56.)

For a sign has a certain meaning for certain people, but not necessarily for others. Again, a sign may be said to cease to have a certain meaning if people stop using it in the way they do or being affected by it in the way they are. I think these points are strong enough to justify Stevenson's preference for locating meaning or disposition in signs rather than in people.

Before proceeding, however, I wish to introduce two points. The first one concerns "psychological processes" which was a phrase used by Stevenson in defining meaning. It is not always clear what these processes refer to and whether they do in fact occur in all cases. The word "fire" may bring to my mind the "image" of red flames rising in all directions. This may be called a psychological response. But alternatively, on hearing the word (or more obviously on hearing the fire-alarm) I may simply get up and rush out of the building. Can this sort of response be held to consist of a "psychological process"? Using the terms "psychological process" does not seem very helpful in such a case, though it may not be strictly implausible either. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the response in a sign-situation may be any one of a variety of things: feelings, desires, wishes, and "images", whether or not of the things desired, decisions and choices (all of which may be called "psychological processes"), but also actions and the use of other signs (properly speaking, "symbols", for as we shall see only "symbols" may be said to be "used" or "produced", as opposed to "consumed" or "received"). Any one of these dispositions may happen to be the dominant one in a particular situation. I suggest, therefore, that we abandon the terminology of "psychological processes" and define meaning (from the viewpoint of the hearer or reader), as a (second-order)

dispositional property of the sign to activate or produce a (first-order) disposition in the hearer—a disposition, that is, to feel, to desire, to "imagine", to act, and to use (if the hearer is a "symbol" using entity) certain other symbols. (A first-order disposition is the response of a second-order disposition. Cf. p. 53.) And we can introduce the point of view of the speaker by adding what Stevenson calls a "passive disposition" to our definition, i.e., a dispositional property of the sign to be used for the purpose of expressing a feeling, a desire and an image. (Note that from the speaker's viewpoint, we seem in all cases to need a psychological state, though expressing that state is a productive act, an expression of freedom. Note also that the term "expression" here is to be interpreted in a general sense, not the narrow sense of "effusion" or the "pouring out" or "venting" of emotions, what Stevenson calls "interjections".)

The second point, already referred to at the beginning of this section, concerns the terminology of "meaning". This terminology may be appropriate when applied to "things" or "events" which merely happen, but in speaking of language (or in general, "symbolic activities") the terminology of "use" is more accurate, for it saves us from some confusions which the indiscriminate use of "meaning"-terminology may cause. Some of Stevenson's own remarks already point in this direction. One of them we saw at the beginning of the present section. By way of developing the notion of meaning, Stevenson points out that not all words are meaningful, whereas "all words, even nonsense syllables, may be ascribed some disposition to affect the hearer." Therefore, Stevenson concludes, "A sign's disposition to affect a hearer is to be called a "meaning" (for the not unconventional sense in question) only if it has

been caused by, and would not have developed without, an elaborate
process of conditioning which has attended the sign's use in
communication." (57.)

Here too meaning is characterized in terms of "use". Of course,
as this passage shows meaning cannot be exhausted in terms merely of use;
"an elaborate process of conditioning" is also required. Meaning is
assigned to recognized grammatical parts of "language", not to "natural
expressions" such as laughters, groans, sighs, coughs, and the like.
(The locution "natural" is confusing here, for it can be applied to
ordinary language too, and it is precisely to distinguish laughters,
groans, etc. from language that Stevenson seems to be using the terms
"natural expressions". I will say more about this in Chapter 5.) This
is because, says Stevenson, the sense in which "natural expressions" too
may be said to mean something is too sweeping to account for the fact
that they do not depend for their disposition to affect the hearer or to
be produced by the speaker on "an elaborate process of conditioning".
(In connection with language and other symbolic activities, it is
preferable to speak of "conventions" instead of "conditioning", so that
we capture the spontaneity and freedom involved in the production of a
symbol. Stevenson too speaks of "conventions" in relation to
"interjections" and language in general. It is true, of course, that
conditioning is necessary both for the creation of conventions and for
passing them on from one generation to another.) In short, meaning in
the proper sense in which it is applicable only to a language (or in
general a symbolic activity) and not to "natural expressions", is
defined, by Stevenson himself, as conventional use.

This is a point of some importance, for it shows that Stevenson's account of the logic of ethical discourse is not implausible because it confuses meaning with use, as MacIntyre, e.g., has suggested (above, p. 37), but rather because it is, as I will be arguing, based on an *a priori* and indefensible separation of ethical and scientific discourses. It is this separation that is responsible for the paradox of which I have spoken, i.e., the paradox of introducing evaluative considerations, through the use of such sentences as the "typical" or "characteristic" function of ethical terms, into what is purported to be a purely descriptive or second order statement about the status of moral language. And it is the same separation which has led to an account of evaluative language which, by focussing on the expression and evocation of attitudes, tends to underrate an important aspect of the totality of a linguistic situation, namely, its descriptive aspect and the related principle of universalizability. Indeed, Stevenson's emphasis on use, as was illustrated above, can be taken as a positive step against the hard and fast distinction between two broad classes of evaluative and descriptive meaning or discourse, a step which he is not prepared to take. The use-theory of meaning, in virtue of underlining the diversity of use, demonstrates a tendency toward the abandonment of the evaluative/ descriptive dichotomy (though it may not logically entail it), in the sense that unless good reasons were offered, our explanation would be simpler if we gave up that dichotomy.

That "natural expressions" do not depend on conventions for their use is also the reason why we cannot "communicate" anything by using them; at least, one does not communicate when one uses them in the usual, "natural" way in which they function. It is, for instance,

possible to (use a) cough effectively when one does not have a peculiar sense of irritation in the throat or chest, but, somewhat "conventionally", in order to warn someone else of one's unexpected presence. Likewise, one may laugh and produce the desired effect in the hearer without really being in the mental condition of cheerfulness and pleasure which usually attends laughter, in order to mean something else, e.g., to ridicule someone. These, however, would be unusual "uses" of "natural expressions". Indeed, as such they are open to misinterpretation and confusion. Their standard occurrences are those which do not depend for their effect on any convention and with which we do not ordinarily communicate. Needless to say, language is not always used for the purpose of communication, it is, as we shall see, primarily an instrument of "thought". But it remains that communication is not "external" to language, for the obvious reason that we could not <u>learn</u> a language (not perhaps even a "private" language) if we did not communicate with others (or with ourselves, as evidenced in the frequency of the practice of "talking to oneself").

Even "interjections" must be distinguished from "natural expressions", according to Stevenson. "People groan in all languages, so to speak, but say "ouch" only in English." (39.) Interjections like "ouch" have, unlike "natural expressions", a place in a language through habits of emotional expression in living contexts, such that if they are divorced from these habits, a feeling of incongruity inevitably results. It is difficult to swear at someone while using an agreeable and mild tone of voice, because the emotional habits which accompany abusive words are incompatible with those which normally find expression in an agreeable tone of voice. This may partly have to do with phonetic

factors. Words of abuse, by virtue of their pure sound, may have a
physiological fitness for venting certain emotions but not others. It
remains, however, that the incongruity in question is due mainly to
expressive habits or conventions that have grown up in the history of the
use of language.

In sum, Stevenson's distinction between linguistic signs and the
so-called "natural expressions" helps bring out the priority of "use"-
terminology to "meaning"-terminology by characterizing meaning in terms
of conventional use. I now turn to the discussion of Stevenson's
distinction between "descriptive meaning" and "emotive meaning" as two
species of the genus "meaning". It is to be stressed that what has been
said so far about the priority of "use" to "meaning" and the suggestion
that we need a dispositional definition of meaning which would do more
justice to the variety and complexity of the kinds of response (from the
standpoint of the hearer) and stimulus (from the standpoint of the
speaker) obtaining in a sign-situation, already place the distinction
between two broad species of meaning in an unfavorable light. This is
so because use-terminology or the characterization of meaning partly in
terms of a diversity of dispositions to use certain symbols, as distinct
from being merely affected by them, serves to underline the multiplicity
of uses. Meaning-terminology, on the other hand, manifests a tendency
toward a distinction between broad classes or kinds of meaning, one of
which would allegedly be ethical, another scientific or descriptive. Of
course, it may not follow logically that once we have adopted the
terminology of use as distinct from meaning, the distinction between the
broad species of meaning breaks down. There would, however, be a
tendency in this direction, in the sense that in the absence of reasons

to the contrary, more simplicity of explanation would be achieved by abandoning the distinction in question than by preserving it.

But this should not prevent us from a more detailed understanding of Stevenson's theory of meaning and its place in his analysis of ethical discourse. For, as we shall see, Stevenson's discovery of the peculiar way in which these two kinds of meaning may interact in the process of "persuasive definition" is his most valuable contribution to the philosophical analysis of language. Not the language of "morals", however, or even "evaluative" language in general, but one of the ways in which language in general is used. It is the language of "propaganda" (which, I venture to say, is the reflection of a level of perception and thought lower than the truly moral) that Stevenson seems to be concerned with. And, I argue, that the language of "propaganda" (what is sometimes called "rhetorics") is what emotivism falls back on because of the (unjustified) presumption that ethical discourse is logically distinct from scientific discourse.

"Emotive meaning", says Stevenson, is "a meaning in which the response (from the hearer's point of view) or the stimulus (from the speaker's point of view) is a range of emotions." (59.) He goes on to suggest that "emotion" be replaced by "feeling or attitude", and makes a distinction between "feeling" and "attitude". "Feeling", says Stevenson, designates an "affective state that reveals its full nature to immediate introspection, without use of induction." (60.) An attitude, on the other hand, is a "complicated conjunction of dispositional properties ... marked by stimuli and responses which relate to hindering or assisting whatever it is that is called the "object" of the attitude." (60.) (Note that in the above definition the attitudes expressed and evoked by

a sign are no longer characterized vaguely as "psychological processes",
but simply as dispositions. And this is consonant with the improvement
I tried to make above in Stevenson's generic definition of meaning.)
Moreover, according to Stevenson, feelings may be regarded as different
"introspective manifestations" of an attitude. An attitude, then, is a
disposition to <u>feel</u> in a certain way on the one hand, and to <u>act</u> in a
"hindering or assisting" manner toward the object of the attitude on the
other. (See also p. 90.) Note also that emotive meaning is defined as
a disposition of a sign to express <u>and</u> to evoke attitudes or feelings.
The conjunction of expression and evocation is important because it
takes into account the point of view of both the speaker and the hearer.
The emotive meaning of a sign depends not only on the attitudes it is
conventionally used to express, but also on the hearer's habitual
responses to the use of the sign. And this is no less true of "private"
uses of signs, i.e., where the speaker and hearer are one and the same
person.1

     "Descriptive meaning" is the other species of the genus
"meaning", according to Stevenson. It is defined as a sign's
"disposition to produce *cognitive* mental processes, where "cognitive" is
to be taken as a general term designating such specific kinds of mental
activity as believing, thinking, supposing, presuming, and so on." (62.)
What exactly is the nature of these cognitive mental processes?
Stevenson holds that neither "imagery" nor a particular feeling of
tension perhaps resulting from expectation is in itself adequate for
characterizing what is involved in cognitive mental processes, because
there is no single, fixed introspective experience attending the same
thought or belief. These introspective states must in turn be taken to

be "varying manifestations of a constant disposition to action." (63.)
I think this characterization of cognitive mental processes primarily in
terms of action reveals a "behavioristic" bias in Stevenson's account.
But before following this comment we need to attend to Stevenson's own
reservations.

He discerns three main difficulties in his account of cognitive
mental processes, and by implication, in his notion of descriptive
meaning. (1) It is too wide, for it does not specify the range over
which those actions may vary while the disposition is constant. To take
his example of acting on the belief that it is raining, the response to
the sign-situation, the action, may include any number of possible
actions: putting on a rain-coat; reaching for an umbrella; picking up a
book and reading instead of going out; closing the windows; and so on.
(2) It is difficult to specify the range over which the stimulus of such
a disposition may vary in order for the disposition to count as
"cognitive". The list of the stimuli which prompt action upon the belief
that it is raining is an indefinitely extensive one: not only the sight
or sound of rain (these being, more properly speaking, the causes of the
belief itself rather than the stimuli for its manifestation in form of
action), but the sight of the rain-coat or the umbrella, being reminded
that the windows are open, and so on. It is difficult to say which of
these factors, singly or combined, operate as the stimulus for the
disposition to count as cognitive. (3) Apart from the problem that any
disposition may lead to many actions, not just one, there is the problem
that any given action may involve many dispositions, whether cognitive or
non-cognitive. In other words, the definition of a cognitive mental
process faces the problem that "No concrete action can be related

exclusively to one single belief; it must also be related to many *other* beliefs--usually a complicated system of them--and must be related to attitudes as well." (65.) Following the above example, putting on a rain-coat may be an action done not merely on the belief that it is raining, but also on the belief that it would keep one dry if one went out and on wanting to go out and to keep dry. A cognitive process is a disposition whose response is modified by the combined influence of other dispositions.

(1), (2), and (3) together bring out the difficulties in any general account of meaning which is "behavioristic". (See below, Chapter 5.) But (2) and (3), indeterminacies in the range of the stimuli and of the disposition itself, in particular serve to underline the difficulty facing "behaviorism" specifically to give a clear account of the distinction between the so-called "cognitive" and "non-cognitive" mental processes. In the light of Stevenson's definitions of emotive and descriptive meanings, (3) in particular shows how difficult it is in practice to distinguish these two kinds of meaning. For both are defined in terms of second order dispositions to produce a first order disposition to <u>action</u>, and except for the introspective element of feeling involved in emotive meaning, there seems to be nothing by which Stevenson's account could distinguish the two kinds of meaning. But surely there must be more involved in the distinction <u>if</u> belief and attitude are "logically", not merely "psychologically", distinct, if only beliefs can be true or false. (See 2.1. above.)

Stevenson is fully aware of the behavioristic bias of his analysis, as his discussion of the difficulties (1), (2), and (3) suggest. (See also p. 98.) But he hastens to add:

> In stressing dispositions to *action*, the present
> account is not presenting an uncompromising defense
> of behavioristic psychology. As has previously been
> remarked, there are certain immediate experiences
> which are involved, in various ways, in the
> processes to which the term "cognitive" is usually
> applied. An adequate study would undoubtedly have to
> take account of them—though it would seem that they
> too are only dispositionally present in cognition.
> The present emphasis on overt action is intended to
> supplement an introspective analysis, not to
> discredit it. (66.)

If, one may ask, the aim of the analysis is not to "discredit" the
introspective aspects of cognition, why is there an emphasis on overt
action? It does not seem that this emphasis amounts merely to pointing
out an aspect of what Stevenson calls "cognitive" processes which an
introspective account of these processes would rule out as
insignificant, for Stevenson is prepared to exclude images, attitudes,
and other introspective states from the domain of the so-called
"cognitive" processes. (In connection with "pictorial meaning", see
especially pp. 78f.) This exclusion is clearly related to Stevenson's
distinction between the two kinds of meaning. But that distinction
needs to be justified independently. I am arguing against that
distinction and suggesting that a dispositional analysis of meaning may
be undertaken such that by taking account of those introspective (or
what I shall later refer to as "ideational") aspects such as feelings,
desires, images, and the like, it would fit the complexity of a
"practical" sign-situation more adequately. (All sign-situations seem
practical in the broad sense of the word.)

Stevenson's remarks concerning linguistic rules might at first
glance seem promising as an account of a criterion for the distinction
between descriptive and emotive meanings. In conformity with the

generic definition of meaning, both descriptive and emotive meanings are viewed as dispositions caused by an elaborate process of conditioning attending the sign's use in communication. This, in accordance with what was said earlier, may be taken to mean roughly that both kinds of meaning are "conventional". But, says Stevenson, the difference is that the disposition to affect cognition (descriptive meaning) is "rendered fixed, at least to a considerable degree, by linguistic rules." (70.) Of course, to terms which have no previous use in communication and hence no descriptive meaning, we "assign" a descriptive meaning by employing linguistic devices such as definitions and stipulations which relate those terms to words which do have a rule-governed use. Note that descriptive meaning is required to be fixed "to a considerable degree". This leaves some degree of vagueness for this kind of meaning, but the importance of rules is that they provide a more precise test for determining when a sign's meaning has changed, to what extent its descriptive meaning is vague or its cognitive disposition alters. This possibility, however, seems to be excluded for emotive meaning. (69-71.) For Stevenson, emotive meaning, insofar as it is changeable at all, seems to be changeable only "by the use of a compensating tone of voice, or by the alternation of laudatory and derogatory terms." (78.) I infer from Stevenson's distinction between emotive and descriptive meanings and the fact that he discusses linguistic rules in connection exclusively with descriptive meanings that he is not willing to allow any relation between emotive meaning and rules.

Precision in descriptive meaning, according to Stevenson, may be achieved by the use of rules as "fixed procedures" or routines for going from one symbol to another much in the same way as a child by acquiring

a mechanical ability to apply such rules as "100 comes next after 99",

"10 times 10 is 100", "1000 divided by 10 is 100", and the like, comes

to attain a more precise grasp of "larger numbers". Here, of course,

the full understanding of the meaning of a symbol (in this example, a

particular number) depends on some knowledge of other symbols plus the

rules whose mechanical application is part of the conditioning process

which leads one to react "more constantly" to any one of the symbols.

(68.) Thus any rough meanings which may be known from the beginning are

rendered more fixed by means of these rules; the rules do not suffice to

establish a meaning from the beginning. (68-9.)

Even with such logical connectives as "and" and "or", suggests

Stevenson, the acquisition of meaning goes beyond employment of

linguistic rules by relating symbols to nonlinguistic cues of various

sorts. "A child who is told to bring either this *or* that is frowned

upon when he brings neither and praised when he brings one. The frowns

and praises are parts of the nonlinguistic circumstances that help to

give "or" its meaning; and it is not easy to see, for the psychological

sense of "meaning" that is here in question, how they or their

equivalent could be dispensed with." (69. n.24.) In such cases as

these, what is necessary for the application of rules is not only some

understanding of other symbols (in the example these might be such words

as "bring", etc.) but also nonlinguistic phenomena ("frowns" and

"praises"). As we shall see later, the "referential" aspect of most

abstract symbols (of which "and" and "or" are examples) can be very

complex and at first glance very difficult to determine. (See below,

Chapter 5.) But that complexity does not entail the lack of a

referential aspect. It remains, however, that in the absence of rules

for connecting it to other symbols (linguistic or not) a symbol cannot
be said to have a more or less fixed (descriptive) meaning; it can at
best <u>suggest</u> something. Nor would there be, without rules, a precise
test for determining when the meaning of a symbol has changed. (69-70.)
In this way, then, there is a close connection between descriptive
meaning and rules; emotive meaning, on the other hand, is not governed
by rules.

Stevenson's remarks concerning rules hold considerable insight.
Much of what will be said in Chapter 5 about the nature of language as a
symbolic system and the dimensions of a total linguistic situation are
already anticipated in his remarks. Notwithstanding this point, the
distinction between emotive and descriptive meanings needs independent
argument and support. Once we realize that feeling and attitude are
<u>aspects</u> or dimensions of meaning in a tightly structured linguistic
situation, we begin to see that the distinction between two species of
meaning is artificial, and that linguistic rules cut across both
"cognitive" and "non-cognitive" aspects of meaning.

We saw above that Stevenson's own remarks about the difficulties
of a behavioristic account of descriptive meaning (and, as I suggested,
meaning in general) discloses the possibility that emotive and
descriptive meanings (if there are such things at all) are intimately
tied together in practice. Interestingly enough, this point does not
escape Stevenson himself. Some of his remarks show that he is intensely
aware of the problems involved in overemphasizing the distinction
between the two kinds of meaning. The question of the relation between
these kinds of meaning, he says, "is an endlessly complicated matter"

(75) and lies for the most part in "a little-charted region of psychology" (76).

> Emotive and descriptive meanings, both in their
> origin and practical operation, stand in extremely
> close relationship. They are distinguishable *aspects*
> of a total situation, not "parts" of it that can be
> studied in isolation. For varying purposes, the one
> or the other may require a preponderance of
> theoretical *attention*. And in practice it is often
> necessary, lest general intelligibility be sacrificed
> to an overwhelmimg body of details, to pretend that
> they are more neatly separable than they are. Such a
> compromise must often be made in the analysis of
> ethics that is to follow, and as a compromise it will
> serve its purpose. (76.)

I suggest that the theoretical separation of the two meanings and the granting of a primary role to emotive meaning in ethical discourse are motivated by Stevenson's basic assumption that ethical discourse is distinct from and independent of scientific discourse by virtue of a peculiar logic. Since for this assumption no independent argument has been offered, even if we accept the distinction between the two kinds of meaning, it does not follow that what is primary in ethical discourse is emotive meaning. But even Stevenson's distinction between the two kinds of meaning becomes dubious in the light of the above considerations.

Earlier Stevenson points out that "most common words do in fact have a meaning of both sorts", and that these meanings grow not in isolation but through "a continual interplay". (71.) And he goes on to say, "It may happen--to take only a simple and not wholly typical instance--that a word acquires a laudatory emotive meaning partly because it refers *via* its descriptive meaning, to something which people favor." (71.) Here the suggestion is that although the laudatory emotive meaning of a term may be acquired in virtue of its reference to some fact or object, nevertheless this is not a "wholly typical" case.

Stevenson suggests that the typical cases in the history of a word's usage are those in which the acquisition of emotive meaning is not <u>entirely</u> dependent on and is only <u>partly</u> explainable by descriptive meaning. Such cases involve a reciprocal interaction between the two kinds of meaning. This interaction in turn may involve holding the emotive meaning constant and altering the descriptive meaning of the term, or *vice versa*. Although descriptive and emotive meanings grow together, they may not always <u>change</u> together: "Either may come to vary while the other remains roughly constant." (72.) For example, "democracy" (a much abused term these days) may preserve its descriptive meaning, while through people's change of attitude toward some of the practices or concepts involved, the word may come to acquire less laudatory emotive meaning. On the other hand, its laudatory emotive meaning may be kept unchanged while the term comes to refer only to certain practices or aspects of practices which were formerly involved in the referent of the term and thus acquires a novel descriptive meaning. (Something like the latter kind of transmutation seems to be what has come about in most of our modern so-called democratic (or "free") institutions. The majority does not possess the "original" freedom to determine its own destiny, and is yet regarded free as long as it abides by the rules of the bureaucratic machinery.) More about this will be said when we come to examine Stevenson's notion of "persuasive definition".

There does seem to be a truth in his insistence that only a distinction between the two sorts of meaning would account for their unparallel changes, despite their common origin and growth. It is tempting, however, to conclude on the basis of this distinction that

there may be cases in which emotive meaning is realized independently of any descriptive element in the sign-situation. "Interjections", Stevenson would say, have a wholly independent emotive meaning (see above and pp. 72-3). But this, as I suggested earlier, seems untrue.

A second temptation is to regard the cases which are emotively active, i.e., where words are used not purely or almost purely descriptively but with a partly independent emotive meaning, as typically "moral" or "evaluative". In the next section I will suggest that, in the light of the above remarks, the cases where despite a common origin and growth the two sorts of meaning (are made to) change independently of one another represent only one kind of use made of language in general. It is perhaps focusing on very general words such as "good" and "ought" or even "culture" or "democracy" that in part motivates an analysis of the kind offered by Stevenson (and, as we shall see in the next chapter, by Hare), for it is such terms that lend themselves more easily to a treatment involving unparallel changes of two different kinds of meaning. Less general terms such as "promise", "loyalty", "coward", and the like are very difficult to treat that way; on the view I am defending, there is a necessary connection of some sort between emotive and descriptive meanings and, more often than not, a parallel (if any) change in them. If this is correct, it becomes as such irrelevant, for the purpose of the analysis of ethical language, whether a word or a particular use of a word or a sentence is classified as emotive or descriptive. It may be relevant to propaganda and rhetorics, but not to moral discourse.

I am not denying that there is an emotive aspect to the meaning of ethical language. (All discourse, indeed all symbolic activities

have an emotive dimension which, to use Stevenson's own phrase, "is largely a matter of degree." (282.)) But it does not follow from this admission that in ethical discourse this aspect is the dominant or the primary one. The assertion that it is, I would argue, reflects a practical or normative consideration. It is not, however, its being "practical" as such that is objectionable. Rather it is objectionable because seen against the claim that emotivism is an (even roughly) "neutral" analysis, it generates a paradox. The paradox involves claiming that the analysis of ethical language offered is a relatively "neutral" one, while at the same time regarding that analysis not simply as a discovery, but at least in part as an instance of "imparting" a distinctive ethical meaning by singling out certain aspects of a linguistic situation as more important than others for the analysis of the peculiarly ethical use of language. Again, it is not as such this act of singling out an aspect as more important that I am objecting to. (Otherwise, I would be indeed accusing him of what I will be doing myself in emphasizing the descriptive and universalizable aspects of a linguistic situation.) What I am criticizing Stevenson for is in part his lack of recognition that he is in fact doing so and his claim that he is offering a relatively neutral analysis. A total linguistic situation, we may note and Stevenson need not disagree, includes not merely feelings and attitudes, but also beliefs and images and the "objects" or "referents" of beliefs and attitudes, as well as other symbols. More importantly, it is privileging attitudes and feelings that is objectionable. It is objectionable because it underrates as part of the "logic" of ethical discourse many uses of language other than those which are primarily geared to expressing and influencing

attitudes, in particular those which are primarily descriptive of beliefs and universalizable. I suggest that more theorethical importance can be given to the latter uses, since a <u>greater</u> portion of moral discourse does seem <u>as a matter of actual practice</u> to concern rational methods of resolving <u>disagreements in belief</u> (the objects of belief being either external facts or, more essentially, people's feelings, desires, and interests, or both), as well as a greater amount of agreement than disagreement. I do not think this argument begs the question, though I admit that part of its force depends on the truth of the premises about the actual practice of moral discourse just mentioned. To <u>prove</u> that they are true is, I confess, beyond my ability and the scope of this thesis. I have offered examples (above, mainly pp. 13 and 28-30) which I think are typical of moral discourse. The rest of the force of my argument derives from the analysis of meaning, the analogy between the so-called descriptive and ethical terms, and the flexibility of reference as will be further developed in the course of the thesis, particularly in Chapter 5.

2.3. "Persuasive Definitions"

Common discourse is marked by persistent ambiguity and vagueness. The task of linguistic analysis of evaluative discourse is, for Stevenson, mainly to make the presence of ambiguity and vagueness evident, to disclose their source as well as their role in ordinary evaluative language. Ambiguity has to do with different, sharply distinguished senses in which a word can be used. The word "free",

e.g., may be ambiguous between "free from" and "free to". Some words, however, are more than ambiguous; they are vague. Although they may designate certain definite things in various contexts or cases, there are borderline cases where it is not clear whether or not some factors are to be included among the designata of the term. The meaning or sense of the term, therefore, changes with the context and the purposes for which the term is used; for these senses there is no established usage. "Red" is such a word. It is vague because "There is a certain region on the spectrum to which this term definitely refers, and another broader one to which it definitely does not refer; but between them there are near-orange hues which (in ordinary usage, as distinct from some technical use in science) people have neither decided to call "red" nor decided to call "not red"." (35.) "Red" is definitely not the same in meaning as "green", but it can without misusing language be used to refer to any shade of color between orange and purple, since common usage is flexible over the undecided areas.

Ethical terms, says Stevenson, are even more vague than terms like "red". They can be used for a variety of purposes and in a broad range of contexts. (See p. 208.) The term "good", for instance, may be used with a multiplicity of "descriptive" references such as "reliable", "compassionate", "open-minded", "clean", "humorous", "responsible", and what not. Indeed the term may at times be "thinned out to refer only to the attitudes of the speaker." (35.) In other words, the referent of "good" may be reduced to the mere belief about the favorable attitude of the speaker. In short, it is difficult to determine or specify the descriptive meaning of "good". Nor does "good" have any exact emotive synonym. Any suggested equivalent expression for "This is good" such

as, e.g., "Oh that you might approve of this as I do!" or "This is worthy of being approved" or "Hurrah for this!" can at best only approximate it in its emotive aspect. "Each term", says Stevenson, "bears the characteristic stamp of its emotional history." (82.)

The boundaries of the common usage (both in its descriptive and emotive aspects) of "good" are wide, and therefore many definitions of "good" are possible so long as common usage is our guide. But, according to Stevenson, ethical terms combine emotive and descriptive meanings, and definitions in ethics have a peculiar function. They do not merely "clarify common notions or make convenient abbreviations", as in science or logic, and are scarcely guided by purely descriptive interests. "Description", says Stevenson, "is usually a secondary consideration. Ethical definitions involve a wedding of descriptive and emotive meaning, and accordingly have a frequent use in redirecting and intensifying attitudes." (210.) This is why they are called "persuasive definitions". Stevenson offers the following "formal scheme" for the persuasive definitions of "good": ""This is good" has the meaning of "This has qualities or relations X, Y, Z ..." except that "good" has as well a laudatory emotive meaning which permits it to express the speaker's approval, and tends to evoke the approval of the hearer." (207.) As long as we remain within the boundaries of the common usage, boundaries which rule out certain descriptive meanings as "unnatural", any substitution for the variables in the above schema is likely to render a persuasive definition of "good"; it is likely to give emotive praise to what the descriptive components of the definition designate. (207-8, 218.)

It may be noted that "persuasive definitions" figure in the
second pattern of analysis of ethical terms offered by Stevenson, but
the first pattern of analysis according to which "This is good" means
roughly "I approve of this; do so as well" is held to be parallel to the
second pattern. (Cf., for example, p. 209.) For instead of saying "This
is good" means "This has qualities or relations X, Y, Z ... plus a
laudatory emotive meaning", one can say, in the first pattern manner,
"This is good" (thus actually expressing one's own approval and evoking
that of others), and add "because it has characteristics X, Y, Z ..."
(thus proceeding to give reasons for one's ethical judgement, reasons
which bring out the good-making characteristics of the referent of
"this"). (229ff.) However, the second pattern seems more helpful in
bringing out the interplay between the "emotive" and descriptive aspects
of ethical language, in particular its function to influence attitudes.
It is designed to clarify the methodological problems which arise due to
the vagueness, flexibility, and variety of descriptive meanings of
ethical terms referred to above. The first pattern, says Stevenson,
deals only with those cases where the descriptive meaning is limited to
the speaker's attitude of approval or disapproval. The second pattern,
on the other hand, adds descriptive meanings which have to do with the
qualities of the objects of approval or disapproval, and in this way it
accounts for the direction of the emotive influence. (206 & 227.) In
this section I will be focusing on the second pattern of analysis in an
attempt to advance a critique of that "emotive" or "directive" aspect
and its relation to the rest of ethical discourse as conceived by
Stevenson. However, the parallelism between the two patterns, pointed
out above, will enable us to support the conclusions reached here by

attending to the question of the relation of reasons to ethical
judgments in the next section.

As is evident, persuasive definitions (and persuasive statements
in general) combine descriptive and emotive meanings. A descriptive
component is necessary because without descriptive meaning to indicate
or designate something, emotive influence cannot be centered on
anything. (227.) In other words, persuasion would have no direction
without a descriptive element in the definition or statement. Of
course, one may persuade without strictly designating an object, but in
such cases the object must be tacitly recognized from the context. (227,
n.) On the other hand, an emotive component is necessary since the
prime goal of a persuasive statement is to express and influence
attitudes. (See below.)

It is important to keep the two components of persuasive
definitions apart, for these definitions serve the primary goal of
redirecting people's attitudes. This they do by keeping a term's
emotive meaning "substantially" constant, while altering its descriptive
meaning. (210.) Thus, to use one of Stevenson's examples, by changing
the descriptive meaning of a term such as "culture" and keeping its
laudatory emotive meaning unaltered, one may persuasively (re)define
that term. E.g., B may urge A who has used the term to refer to
subtlety and sophistication in thinking and historical and literary
knowledge, to use it instead to refer to a high level of imaginative
capacity, to sensibility and originality. (211.) Redefining "culture"
in terms of the latter set of qualities rather than the former redirects
A's attitude of admiration which is expressed in the use of this
"emotive term" from one set of descriptive characteristics to another.

The reason why "culture" lends itself to such a persuasive (re)definition is that it has a rich emotive meaning, that it also has a vague and flexible descriptive meaning, and that its emotive meaning is in part independent of its descriptive meaning. (212.)

Now emotive terms are not always defined persuasively. When the speaker's purpose is primarily to describe, he may "neutralize the effects of emotive meaning by intonation or explicit admonition", or alternatively "by balancing a particular laudatory term with a particular derogatory one." (245.) Again, a definition may serve a mainly descriptive purpose and effect when there is a background agreement on relevant evaluative matters. (212.) Or again, there are "emotively inactive" uses of ethical terms, as when "good" is used in the same sense as "effective" or "in accordance with social customs". (83-4.) In such cases we would be dealing with uses or definitions of ethical terms in which the emotive meaning is practically negligible; as such our definitions would be "detached" and would make way for a "detached" study of the sort undertaken in sciences and logic. According to Stevenson, the influence exerted by detached definitions is, unlike that of persuasive definitions, indirect. Moreover, this influence is limited to interests in knowledge. (282ff.) The influence exerted in ethical discourse, on the other hand, is frequently direct and is not limited in that way. In ethics, in Stevenson's view, we do not usually assume a background agreement in attitude; to resolve disagreements in attitude is the typical aim there, as we have seen. Nor do we first neutralize the emotive meaning (and thereby persuasively resolve the relevant disagreements in attitude) before proceeding with the definition of an ethical term. Ethical terms, Stevenson holds,

introduce peculiar linguistic and methodological problems. (206.) And
in ethical definitions, "description is usually a secondary
consideration." (210.)

It does not follow from the fact that sometimes ethical agreement
may be effected through the use of persuasive definitions that
persuasive definitions (or in general, persuasion) is the typical way of
directing or intensifying moral attitudes, as the points alluded to in
the above paragraph suggest. Persuasive methods, i.e. methods which go
beyond cognition or interest in "knowledge" or reasons are sometimes
used in ethics, but they are by no means characteristic of ethical
discourse. (I doubt even whether persuasive methods are characteristic
of art. Art is primarily interested in the cultivation of
"imagination", and to this extent there is, as Hare and others have
pointed out, a close relationship between art (that is, "true" art, not
mere amusement or excitement) and morals. But imagination is cultivated
in a much more complex manner than by persuasive means.) They may be
"essential" to propaganda, even if we exclude the usual negative
overtones of this term which suggest subversiveness and abuse, and take
the term to refer to those modes of discourse which exert a direct
influence upon attitudes and feelings by "suspending" the rational
aspects of language. Persuasive methods seem also to be used frequently
by "moralists", political and social reformers. But it is highly
doubtful whether they are characteristic of ethical discourse, for the
latter concerns many aspects of life. The fact, cited by Stevenson,
that Socrates in the *Republic* first "praises" justice in order to give
it the dignity of a laudatory emotive name before he defines it does not
by itself turn the *Republic* into an ethical document. In fact it does

not seem too far-fetched to say that insofar as this persuasive aspect of the dialogue is concerned, it may be assigned, as a plea for an aristocratic notion of justice, a position in the rank of propaganda.

I conclude that we could accept everything Stevenson says concerning persuasive definitions, and yet plausibly ask why persuasion is the primary function of ethical discourse. Stevenson does not answer this question satisfactorily. It is true that, as he remarks, "If we always inhibited any expression of enthusiasm, avoiding all strongly emotive words ... our emotional lives would derive so little exercise that life would be unbearable." (163.) But this would be irrelevant as a comment about the standard or characteristic force of moral or evaluative language, for expression (and evocation) of enthusiasm is not the main condition on which the force of moral or evaluative discourse depends. The truth of this statement may be gathered from our common experience, though further justification is needed on the basis of a more comprehensive analysis of a linguistic (or in general symbolic) situation, an analysis which will be undertaken in Chapter 5.

Stevenson would probably agree that in scientific discourse we portray mainly a _partiality_ for reason by bringing the cognitive potentials of our language to bear. But there is no reason to rule the same out of moral discourse, as Stevenson's analysis seems in effect to do, despite his attempts to account for the rational aspects of moral language. Nor is there any reason to fear that a partiality for reason will impoverish our emotional life. It would, if there were some necessary or intrinsic opposition between reason and passion, something in the nature of things which sets the two against one another. But reason may be interpreted as a disposition which helps discover and

harmonize desires and passions. As was mentioned earlier, rationality may be viewed as concern for facts, subjective or objective, and efforts to bring consistency to the judgments in which those facts figure.

In the next section I will discuss Stevenson's treatment of the role of reasons in ethical discourse. I will attempt to show that in this connection Stevenson's account reflects a bias analogous to the ones we saw in his giving priority to disagreement in attitude over disagreement in belief, emotive meaning over descriptive meaning, and persuasive definitions over detached definitions, in ethical as distinct from scientific discourse. This distinction, I will suggest, needs to be abandoned not only to avoid the paradox of which I have spoken, but also in the light of the partiality for reason and the related principle of universalizability which we do in fact manifest in moral discourse, but which Stevenson (and other non-cognitivists) fail to recognize in their theories. The recognition and application of that partiality are made possible through analogies I have referred to earlier and will explore further between scientific and ethical language and method, as well as the study of the nature of language as a symbolic system and the parallel study of the speech act theory. These will be undertaken and developed in the course of the following chapters.

2.4. The Relation between Reasons and Ethical Judgments

An ethical judgment may be construed as a series of symbols which are used in a complicated situation in which the so-called "cognitive" and "non-cognitive" dispositions stand in close relationship and

continual interplay with one another. According to Stevenson, reasons invoke and alter beliefs (cognitive dispositions) and as such can only bring about agreement in belief, only indirectly agreement in attitude or "ethical" agreement. Reasons are, of course, most called for when the other factors in the situation are not in themselves sufficient to bring about ethical agreement. When they are sufficient, e.g., when the hearer is habituated to the preponderantly emotive force of moral terms or holds the speaker in esteem or has latent attitudes which converge with those urged by the speaker—in such circumstances the mere use of an emotive term is likely to secure a decisive effect. (See 2.3. concerning the descriptive uses of emotive terms.) The situation is, however, often different: the emotive force of ethical judgments may be faced with resistance or counterinfluence, and then a dispute arises which may go beyond the emotive force of ethical terms to reasons which support or attack judgments. Reasons may then "serve to intensify and render more permanent the influence upon attitudes which emotive meaning can often do no more than begin." (113.) Thus reasons do in this way (indirectly) influence attitudes.

Whether reasons are true or false or whether they do in a particular circumstance turn out to be effective is beside the point. They may not in fact support or oppose a judgment if they are untrue or if they are true but the hearer does not change his beliefs in the light of them, or if he does but they fail to alter his attitude. Regardless of whether or not a factual statement is true or is accepted as a reason by the hearer, says Stevenson, it may be properly called a reason as long as the speaker finds it "likely to alter attitudes". (114.) Because in ethical discourse a reason needs only to be considered likely

to change attitudes in order to be a reason properly speaking, the relation between reasons and ethical judgments (which, as we saw, are, for Stevenson, geared mainly to expressing and evoking attitudes) turns out to be _primarily psychological, not logical_, except in two kinds of cases. Stevenson himself makes this point explicitly: "The reasons which support or attack an ethical judgment have previously been mentioned. Subject to some exceptions that will be noted as we proceed, they are related to the judgment psychologically rather than logically." (113.) The "exceptional" cases are as follows.

(1) Where reasons serve to point out formal consistencies or inconsistencies between the descriptive components of one or a number of ethical judgments, ethical judgments could be said to be supported by reasons logically. "In general", says Stevenson, "ethical statements, like all others that have at least _some_ descriptive meaning, are amenable to the usual applications of formal logic." (116.) In such cases, according to Stevenson, care must be taken, however, that stating reasons is not eclipsed by an attempt to change attitudes, an attempt which may, due to the presence of emotive meaning even in a language which is not strongly emotive, accompany reasons in subtle and complicated ways. It is, in other words, important in such cases that rational methods are not a mask for persuasive ones. (2) Where appeal is made to induction from more specific ethical judgments to general ones and ethical agreement becomes simply a matter of agreement in belief, again the relation between reasons and ethical judgments is logical. Thus one may support a very general ethical judgment "All X's are immoral" by arguing from specific judgments such as "X1 is immoral", "X2 is immoral", and so on to the immorality of all X's. (117-8.) Were

these specific judgments significantly challenged, however, the inductive argument might fail to be sufficient for bringing about ethical agreement; the latter would have to be reached in ways other than by inductive reasoning.

In a great many cases, however, reasons support ethical judgments psychologically. These, Stevenson believes, are typically "practical" cases; only where reasons direct attitudes psychologically can they be properly called "practical" reasons. For him, such cases are central to ethical discourse. This is suggested not only in the extent of the space devoted to the discussion of such cases, but in the fact that the above two situations where ethical judgments are related to reasons logically are treated as "exceptions". Here too Stevenson is very explicit: cases (1) and (2), he says, "present *exceptions* to the rough but useful rule mentioned previously--the rule that ethical judgments are supported or attacked by reasons related to them psychologically, rather than logically." (115.) Let us briefly consider the allegedly central cases.

One such kind of situation involves (3) pointing out the nature or consequences of that which is judged. Reasons are here effective depending on the hearer's attitude to the nature of the object as revealed by the speaker or to its consequences. The consequences, of course, may be more or less remote, and more or less general. Another is (4) that of pointing out motives for doing something. This may be said to be a case of indirectly pointing out the "nature" of the action judged, for motives are grounds of action and may help to predict or explain subsequent actions or the consequences of the original action. Again, (5) where reasons suggest indirect consequences of doing

something, they support ethical judgments psychologically. The judgment "You have an obligation to participate in our anti-war demonstration" may be supported by a reason such as: "If you don't, you cannot wish others to make the same decision". In this example, the consequences suggested may include setting a precedent for others, developing habits of non-cooperation, and the like. The force of reasons might in this type of cases be explained in terms of the Kantian categorical imperative. By virtue of containing the term "obligation", the above judgment may exert an influence which extends to the class of all anti-war activities of the kind in question. This it does in virtue of a tacit claim that a "latent" principle is generally acceptable. But, according to Stevenson, to "will" that this principle be generally acceptable (or in Kant's own terminology, to will that the maxim becomes a universal law) is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the ethical judgment to have the force that it has. It is not necessary because there is no logical inconsistency in making the judgment and failing to will the principle. It is not sufficient because: (i) being latent, the principle is not precise enough; (ii) the same action may fall under more than one principle; (iii) the principle willed universal by one person may not be so willed by another. (i) and (ii) may be solved by articulating the principle (except where principles come into conflict). (iii) remains, however, the most serious problem and as such undermines the sufficiency condition, for, Stevenson insists, people "disagree in attitude about classes of actions no less than about particular ones, exerting different influences." (122.) Because of these problems, Stevenson thinks his own explanation of the force of reasons in this type of cases is superior to the Kantian explanation.

(6) Beliefs about the origin of the attitude to which the speaker's ethical judgment testifies are often important in determining whether or not the attitude in question will continue. Pointing out that origin, however, can support the speaker's judgment only indirectly. (7) When the effect of reasons depends on the hearer's respect for the authority appealed to, they support the judgment psychologically. (An authority may be some one person, a group of people, a text, or even a tradition or convention.) The same is true (8) when reasons appeal to the consequences of a judgment's influence. As a result, either the original judgment will be withdrawn or further consequences will be explored in an attempt to reach ethical agreement. And lastly, there are cases (9) where the hearer "is less concerned with resolving disagreement in attitude than with temporarily evading the force of a disconcerting influence, or altering the means by which it is exerted." (127.) Appeal to the speaker's sense of equality ("You are making an exception in your own case") or attempts to show that the hearer "sees through" what motivates the speaker's judgment are other forms of counterinfluence. Their impact depends not on the logical force of reasons, but on the extent to which the speaker is anxious to escape the psychological pressure imposed by others in the form of humiliation or embarrassment.

Typically when reasons support or attack an "ethical" judgment, there is no exhaustive method by which they may become convincing to all people involved, no matter how many the reasons and how (deductively or inductively) valid the arguments based on them; even if all parties involved grant the reasons offered, ethical agreement as such is by no means guaranteed. (135-6.) For it is influence upon attitudes which,

according to Stevenson, determines the fate of ethical situations. This means that even the greatest extent of factual knowledge may "leave ethical disagreement permanently unresolved." (137.) For instance, the scarcity of resources may lead to ethical disagreement about who is entitled to a disputed resource or territory. Such a disagreement need not be permanently unresolved. For if the parties to the dispute use all the rational means at their disposal for resolving the disagreement, i.e., empirical (contemporary as well as historical) and formal reasons, and are still left with a disagreement in attitude, then they may resort to non-rational methods in the hope of resolving disagreements. In typically ethical disputes rational methods are, according to Stevenson, insufficient for effecting a resolution. (See above, 2.1, and below, for further discussion of this point.)

Except for the emphasis placed on non-rational methods of reaching agreement in the typically ethical situations, the above remarks need not be questioned. We may also accept Stevenson's caution that not all disagreement in attitude may be rooted in disagreement in belief; some disagreements in attitude seem rooted in temperamental differences and cannot be reconciled unless the latter are reconciled. (136.) As he points out, the statement "All disagreement in attitude is rooted in disagreement in belief" is at best an assumption which can be neither confirmed nor discarded. (136-7.) The reason for this is that a proof or a refutation of the statement would depend on experimenting "in a world where all men had the last word of factual knowledge, and observe[d] whether any disagreement in attitude remained." (137.) Such an experiment, however, is impossible, for science cannot even pretend to be able to know all the facts, or even the "essential" ones. (137.)

Scientific statements are statements of probabilities with more or less degree of certainty. In suggesting that not all disagreements in attitude may be rooted in disagreement in belief, therefore, Stevenson is right.

To be sure, according to Stevenson, in some cases rational methods would bring about a change and hence agreement in attitude by changing beliefs. But cases of this sort are not what Stevenson regards as the typically ethical cases; qua ethical a case is never resolved merely on the basis of agreement in belief. Of course, Stevenson does not make the statement that all ethical disagreements depend on non-rational methods for their settlement—not in so many words, at any rate. There are cases of the kinds (1) and (2) outlined above where there is a logical relation between reasons and ethical judgments. But, as we saw, these are regarded as "exceptions". At another point, Stevenson writes: "With increased descriptive meaning, ethical judgments are open to more direct use of empirical and logical methods .... We shall see, however, that this is a wholly unimportant matter, without any results upon the possibility or impossibility of reaching ethical agreement." (209.) Given these statements and what was said above concerning the priority of disagreement in attitude to disagreement in belief (see also 2.1.), of emotive meaning to descriptive meaning (2.2.), and of persuasive definition to other types of definition (2.3.) in ethical discourse, I am fairly sure that we can attribute to Stevenson the view that rational methods are inadequate in the typically ethical situations. However, it is when we ask why it is the characteristic of ethical disagreement as such that it would typically persist unless appeal is made to non-rational methods which serve to

resolve disagreement in attitude that we begin to see that Stevenson's argument proves too much.

Stevenson may be wrong in distinguishing ethical discourse from scientific discourse on the premise that disagreements in attitude are central in the former but not in the latter. On the contrary, I suggest, these discourses are different in that while ethical discourse mainly attempts to harmonize attitudes through harmonizing what Stevenson would call "beliefs about attitudes" (or what may be designated more generally as beliefs about "mental facts") science is mainly concerned with bringing concord to our beliefs about "physical facts". In other words, ethical discourse does not involve chiefly attempts to <u>influence attitudes</u>; like scientific discourse, it seems concerned mainly with <u>differences of belief</u>. The difference between the kinds of facts involved in these discourses may also explain the comparative lack of consensus in ethical discourse as distinct from science; whereas beliefs in science are often agreed upon by scientists and informed people, serious disagreements are by no means scarce in morals. But this is a question of <u>degrees</u> and by itself, or in the absence of further reasons, does not justify a logical or formal separation of ethical and scientific discourses. In other words, there is nothing in principle to prevent us from the acceptance and application of scientific rationality as the necessary and sufficient condition of moral discourse. The logical separation of ethical from scientific discourse is the correlative of the view that non-rational methods of reaching agreement are primary in ethics, a view that renders ethical consensus open to psychological manipulation, rather than

autonomous and rational will-formation. But no good argument is offered for that view.

From the standpoint of my thesis, on the other hand, both science and ethical discourse have to deal with uncertainties and neither of them has a monopoly on truth. There is no reason why the cases outlined under (3)-(9) above (perhaps with the exclusion of (7) which concerns appeal to authority and is essentially non-rational) should be so sharply separated from those under (1) and (2). Indeed, as I suggested earlier, typically moral situations are those in which agreement may be reached (rationally) through the description of beliefs, in particular beliefs about attitudes or motives, as well as their likely consequences. From the standpoint of a scientific ethics, given all the available facts about motives and desires, their origin, the nature and likely consequences of the situation, as well as universalizable principles and valid reasoning in the light of these principles, any residue of disagreement in attitude or attempts to influence attitudes directly becomes relatively insignificant and consensus becomes a rational and autonomous one. At least, there is nothing in principle that would prove otherwise, and much that could support this claim. What will be said by way of developing the analogies between scientific and ethical languages, will hopefully make that claim good.

(In one respect at least, Stevenson's view is, I think, clearly false. He says: "It is even possible that increased knowledge would be hostile to ethical agreement." (137.) I will not make too much of the point. But briefly, his argument here seems to be based on an appeal to the authority of Plato's *Republic* where rulers are allowed to lie to the citizens for the sake of public good. Presumably the rulers <u>know</u> the

best interests of the citizens <u>better</u> than the citizens themselves do.
This assumption, however, is far from true. It seems not increased
knowledge that is hostile to ethical agreement but, at any rate as far
as politics is concerned, those very lies which the public are sometimes
told and habituated to accept and assent to without adequate freedom
either to discover or exchange a requisite degree of knowledge of facts.
Elsewhere, Stevenson makes a similar and highly questionable assertion
that not all the detailed reasons available have to be given to the
public by their "moral authorities" or leaders because "these reasons
are often too complicated for the followers to understand, and they have
been content to be followers rather than leaders, partly on that
account." (164.) This is to underestimate the rational capacity of the
people and to overestimate that of their leaders. Moreover, it gives no
explanation for the alleged lack of understanding; it merely exploits it
against those who follow authorities. This explanation is absent in
Stevenson's account because the cause seems to be confused with the
effect: it may well be that the lack of understanding on the part of the
followers is caused partly by the condition of being a follower, not
vice versa. Perhaps we should only say this. Stevenson's position here
simply assumes naively that moral thinking and action takes place in the
context of an open society where efforts to influence attitudes are for
the most part uncoercive or open to critical scrutiny.)

Stevenson is keenly aware of the fact that his whole account of
ethical language rests on the separation of scientific and ethical
methodologies, i.e. the ways in which inferences are made from reasons
to judgments. He seems to concur with Hume that even scientific
induction reflects our psychological habits which originate in

"temperament or training". (172.) But he insists that even if Hume is right about scientific methodology, the similarity between ethics and science "must not blind us to points of difference." (173.) These points, according to Stevenson, are mainly two. (i) "It is possible helpfully to classify inductive inferences with regard to the logical forms of the statements used, and thus to handle them quite generally, without going into elaborate details of their subject matter." (173.) This, he thinks, is not possible in ethics. (ii) Although inductive conclusions reflect decisions, these can be "shared by all others who trouble to understand them." But "In ethics a parallel situation cannot be hoped for, since temperamental differences in people's aspirations might lead to insoluble controversies about the methods proposed." (173.)

(i) seems to argue for a <u>comparative</u> lack of generality in the analysis of ethical discourse, not for a distinction in logical form between scientific and ethical inferences; merely <u>calling</u> the latter "evaluative" as opposed to "inductive" does not establish a logical distinction between scientific and ethical methods, in the same way as if I call the pen with which I write "*ruchka*" instead of "pen", I cannot therefore be taken to speak of a Russian pen, not an English one. Hence, the burden of convincing us that the comparative lack of generality in ethical discourse makes for a formal or logical difference is on Stevenson. This is so especially in the light of the analogies one may draw between scientific and ethical languages or methods, e.g., between, on the one hand, the fact that scientific hypotheses are agreed upon to the extent which they pass the test of observation and, on the other, that those moral rules or principles are commonly regarded as

best guides for thinking and action which accommodate as many exceptions as possible, exceptions which are brought forth by increasing experience. As we proceed, I will say more about the similarities between scientific and ethical discourses which serve to bring home the suggestion that these discourses are formally the same.

Stevenson's second proposed difference between ethics and science, (ii), asserts only what is in question and I have raised points in the course of this chapter which challenge the view that ethical disputes are rationally irresolvable or, as MacIntyre has tried to show in *After Virtue*, "interminable". Of course, we still have to establish the ground for the partiality for reason which motivates the objections raised above. Such a ground will be explored further through a study of language as a symbolic activity and a parallel study of the speech act theory. (See below, Chapter 5.) The main conclusions of these investigations have already been outlined. The suggestion that moral and scientific discourses may be logically inseparable, and that the differences in the degree of consensus achieved in them may have to do with the difference between the facts with which they are primarily concerned, help, I hope, to show further that if there still seems to be some radical difference between sciences and morals, it may be due to a relative lack of information about the facts which may be relevant in espousing ethical views. There is much to commend this statement of Dewey (which Stevenson quotes in disapproval) that: "Moral science is not something with a separate province. It is physical, biological and historic knowledge placed in a human context where it will illuminate and guide the activities of men." (*Human Nature and Conduct*, 296.)

Chapter 3

Hare: Universal Prescriptivism

In this chapter I wish to examine another version of the general thesis that judgments of value are independent of statements of fact or statements about the logical character or function of value-words and sentences. This doctrine is clearly put forward by Hare in *Freedom and Reason* (Chapter 10) and as I hope to show in the course of the present chapter, not only does it involve a rigid separation of ethical from scientific discourse, but gives rise to the paradox of introducing normative considerations into an allegedly analytic or neutral (second order) statement about the primary function of ethical language. As in the previous chapter, I wish to argue that there is nothing wrong with mixing first order and second order ethical statements, that it is indeed inevitable, and that therefore it is Hare's separation of them which, on the one hand, generates the paradox and, on the other, leads, insofar as the prescriptivistic aspect of Hare's analysis of moral language is concerned (not its universalistic aspect), to stressing or privileging those aspects of a total linguistic situation which he does.

Moreover, I will argue that since the privilege is given to choice and decision (to act), there is a tendency in Hare's account, in its prescriptive aspect, to make consensus an accidental matter of harmony among individual choices and actions. This accounts for a tension present in Hare's analysis of moral language between the two

101

doctrines of prescriptivism and universalizability (or between "freedom" and "reason"). These are not, of course, _logically_ incompatible; there are indeed prescriptive and descriptive aspects in all linguistic situations. Nevertheless, as a doctrine about the _distinctive_ logic of moral discourse, i.e., as distinct from scientific discourse, prescriptivism seems to point in a different direction from that of universalizability, i.e., toward individual choice and action, rather than away from (though, of course, not necessarily against) these and toward a global community of thinking and acting individuals where equal weight is given to the relevant interests of all. However, I will leave this latter point for a later occasion (Chapter 4) because, as we shall see, it is related to Mackie's objection to universalization as part of the logic of ethical discourse, and I want to discuss (and defend) universalization separately from the discussion (and criticism) of prescriptivism. The moral of my argument will be that if a normative consideration is, as was mentioned, indispensable in the analysis of moral language or for that matter any inquiry, and if moral discourse is cognitively rooted and has universalistic tendencies, then, unless we dogmatically insist on the non-cognitive aspects of moral language in the face of its actual and possible function, the analogies between the language and method of science and morals (which will be further elucidated) provide reason to believe that a proper analysis of moral discourse should bring out a major concern for facts (mental as well as physical) and for universalizability of our moral judgments, rather than their prescriptivity.

Hare maintains that moral and non-moral value judgments typically contain two different, but closely related and indeed logically

equivalent, uses of such words as "ought", "right", "good", and the like. Since it is with the "logic" of moral as distinct from factual language that Hare seems to be primarily concerned, most of what he says about moral language he applies, in much the same way as Stevenson, equally to non-moral evaluative language, and *vice versa*. Thus except for occasional specifications, "moral" and "evaluative" may be taken as interchangeable and the analysis he offers to be applicable to both moral and non-moral evaluative discourse. (See *The Language of Morals*, 3. In what follows I will refer to this work as *LM*, and unless otherwise mentioned all the references to Hare's views will be from this book. The other major work of Hare discussed in this chapter is *Freedom and Reason* for which I will use the abbreviation *FR*.) As was suggested in the previous chapter (especially 2.3), my own view is that ethical and aesthetic judgments are indeed logically the same, but their logic is <u>not</u> distinct from that of scientific discourse. The differences between science, ethics, and aesthetics are in their contents, not their logical forms. What is emphasized in science are physical facts, in ethics mental facts of attitudes as well as imagination, and in art imagination and the perception of fictional states of affairs. "Freedom" is the prime impulse of these discourses and universality is what they all aspire to. But these points need not concern us any further here. It suffices to say that we are mainly concerned with moral language.

According to Hare, as we shall see, when we make a moral judgment we do something very special and different from making a factual assertion: not only do we "invoke" a <u>principle</u> of some sort, but also we attempt to guide <u>action</u> and/or <u>choice</u>. Actions are the best test of

one's moral principles and the function of moral principles and the judgments in which they are embedded is to guide conduct in the sense that when faced with choices or decisions between alternative courses of action, they assist in answering the question "What shall I do?" (*LM*, 1.) "Moral language belongs to the genus 'prescriptive language'." (2.) Likewise, non-moral value judgments "embody" standards or principles for choosing between certain alternative things. Hare says that "the language of non-moral value-judgments" is "a kind of prescriptive language". (2.) It is for this reason that in order to clarify the language in which the problems of conduct are raised, Hare sets out first to examine "the logical behaviour" of prescriptive language in its simplest form, i.e., imperative sentences. And he thinks that the logic of evaluative language is analyzable in terms of universal imperatives containing "ought".

3.1. Imperatives

Hare starts with drawing a distinction between "statements" and "commands". The word "statement" is meant "to cover whatever is expressed by typical indicative sentences, if there be such." (*LM*, 4.) Typical or ordinary indicatives are such sentences as "You are going to shut the door." The term "command", on the other hand, is used "to cover all these sorts of thing that sentences in the imperative mood express." (4.) "These sorts of thing" may include not only orders, as in "Shut the door", but also pieces of advice, requests, suggestions, instructions, and the like. The difference between statements and

commands is not merely a difference in the grammatical form of the sentences expressing statements and those expressing commands, i.e. not simply a difference between indicative and imperative moods, but also between the <u>meaning</u> these forms convey, for they say different things about a subject matter. "An indicative sentence is used for telling someone that something is the case; an imperative is not--it is used for telling someone to make something the case." (5.) Thus "Shut the door" and "You are going to shut the door" are both about "your shutting the door", but whereas the former is used to tell someone <u>to</u> shut the door, the latter is used to tell someone <u>that</u> he is going to shut the door. According to Hare, they may be analyzed respectively as: "Your shutting the door in the immediate future, please" and "Your shutting the door in the immediate future, yes." (17ff.) The difference between a command and a statement with the same subject-matter (or "phrastic") would be the difference between what is involved in affirming or assenting to them; it would be a difference between the functions performed by the words "yes" (used for both affirmation and assent) on the one hand, and "please" (used for the purpose of affirmation by the speaker) or "Let me do so-and-so" or an expression of "resolve", but not prediction, such as "I will do so-and-so" (used for assenting by the hearer) on the other.

To reduce imperatives to indicatives, says Hare, leads to the paradox that "Shut the door" and "Do not shut the door" would not be "contradictory". If all "Shut the door" expressed were the statement "I want you to shut the door", then if X said "Shut the door" and Y said (to the same person) "Do not shut the door", X and Y would not be contradicting one another, but merely stating their different wishes. (It is, I think, better to use the term "conflicting" instead of

"contradictory" for two conflicting "illocutionary speech acts" or utterances in general, and reserve the term "contradictory" for specifically "descriptive" utterances. This would indeed be more compatible with Hare's purpose here, though, as we shall see, the distinction between contradiction and conflict or that between descriptive and imperative utterances cannot be made so sharp as Hare would like it to be.) Since "Shut the door" and "Do not shut the door" are about the hearer's "shutting the door" and not about X's and Y's states of mind, the exhaustive analysis of these sentences respectively as "I want you to shut the door" and "I do not want you to shut the door" is misleading, according to Hare. Imperatives have a bearing on decisions to act; they are not reports (ignoring the slight difference between reporting and stating) of introspective states. (5-7.)

Nor do (singular) imperatives merely express attitudes of approval or disapproval. To think they do, says Hare, is harmless on the colloquial level, "though it tells us little". Nevertheless, it is philosophically misleading, since we do not "confirm" expressions of approval or disapproval by examining the speaker's mental state. (10.) Nor do universal imperatives do this, for if we said "One ought not to tell a lie" (this Hare takes to be logically equivalent to a universal imperative) expresses the attitude or the thought that one should never tell a lie, we would not have said anything which would make the imperative more intelligible. In fact, says Hare,

> Sentences containing the word 'approve' are so
> difficult of analysis that it seems perverse to use
> this notion to explain the meaning of moral judgments
> which we learn to make years before we learn the word
> 'approve'; and similarly, it would be perverse to
> explain the meaning of the imperative mood in terms
> of wishing or any other feeling or attitude, for we

> learn how to respond to and use commands long before
> we learn the comparatively complex notion of 'wish',
> 'desire', 'aversion', &c. (12.)

Again, it is philosophically wrong, though on the colloquial level

harmless, to say that the function of commands is to <u>influence</u>, induce,

or persuade someone to do something. Influence on attitudes may or may

not result from a command. If the command is successful, it will indeed

secure a certain response from the hearer. But this particular response

is not <u>the purpose or function</u> of the command. The function of a

command is merely to <u>tell</u> someone to do something, not to <u>get</u> (or try to

get) him to do it in the sense of causally affecting him. (13ff.)

In order to evaluate Hare's criticisms of the analyses of

imperatives as indicatives or as expressions of and/or influence upon

attitudes, I will use J.L. Austin's distinction between "performative"

and "descriptive" (or more generally, "constative") utterances.

Performatives are those type of utterances where "the issuing of

the utterance is the performing of an action--it is not normally

thought of as just saying something. (*How to do things with Words*, 6-

7.) Thus "I will" as uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony or

"I bet ..." uttered in the appropriate circumstances is a performative,

for uttering it is not the same as describing any action or state of

mind, but itself doing something: marrying or betting. (*Ibid.*, 5-6.)

Other examples of performatives are apologizing, thanking, and, of

course, "imperatives"--ordering, permitting, demanding, requesting,

entreating, suggesting, recommending, warning, and even expressing a

condition or concession and definition. (*Ibid.*, 76-7.)

Now Austin points out that the same utterance may be sometimes a

performative and sometimes a descriptive. "I approve" is one such

utterance (other examples are "I am sorry", "I blame". See *ibid.*,

Lecture VII). It "may have the performative force of giving approval

or it may have a descriptive meaning: 'I favour this'." (78.) In other

words, "I approve" operates in an ambivalent way, sometimes describing

the speaker's state of mind, sometimes explicitly performing an act—

approving. A slight change of phrase from "I approve" to "I approve of

... " may be important to show whether it is one or the other that is

being done by the utterance. But this test is not really rigorous

enough, says Austin. (*Ibid.*, pp. 84 & 87.) (Austin offers four other

tests for "pure" performatives, not all of which can in all cases be

successfully implemented: (i) it makes no sense to ask "Does he really

...?"; (ii) one could not be doing the act without uttering the

performative, e.g., approving without saying "I approve"; (iii) one

could do it deliberately or willingly; (iv) what one says cannot be

literally false, but only involves "infelicity" or "unhappiness".

(*Ibid.*, 79-80.) These tests need not concern us here. It is to be

noted, however, that Austin does not find any of these tests rigorous

enough; their lack of rigor leads ultimately to his substitution of the

"illocutionary"/ "perlocutionary" distinction for the performative/

constative.)

Given Austin's remarks, Hare's point might now be interpreted as

suggesting that it is due to the ambivalence of such phrases as "I

approve of ..." that one might be misled into concluding that

imperatives may be analyzed in terms of descriptions of the speaker's

attitude or belief. But, as we saw above, Hare rejects even the

analysis of imperatives in terms of expression and evocation of the

attitude of approval or disapproval (as distinct from its description).

As far as "expression" of attitudes is concerned, Hare's ground for this rejection is that such an analysis does not make the function of an imperative any more intelligible than the imperative itself does.

Now, leaving the "evocative" aspect of imperatives aside for a moment, Hare makes it clear that he is in part attacking an aspect of Stevenson's theory. (11, n.) And indeed Stevenson can be interpreted as attempting such an analysis of imperatives, though his notion of "imperative" is perhaps narrower than Hare's (which, as we saw at the beginning of this section, includes not only orders, but also advice, suggestions, and the like) and Stevenson makes it clear that he does not believe moral judgments can be entirely assimilated to imperatives, that the latter function only as rough approximations to ethical judgments and are too crude to do what ethical language as such does, i.e., express (and influence) attitudes. (See above, 2.2.) Now, unlike Hare, I do not think that Stevenson's theory in its "expressive" aspect is "perverse" or philosophically wrong just because we do not "confirm" expressions of approval or disapproval by examining the speaker's mental states or because we learn the meaning of "approve", "desire", and the like after that of imperatives. Much of what philosophical analysis aims at and achieves is a clear articulation of what we do in everyday life and say in ordinary language. And it may well be that before we knew the meaning of complex notions such as "feeling" and "attitude" we "understood" and "responded" to imperatives in a different manner. "Confirmation" or "verification" is trickier; it is relevant in connection with scientific methods, though even there it does not seem to capture the nature of those methods precisely. In any case, it does not follow from the fact that we do not ordinarily confirm imperatives

by examining the speaker's attitudes that an analysis of them in terms of attitudes is philosophically erroneous. Such an analysis may not be instructive, in the sense that it fails to say something about imperatives in particular; the word "express" is ambiguous enough to enable us to say that all speech acts, whether in imperative mood or not, express mental states of certain kinds, e.g., belief, desire, feeling, and so on. But this shows that analysis in terms of the expression of attitudes fails to say something distinctive about imperatives, not that it is entirely uninstructive.

As I tried to argue in Chapter 2, the key problem with Stevenson's analysis of ethical language is that by giving a narrowly "behavioristic" account of attitudes, it fails to accomodate those uses of language which are not geared primarily to influence upon physical action, in particular universalizable statements of desires, interests, and ends. Hare is too quick to dispense with the terminology of attitudes, and he excludes "feelings" from the logic of moral discourse. Instead, in his account of ethical language he assigns a special place to guiding action and choice. (The question of "choice", of course, seems to be somewhat different from that of action; it concerns primarily a mental state and is particularly relevant to deliberation, as distinct from action.) I will say more about these latter points in the next section.

Notwithstanding Stevenson's reservations noted above about how successful imperatives can be in encouraging people or altering their attitudes and aims, I think that Hare's objection to the "evocative" aspect of the analysis of imperatives is more defensible than his objection to its "expressive" dimension. As we saw, he says that the

purpose of a command is not to secure a particular "effect" or to influence someone's attitude, but merely to tell someone to do something. In this connection again Austin's work comes to our assistance, in particular his distinction between "illocutionary" and "perlocutionary" acts. I wish to give a brief outline of this distinction as it appears in *How to do things with Words*, and then return to Hare.

Austin defines an "illocutionary" act as "performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something. (99-100.) An act of saying something or "uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference" (109) is a "locutionary" act in which a distinguishable, though not separable act of illocution is performed. (114.) Thus in performing the locutionary act of saying "Where are you going?" we would be performing the illocutionary act of asking a question. Informing, ordering, warning, and undertaking are other examples of illocutionary acts. A "perlocutionary" act is, on the other hand, "what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading." (109.) Austin speaks of perlocution and illocution (and of course, locution) as "different senses or dimensions of the 'use of a sentence' or of 'the use of language'" (109-10), despite the differences pointed out above and the fact that only locution and illocution could be said to be "conventional", not perlocution.

The latter point needs some clarification. As a dimension of the use of language, I suspect, a perlocutionary act could be said to be conventional, for conventional acts can be performed to bring off a perlocutionary effect. It is more precisely the perlocutionary effect

of an utterance that Austin seems to take to be non-conventional, because this effect is part of the "natural" world and could be brought about by non-conventional means, not only by conventional (whether or not linguistic) ones. (See *ibid.*, 119.) Thus whereas illocutionary acts (whether performed by saying something or non-linguistically, as in Austin's example of swinging a big stick by way of warning) are strictly speaking conventional or conventional for the purposes for which they are performed, perlocutionary acts <u>may</u> be, and perlocutionary effects <u>always</u> are, non-conventional. The distinction between perlocutionary and illocutionary acts is difficult to draw and usually appeal is made to examples. This is because the boundary between conventional and non-conventional acts is not clear. As Austin points out, "it is difficult to say where conventions begin and end." (*Ibid.*, 119.) It seems then that strictly speaking it is perlocutionary effects, which are intimately bound up with and are characteristic of perlocutionary acts, that are non-conventional. (See below, 5.2., for more about this.)

Now it is important to note that although illocutionary acts, unlike perlocutionary, are not themselves the producing of an effect, they <u>are</u>, for Austin, connected with the production of effects in the following senses (116ff). (1) A certain effect must be achieved by an illocutionary act if it is to be successfully or happily performed. Warning, e.g., needs to be heard and its meaning understood by the audience in order to achieve what it intends—to alert or alarm. The performance of an illocutionary act secures an "uptake". (2) An illocutionary act "takes effect" in the sense that it brings about changes in the normal course of events. Thus "defining X as Y" restricts the later admissible use of X. "Promising to do A" commits

me to do A. (Austin himself does not use the latter example. I am aware that the sense in which a promise may be said to "entail" a commitment is itself unclear and is indeed the center of much controversy, as we shall see in detail in the next chapter.) (3) An illocutionary act "invites" a conventional response, as distinct from bringing about or producing a certain effect or consequence. Thus an order invites obedience, and offering invites taking or accepting the offer. (This last sense, says Austin in a rather different context of comparing statements with other illocutionary acts, is not essential. (139.))

In the light of the above points, Hare's objection to the "evocative" aspect of the analysis of imperatives may be interpreted as implying that Stevenson places undue emphasis on perlocutionary uses of language, and that consequently his analysis fails to keep influencing attitudes separate from the senses in which, as was noted in the previous paragraph, uttering a meaningful sentence (i.e., with sense and reference) may be connected with the production of certain kinds of effect (securing an uptake, taking effect, and inviting a response). Of course, according to Stevenson, the function or force of ethical utterances (supposing again, for the sake of argument, that the analogy with imperatives is closer than Stevenson actually claims it to be) is not the <u>same</u> as their effect. Ethical utterances, we may remember, have a <u>disposition</u> to be used to express and influence attitudes in virtue of their emotive meaning. Their influence or effect on the hearer is not the same as that disposition. Nonetheless, they turn out to be, for Stevenson, primarily perlocutionary acts which are defined, though not exhaustively, by the actual achievement of

effects different from those in the restricted senses outlined above, pp. 112-13. To put this point in terms which would bring out the main theme of the previous chapter, Stevenson's analysis of moral language seems to have fastened upon a very limited kind of use made of language which is connected with producing effects different from the effects secured by all illocutionary acts.

Given the foregoing, Hare's objection to the "evocative" aspect of Stevenson's emotivism seems acceptable. What that objection does not touch, however, is the question whether ethical or evaluative utterances have any closer relation to commands or imperatives than to any other illocutionary act (including stating or describing). It is, in other words, at least *prima facie* as questionable to assimilate ethical utterances to (universal) "commands", as Hare does (notwithstanding the universalistic aspect of Hare's analysis), as it is to assimilate them to perlocutionary acts of persuading or influencing attitudes, as Stevenson seems to do. It seems not only the latter but also the former that introduces a normative or practical element into the analysis of moral judgments, in the sense that the claim that moral statements have the logical status of "commands" or "imperatives" is not self-evident, that it appears to consist partly of a first order or "practical" view about what is and what is not central or important in moral language. Of course, this is not in my view what has gone wrong in Hare's analysis of moral language, because I do not believe that first order and second order statements are either logically distinct or practically independent. The problem is rather that Hare believes they are and claims, consistently with that belief, that he is offering a purely second order statement about the the status of moral language.

(See *FR*, Ch. 10.) And yet, as we shall see further, by using such terms as the "primary" or "distinctive" meaning or use of ethical terms he appears to be inserting first order claims into what is allegedly a purely second order statement. This is the paradox of which I have spoken. And related to this problem is the fact that an analysis of moral language which centers on those utterances concerned primarily with choices and decisions to act seems no less unsatisfactory than one which centers on the expression and evocation of attitudes, for even though imperatives may be said to be primarily geared to guiding choice or action, it remains to be seen what this has to do with ethical discourse as such. In what follows I will attempt to make these claims good and to show that in spite of his "universalizability" thesis (which is the sunny side of his theory), Hare's prescriptivistic bias draws artificial and indefensible boundaries to the domain of ethical discourse.

Hare does not deny that there is some similarity between imperatives and statements. He says: "Commands, because they, like statements are essentially intended for answering questions asked by rational agents, are governed by logical rules just as statements are." (15-16.) We will see how this is so in a moment. It is important to note, however, that according to Hare there are important differences between the "logic" of imperatives (therefore, moral judgments) and that of statements which, I think, generates the difficulties referred to in the previous paragraph. That, as was noted above, imperatives are used to tell someone to make something the case, whereas indicatives are used to say that something is the case will amount to an essential logical or formal difference between imperatives and

statements in Hare's view. But first let us see how commands are
governed by logical rules, as he claims.

According to Hare, a piece of moral reasoning can be formulated
in the following manner:

(1) A universal imperative (major premise) of the form: "In all
situations of the kind X do Y."

(2) A factual indicative statement (minor premise) of the form: "This
situation is of the kind X."

(3) A singular imperative (conclusion) of the form: "Do Y."

To the important question why moral language could be assimilated to
imperatives, in the sense that imperatives bring out what is a primary
feature of moral language, I will return shortly. For the moment we are
concerned with the way in which commands are governed by logical rules.
The above piece of reasoning is a valid deductive inference, since it is
part of the meaning of "all" in the major premise that if one assented
to (1) and (2) and dissented from (3), one would have failed to
understand either the meaning of the word "all" or that of one of the
sentences. Another way of saying this is that all deductive inference
is analytic in character: "nothing can appear in the conclusion of a
valid deductive inference which is not, from their very meaning,
implicit in the conjunction of the premises." (32. See also p. 47.)
According to Hare, if the above argument is a valid one, then that a
singular imperative can be derived from a universal principle in
conjunction with an indicative statement shows that imperatives are
governed by logical rules just as indicatives are. (25-6.) In this way,
in Hare's view, there is a similarity between statements and
imperatives.

Now in an attempt to clarify the (logical) difference between statements and imperatives there are two theses which Hare sets out to refute: (I) that imperative conclusions may be derivable from purely indicative sentences, or that the principle of the above "practical" syllogism may be purely factual while its conclusion remains an imperative; (II) that imperative conclusions may be derivable from self-evident principles.

Against (II) Hare argues in the following way. If it is true that any singular imperative of the form "Do Y" can be deduced from a universal principle as the major premise in a deductive argument of the sort offered above, then if we are in doubt about assenting to the command "Do Y" or the answer to the question "Shall I do Y?", we must *eo ipso* be in doubt either about the principle or about the minor indicative statement. The latter alternative is ruled out *ex hypothesi*. Hence, since we are often in doubt whether or not to do Y, it follows that no general prescriptive principle can be self-evident. (39-41.) In an interesting passage which is important for our purposes Hare says:

> It is quite true that, when we have had experience of
> making such decisions [e.g., decisions about the
> individual cases of saying what is false], we may
> eventually find ourselves able to accept the general
> principle. But 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, by inference
> 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? (40.)

I will comment on this passage in a moment. Hare goes on to advance more arguments against the claim that principles of conduct may be self-evident by challenging certain interpretations of "self-evidence" on which that claim may rest. He argues that if a self-evident principle means one which it would be logically impossible or self-contradictory to reject, then such a principle would have to be "analytic" and hence without content. Principles of conduct are not purely formal or without content. On the other hand, if we take a principle of conduct to be self-evident in the sense that it would be psychologically impossible to reject, we would not be saying anything about the logical status of such a principle, we would be merely reporting a contingent fact "about the constitution of people's psyches" (44). If we happen not to be in doubt about the principle, this is because the principle is evident to us psychologically; and no imperative conclusion follows from a psychological fact. On a third interpretation, "self-evident" means "rational". A principle of conduct would, on this view, be self-evident because it is impossible for a rational person to reject it. According to Hare, this view should offer a criterion for deciding whether a person is rational or not. Such a criterion cannot be purely factual, since if it were, it could not render an imperative conclusion. The criterion in question, then, would be at least in part evaluative. But if "evaluative" questions have self-evident answers, the criterion becomes circular. Therefore, the criterion of rationality and hence the impossibility of rejecting principles of conduct must be based on something which is neither factual nor self-evident. (41-3.)

Hare's arguments against thesis (II) are the ground for his attempt to refute those ethical theories which claim, e.g., that it is

self-evident that we "ought" to do what our "conscience" tells us. We are often in doubt whether or not to do what the voice of conscience tells us, and even if we were never in doubt in this regard, it would be merely a psychological fact about us; no imperative conclusion would follow from this fact. (43.)

Now Hare's argument against the first interpretation of self-evident principles of conduct is, I think, sound. From purely formal principles one cannot derive imperative conclusions. The arguments against the second and third interpretations do not seem conclusive, for their force depends on the truth of the assumption that from purely factual premises we cannot get imperative conclusions. This assumption and its justification will be considered later.

Hare's main argument against thesis (II), as outlined above, namely that if we are in doubt about a singular imperative, we must be in doubt about a general principle, is, I think, strong enough; it does show that imperative conclusions cannot be deduced from self-evident principles. But note that it is also true that factual conclusions cannot be derived from purely self-evident or analytic principles. This is so because the derivation of P from the tautology P --> P is valid only for one assignment of truth-values to P, i.e. where P is true. In other words the formula (P --> P) --> P is contingent. Hence, to obtain a true proposition, P, with a particular factual or "material" content, a self-evident proposition, P --> P is insufficient; it should be supplemented with at least one factually true proposition, P, such that from P --> P and P we can deduce P. The force of this analogy between factual indicatives and imperatives is that although Hare may have successfully refuted the thesis in question (II), nothing follows from

that refutation about the "logical" status either of imperatives or of moral principles as distinct from the "logic" of indicatives.

In the passage quoted above, p. 117, Hare appeals to the cases where we are faced "for the first time" with the question "What shall I do?" because it is the novelty or relative independence of these cases from past experience that serves to bring out the imperative character of moral language, their function to guide choices or decisions to act. It may be important in connection with imperatives to appeal to such cases, though even then, I would argue, we are still owed an explanation for assigning to imperatives a separate logic. But more urgent for our purposes is the question why we should focus on such cases in connection with moral questions. To this question we shall have to return again. I will argue that habitually acting or choosing in accordance with principles or standards is no less important in morals than acting or choosing in the novel cases of the kind explained above. Nor does all ethical language, or even a prominent segment of it, seem to be essentially action- or choice-guiding. "There is hardly a noble character throughout the whole novel" is an "ethical" (or at any rate, "evaluative") statement without having any essential import in guiding my choice or decision to read the novel or, having read it, to try to avoid thinking and acting in the same way as the characters do. (The moral force of the above judgment, of course, is carried primarily by the term "noble". Since this term is attributable primarily to character-traits, it may help more effectively challenge prescriptivism in its emphasis on choice, rather than action. Different examples of moral judgments which employ value-terms primarily attributable to actions may be preferable because they would represent an attempt to

challenge prescriptivism in its emphasis on action. I think the examples given in Chapter 1, pp. 13 and 30, where moral dialogues concerned plagiarism and the government's measures, would serve this purpose.)

It seems that, as far as the prescriptivist side of Hare's analysis of moral language is concerned, the appeal to the cases of the kind in question, i.e. novel cases, involves singling out some aspects of the totality of a linguistic situation (action or choice) at the cost of underrating a significant portion of such situations (feelings, beliefs, and attitudes), for the latter are excluded from the "logic" of evaluative discourse as such, i.e. as distinct from scientific discourse. (See above, pp. 106-110.)

We have to attend now to Hare's reasons in refuting the first thesis (I) noted above, according to which imperative conclusions can be derived from purely indicative premises. For reasons that will become clear, the question raised in the previous paragraph is more directly related to Hare's attack on this thesis. Let us bear in mind that so far we have not been presented with a good argument for drawing a logical distinction between imperatives and factual indicatives or statements.

Against the first thesis (I) Hare raises the following threefold *reductio ad absurdum*. (i) To think that an imperative conclusion can be derived from purely indicative premises through certain special rules of inference, "leads to representing matters of substance as if they were verbal matters." (47.) In other words, it treats rules of conduct (which are imperatives with certain contents) as if they were formal or logical rules of inference. This it does by ignoring the action-guiding

role of the principles of action and by replacing them with either a
special rule of inference or definitions of the words used. But, Hare
says, principles of conduct are different from rules of logic in the
same way as scientific laws differ from rules of logic, though of course
this does not mean that principles of conduct are about matters of fact,
as scientific laws are.

(ii) The special rules of inference appealed to in thesis (I) are
claimed to be "looser" than rules of deductive logic; they are said to
be merely "general", not universal principles. But, according to Hare,
this qualification does not help, for there are two different senses of
"looseness" which the thesis fails to distinguish: (a) the sense in
which our principles allow numerical exceptions, as when we say that it
is not wrong to make an exception to the rule against taking some time
off work as long as we do not make too many exceptions to the rule; such
rules are indeed by nature loose in the sense that we could break them
without modifying them; (b) the sense in which exceptions belong to a
special class of their own, exceptions which if made will in effect
modify the principle, as when we say "Lying is wrong except when it
saves a life"; lying to save a life belongs to a class which ought to be
treated as exceptional. This kind of exception indeed makes the
principle more rigorous, not looser. What is important in moral
situations is that we have to decide whether to observe the principle
and refuse to modify it, or to break it and modify it by admitting a
class of exceptions." (54.)

(iii) The attempt to derive an imperative conclusion from purely
indicative premises leaves out of moral reasoning the factor of
decision; it ignores the fact that we decide to act upon the principle

or to make exceptions to it. In a sense we do a great deal more than
merely infer. (55.)

(i) raises a difficulty for Hare's view which was also raised by
the argument against the second thesis (II), namely: it does not follow
from the fact that principles of action cannot be replaced by logical
rules of inference or by analytic statements that they are therefore
"logically" distinct from factual indicative statements. What (i) shows
is that principles of conduct cannot be analytic in the sense that their
negation would be self-contradictory, that they have a "content". But
nor is the negation of a factual indicative self-contradictory. Hence,
(i) does not prove that that "content" is essentially or "logically"
different from that of indicatives. (Indeed I think that the term
"content" is inappropriate here, for how _can_ there be a logical or
formal distinction between two "contents"?) It may turn out upon
scrutiny that principles of conduct are primarily about matters of fact,
in the same way as scientific laws are. (See below for further
comparison between scientific inquiry and moral reasoning.) A closer
attention to the nature of language (as a symbolic activity or as speech
acts) may show that such distinctions are too artificial to do justice
to the complexity of a total linguistic situation. Imperatives are
sometimes used (quite successfully or "happily") to report the speaker's
state of mind, especially when someone makes a request or suggestion.
(Note that requests and suggestions are classified under the general
heading of "imperatives", though not all requests or suggestions need to
be taken (by Hare or by Austin) as being _purely_ imperatives. It
remains, however, that Hare does take requests and suggestions to be
primarily imperatives, in the sense of being the species of a genus--the

genus, that is, of "imperative". I am arguing that the division of language and its meaning or function into two broad genera of "indicative" and "imperative" is too artificial, and that the assimilation of moral language to imperatives is, in the light of the complexities of moral discourse or situation, implausible.) On the other hand, indicatives are used (again quite happily) in order, e.g., to warn, suggest, or order. "Smoking is hazardous to your health" is no less a warning than a factual statement; it may guide action and choice no less forcefully than indicate a scientific discovery. These facts point to (though they do not by themselves establish) the weakness of an attempt to draw a sharp "logical" distinction between indicatives and imperatives. But more will be said about this in Chapter 5.

(ii) is in part concerned with the question of the universalizability of the principles of conduct and the sense in which they may be said to constitute part of the logic of moral discourse. This matter deserves a detailed examination and does not seem to be directly related to the prescriptive aspect of Hare's theory which we are now considering. (iii) makes reference to "moral" reasoning, whereas (if I have read Hare correctly) its original purpose was to refute a thesis about imperatives. In both respects, however, it begs the question. For we need an argument to show that imperatives are primary in moral discourse, and an argument to show that the importance of decisions in connection with imperatives requires a different logical treatment than factual indicatives. I have not found such arguments in Hare's works. The example given earlier, the statement, "There is hardly a noble character throughout the whole novel", seems to count as a counter-example; in uttering the sentence the speaker need not

primarily guide action or choice; the context of the utterance, a

conversation or a piece of literary criticism, the images called up by

the sentence, the interests and ideologies associated with the

characters' ways of life, and the like may equally, if not more,

contribute to the "moral" force of the statement. And it seems to me

that the greater portion of moral discourse is of a similar sort, as was

suggested by other examples.

(ii) and (iii) draw attention to the point of central importance

in Hare's theory, namely that moral discourse is in a special way

concerned with guiding decisions of principle or choices of standards.

For, as we shall see in more detail later, the "critical", "crucial",

"essential", or "characteristic" situations in moral discourse, for

Hare, seem to be those in which the question is raised as to which

principles are to be accepted or endorsed, which to be rejected, and

which to be modified. (Cf., e.g., *LM*, pp. 74-6, 127 & 168.) The reason

why it is so important, for Hare, to make a <u>decision</u> as to a given

principle (or to "form" it for the first time (see p. 59)) is that moral

situations are typically those in which we could assume either that the

agent has had no past experience of a relevant kind (or no already

"formed" principle which might be adopted from others), or that there

are enough factors in the situation he is faced with which make it a <u>new</u>

situation deserving special considerations beyond those made in the

past.

But far from denying that this may indeed be an important feature

of moral situations, I wish to raise the question: "Why, as far as

ethical discourse is concerned, are these cases most important or even

more important than more or less "habitual" cases?" To be sure, often

(especially in the so-called tragic conflicts) caution requires us to consider and scrutinize the detail of a situation and accordingly to decide whether or not and how to modify the available principles, principles which we have internalized in the process of learning things. This is indeed how our rule-governed, entrenched habits of action may improve. (62-3.) It is also the reason why judgments made by those who have a wide experience of life are seldom very simple or general. (*FR*, 38.) But like skills, moral judgments are, more often than not, found suitable and made without making rules or principles explicit and simply on the basis of the knowledge of the kind of situation one is confronting. In a sense we make a "decision" in such cases in accordance with or within principles, in the sense that a principle can (ideally) be produced upon request. For instance, an act falling under the description "cowardly" is judged (*prima facie* at least) wrong against the background of an internalized moral principle. But the sense in which a "decision" is made here is not what Hare's narrow sense explained above suggests.

He himself isolates two procedures which may be adopted in teaching principles: (1) establishing the ends of action at the beginning and teaching the means conducive to those ends; (2) teaching simple rules of thumb, and only gradually the ends for which what is done is done. And Hare realizes that often our instructions have to accord with (2) not merely because the learner may not be intelligent enough or in any case unprepared for the first procedure, but more importantly because it is of no use to establish a general end at the beginning. For example, it is of no use, he says, to ensure that even the most rational driver understands and accepts the end of "the

avoidance of avoidable inconvenience" at the beginning of driving

instructions, the reason being that "'inconvenience' is a value-word,

and until he has had experience of driving, the learner will not know

what sorts of situation are to count as avoidable inconvenience. The

general end or principle is vacuous until by detailed instruction we

have given it content." (*LM*, 67.) My point is simply that if teaching

principles often combines the two methods, there is no reason why the

first method should be given a theoretical emphasis. In the passage

just quoted Hare goes on to say: "Therefore it is always necessary to

start, to some extent, by teaching our learner *what* to do, and leaving

it for him to find out later *why*." (67.) If the second procedure is

"always" to some extent necessary, there is no reason to stress, as Hare

seems to be stressing in his formulation of the logic of "practical"

discourse, <u>decisions</u> of principle as distinct from the habit of acting

<u>in accordance with</u> them.

Moreover, in almost every department of human "activity" we are

faced with the question "What shall I do?" or what decisions are to be

made. Hare himself says, in a somewhat different context, "principles

of prediction are one kind of principle of action; for to predict is to

act in a certain way." (59.) And "Even to learn or be taught a fact

(like the names of the five rivers of the Punjab) is to learn how to

answer a question; it is to learn the principle 'When asked "What are

the names of the five rivers of the Punjab?" answer "The Jhelum, the

Chenab, &c."'." (60.) Hare's purpose in this passage is, of course, to

show that learning everything is necessarily learning a principle. And

with this point I have no quarrel; it concerns the universalizability

thesis which I think is defensible. The passage quoted, however, seems

to confirm the point about the possibility of applying prescriptivism in the broad sense of guiding action or choice to almost every instance of learning, whether it is learning to do or to "say" things. As was suggested above, p. 124, it is possible for factual statements to guide action or choice, for a statement of wants, desires, or ends may induce action or choice in the hearer in a no less effective manner than an advice, warning, or order may. It seems not this kind of sentence or that which is imperative or indicative, which is concerned primarily either with choice and action or with facts. Hare's position is clearly the opposite, for it involves prescriptivism not in the broad sense noted above, but in the narrow sense that the action- or choice-guiding force of imperatives accounts for their distinctive logic. But this needs argument. Choice, action, and facts (mental or physical) are various dimensions of the totality of a linguistic situation (another dimension of which, as we shall see in Chapter 5, is other sentences or symbols). And it seems not this kind of sentence or that which is in some special way ethical or evaluative in general. Ethical discourse seems to be concerned mainly with the description of (beliefs about) common feelings, motives, interests, and ends, in the same way as ethics seems to be concerned mainly with harmonious thinking and acting--living with oneself and with others.

Hare says at one point that the claim that genuine value judgments of the form "I ought to do X" entail an imperative such as "Let me do X" is "impossible to prove or even to render plausible". And he proposes to solve this problem "by making it a matter of definition" of value judgments that if someone assents to the judgment "I ought to do X", he must also assent to the command "Let me do X". (168-9.)

However, by emphasizing decisions to act or choices, Hare's definition or explanation of the logic of moral language seems to sidestep the complexities of moral discourse and the usual way in which it is practiced.

In *Freedom and Reason* Hare draws attention to an important similarity between the logic of scientific inquiry and that of moral reasoning. "It may be", he says, "that moral reasoning is not, typically, any kind of 'straight-line' or 'linear' reasoning from premises to conclusion." (87.) The analysis of moral reasoning in terms of practical syllogism, though to some extent useful in clarifying the structure of reasoning which may be more or less unreflectively operating in our moral life, must not blind us to the fact that the actual practice of moral reasoning is not a "linear" reasoning of the kind suggested by the syllogistic, deductive pattern, but more like what happens in the process of scientific inquiry as interpreted by Popper, i.e. "a kind of *exploration*, or looking for hypotheses which will stand up to the test of experiment." (88.) In moral reasoning, according to Hare, we "look for moral judgments and moral principles which, when we have considered their logical consequences and the facts of the case, we can still accept." (88.) In the same way in scientific inquiry those scientific statements and hypotheses are accepted which we fail to falsify. (Cf. K.R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*.)

Hare insists, however, that there are two important differences between scientific method and moral reasoning. (1) Whereas a scientific hypothesis is falsified by observation-statements, a moral principle is rejected if we deduce from it together with other premises (about the features of the situation, inclinations and desires of the agents) two

"contradictory" prescriptions. (*FR*, 91-2.) (2) In moral reasoning the "crucial experiment", which leads to the rejection or revision of the principle, need not be one which is conducted in relation to actual facts. All that is necessary is an effort of imagination which reveals the effect on the agent of a similar action in a relevantly similar hypothetical situation. In this way also one may come to regard other people's interests and inclinations and, having universalized the judgment, give as much weight to them as one would give to one's own. (93-5.)

Concerning (2) two points seem worth noting. First, Hare thinks that "imagination" is distinct from universalizability. This need not be disputed. But Hare also thinks that whereas universalizability is part of the "logic" of moral discourse as well as one of its "necessary ingredients", imagination, interests, and facts are simply its (other three) ingredients. But he does not offer any argument for regarding universalizability as a "logical" constituent of moral discourse, but not imagination. It is true that, as he would agree, imagination is not the same as emotional understanding and sympathy. But this is exactly why it may be much more closely related to universalizability and hence to the logic of moral discourse than Hare seems to suggest; imagination is a medium, as it were, in which universalization takes place. Secondly (and with this Hare need not disagree either), even in science the notion of "evidence" or "test" is not a purely factual notion; it is in part theoretical, hypothetical, or imaginative, for it depends in part on the scientist's interest in preserving the coherence of a theory. If these points are correct, however, the actual occurrence, as opposed to the imaginative or hypothetical projection, of the states of

affairs which could lead to the revision of a principle, as such does
not seem to have any bearing on the question of the methodological or
logical difference between science and morals. The fact that in moral
reasoning it is sufficient to imagine such states of affairs would seem
perhaps to draw attention to the nature of the facts which are of
particular interest in moral reasoning, i.e. subjective facts of
desire, end, and the like, as distinct from those of particular interest
in scientific reasoning, i.e. physical facts, not to the actual
occurrence or non-occurrence of these facts. Moral argument or
discourse, indeed, often, though by no means always, involves attempts
to harmonize the actual interests or viewpoints of the parties in a
dialogue, not a monological application of the principle of
universalization.

What I have said in the course of this section by way of
questioning Hare's logical distinction between imperatives (or moral
judgments, in his view) and factual indicatives has hopefully thrown
some doubt on the accuracy of (1), the first alleged disanalogy between
scientific and moral reasoning. For moral judgments may not be
essentially or characteristically imperatives. It seems at best in a
broad sense that we can speak of their prescriptivity, and this sense
does not amount to Hare's hard and fast distinction between descriptive
and evaluative or ethical utterances. Even if moral judgments were
essentially imperatives, Hare's arguments would not successfully show
that they may not be derivable from factual indicative statements. And
if we show that they can indeed be derived from factual statements, we
have shown that they can be "falsified" in the light of experience. In

the next section I will explore Hare's doctrine of prescriptivism more
thoroughly.

3.2. Prescriptivism: The Two Kinds of Meaning

As was mentioned in the previous section, Hare maintains that in
spite of differences in their spheres of application, moral and non-
moral value judgments are logically equivalent uses of value-words such
as "good" and "ought". Part of the logical character of value judgments
is their prescriptivity and part of it their universalizability. These
two aspects of evaluative language are, according to Hare, "mutually
consistent" and "jointly sufficient" for establishing the rationality of
morals. (*FR*, 18.) It is primarily prescriptivity that I wish to
discuss here, though references to universalizability and what it
designates are, as will be evident, indispensable in the course of the
discussion. A detailed treatment of "universalization" will be taken up
in the next chapter in the context of Mackie's criticism of it.

Hare thinks that value judgments containing words like "ought"
and "good" are primarily prescriptive and more important for the
analysis of, because closer to, moral discourse than simple imperatives.
The proper understanding of the logical behavior of "good" and "ought"
serves best to elucidate ethical problems. He recognizes, of course,
that there are other words used for the same purpose as that for which,
he thinks, "good" and "ought" are primarily used, i.e. for the purpose
of "commendation" or guiding choice and/or action. He says: "almost
every word in our language is capable of being used on occasion as a

value-word (that is, for commending or its opposite); and usually it is only by cross-examining a speaker that we can tell whether he is so using a word." (*LM*, 79-80.) The choice of such very "general" and "typical" words as "good" and "ought" for discussion, says Hare, is motivated by: (1) the simplicity of exposition; (2) the fact that the examination of the logic of these "value-words" is one which proceeds mainly by examples and illustrations rather than definitions, definitions being postponed until much later in the discussion, and as a result the selection of these words will not prejudice the analysis in any particular direction; (3) the fact that the logical characteristics of these words can be shown to be manifested not only in moral, but also in non-moral contexts. (79-80. See also 85. In *FR* Hare offers another reason for the choice of general value-words to which I will attend towards the end of this section.)

(1) and (3) are, I think, acceptable as reasons for concentrating on "good" and "ought". (2) would be satisfactory if it indeed were true, but there is an important sense in which Hare's analysis is guided even early in the game by an attempt, however implicit, to "define" the function of value-words. Consequently, the selection of these very general words for examination is conducive to a specialized analysis of the logic of evaluative discourse which, as I will try to show, is not neutral and reflects certain "normative" preoccupations: prescriptivity and universalizability. Whether there is a necessary connection between the generality of the words adopted for analysis and the nature of the analysis (the characterization of the function of value-words) may itself be an interesting question. My own view is that there is no such a connection, that one could select "value-words" of a less general

character such as "coward", "cruel", and the like, and yet give a
similar analysis as that offered by Hare. In fact, he does discuss such
value-words as "tidy" and "industrious" which, he says, are evaluative
"in a less full sense than 'good'". (121.) Again, he cites in *Freedom
and Reason* such words as "courage" which firmly tie evaluative and
descriptive aspects. "Courage", he says, "incapsulates" a favorable
attitude to the kind of action which can be described as "disregarding
one's own safety in order to preserve that of others." (*FR*, 189.) For
this reason, it can be used both evaluatively to commend those who
preserve others' safety by disregarding their own, or descriptively as
in the phrase just quoted. Nevertheless, Hare relegates words such as
"courageous", "industrious", and "tidy" to a rank of "secondary"
importance in evaluative discourse, for their "evaluative meaning", he
stresses, is secondary to their "descriptive meaning", and it is the
latter that is most firmly attached to them. (*LM*, 121; *FR*, 24.) On the
other hand, as I will try to show, the most general "value-words",
"good", "ought", and "right", may be regarded as primarily descriptive
of desires, interests, and ends, and hence the judgments in which they
figure are universalizable. "Commendation" or its opposite may not be
the primary function of value-words and sentences, though it may be more
prominent with "good", "ought", and "right" than with other, less
general terms. Ordinary language reveals a predominantly "commendatory"
tendency only in one class of usages which may indeed be far from what a
genuine evaluative use is all about. Indeed the logical distinction
between evaluative and descriptive words or utterances in general will
itself turn out to be indefensible; it will break down under the weight

of a cognitive potential which is omnipresent throughout what may properly be called "language".

In sum, the choice of very general words for the analysis of moral language does not seem to necessitate any particular analysis, though it seems to have tempted (psychologically perhaps?) many writers on ethics into (what they would perceive as) "non-cognitive" channels. To see what this temptation amounts to, in Hare's account, and what sort of difficulties it generates, we need to advance a more detailed examination of "prescriptivity".

One of the most characteristic features of value-words, says Hare, is their "supervenience". This means first that to say "X is a good Y" is to say that not only X but all the other Y's similar to X in all relevant respects are good too. Thus to say that "P is a good picture" is to say that not only P but all the other pictures Q, S, ... which are similar to P in all relevant respects are good too. The "relevant respects" are those which we think entitle us to call P good. (Concerning this last point see especially *FR*, 11. We assume throughout that there is no intention to deceive, etc., in "calling" something by a name.) The logic of "good", in other words, is such that it would be, to say the least, puzzling to say that "P is a good picture", that there is some other picture, Q, similar to P in all relevant respects, and that Q is not a good picture. To call P good and Q not commits the speaker to holding that there is some relevant difference between P and Q which makes them differ in respect of goodness. But if there is *ex hypothesi* no such difference (not, that is, in the relevant respects), then Q must be called good too. The goodness of P, Q, S, ... logically depends on some one characteristic or set of characteristics in the

sense that if P or Q or S or ... is not good, it must lack that characteristic or at least one of the characteristics in the set.

However, according to Hare, this relation of "logical dependence" between goodness and the conjunction of those characteristics is not one of "entailment" in the sense in which if A entails B, then not-B entails not-A. The relation in question is "supervenience". To think that it is entailment is, says Hare, to commit the so-called "naturalistic" fallacy. Of course, the term "naturalistic" is misleading here, as Hare himself remarks, since the fallacy in question may be attributed equally to those theories which appeal to metaphysical or supersensible characteristics as the referent of "good" and to those which discern empirical properties. Therefore, it may be preferable to call the alleged fallacy "descriptive". (See *LM*, 92.) But it is the main intention of my thesis to reject the charge that descriptivism in ethics rests on a fallacy, although, I will argue, the rejection of that charge need not make us revive the ghost of either empirical or supersensible properties as the referent of "good".

According to Hare, to think that the relation between goodness and the conjunction of those characteristics is one of entailment would be a fallacy because it would ignore "something about the way in which, and the purpose for which we use the word 'good'." (83. My emphasis.) It would "leave out the prescriptive or commendatory element in value-judgments, by seeking to make them derivable from statements of fact." (82.) Goodness "supervenes" on the descriptive characteristics of those objects to which it is applied because and insofar as the word "good" is used "in our ordinary talk" for the purpose of commendation. (85-6.)

The difference between "supervenience" and "entailment" may be brought out by comparing the relation of goodness to the good-making characteristics of P in "P is a good picture" with the way in which the shape of the picture (say, rectangle) is related to its other geometrical properties. Rectangularity may be said to be entailed in "being a rectilinear plane figure and having all angles of a certain size, namely 90 degrees", since the latter just is the meaning of "rectangular". To say that P is a rectangular picture, that there is some picture Q exactly like P in all relevant respects, i.e. in being rectilinear and having all its angles 90 degrees, and that Q is not a rectangular picture would be inconsistent. If being like P in all relevant respects, i.e. being rectilinear and having all 90-degrees angles, means being a rectangular picture, to say that Q is like P in all relevant respects, but is not a rectangular picture is to make a self-contradictory statement. The difference between "entailment" and "supervenience" can now be seen to consist in the fact that having said "P is a good picture", the assertion "Q is like P in all relevant respects except that Q is not good" is not self-contradictory; what is wrong with it is something other than self-contradiction. (Hare says at one point that it is "similar" to a contradiction in that it involves "imparting" two inconsistent standards. (*LM*, 134.)) What is wrong with that assertion is that it prevents us from doing what we use "good" to do, namely to commend things. "The primary function of the word 'good'", says Hare, "is to commend." (127.) Indeed, commendation is, for Hare, "the purpose for which it [evaluative language in general] is designed" (150).

What is involved in "commendation" is partly that "whenever we commend, we have in mind something about the object commended which is the reason for our commendation." (130.) When we commend something, we have in mind certain descriptive characteristics of the thing as our "reasons" for calling it "good". These reasons may be uncovered by asking "Why do you call so-and-so good?" An answer to this question would reveal the characteristics in virtue of which commendation is given. Moreover, when I commend, says Hare, I should be prepared not only to give reasons of this sort, but also to call good any other object which is similar to the one commended in possessing the characteristics in question. (This point might be put somewhat differently; it might be said that "good" is not primarily concerned with guiding a particular choice, but choices. I think this way of putting the matter can be misleading. One does not generalize (or universalize) over choice (and decision), though one may choose a general or universal principle or standard. As was suggested earlier, p. 30, unlike desires, interests, ends, and the like, choice and decision are entirely "personal" and lack the generic aspect characteristic of other mental phenomena which enables us to speak of, e.g., "similar" feelings, desires, or interests. Of course, there is nothing in Hare's account which would suggest that commendation involves generalization over choice, though what he says at some points, e.g., on p. 129, may be thus (mis)interpreted.) For guiding a particular choice, the choice concerned directly with an individual occasion, we normally use singular imperatives (Hare calls these "type A prescriptions" on 155ff). Commendation, on the other hand, is "covertly universal" in the sense that it implies the acceptance of a standard applicable to all the

objects similar to the object in question in relevant respects or to all the occasions of the same kind. (129ff.) Of course, guiding a particular choice too may and usually does imply a general standard. But not so in the strong sense that it would be logically impossible to make a value judgment using "good" ("X is good") or a "type C prescription" using "ought" ("You ought to do X") without "invoking" a standard or principle. (See pp. 156ff.) Not, that is, in the sense that if we did so, we should make people wonder whether we knew the meaning of "good" or "ought". (See also 175ff.) In short, in virtue of the commendatory function or the supervenient character of value-words like "good", value judgments containing such words are rational and covertly universal in the sense explained above.

Note that for our purposes here we are ignoring the difference between "good" and "ought" of which Hare seems aware, namely that whereas "good" may be used primarily to guide choices, "ought" may be primarily action-guiding (though both of these assertions seem doubtful). "Good" seems more closely connected with the mental states of desire, choice, belief, and the like, and hence with deliberation. "Ought", on the other hand, is more conducive to guiding action. And for this reason, it may be more appropriate to speak of "commendation" and "evaluation" (which seem to capture the relation with subjective, mental states better than that with action), though perhaps not of "morality" in general, in connection with "good" than with "ought". This important difference between "good" and "ought" notwithstanding, both of them have, according to Hare, the peculiar logic that their function is not entailed in, but supervenes on the descriptive characteristics of the objects or actions to which they are applied.

Related to this point is Hare's emphasis on choice or decision to act which, I will argue, is an implausible feature of his analysis of ethical language, caused perhaps by focusing on such general terms as "good" and "ought".

It follows from the foregoing that, according to Hare, an important part of the meaning of "commendation" has to do with the fact that goodness cannot be <u>derived</u> from the descriptive characteristics of the object to which it is attributed, characteristics which may enter into the "definition" of the object, because it is not entailed in them. (84-5.) If it could be derived from such characteristics, if it were a part of the definition, we would not be able to do what we "sometimes" want to do and "succeed in" doing—to commend the object in question for having those characteristics. (84-6.) The qualification "sometimes" is worth noting, because, as we shall see shortly, according to Hare, it is not the case that "good" or other value-words are <u>always</u> used for the purpose of commending or condemning something for having certain characteristics. At times Hare's qualification is stronger than "sometimes", as in the statement "it is because 'good' is sometimes (indeed in almost all cases) used otherwise than according to "naturalistic" definitions, that we can use it in order to commend." (89.) Here the analysis of evaluative language in terms of the special function of "commendation" seems to benefit from the generality of the word used for the purpose of illustration, i.e. "good". A statement such as the one just quoted could not easily be made about a less general word, say "loyalty". At any rate, Hare wants to hold that although value-words may not always be used for commendation, their non-commendatory uses are <u>secondary</u> or derivative; commendation is "a

special" or "the primary" function served by value-words. (91, 117, 127, 146. Hare also uses the terms "distinctive" and "essential" to refer to this function or feature (171-2).) This is the central thesis in all of Hare's writings on ethical language. In order to assess it we need to identify further resources in Hare's analysis of moral (or evaluative) language.

Related to their supervenient character and commendatory function is a second logical feature of value-words such as "good", namely that they "can be applied to any number of different classes of objects. We have good cricket-bats, good chronometers, good fire-extinguishers, good pictures, good sunsets, good men." (95-6.) In this respect "good" is like property-words such as "red". We are able to use "good" for classes of objects which we have never called good before. In relation to some classes of objects, e.g. pictures, sunsets, etc., we might have learned to use the word "good". But the fact that we may have never used "good" in connection with some classes of objects, e.g. chronometers, should not prevent us from applying it to them if and when we want to place them in an order of merit. To do this, of course, we must in addition set up certain criteria, or learn the criteria already available, for good chronometers--precision, readability, durability, and so on. But this does not affect the point that "it is possible to use the word 'good' for a new class of objects without further instruction." (97.) In one sense no new lesson is required for learning the use of "good" in a new class of objects. In another sense, that in which we need criteria for the application of "good" to each new class of objects, there is a need for a new lesson. (As we shall see in a moment, it is, according to Hare, in the former respect that there is a

similarity between "good" and "red", not in the latter.) In fact, Hare suggests that knowing how to use the word "good" in the first sense is implied in and is a necessary (though perhaps not a sufficient) condition for learning, setting up, or disputing the criteria of goodness in new cases. (97.)

So far we have seen that learning the use of "good" in a new class of objects involves neither an entirely new lesson, nor just the same lesson as those learnt in its old uses; with respect to the criteria of application it may be a new lesson, but with respect to another aspect of the use of "good" it is not. (In the latter respect it seems natural to label this aspect of use "meaning", because of the fact that, according to Hare, it is common to all uses of the word.) And the need for new criteria for application to new classes of objects is indeed what makes "good" different from "red". Whereas in the case of "red" no new use involves a new lesson but is rather "just the same lesson over again, with a different example" (96), in the case of "good" every application to a new class of objects involves something new ("descriptive meaning" or criteria of application) and something old ("evaluative meaning"). Nor does this something old refer to a property, as it does in the case of "red". It seems indeed that it is because of the distinction between evaluative and descriptive meanings (which Hare abbreviates respectively as "meaning" and "criteria"), a distinction that breaks down in the case of "red", that in Hare's view "good" cannot be said to be the name of a property. (See 94-5.) For if it were, the criteria for application of "good" to different classes of objects would remain the same analogously to "red".

Note that it does not follow from the point just made that if we show, as I am attempting to, that the distinction in question does ultimately break down as a "logical" distinction (except, of course, when it is artificially and dogmatically maintained by the analyst at all costs), then "good" and similar so-called "value-words" will be the name of a property in the same way as "red" is. (From "P —> Q" one cannot logically deduce "-P —> -Q".) What my thesis is committed to is some necessary relation between the meaning of "good" (and of "ought") and factual states of affairs (mental facts of desire, interest, and preferences, or descriptive characteristics of the objects to which the word is applied). Of course, that relation, which may be called "reference" (in the wide sense specified in Chapter 5, in contrast with strict "correspondence"), need not exhaust the meaning of "good". For there are other factors or dispositions in the situation in which "good" is uttered, factors which contribute to the meaning of "good".

Before pursuing the very important comparison between "good" and "red" to which we were led in studying the second logical feature of "good", I wish to consider Hare's treatment of a class of words called "functional". The discussion of functional terms is introduced by Hare in the context of an attempt to show that even if "good" is interpreted instrumentally, not, as taken so far, intrinsically, the difference between the logical behavior of "red" and that of "good" is preserved. His discussion, however, is meant to underline his conception of "evaluative meaning" and the nature of "prescriptivism".

Functional words are those which name "instruments" or "techniques" (but also "technicians"). Since instruments are used or designed for certain ends, functional words cannot be fully defined

without reference to some ends. Thus, to use Hare's example, to know

the meaning of "auger" is in part to know what it is that augers are

used for; it is to know that they are used for boring holes in wood.

Now to know that something is used for a certain purpose or end is,

according to Hare, to know what it means to "choose". This is because

"to try to produce a result is to *choose*, subject to the limitations of

our knowledge and power, to do those things which are conducive to that

result." (101.) Only if one understands what choosing is can one

understand what is involved in being an instrument, and hence what it

means for a word to be a functional word. Knowing this is in turn a

necessary condition for learning the particular end(s) of a given

instrument. Learning the meaning of a particular functional word

implies a lesson in the meaning of "choosing", since knowing what the

end of a certain class of instruments is requires knowing what it means

to choose to do things conducive to that end-result, analogously to the

way in which, as was noted above, knowing the evaluative meaning of

"good" is implied in and is a necessary condition for learning, setting

up, or changing the criteria for the application of "good" to new

classes of objects.

We seem to have the following analogy. As "choosing" stands to

the end of an instrument, so the evaluative meaning of "good" stands to

its descriptive meaning. For the sake of argument, let us assume that

Hare is right in saying that to know that something is used for a

certain purpose or end is to know what it means to "choose". Given this

assumption, let us explore the analogy and see how strong it is. I will

try to show that the analogy is not as strong as it appears in Hare's

treatment, and that therefore it does not in itself affect: (1) the

force of the distinction between evaluative and descriptive meanings or the extent to which it merits emphasis, and (2) the possibility of reducing the evaluative meaning of "good" and other such terms to "choosing".

Hare points out that to know the end of any class of instruments (and *eo ipso* to know the meaning of choosing) is to be able to give at least "some rudimentary explanation of how to tell a good member of any class of instruments from a bad one." (102.) It is to know "one necessary condition" (101) or criterion which makes a member of the class of instruments a good member of that class. For example, to know that an auger is an instrument used for boring holes is to have a minimal knowledge of what makes an auger a good auger. (101ff.) It is only <u>one</u> criterion because we still have to know other things about the criteria of a good auger, that, e.g., it "does not blister the hands, is not rusty, and bores holes that have clear edges." (101.) Nevertheless, it <u>is</u> one of the good-making criteria (a necessary one for that matter), for if we come across an auger which does not bore holes at all, we should conclude both that it is not an auger (even if it has all the other features necessary for being an auger) and that it is not a <u>good</u> auger. Functional words, then, seem to have this peculiar feature that by virtue of their reference to an end, at least one of the good-making characteristics of the objects which they stand for is part of their definition or meaning. To put this somewhat differently, with respect to an end there is an overlap between the descriptive and evaluative meanings of the word "good", when it is interpreted instrumentally. This is why to say "This is an auger" is *eo ipso* to say "This is a good auger" (in the purely instrumental sense of being able to bore holes).

We might still want to say that this is a good auger in that it has other good-making features, that it does not blister the hands, etc. But this would involve providing further good-making characteristics, and as such does not change the point in question.

But the analogy referred to above is dubious if and insofar as "good" in that analogy is interpreted in other senses than the instrumental, e.g. in an "intrinsic" sense. It would seem, *prima facie* at any rate, less natural to think that "good", used instrumentally, has two <u>logically distinct</u> meanings, that the relation between goodness and the descriptive characteristics of an instrument (the ends for which it is designed) is not one of entailment. For the analysis of functional words showed that with respect to the end of an instrument that distinction between evaluative and descriptive meanings fails to apply. For Hare, on the other hand, all the "standard" uses of "good", including the instrumental use, have in common an evaluative, commendatory meaning, a meaning which must be logically distinguished from descriptive meaning. The latter, but not the former, is different with different classes of objects. (This is in turn why Hare stresses that the full knowledge of the evaluative meaning of "good" does not guarantee its correct application, for the latter requires the knowledge of the right criteria for the class of objects to which "good" is applied. Likewise, the correct application of "good" is possible in ignorance of the fact that in using the word one is expressing choices. (103 & 108.))

If I am correct in suggesting that the hard and fast distinction between evaluative and descriptive meanings in the case of functional terms is artificial, Hare is faced with a dilemma. If he keeps the

analogy, "As choosing stands to the end of an instrument, so the evaluative meaning of "good" stands to its descriptive meaning", he must lose the hard and fast, "logical" distinction between the two kinds of meaning of "good". If he keeps that distinction, he loses the analogy and the support for prescriptivism; it becomes dubious whether the claim that the evaluative meaning of "good" interpreted instrumentally is "choosing" could in any way lend further support to the thesis that the evaluative meaning of "good" interpreted otherwise (e.g. intrinsically) concerns guiding choices. I conclude that the discussion of functional words and the analogy appealed to therein neither support the logical distinction between evaluative and descriptive meanings nor show that evaluative meaning is the same as commendation or its opposite. Indeed, it is far from self-evident even that to know the end of an instrument depends merely or even primarily on knowing how to choose to do certain things with the instrument. Hence, both Hare's distinction between evaluative and descriptive meanings and his assimilation of the former to choices need independent arguments.

These comments, I hope, press my thesis a step forward (though, of course, they do not yet establish it) in arguing that the distinction between the two kinds of meaning and the characterization of evaluative meaning in terms of choice may be viewed as artificial projections which constitute placing relatively greater importance on certain aspects of a total linguistic practice as opposed to others. The actual practice of moral discourse does not seem to lend support to such enterprises. Ordinary language is predominantly commendatory only in one class of its uses, and choice is only one dimension of a linguistic situation. Nor is this kind of use of language or aspect of a linguistic situation

characteristically evaluative or ethical, for there are evaluative judgments which do not essentially commend or condemn, as was suggested through examples. (See above, pp. 120-1.) The claim that evaluative judgments are prescriptions is not self-evident, it calls for further argument.

It might be said that if choosing is not the evaluative meaning of "good", something else may be; the fact that we can and do apply "good" to entirely (or significantly) new classes of objects with different sets of good-making characteristics, that we predicate it of objects which we have never called "good" before, calls for explanation. But I am not denying this. What I am denying is that the explanation requires a "logical" distinction to be drawn between the meaning of "good" and that of property-words such as "red", or what amounts to the same thing, between "descriptive" and "evaluative" meanings of "good". Just as "red" has many different uses, just as it may be applied to many different classes of objects, so does "good" and similar so-called value-words. (See below.) Indeed the division of language into two logically distinct realms, evaluative and descriptive, is itself questionable. Value-words are sometimes used to guide choices or decisions to act, but they are also used in other occasions to recall or produce an image, to state or express or influence beliefs or attitudes, and sometimes to initiate a "conversation" (with oneself or with others) in which other symbols (including words perhaps, but perhaps also diagrams, pictures, gestures, and the like) may be used. There are many uses of language which in one way or another focus on one of the aspects of a holistic symbolic situation. But there is no instance of the use of a word or symbol which does not (directly or indirectly) "refer" to

the "world", is not associated with a state of mind, is severed entirely from action, or is not somehow linked with other symbols. I suggest that the "evaluative" use of language, if we wish to call it so, is one in which the speaker is prepared to give universalizable reasons of various sorts and in this way to bring to bear upon a situation the cognitive potentials that exist throughout language. As such, it is formally the same as "scientific" or "descriptive" language. These claims may be established, I think, on the basis of certain strong analogies between scientific and ordinary descriptive language on the one hand and the so-called evaluative language on the other. These analogies have to some extent been pointed out, but they will be developed further in the sequel. We need, moreover, to undertake a more in-depth study of language or symbolic activities in general, a study which I propose to leave for a later chapter, but whose main conclusions have been outlined here and earlier.

I wish to go back now to the comparison between "red" and "good" and then examine the related topic of the "primary" and "secondary" uses of value-words. It was noted above that the fact that "good" is predicated of different classes of objects points to a feature of "good" which is shared by "red", for "red" too may be applied to any number of different classes of objects: we have red tomatoes, red mail-boxes, red inks, and what not. To put this somewhat differently, there is a similarity between the way in which we learn the use of "red" and that of "good". Just as it is false to say that every use of "good" requires an entirely new lesson, so is it in the case of "red". Just as having learnt the use of "good" in some cases, say, in connection with pictures and sunsets, we are able to use it in others, say, in connection with

chronometers, so knowing how to apply "red" to some objects, say tomatoes and mail-boxes, we can apply it to others, e.g. inks.

There is a second, related similarity between "good" and "red" in that "both can be, and often are, used for conveying information of a purely factual or descriptive character." (112.) The expression "M is a good motor-car" when used in a context in which both the speaker and the hearer know the criteria or standards of goodness in motor-cars, and when the hearer knows nothing of M, serves to convey information about M, that, e.g., it goes fast, it is not rusted, has a powerful engine, does not use much oil, and so on. Likewise, when I am told that mail-boxes are red in Canada, I am led to expect to discover that they are of this description, not of a different one. (112-3.)

And thirdly, there is the similarity between "good" and "red" that both are sometimes used "for putting our hearer in a position" subsequently to use them for conveying information. This in the case of "good" involves teaching or explaining the standard of goodness in a class of objects, and in the case of "red" explaining or teaching the meaning of the word, according to Hare. Nevertheless, the procedures are similar in both cases. (113-4. See also 122. For a similar account in connection with "ought", see 135-6 and 159-60.)

These similarities stem from the fact that both the criteria of goodness for a class of objects and the meaning of "red" are normally public and commonly accepted, in the sense that both "good" and "red" are used in the same way by the members of a speech group and that having learnt their use, people come to use them for conveying information without confusion. Of course, both "good" and "red" are vague words, as Hare points out and as we saw in the last chapter (2.3).

They "can vary as regards the exactitude or vagueness of the information which they do or can convey." (114.) Thus "red" may mean any color between orange and purple, and "good motor-car" satisfies no precise set of criteria. We may or may not decide on a certain specific shade of "red" for our mail-boxes and a precise set of criteria for calling a motor-car "good"; both color-words and value-words may be descriptively loose or rigid, depending on the customs of usage. This is why the degree of descriptive looseness or precision does not serve to distinguish value-words from descriptive-words; the fact that both can be vague is indeed another aspect of the similarity between "good" and "red". (115.)

In spite of these similarities, Hare insists that there is the essential difference between "good" and "red" that, unlike "red", "good" cannot be "ostensively" defined; it is the "ostensive" character of "red" that presumably sets it logically apart from "good". What is involved in this claim seems to be related, for Hare, to a difference in the process of learning or explaining the meaning of these words. If we want to teach or explain the meaning of "red" to a non-English speaking person, he says,

> we might take him to see pillar-boxes, tomatoes,
> underground trains, &c. and say, as we showed him
> each object, 'That is red'. And then we might take
> him to see some pairs of things that were like each
> other in most respects, but unlike in colour (for
> example pillar-boxes in England and Ireland, ripe and
> unripe tomatoes, London Transport trains and main
> line electric trains), and on each occasion say 'This
> is red; that is not red but green'. In this way he
> would learn the use of the word 'red'; he would
> become conversant with its meaning. (95.)

According to Hare, the meaning of "good" and many other words such as "this", however, cannot be adequately conveyed in this way, for

explaining (or learning) the meaning of "good" (in the sense of "evaluative" meaning) involves an entirely ("logically"?) different process from that of explaining (or learning) the various criteria of its application. (105-6.) This is why, as was noted, it is possible to be right about (evaluative) meaning and wrong about criteria, and *vice versa*. For instance, the evaluative meaning of "good", commendation, might be known by someone who did not know the criteria of its application to, e.g., bicycles. And one might know how to apply the word to the right object without knowing that its meaning (or "primary" use) is commendation. It is also the reason why even when we have learnt the (evaluative) meaning of "good", we can still learn something new in new classes of cases, but having learnt the meaning of "red", no subsequent uses of the word involves a new lesson; it can be only the old lesson with a new example. Unlike "good", the (explanation or learning of the) meaning of "red" is not independent of the (explanation or learning of the) criteria for its application. It is impossible to know the meaning of "red" and yet call "red" an object which is, say, green.

I do not think there is a logical difference between the meaning of "red" and that of "good". Nor do I think that while in the case of "good" meaning and criteria of application are independent, in the case of "red" they are not. To be sure, in claiming something to be good, we may invite the question "Good in what respects or for what reasons?", whereas a similar question does not seem appropriate in connection with "red". But, I suggest that common sense or ordinary language is not entirely consistent in this regard: while it takes scientific theories (which attempt to provide precise theoretical descriptions for the

observable world, and hence criteria or standards for the proper application of empirical language) for granted, it tends at times to call the criteria for the application of "evaluative" terms into question.

Take the term "red". Like other color-words, it refers to a state of affairs which has a subjective and an objective aspect; subjectively it refers to a certain kind of visual appearance, and objectively to the property (the spectral characteristics such as wave-length, luminance, and purity) of the light reflected, transmitted, or emitted by an object of that color. The science of optics tells us that "red" refers to the experience of an observer with "normal" color vision when the wave-length of the white light (a light with a standard distribution) emitted or reflected is at 650 nm (nanometer; billionths of a meter). We may ask now whether it is not quite plausible to respond to the claim "The color of this ink is red" by asking "Is the wave-length of the white light reflected from the ink (in the eyes of a normal observer) at 650 nm?", or more generally, "Are we applying the word "red" where these conditions are satisfied?". Such questions seem no less to the point than similar ones asked in connection with "good". The reason why we do not usually ask them is that we are not interested in the scientific descriptions, that the experience of the color is all we need, for ordinary purposes, not that the descriptive criteria in question cannot be (analytically) distinguished from the meaning of "red". Of course, scientific language provides more exact ("universalizable") criteria of application (what, as we shall see in 5.3., E. Nagel refers to as "correspondence rules", i.e. rules which link theory with observation) than does "evaluative" language. But

exactness in science is never so complete as to make meaning the same as standards of application. (Cf. below, 5.3.) In the above scientific definition of "red", e.g., the observer's mental state and the viewing conditions (the wave-length distribution of light) play essential roles. The flexibility of scientific standards (and indeed the complexity of "ostensive definitions", as will be noted in a moment) is on the same "logical" footing with the fact that the criteria for application of "good" vary in accordance with the class of objects to which it is applied. Hence, in the absence of reasons to the contrary, the difference between scientific and evaluative discourses may turn out to be not a matter of principle or "logic", but the degree to which there are accepted and common standards appealed to explicitly or implicitly in language. This difference, I suggest, rests in turn on the difference (perhaps an important one) between the kinds of facts with which these two discourses are primarily, though not exclusively, concerned—science with physical facts in the external world, ethics with mental facts of feeling, desire, and the like. But it does not follow from this that evaluative discourse cannot in principle aspire to as much universality as science does, that our desires and ends cannot be brought to as much harmony as our scientific beliefs can.

It is worth noting that the argument offered above is meant only to throw doubt on the claim that whereas in the case of "good" standards of application can be distinguished from meaning, such a distinction is implausible in the case of "red". I am not claiming that the standards for application of "red" vary between different classes of objects in exactly the same way as those of "good" do. Indeed, while the latter are class- or type-dependent, the former are not; while "good" is multi-

criterial, "red" is not. But I am not convinced by Hare's argument that this difference amounts to a <u>logical</u> distinction between the function of "good" and that of "red". Suppose "good" was applied only to one class of objects. (This is not too far-fetched a supposition, though perhaps it would be more congenial to make a similar hypothesis with respect to less general value-terms. It is "good", however, with which we are mainly concerned here.) On this supposition, while "good" would require only one set of criteria for application, its force would seem neither significantly diminished nor amplified. Hence, the fact that "good" is, unlike "red", multi-criterial, in the sense that its criteria of application vary from class to class, is really irrelevant to the force or logic of the term.

The difference between "good" and "red" seems, as suggested above, to be due to the difference in their "content"--the facts with which they are primarily concerned. As we shall see in the next chapter, Mackie's defensible analysis of "good"--"such as to satisfy certain requirements"--is broad and flexible enough to be applicable to terms like "red" too. The above arguments, I hope, explain this point a little further.

Hare's distinction between "good" and "red" seems to depend on <u>his</u> conception of what is involved in an "ostensive" process. And that conception generates a great deal of tidiness indeed. But this is not what is wrong with it. What is wrong with Hare's conception of "ostensive definition" is that it pays too high a price for tidiness. It is in essence too expensive a proposal to be affordable by our actual linguistic practice. I will try to argue in more detail in Chapter 5 that given a broader conception of "ostensive definition", one which

does not necessarily involve taking the student of language by the hand and pointing to the empirical features of a present (as opposed to "absent") state of affairs, but rather drawing "attention" or "concern" to objects (whether mental or physical) which may or may not be in the immediate environment—given this conception of an "ostensive" process or definition (as well as the related complexity of "meaning", opacity of "reference", and flexibility of "correspondence rules"), the logical disanalogy between descriptive and evaluative words breaks down. What we would have then consists in situations where the different uses of language may be seen as the symbolic manifestations of the different ways in which one may be said to have or invoke a "concept". On the basis of this alternative conception of "ostensive definition" and the other related conceptions we may also argue for a close connection between the evaluative and descriptive meanings of the so-called value-words, such that Hare's separation of these two kinds of meaning and his quaint notion of "supervenience" could not be saved except by the "non-cognitive" philosopher's artifice and bias for non-descriptive factors in a complex meaning-situation.

In the above pages "meaning" and "use" have (for the following reason) been treated interchangeably, and Hare himself follows more or less the same procedure. This can be gathered from most of what goes on in *The Language of Morals*. But in *Freedom and Reason* he says explicitly that "Meaning of any kind (as far as it is words that are said to have meaning) is or involves the use of an expression in accordance with certain rules; the *kind* of meaning is determined by the *kind* of rules." By "rules", Hare states, we do not mean here "very simple general rules which can be formulated in words", but rather "consistency of practice

in the use of an expression which is the condition of its intelligibility." (7.) These remarks suggest that meaning can be translated as "use in accordance with rules", and since "rules" give consistency to a usage, meaning consists, for Hare, in "consistent use". (See also *FR*, 75-6.) Consistency has to do with that aspect of language (not only moral language) to which we referred as "universalizability". As such, I think, we can take it for granted, since the present discussion is mainly concerned with "prescriptivity". Hence, given "consistency" or dependence on "rules", we may treat "meaning" and "use" synonymously. (Note that much the same conclusion was reached in the previous chapter; see especially 2.2. This point will be further supported in Chapter 5.)

For Hare, as we have seen, there are two broad kinds of meaning or use of value-words, evaluative and descriptive. In his view, not only are these two logically separate, but evaluative meaning or use is "primary" or logically prior to descriptive. Let us look at this claim more closely.

Hare offers two reasons for holding that the commendatory function of value-words is prior to their other functions which he lumps together under the name "non-commendatory" or "descriptive". I will refer to this view as "the primacy thesis". With respect to "good", on which we are focusing here, the thesis involves the claim that all other uses depend on a special evaluative use, but not *vice versa*. With respect to "ought", it claims that the statement of the principles held in general by people ("statement of sociological fact") as well as the statement of feelings of obligation ("statement of psychological fact") can be expanded in terms of an "ought"-sentence ("value-judgement"), but

not *vice versa*. (167ff. See also 159-60.) Both reasons may be gathered from what has so far been said. The first is that "the evaluative meaning is constant for every class of objects for which the word is used." (118.) Thus, whereas in applying "good" to any class of objects we perform the single act of commending, there is another, descriptive meaning of "good" which is class-dependent and which varies according to the class of objects to which the word is applied. This reason rests obviously on the distinction between the two kinds of meaning or use which, I suggested, may be called into question by revising the notion of "ostensive definition" and the related concept of "reference".

Hare's second reason for holding that evaluative meaning or use is primary is that "we can use the evaluative force of the word in order to *change* the descriptive meaning for any class of objects." (119.) Retaining the evaluative meaning of "good", we use it to alter its descriptive meaning or the standards for its application to a class of objects. To allow for changes of descriptive meaning, the logic of value-words must be such that evaluative meaning is primary and descriptive meaning secondary. Of course, such a process cannot properly be called a "redefinition" of "good", for "definition" is possible where we are dealing with a purely descriptive word. But "good", believes Hare, has an evaluative meaning aside from and independent of its descriptive meanings. It cannot, therefore, be merely "redefined". (We may remember that Stevenson called the process whereby evaluative meaning is held constant and descriptive meaning is changed "persuasive (re)definition", not merely "redefinition". Needless to say, though Hare shares Stevenson's separation of two kinds

of meaning, he has a different view of what the non-descriptive use or meaning consists in.)

Now not only do we sometimes retain the evaluative meaning in order to alter the descriptive criteria, but sometimes (especially with value-words which are not so general as "good") a value-word comes to be used in a "conventional" or "inverted-commas" way, i.e. "when it has lost all its evaluative meaning it comes to be used as a purely descriptive word for designating certain characteristics of the object, and, when it is required to commend or condemn objects in this class, some quite different value-word is imported for the purpose." (120.) This is what, e.g., has happened to "eligible bachelor". Not only did it gradually change its descriptive meaning while maintaining its evaluative meaning ("such as should be chosen as a husband for one's daughters"), but those descriptive meanings became increasingly rigid such that the words "eligible bachelor" lapsed into a purely descriptive or "conventional" use, so much so that we even feel a certain irony or inverted commas around the words when it is used to refer to a husband for one's daughter. The phrase has come to mean "someone with substantial and well secured wealth". Having lost its commendatory function, the phrase is now replaced by different words such as "good" when we want to commend bachelors who are likely candidates for being a husband for one's daughter. (120-1.)

Before proceeding with a critical examination of Hare's second reason for the primacy thesis, it is important to note the subtle differences among the "conventional", "inverted-commas", and ironic uses referred to in the above example. Inverted-commas use, says Hare, is one in which we are "not making a value-judgment ourselves, but alluding

to the value-judgments of other people." (124.) Ironic use is very closely related to inverted-commas use. It is similar to inverted-commas use, but also differs from it in that the value-word is not used so much non-evaluatively as in an opposite direction of evaluation. The word "good", e.g., is used ironically when it is used not to commend, but to condemn. (125.) In conventional use we are faced with yet another distinct feature: "the absence of evaluative content is not sufficiently obvious to the speaker". This is why we say that so-and-so pays "lip-service" to a convention. (125.)

Now given these differences and granting the distinction between evaluative and descriptive uses for the moment, it seems that only inverted-commas use could be said to be non-evaluative or purely descriptive. Ironic use could not be called non-evaluative because, according to Hare himself, evaluative use is not restricted to commendation, but rather may involve its opposite, condemnation. It is more difficult to decide whether there is an evaluative element involved in conventional use. This element, of course, may not be commendation or its opposite; and there is no reason for thinking that it has to be, unless we (mistakenly) accept Hare's reduction of evaluation to commendation. Using the example of my saying "This piece of furniture is of good design", without wishing to commend the furniture and simply in an attempt to show that I have "good taste" in furniture, Hare says himself that "It would be difficult in such a case to say whether I was evaluating the furniture or not." (125.) But this "difficulty" shows that only if we assume *a priori* that evaluative use can be nothing but commendatory use (or its opposite) that we may hold to the "absence of evaluative content" in the case of conventional use, and even then it is

questionable whether a commendatory _element_ is entirely absent from the usage. (See below.) "This piece of furniture is of good design" may be uttered with an intention to show off, favor or oppose a view, but neither showing off nor favoring or opposing a view is so obviously a non-evaluative use of "good".

If these remarks have some weight, they seem to throw doubt, on the one hand, on Hare's initial suggestion that the conventional, inverted-commas, and ironic uses of "good" are kinds of "cases in which we use the word 'good' with no commendatory meaning at all" (124). For this statement seems correct at best with respect to inverted-commas use. On the other hand, they support the doubts expressed on several occasions earlier whether evaluative meaning or use is reducible to commendation or its opposite. For if it were, the non-commendatory uses of value-words would be at the same time non-evaluative. But conventional use is, as we saw, in a sense evaluative without being merely commendatory or condemnatory. (The qualification "merely" is added because I am not denying that there may be a commendatory element or its opposite involved in conventional use, and indeed in all uses. See below.) Therefore, the assumption that evaluative meaning can be exhausted in terms of commendation or its opposite seems false.

This, however, leaves us with inverted-commas use, and more particularly with the procedures through which a value-word may come to be "deprived" of its evaluative meaning. Now the second reason on which the primacy thesis was based appeals to a class of uses of value-words in which the evaluative force is kept constant in an attempt to change descriptive meaning. There is a sense in which this use is analogous to inverted-commas use; their differences notwithstanding, they both

involve "abstractions" from evaluative force and focus on descriptive meaning: in inverted-commas use in a sense we <u>suspend</u> the evaluative function of the word and use it for purely descriptive purposes, analogously to those cases where we <u>keep</u> the evaluative meaning constant in order to <u>change</u> the descriptive criteria for the application of the word. It is important to note, however, that such uses are peculiar types of linguistic usage in general. (We must resist saying "value-words" or "evaluative language", if these locutions are meant to reflect the evaluative/ descriptive dichotomy. For not only, as we saw Hare himself point out, can almost every word in language be used evaluatively, but indeed we are here trying in a sense to decide whether there is such a thing as "primarily" evaluative words or uses of words as distinct from descriptive.) I would argue that because the use of evaluative force for the purpose of changing descriptive meaning is a peculiar kind of linguistic usage in general, the primacy thesis does not seem to hold for all or even for most evaluative uses of language. The suggestion that it does would seem to ignore or underrate the evaluative force of a great number of cases where we neither keep evaluative meaning constant in order to change descriptive meaning, nor suspend, in an inverted-commas manner, evaluative meaning for purely descriptive purposes. That suggestion seems also to point to a normative bias as to what evaluative language <u>must</u> mean, what is especially <u>important</u> in it. This bias may be sound in itself, but it turns into a paradox once seen against the claim to the neutrality of analysis. And it cannot be sustained in the face of the similarities between "descriptive" and "evaluative" discourses to which I have drawn attention.

Language does not lend itself easily to a split between such broad species as "evaluative" and "descriptive", but to a variety of uses few of which are reducible to commendation or its opposite. Hare fears that if we ignore general words like "good" and their commendatory function or use as a means of changing standards, we would have limited ourselves to the language of "an irrevocably closed society". (*FR*, 25.) He argues (against "naturalism") that it is possible to use more general words such as "good" or "better" or "bad" or "worse" to alter or reject the evaluations attached to less general words such as "nigger" or "courageous" as well as purely descriptive, inverted-commas (and, he adds, conventional) uses. Therefore, mere possession of a certain word never commits us to certain evaluations; "nobody can be compelled logically to accept the *evaluation* which is normally incapsulated in the word; he can only be compelled to accept what is implied in the *descriptive* meaning of the word." (*FR*, 190.) In short, we use general value-words as vehicles for new standards and ideals such that we may not be "the prisoners of our own conceptual apparatus". (*FR*, 189-90.)

With Hare we may agree that we are not compelled <u>logically</u> to accept the evaluative aspects of a word, but it seems to me, contrary to Hare, that we are not compelled <u>logically</u> to accept its descriptive meaning either. Words are vague (or "problematic") not only evaluatively, but also descriptively. We are not always fully aware of our own desires, interests, and goals. Nor do we ever fully know their origin and consequences. Uncertainties and disagreements pervade "moral" life, no doubt to a greater degree that they do in science or perception. But less uncertainty and disagreement in perceptual and scientific domains do not mean no uncertainty and complete agreement.

And if this is true, the difference between moral or evaluative discourse and scientific discourse turns out, at least insofar as the questions of uncertainty and disagreement are concerned, to be a matter of degree. The main difference between them, as was suggested earlier, seems to be in the nature of the sort of facts with which they are primarily concerned, science with physical facts and moral discourse with the psychological facts of desire, preference, interest, and ends. The point remains that we need further argument for the claim that the difference in question is more than a matter of the degree of uncertainty and disagreement and the nature of the factual contents of scientific and ethical discourses, that it is a "logical" difference. But no such argument is offered by Hare. As was noted earlier, science is by no means devoid of theoretical constructions which are then put to the test of experience. (Note Hare's own analogy between the methods of scientific inquiry and moral reasoning referred to above, p. 129.) In the light of these remarks, it seems that the burden of the proof of a logical distinction between scientific and moral discourses is on Hare.

The emphasis on "good" and "ought" does seem to draw attention to commendation as their primary use. At least "ought", though perhaps not "good", seems to lend itself best to such a use (though we also have Stevenson's alternative of expressing and evoking approval or disapproval). But it does not follow that it is only or even primarily these general words which serve to change (for better or for worse) our "conceptual apparatus". Indeed such words in many situations are too crude and weak to change anything. And even if they did, this would say nothing for their being "evaluative" (or more to our purpose, "moral"). It is not this kind of word or that, this kind of use of language or

that, which is moral. It is mainly description of feelings, desires, and ends, and what such description aspires to—a rational life led in harmony with others—that can be said to have moral force.

There are passages in *The Language of Morals* which support my criticisms. In one of these, as we saw, Hare points out that virtually all words can be used evaluatively. Elsewhere, he says: "'good' normally has at least some of both sorts of meaning." (124.) On another occasion, he makes a stronger observation: "Although the evaluative meaning of 'good' is primary, the secondary descriptive meaning is never wholly absent." (121-2.) Related to this remark is Hare's point that "the relative prominence of the descriptive and evaluative meanings of 'good' varies according to the class of objects within which commendation is being given." (122.) Thus with a certain class of objects, e.g. eggs, there is an accepted standard of goodness, and hence "good egg" is primarily (though not exclusively) descriptive. With other classes of objects, e.g. poems, there is no accepted standard of goodness; "good poem", then, is primarily (though, again, not exclusively) evaluative. It is unfortunate that from these remarks Hare does not draw the conclusions which, as I have tried to show, seem imperative. Evaluative meaning (this locution seems preferable to "the relative prominence of evaluative meaning", since the descriptive/ evaluative distinction has turned out to be an unhappy one) or use is a function not of any specific kind of words, but of the extent to which there is an accepted and common set of standards, i.e. the extent to which there are universalizable criteria to which we explicitly or implicitly assent. I hope it has become clearer that the reasons why Hare does not draw this conclusion are related to his prescriptivism as

explained above, reasons which in the light of our actual linguistic practice amount to an indefensible bias. Also, these points will hopefully throw some light on my suggestion at the outset of this chapter that there is a tension, though not perhaps any contradiction, between the prescriptivistic and the universalistic sides of Hare's analysis.

In the light of the foregoing, it seems to be universalizability, to which Hare's theory is committed, and not prescriptivity as well, that is the essential "logical" mark of moral discourse. As was noted earlier, commendation is, according to Hare, "covertly universal" in the sense that it involves adducing "reasons", and reasons entail the acceptance of a standard applicable to all the objects similar in relevant respects to the one in question. I have been arguing that the use of moral words involves these standards not primarily or essentially as standards which are <u>chosen</u> or "invoked" in order to guide <u>choice</u> or decision to <u>act</u>. They are related primarily not to choice or action, but to attitudes (desires, wishes, aims, and the like) as well as beliefs, physical objects or events, and the other words (in general, symbols) used in the rest of a dialogue. In other words, moral language has the force not primarily of expressing and guiding choices or actions which exemplify or conform to a universal principle, but of guiding desires, interests, beliefs, and "ideals" (if, as I shall ask later in 4.1., there is such a thing as distinct from interests, desires, and beliefs) which can coexist in harmony with one another.

Chapter 4

Mackie: Scepticism and prescriptivism

In this chapter I hope to show, first, that in *Ethics: Inventing
Right and Wrong*, despite his preoccupation with what he calls the
"ontological" thesis about the status of values, Mackie does offer a
more or less systematic account of the core meaning or use of ethical as
distinct from scientific language. This account, contrary to Mackie's
own suggestion, does <u>not</u> seem to be independent of first order
"practical" considerations. Thus it confirms once again a part of my
thesis that a (second order) analysis of the core meaning or use of
ethical language cannot help but introduce normative concerns in the
shape of privileging certain dimensions of a total linguistic situation
as distinct from others. Secondly, this normative concern seems to be
linked with Mackie's prescriptivistic account of the core meaning or
standard force of ethical language, in spite of his attack on Hare's
principle of universalizability as part of that meaning or force and the
contention that the principle of universalizability is the product of
normative considerations.

I will suggest that since prescriptivism is not, as Mackie
himself stresses, necessarily related to "scepticism" as an ontological
thesis about the status of (moral) values, the latter may be accepted
without the former. I will raise similar objections to Mackie's
prescriptivism as I raised to Hare's, though the subtleties introduced

by Mackie in his analysis call for further consideration. (However, as we shall see, Mackie's analysis of "good" seems acceptable; indeed it contributes to the analogies between so-called descriptive and evaluative words.) Apart from considering the counter-example of "promising" (as discussed by Searle, though in the slightly different context of "is"-"ought" relation), I will argue that if the partiality for reason which I have been defending can be established by examining the cognitive tendencies of language and the analogies between scientific and moral discourses, then Mackie's linguistic thesis of prescriptivism becomes, like Hare's, dubious and replaceable by such theory as will make room for an essentially rationalistic and universalistic ethics.

4.1. A Critique of Universalization

In the last chapter we saw Hare pointing out that a moral judgment is universalizable in the sense that assent to it entails assent to the same judgment in all relevantly similar circumstances. Another way of saying this is that in virtue of the meaning or standard force of moral language, or part of that meaning or force, only different circumstances can be treated morally differently, such that if different moral judgments are made, relevant and real differences must be adducible as reasons or justification. A judgment is moral only if the speaker is prepared to apply it in all relevantly similar cases. Mackie's critique of universalizability rests on the importance he seems to attribute to the words "relevantly similar". The qualification these

words introduce into the concept of universalization is essential because if all the differences between situations in which we think about moral matters and act were relevant (or if no similarity was relevant), despite its universal form, no moral judgment could be said to apply to more than a specific situation, and moral education or learning in the proper sense would be impossible in the sense that every moral decision or action would have to start from scratch, blindly, as it were. To consider the relevant similarities between different cases is to have enabled moral education to get off the ground. On the other hand, if no difference between moral situations were relevant (if all moral situations were similar in relevant respects), it would be difficult to find a situation which would not conform to a maxim. Such a judgment is almost impossible to come by; even if it were found, it would be empty and as such provide no guidance.

We may say, in general, that the words "relevantly similar" point to the indeterminacy of the boundaries of a "rational" morality. Mackie's conclusion, as we shall see, is more radical; it amounts to dispensing with rationality as a "logical" requirement of moral discourse. His conclusion seems to be motivated primarily by the term "relevantly", referred to above. This term holds particular interest, for it suggests that the similarities on the basis of which moral judgments may be extended from one situation to another may be only a matter of "interpretation", that there may be no "logical" similarity between the descriptions of different situations. (The same holds for "ontological" similarity between these situations, but ontological questions are not our main concern here, nor is it indeed Mackie's in that part of *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* which I am expounding.

From now on, I will refer to this work as *Ethics*, and unless otherwise mentioned, the page references will be from the same book.) That there is no "logical" similarity on the basis of which moral judgments may be extended from one situation to another is indeed Mackie's view. In conformity with this view, he argues, as we shall see, that universalization is a "practical" requirement, expressing our decisions, not a "logical" one in the sense that its rejection would be self-contradictory. I will argue that Mackie's criticism of universalization benefits from his artificial separation of what is logical from what is practical, and that this in turn rests on too narrow a conception of "practice". On a wider notion of "practice", such abstract and general discourses as mathematics and logic, and the less abstract discourse of science, are "practical" indeed, and there are no good arguments for a distinction in principle between these and ethical discourse. Moreover, with the establishment of a formal equivalence between scientific and ethical discourses a foundation would be laid for the possibility of rational and autonomous consensus on a global scale. In prescriptivism, a position on which Mackie falls back, such a consensus is rendered accidental, for it is made ultimately contingent on individual decisions to opt into or out of a "practice".

To go back to the question of universalizability of moral judgments, the question to ask is: If a moral judgment is one whose adherent is prepared to apply it in all relevantly similar situations, what kinds of differences are irrelevant? This question is important to consider because, as we saw above, we can say neither that all differences are relevant nor that they are all irrelevant. It may be held that numerical differences between the speakers are irrelevant to

the "morality" of a judgment about a certain object (action, person, or state of affairs). (As before, in "calling" something by a name, we assume sincerity, not a deliberate attempt to mislead.) It may be said, what is morally right from X's point of view can be wrong from Y's, not because X is X and Y is Y, and X and Y are numerically distinct, but because of the other "generic" differences between X and Y or between their situations. A moral judgment cannot contain an "essential" reference to an individual. Proper names and indexical terms such as "I", "this", "here", and the like, can, of course, be used in moral judgments. But they can be used not as constants, but as variables or place-holders for general descriptions. Thus if and when the speaker uses such proper terms he must at least be prepared to assent to the same judgment with respect to any other individual case satisfying a general description. "Relevant" moral differences are "generic" differences or differences of kind between the speakers of moral judgments or the situations in or to which those judgments are applied. (*Ethics*, 83-4.)

This kind (or "stage") of universalization, says Mackie, rules out one sort of egoism which places the interests of a particular person (or family or nation) above every other person's (etc.) interests. It also rules out some ascetics' "inverted egoism" which is reflected in the judgment: "I cannot allow myself such indulgences, but I do not condemn them in others." (84.) But in general, it does not rule out any variety of self-referential altruism which says: "Everyone should promote (exclusively or primarily) his own interests (or those of his own family, relatives, friends, or nation). Nor does it rule out the inverted self-referential altruism which says: "Everyone should promote

(exclusively or primarily) others' interests (be it other people or other countries) rather than his own", rare as this kind of altruism may be. (84-5.)

Can we say that as long as a maxim passes this first test, it counts as a moral judgment, and that there are no further constraints on what can count as a relevant moral difference? If so, no difference of kind between persons or situations would fail to be a relevant ground for making or assenting to a moral judgment as long as the speaker (sincerely) takes it to be so relevant. According to this view, the judgment "All black people should be subservient to the white", pronounced by one who regards a difference of race as a ground for discrimination or adverse treatment of blacks, is a moral judgment simply because it passes the first test, because the speaker may be prepared to apply the judgment not only to the black and white people of South Africa, but also to those of North America, or indeed to the rest of the world. Any "decisions", then, about what generic differences are or are not relevant is independent of this kind of universalization. But the constraints introduced by this kind of universalization on what counts as a relevant difference do not seem to be adequate, though they seem to be necessary for an account of what we ordinarily mean by a "moral" judgment. Surely, we tend to think that the speaker cannot take just any qualitative difference between persons or situations as a relevant ground for treating them differently. We tend to think, therefore, that this first kind of universalization is insufficient because it allows partiality or unfair discrimination between people on grounds of color, sex, or religion. Our use of moral language seems to

demand that there be more constraints on what counts as a "moral" judgment, more rigor from the criterion of universalizability.

The second kind of universalization is designed to counteract those discriminations with respect to color, sex, or religion which the first kind of universalization left open. Here, we universalize not only in the sense of eliminating numerical differences between persons or their situations as irrelevant to the "moral" character or force of a judgment, not only do we apply a judgment as things actually are, but also go on doing so no matter what changes (possible or not) in physical or mental quality, resources, or social status may be implied in reversing roles. Other differences, then, would be regarded as relevant only if they look relevant from the point of view of each of these roles. In this way, the judgments that result will not take unfair account of one's own special qualities, resources, or social position. (90ff.) The same considerations apply in the third kind of universalization, except that this kind "involves putting ourselves even more thoroughly into the other person's place, so that one takes on his desires, tastes, preferences, ideals, and values as well as his other qualities and abilities and external situation." (92-3.)

Of course, for the second and third kinds of universalization, especially perhaps for the third, there may be considerable effort of "imagination" needed, for they involve looking at things from both an actual and a "hypothetical" point of view (in the sense of belonging to or being an other), or from all actual points of view. And this makes it very difficult for a maxim to pass these two kinds of test, for what they are meant to eliminate may be very radical and divergent differences.

In spite of these difficulties, however, one may insist that unless such constraints as introduced by these two kinds of universalization restrict the range of what counts as a relevant difference, a judgment cannot properly be called "moral", and that the difficulties can "in principle" be overcome. Now if we go back and look more closely at the exposition of the three kinds of universalization, we find such statements as that a moral judgment cannot contain an "essential" reference to individuals, that its speaker "must" be prepared to eliminate numerical differences, that we "demand" that a certain kind of universalization place certain "constraints" on what counts as relevant differences, that the first and the second stages may be "inadequate" because of what they leave out of considerations, and that universalization must be as "rigorous" as possible even if it calls for a considerable effort of imagination. The terms in inverted commas already suggest that the thesis that moral judgments are universalizable may not be a "logical" thesis, but a "practical" one. (88.) The sense in which this is so is as follows.

With respect to each of these kinds of universalization, Mackie distinguishes a "logical thesis" from a "substantive practical thesis". The logical thesis is that which holds in virtue of the meaning or the distinctive use of terms. For instance, universalization would be a logical thesis if "good" or "ought" had such a (core of) meaning as the judgments in which they figure were universalizable, or if it were by virtue of their standard moral force that "good" or "ought" could be supported by universalizable reasons. (87.) The case with a substantive practical thesis is different, according to Mackie, in that it holds neither as a part of "general logic" (i.e. the logic of such words as

"and", "or", and the like) nor as a part of a "special logic" of moral language or thought (i.e. by virtue of the meaning or standard force of such words or concepts as "good" and "ought"). For example, even if it were in virtue of the special logic of moral uses of words like "good" and "ought" that the judgments which employ them are universalizable, it would be a substantive practical thesis "that one should, in thinking that guides one's choices of action, make a vital use of terms and concepts that have this special logic" (88), or "that actions are to be guided by maxims which pass this test [of universalizability]" (92). That one "should" use judgments which one is prepared to universalize, or that one's actions "are to be" guided by maxims which pass the test of universalizability, does not follow from the logical thesis, because it is a practical thesis and as such independent of what the meaning or force of words requires. The logical thesis can be true or false without affecting our decision to adopt or reject the practical thesis. For, says Mackie, supposing the logical thesis were true, that to make a moral judgment using "good" or "ought" with its full standard moral force meant being prepared to universalize in any one of the senses discussed above, it does not still follow that one cannot "use moral terms with only part and not the whole of their standard moral force", or indeed that one cannot "with complete consistency refrain from using moral language at all." (98.) Likewise, the logical thesis may be false, and yet "someone may still coherently let his conduct be guided (only) by maxims which are universalizable in this way." (99.) As we shall see in a moment, Mackie holds that the logical thesis about the first and second types of universalizability is dubious and that concerning the third type is false. I will argue that the distinction

between the logical thesis and the practical thesis is itself
questionable; it rests on a narrow conception of "practice".

Mackie says: "It is at most the first stage, the ruling out of
purely numerical differences as morally irrelevant, that is built into
the meaning of moral language: the corresponding logical thesis about
the second stage is more controversial, while that about the third stage
would be plainly false." (97-8.) Even the logical status of the first
stage of universalization is, according to Mackie, dubious. (87.) This
is because, as we saw, though the ascetic's inverted egoism cannot pass
the test of the first stage, it is nevertheless recognizable as moral,
perhaps because it involves a sense of relative self-denial and greater
value for others' interests than for one's own. Even in this first
sense, then, universalizability does not seem to be a necessary
condition for a judgment to be moral. Even if it were, it would be so
as part of a special logic of moral uses of such words as "good" and
"ought", not as part of their general meanings. (87-8.)

The logical thesis about the second stage of universalization,
says Mackie, is "controversial". It is true, of course, that this kind
of universalization is "generally used and generally influential", as is
evident in the popular saying "How would you like it if you were so-and-
so yourself?" or "What would you do if it were you?" But, says Mackie,
"Perhaps we should say that this second stage is a traditionally
recognized and persuasive pattern of moral reasoning, but not one which
has yet been clearly incorporated in the meanings of moral terms." (96.)
For this reason, though judgments which pass this second test may be
found in practice, it is doubtful whether the corresponding logical
thesis is true.

With respect to the third kind of universalization, Mackie says that it is most doubtful whether any maxim stands up to such a severe test as looking at things from all actual viewpoints, where a viewpoint consists not only of personal qualities, resources, or social position, but also of desires, "tastes", preferences, and "ideals", and the interests associated with them. At best we may take account of some basic desires and interests which everyone has, but apart from these, people's preferences and ideals are so divergent that it becomes very dubious whether in making a moral judgment we are committed to wholeheartedly assenting to the same judgment made from all viewpoints. From these considerations Mackie concludes: "Universalizability of this third sort is no part of the meaning of moral terms or of the special logic of moral thought." (96.) (He also says that even if we could take some account of all viewpoints, it would be still more difficult to give equal weight to all of them. For instance, it is not clear how we could even measure and weigh the interests of future generations. Even Hare's "liberal" takes only some account of all ideals; he does not give equal weight to them all, for he places his own ideal of weighing all ideals equally above all the other ideals which he takes into account. It remains, however, that in taking some account of all ideals, Hare's liberal does still pass the test of the third stage of universalizability. (93-5.))

Regarding the first kind of universalization, Mackie himself acknowledges that it is clearly built into our language. He also concedes that the second kind, though it has not "yet been clearly incorporated in the meanings of moral terms", is a popular "form of moral argument". Now it is true that, as we saw Mackie pointing out

earlier, we may use moral terms with less than their full moral force or not at all. But note that this last point is only too obvious; one may accept this point and still hold that the full force of "moral" terms is brought out only if the judgments employing them pass the test of this second kind of universalizability. Given that this kind of universalizability is, however unclearly, incorporated into ordinary language, that it is a traditional pattern of moral reasoning, and that more often than not we do use it, Mackie's willingness to grant the practical thesis about this kind of universalizability need not be accompanied by any doubts about the corresponding logical thesis. The problem seems to be that Mackie wants a neat separation between matters of "logic" or semantics and those of "practice". This in turn seems to rest on a narrow conception of "practice". I would argue that given actual linguistic practice in general and the principle of parsimony or the simplicity of explanation, the practical and logical theses are inseparable.

Insofar as the first two stages of universalization are concerned, there seem to be good reasons to claim that our language in general has universalistic tendencies. As we saw in the previous paragraph, there seems to be some reason to believe that singular statements employing such words as "good", "ought", and "right" are in principle universalizable, in that they can be derived from universal statements applied to relevantly similar situations. But it is not only a characteristic of "value-words" that the judgments employing them are universalizable. In fact all statements which use "generic" terms can be derived from a respective universal statement. The judgment "This apple is red" is applicable not only to the object in front of me, but

to all objects similar to it with respect to being a fruit of a certain
general description and having a color of a certain general description.
(Cf. the analogies between "red" and "good" discussed in the previous
chapter.) Given the truth of this claim and the claim that the several
dimensions of a holistic linguistic practice cannot be logically
separated (both of which we will have to support further in the next
chapter), I argue that both the logical and the practical theses about
the first two kinds of universalizability are acceptable. To put this
in terms which seem to combine both theses, the universalizability of
moral discourse is acceptable in principle, in the same way as in
scientific discourse. And it is not by virtue of the distinctive logic
of moral discourse (i.e. as distinct from the logic of scientific
discourse) or the distinctive use of "moral" terms (as distinct from
scientific terms) that moral judgments are universalizable, for our
study may show that there is no logical distinction between moral and
scientific terms or discourses.

Similar considerations, I think, apply in the case of the third
kind of universalization. Due to its complexity, however, this kind
deserves more attention. Mackie suggests, as we saw, that the
difficulties encountering this kind of universalization stem from the
fact that divergences in "tastes" and "ideals" may be too radical to
make it either practically possible or logically true. Moral language
does not, by virtue of its meaning or any special logic, take some, let
alone equal, account of all interests associated with ideals and tastes.
In this connection Mackie has drawn attention to a tension in Hare. He
refers to the following passage in *Freedom and Reason*:

> We saw above that it is characteristic of moral
> thought in general to accord equal weight to the
> interests of all persons; that is to say, it makes no
> difference whether it is you or I that has the
> interest. The liberal does something of this sort
> with ideals as well as interests; but it is important
> to make clear just what he does; for he is not, as in
> the previous case, *constrained* to do it under penalty
> of being said not to be thinking morally or
> evaluatively. It is true even of the fanatic that it
> makes no difference to him what individual has a
> certain ideal (for he thinks that even if he himself
> should come to abandon his ideal, other people who
> still held it ought to treat him as the ideal
> requires). That is to say, the fanatic nails his
> flag to the *content* of the ideal, irrespective of its
> holder; and therefore his views are as entitled as
> are the liberal's to the name 'evaluative' in the
> sense in which we have been using the term. (*FR*, 177-
> 8.)

In this passage, on the one hand, in conformity with his overall

position regarding the thesis of universalizability, Hare seems to

suggest that it is part of the logic of moral language (or thought) that

the interests of all persons should be given equal weight, in the sense

that it does not matter who has the interest, and on the other hand, he

goes on to say that universalization in the sense of taking equal

account of "ideals" and the interests associated or compatible with

ideals is not a logical "constraint" on the moral character of a thought

or judgment. The latter is suggested in the claim that the liberal (and

the fanatic) are not "*constrained* to do it [i.e. to take equal account

of all ideals] under penalty of being said not to be thinking morally or

evaluatively." In other words, having made the general statement at the

beginning of the passage quoted above concerning the universalization of

interests, Hare goes on implicitly to deny logical status to the

universalization of the interests associated with ideals and hence to

deny a difference of logic or "form" between the liberal's and the

fanatic's positions. From the standpoint of the logic of moral thought, says Hare, the fanatic and the "liberal" are on the same footing; they can both consider what it would be like if their own interests were at stake. And as is clear in the pages preceding and following the passage quoted, Hare's argument against the fanatic rests ultimately on his appeal to the contingent fact that (fortunately) the fanatics who would hold to their ideals and their implications even after having imagined themselves in place of those whose ideals and their associated interests differ from theirs are "extremely rare" (*FR*, 172).

Take the fanatic Nazi, for example. He is one who calls for the extermination of all the Jews even if he himself and his family turn out to be Jews by descent. In Mackie's terms, the fanatic Nazi is willing to endorse the first and second kinds of universalization, though, being firmly attached to a specific ideal, he fails to follow the third kind of universalization and accept its implications in terms of the interests the pursuit of which is allowed by a different ideal, i.e. that of the Jews. It is here, according to Mackie, that the "liberal" and the fanatic differ, for it is part of the liberal's position to take at least some, if not equal account of all ideals and respect them and their associated interests, though after considering them he will find the fanatic's ideal intolerable. (94.) (As was suggested earlier, even the "liberal" is not universalizing in the sense of giving equal weight to all "ideals". But it remains that he takes some account of them all.)

Mackie suggests that the only way the tension in Hare's account can be resolved is by abandoning the stronger version of the logical thesis for the third stage of universalization, this for no better

reason than that this stage involves too severe a test for any maxim or rule of conduct to pass. Mackie disputes the truth of even the weaker version of that thesis, as suggested in the previous paragraph. For, he says, the fanatic knows what moral thinking and language mean, though without inconsistency fails to take any account of other ideals which conflict with his own. In this connection, Mackie points out: "We must lower our sights a little, and look not for principles which can be wholeheartedly endorsed from every point of view, but for ones which represent an acceptable compromise between the different actual points of view." (93.) I do not know exactly what one could mean by a "compromise between the different actual points of view", other than that our principles must be allowed to be complex and to embody as many generalizable exceptions as possible so that they may be capable of dealing with complex situations to which it would be only too naive to apply absolute and inflexible principles. But if this is what we mean by "compromise", there is no need to take issue with Hare on this point, for it is exactly what he would propound. If this is not what "compromise" means, then it becomes very unclear indeed to what extent we should "lower our sights" in practice or in theory; how much is "a little" and how much would be too much. For what Mackie says does not in any way touch the logical thesis about universalizability. This thesis may be, and I have been arguing that it is, true not only in scientific discourse, but also in moral.

Perhaps, then, the tension in Hare may be removed by attending to the meaning of the term "ideal" and asking whether, at any rate insofar as ethics is concerned, there can be any sense in the term apart from what is captured by "interest", "desire", "wish", or "end", either

singly or in conjunction with one another. (In this connection, religious "ideals" or beliefs seem to deserve a special treatment, for their "content" may not be reducible to that of (human) interests and desires. Arguments which attempt to derive religious claims from ethical ones (though not necessarily those which attempt the opposite) are never strong enough. However, the question of the relation between religion and ethics is not our concern here, and what I will have to say about it later is far from exhaustive.) My answer to the question posed at the beginning of this paragraph is negative, but I have no argument to support this answer except that it seems self-evident and is suggested by the etymology of the term (i.e. its derivation from "idea") and the fact that "idea" is merely a vague term used ordinarily to refer to a psychological content, e.g. belief, interest, desire, choice (preference), taste, end, and so on. Save the possibility of divine revelation (in which case strictly speaking we would be dealing with religious discourse, not moral), the differences in "ideals" do not seem independent of mental and physical qualities, special skills, resources, and social status. At least, it is highly doubtful whether they are independent, whether reasons of different sort can be given in their support. For this reason, and of course those offered above in connection with the second stage, I suggest that the third stage of universalization, the stage in which some or equal weight is given to all "ideals", "tastes", "preferences", or "values" (another vague term which is indeed what we are trying to grasp here), is as such superfluous; what it tries to eliminate, namely unequal treatment or discrimination on the basis of tastes, preferences, ideals, or "values", is already eliminated in the second (and by implication, the first)

stage of universalization in terms of (racial, sexual, or religious) "interests".

If these remarks are correct, the difference between the "liberal" and the fanatic does not seem to consist in the fact that the liberal goes in for the third stage of universalization, whereas the fanatic does not. It is doubtful whether even the liberal is in this particular debate applying the third stage of universalizability, for he seems to give hardly any weight to the Nazi's Aryan ideal and regards it as intolerable. The difference in question is that whereas the liberal applies the second stage of universalization, the fanatic Nazi usually does not. For the Nazi is typically incapable of imaginatively and "sympathetically" putting himself in the position of all parties involved; most likely, though not necessarily, he merely pretends to do so, in the sense of universalizing too abstractly, when he expresses readiness to apply his maxim to himself or his family if he turns out to be a Jew by descent. The Nazi's "ideal", therefore, seems for the most part and as far as the general meaning or use of moral language is concerned incompatible with the second stage of universalizability; to that extent it seems "irrational". It does rest on some kind of "evaluation", for being couched in terms of certain generalizable features of the allegedly superior and inferior races, it passes the test of the first stage of universalizability. But it is neither "moral" nor scientific. For both moral and scientific judgments are universalizable at both the first and second stages.

These remarks should not be taken as a denial of the existence of conflicts arising from divergent "ideals" or "tastes". But if I am right in holding that such conflicts are in reality motivated

(consciously or not) by the pursuit of more deep-seated interests which the first and second kinds of universalizability are meant to account for--personal interests, as well as interests associated with social position, resources, special qualities, sex, color, or religion--if, in other words, I am right in holding that the third stage of universalization is spurious and the first and second stages are acceptable as part of the logic of moral discourse (see above, pp. 177-8), then there really is no further barrier on rational consensus or agreement on matters which would safeguard the interests of all and even regard them of equal value. For if differences of number, social position, abilities, etc., are irrelevant to moral discourse, and if ideological conflicts amount to differences of those kinds, then the residue of our unresolved disagreements can be taken care of by appeal to some other criterion of evaluation. I am not sure what the best criterion in this regard could be, and I suspect something like the amount of time spent on "productive" labor would serve our purpose. ("Productive" may be defined as that which is conducive to the interests which are independent of number, social position, special qualities, etc., as mentioned above. Note that this would not be question-begging; it would be only consistent with the universalizability principle which is granted in this argument.) Further thoughts on this matter may take us far afield, though I realize that their importance cannot be underestimated.

These points were to be expected from the notion of universalizability. If moral language is universalizable, it follows that insofar as moral terms are used with their full force, they commit the speaker to assenting to a moral judgment when "roles" are reversed;

they commit him to the _same_ kind of or _equal_ treatment of all relevantly similar situations or all relevant interests. Moreover, these points lend support to my suggestion that prescriptivism, as a view about the special status of moral judgments, is in tension, if not strictly in contradiction, with universalizability, in the sense that they point in two different directions—prescriptivism toward individual or personal choice or decision to act, universalization away from, though not strictly _against_, personal choice and action and toward consensus in a community of thinking and acting rational subjects.

As we have seen, throughout his discussion of universalization Mackie is willing to grant the practical thesis about universalization. This means, he says, that we "decide" to "opt into" the institution of morality, "adopt" or "endorse" the principle of universalization, or let our conduct be guided by those maxims which are universalizable. (See especially _Ethics_, pp. 98-100.) Mackie's readiness to accept the practical thesis about universalizability seems to be related to his prescriptivism, the view, as we shall see, that moral terms have the special logic of decisions. Regardless of what the nature of that relation might be, his prescriptivism deserves a discussion independently of considerations about the status of universalizability. As has been suggested on previous occasions, as a theory about the status of the distinctively moral utterances (or the distinctively moral status of certain so-called ethical terms or sentences), prescriptivism seems to do injustice to the complexities of moral discourse and to underrate the significance of descriptive and universalizable aspects of a total linguistic situation. This is partly why I suggested that the assumption on which prescriptivism rests, the hard and fast distinction

between first order practical or moral statements and second order scientific statements, be abandoned, and universalizability and "concern" for "facts" be accepted in principle, i.e. as both a logical and a practical requirement of moral discourse.

4.2. Prescriptivism Revisited

Mackie's prescriptivism appears most clearly in connection with his objections to Searle's attempt to derive "ought" from "is". Less clearly, it emerges in his critique of Hare's notion of "commendation". Searle tried to argue against the thesis that "ought"-statements (or "evaluative" statements) cannot be derived from "is"-statements (or "descriptive" statements which, of course, need not actually contain the term "is") by using the counter-example of "promising". This counter-example may be explained in general terms as follows. (See *Speech Acts*, Chapter 8. Unless otherwise mentioned, all references to Searle's ideas are from this book. I will abbreviate its title as *SA*.)

In certain circumstances, C, uttering the words "I hereby promise you, H, to do A" by a speaker, S, constitutes by virtue of the meaning of the words the act of making a promise by S to H. C involves among other things that H prefers S's doing A to his not doing A, that S believes H has such a preference, and that it is not obvious to S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events. (*SA*, 57ff.)[1] Now the act of promising, says Searle, is the act of placing oneself under (or "undertaking") an obligation to do the thing promised. And the latter in turn constitutes, at the time of the utterance of the promise, being

under an obligation. Moreover, suggests Searle, in the absence of conflicting obligations or other claims which relieve S from his obligation or override the obligation at the time of promise (these Searle calls *ceteris paribus* clauses and as such holds them not to be central to the argument), S has an obligation to do A when the time of action comes. Now if S is under an obligation to do A, then, as regards that obligation, S ought to do A. The moves from the utterance of certain words to the speech act of promising and then to an obligation and from that obligation to "ought" are, according to Searle, all tautological. Hence, in this way an "ought"-statement can be derived from an "is"-statement. (*SA*, 177ff.)

The point of this counter-example to the thesis that "ought" cannot be derived from "is", says Searle, is to show that the thesis fails in general to deal with "institutional facts" as it does with other facts. Institutions have certain "constitutive rules", and the constitutive rule of the institution of promising is that to make a promise is to undertake an obligation. Moreover, this rule is also a "meaning rule" for the descriptive word "promise". (184-5.) Thus by virtue of the constitutive rules of the institutional fact of promising, or by virtue of the meaning of the word "promise", that someone made a promise (or his utterance of the promise-words) entails the statement that he ought to do what he promised to do.

Searle extends his argument to such examples as "One ought not to steal", "One ought not to tell lies", and "One ought to pay one's debts", all of which he thinks are "tautologies concerning institutionalized forms of obligation." (185.) The first is so by virtue of the constitutive rules of the institution of private property,

for to recognize something as someone else's property necessarily
involves recognizing his right to it, a right, Searle suggests, which
stealing tacitly denies. Likewise, "One ought not to tell lies" may be
said to be a tautology by virtue of the constitutive rule that "to make
an assertion necessarily involves undertaking an obligation to speak
truthfully". And in virtue of the very meaning of "debt", one ought to
(or has an obligation to) pay or return what the debt consists of.
(186.) In fact, Searle extends the argument to such obviously
"descriptive" notions as that of "statement". Even statements, he says,
involve "commitment" (a concept parallel to "obligation"): "he who
states is committed (*ceteris paribus*) to avoiding self-contradictions:
one does not first decide to make statements and then make a separate
evaluative decision that they would be better if they were not self-
contradictory. So we are still left with commitments being essentially
involved in facts." (191.) In the same way, "X is a triangle" <u>commits</u>
the speaker to the proposition "X has three sides". (194.) Searle
concludes that "there is nothing special in this respect about promises;
similar rules are built into statements, warnings, advice, reports,
perhaps even commands." (190.)

The distinction between "ought"-statements and "is"-statements,
according to Searle, "is useful only as a distinction between two kinds
of illocutionary force, describing and evaluating, and it is not even
very useful there since, if we are to use these terms strictly, they are
only two among hundreds of kinds of illocutionary forces." (187.) I
would hesitate to call evaluating one "kind of illocutionary force"
among others, for "evaluation" may turn out to be nothing other than a
cognitive act which <u>underlies</u> all that can properly be called "language"

or illocutionary speech acts. (See below for further discussion of this point.) Searle's point remains in full force, however, that "S ought to do A" and the corresponding commitment are not logically distinct and can be derived from the utterance of promise-terms together with the description of the constitutive rules of promising institution. With these contentions Mackie disagrees. Since, as should be evident by now, my thesis consists primarily in the defense of descriptivism (Searle) and the related doctrine of universalizability and an attempt to show the inadequacies of prescriptivism (Mackie), taking these two theories to be competing for the position of a satisfactory second order statement about the status of moral discourse, a more in-depth look at Mackie's argument against Searle's attempt to derive "ought" from "is" seems to be called for.

Mackie emphasizes a distinction to which, as we shall see, Searle himself draws attention in the course of considering and replying to certain objections. This is the distinction between the internal and external viewpoints with respect to an institution. Institutional facts, Mackie argues, do not sufficiently account for what Searle calls placing oneself under or undertaking an obligation. The move from the speech act of promising to an obligation to keep the promise and thereby to an "ought"-conclusion is possible only through something the agent must do before one can say that it follows from the fact that he has uttered the promise-words in the appropriate circumstances that he is under an obligation and ought to do what he has purported to do. "Undertaking" is not something that follows deductively from the mere statement of the promise together with the description of the constitutive rules of the promising institution; it is in effect the

"invoking", "appealing to", or "endorsing" of the rules of the institution. "Ought" follows from "is" as a matter of institutional fact "not by general logic but by a special logic by which one reasons within the promising institution." (*Ethics*, 68.) More generally, the "ought"-conclusion, interpreted as having an evaluative force, follows from the utterance of a speech act (together with the supplementary factual premises about the rules of the institution and the circumstances of the utterance) only <u>within</u> an institution. Outside an institution too the "ought"-conclusion may follow from "is"-statements, but in that case the "ought" cannot be interpreted as having any evaluative force. It must be taken (however "elliptically") as part of the description of the institution.

The two interpretations of an "ought"-statement serve, for Mackie, to bring out the kinds of attitude or perspective one may take regarding an institution: the internal attitude which involves "invoking" the rules of the institution, and the external attitude which describes or reports those rules. (67-9.) To make his point clearer, Mackie considers the view according to which someone who utters the words "I promise to do A" in the appropriate circumstances implies that he <u>himself</u>, not necessarily a third-party observer, endorses the institution of promising. (He also considers the view according to which "ought" follows from "is" as an intrinsic requirement imposed by "the nature of things". This would involve, he says, yet another sense in which the "ought"-conclusion may be taken; it would involve "in Hume's words, a new relation"; hence, it cannot be derived from the "is"-premises. As we shall see, it is important for Mackie to refute the claim about intrinsic "objective" prescriptions as a central meta-

ethical claim. But we need not be concerned with this claim. It certainly does not contribute to the debate between Mackie and Searle.) According to this view, X may hold that from the fact that S promised H to do A it follows that S̲ ought to do A when the time of action comes, though X may without inconsistency decline to endorse the institution of promising. Mackie says that if X were to do so, his act "would be eccentric, unconventional, it might well make people distrust or dislike me [X], but it is not logically ruled out." (69.) However, the view in question says that it would be inconsistent for S̲, the promisor himself, to decline to endorse the institution. In other words, it may not be logically incumbent on anyone (X) to endorse the institution of promising when he makes an evaluative "ought"-judgment about someone else's (S's) obligation to keep his promise, but if X comes to be in S's place or circumstances, he is, by the very fact that he has uttered the promise-words or by virtue of the meaning of those words obliged or committed to the observance of the institution of promising and hence to the keeping of his promise. (69-71. This is how I read Mackie here; the text is not very clear to me at this juncture.)

The same sort of view is expressed by Searle in the course of considering and replying to certain objections to his argument for deriving "ought" from "is". (*SA*, 188-9.) In what follows I will try to show that in both Searle's argument and Mackie's response to it there is a central element which both seem to have set aside as not central, i.e. the *ceteris paribus* clause, the competing claims and considerations which may lead to removing the obligation or undermining it in the intervening period between the utterance of a speech act of promising and the time when the action is supposed to be done. (See *SA*,

179 and *Ethics*, 67.) I will argue that in spite of this similar initial
treatment of a *ceteris paribus* clause by Mackie and Searle, there is an
important difference between their conceptions of what "accepting" the
institution of promising consists in, and that it is this difference
that has led Mackie to take issue with Searle's derivation; it is not so
much that Searle (or the view which was explained in the previous
paragraph) ignores the distinction between the internal and external
perspectives on the promising institution as that he makes a different
use of that distinction. I will argue that Mackie's peculiar conception
of what constitutes "accepting" a moral institution (a conception which
is tantamount to his "prescriptivism") has led him to re-introduce
implicitly (though perhaps inadvertently) the *ceteris paribus* clause
which at the outset he proposes to exclude. Searle, consistently,
leaves that clause out of the discussion, and his conception of
"accepting" a moral institution seems more defensible than Mackie's.

I begin with Mackie's response to the view explained above,
namely that the utterance of promise-words in the appropriate
circumstances commits the speaker to the endorsement of the promising
institution, and to action as promised. Mackie says that the view in
question mixes up three distinct claims, only two of which are correct.
(I do not think these claims are quite distinct, and Searle too suggests
that there may be some relation between them. But I will not distract
the reader with this point.) These claims are as follows.

(1) The hypothetical imperative claim that if someone wants for
any length of time to retain the benefits of the institution of
promising, he ought to (or it is better and more practical) to do what
its rules prescribe rather than invent new rules and try to observe

them. This, says Mackie, is a "harmlessly correct" view. In general

hypothetical imperatives do not pose logical difficulties for transition

from "is" to "ought". Given the agent's desires and purposes and the

causal and institutional relations holding among the factors involved in

a situation, that he should or ought to do something follows from the

statement of his desires and the causal and institutional rules. (65-6.)

We are dealing in the case of promising essentially with the same

situation. The game of chess perhaps best illustrates the point. "The

rules of the game, together with the actual positions of the pieces, and

perhaps what is likely that his opponent will do, coupled with the

general aim of winning, are sufficient to determine that the player must

not do this, or ought not to do that." (65.) (Of course, it may be said

that winning is not necessarily the aim of playing chess, but this would

make it doubtful whether one who does not have such a general aim (of

which he need not, of course, remind himself in the course of playing

the game) is taking the game "seriously" or "conventionally". Even if

someone makes a move "merely" in order to have tried out a new move, he

would be trying to see whether that move is successful or not, whether

he can win with that move. Winning may be said not to be the prime

motive in this case, but it is part of the reasons for the new move. As

Searle says, "it is a matter of rule of competitive games that each side

is committed to trying to win." (34, n.) Searle also makes it clear

that the derivation of "ought" from "is" in the context of promising

proceeds on the assumption that the promise is a "serious" one. (189f.)

I think what is involved in the seriousness of a promise is in part the

"sincerity" of the speaker (though Searle does not make this clear), but

at any rate the assumption that the speaker has, at the time of the

utterance, an intention to do what he promises to do seems to be included in the conditions (C) referred to earlier, and is as such part of the rules of the promising institution ("sincerity rule").)

(2) The second claim is that if someone "makes a sincere promise, he is at least at that time endorsing the institution, and so is prepared to speak within the institution." (70.) Such a person would be prepared at the time of promise to say: "I will be obliged to do X when the time comes". But this, Mackie thinks, does not pose a difficulty for the derivation either. And, as should be evident, this claim is compatible with Searle's view, except the use of the term "endorsing" with which I will deal later.

(3) The third claim suggested by the view in question, says Mackie, is that by making a promise at one time the speaker commits himself to the institution of promising "in such a way that it will be not merely a change of mind but wrong for him to refuse to endorse it when the time comes for" the action promised to be performed. (70.) To this claim Mackie's retort is: "The alleged commitment is, in effect, a promise." (70.) This means that the utterance of the promise is supposedly also a promise to go on endorsing the institution of promising. But, as such, the claim attempts to validate the obligation to act when the time of action comes in a "circular" manner, since the obligation in question rests on the assumption that there is a commitment to the promising institution which ought to be fulfilled. But, says Mackie, there is no _logical_ inconsistency in making a promise, accepting what is involved in the second claim (2), and yet rejecting the obligation to keep the promise, due to a change of mind, when the time of action arrives. Hence, the obligation to act when the time

comes does not necessarily follow from the utterance of a promise, <u>not
even if the speaker stays within the promising institution throughout
the period just preceding the time of action</u>. (The underlined
qualification is, of course, mine, but it seems to me consistent with,
though ultimately generates a difficulty for, what Mackie says. See
below.)

To see what is happening here more clearly, we must turn to
Searle's discussion. His response to a number of objections which he
considers serves best to bring out the point of contention between him
and Mackie. One of these objections is that "There is a kind of
conservatism implicit in the whole account. You seem to be saying that
it is logically inconsistent for anyone to think that one ought never to
keep promises, or that the whole institution of promising is evil."
(188.) In his reply Searle makes it clear that he is aware that the
derivation of "ought" from "is" is possible inside an institution, not
outside it. Thus one may consistently hold (from an internal point of
view) that promising involves an obligation to do what is promised, and
think at the same time that one ought never to keep promises. "It is
internal to the concept of promising", he says, "that in promising one
undertakes an obligation to do something. But whether the entire
institution of promising is good or evil, and whether the obligations
undertaken in promising are over-ridden by other outside considerations
are questions which are external to the institution itself." (189.)
Searle points out that in effect the objection suggests that the
obligation (at the time when the promise is made) to keep the promise is
always over-ridden by external considerations. This, of course, seems
very nihilistic, but it is not inconsistent. More soberly, one may have

all sorts of reasons, stemming from conflicting obligations or claims, for saying that one ought not, in certain circumstances, to do what one is (*prima facie* and in virtue of the meaning of the words) under an obligation to do. Indeed "There has to be an obligation in the first place to be counterveiled or excused." (180, n.) But, says Searle, considerations which may present counterveiling claims and sometimes override the obligations holding inside the institution have no bearing on the "logic" of promising. (180. The context in which these last remarks occur most clearly is where Searle is dealing with the *ceteris paribus* clause in the derivation.) I take Searle's reply to the charge of conservatism, then, to be that it benefits from confusing an attack on the *ceteris paribus* clause with one on the logic of the derivation. By keeping these questions apart and excluding the *ceteris paribus* clause from consideration, Searle has, I think, successfully answered that charge.

It seems clear, then, that for Searle whatever happens in the interval between the completion of the speech act of promising and the time of action is external (he sometimes says "irrelevant") to the obligation which is entailed in making a promise. But, as was suggested above, it would be consistent with Mackie's position to address the question of what happens in that interval from the internal perspective on the institution: even if the speaker stayed within the promising institution up until the time of action, no obligation to act as promised follows logically from the utterance and the rules of the institution. But, I would argue that this results only because Mackie has re-introduced the *ceteris paribus* clause into the "logic" of the

derivation, thus bringing in what he purported to exclude at the outset (67).

The re-introduction of the *ceteris paribus* clause seems inconsistent with its prior exclusion, but it can be explained in terms of what amounts to a presupposition concerning the notion of "obligation" or "ought" in the specifically moral or evaluative sense, namely that this notion has the force primarily of a decision to endorse (or, since the notion of "endorsing" already has a decisionistic connotation, simply "endorsing") an institution. It is this presupposition, I am arguing, that has led Mackie to the inconsistency pointed out concerning the *ceteris paribus* clause and from there to his charge of "circularity" against the attempt to derive an obligation to act at the time of action from the utterance of a promise. The alleged obligation, we saw Mackie saying, turns out to be a promise. But Mackie is able to launch this attack because for him making a promise involves primarily a decision, it involves endorsing the institution of promising. In effect Mackie is saying that a promise may entail a future obligation to act only if it is consistently made between the time of the completion of the first utterance and the time of action. The speaker, to be sure, does not have to repeat saying: "I promise ..." to the hearer. But, all the same, Mackie seems to imply that for the speaker an essential or primary condition of remaining within the institution, something he needs to do more than anything else, is to decide to remain within the institution.

I would argue that (i) on Mackie's view, it becomes difficult to determine how much more importance must be attached to decisions to remain within an institution as distinct from simply continuing to act

and think in accordance with its requirements. In the same way, it is not self-evident that more importance should be attached to changing the moral and legal codes of a particular organization than acting, speaking and thinking in terms of them. At least we may say that Mackie has not offered a criterion whereby one could choose between acting and thinking in accordance with certain institutional requirements on the one hand and opting out of the institution in question or into another—no criterion, that is, beyond opting into or out itself, i.e. nothing beyond a decision.

Moreover, (ii) Mackie's conception of "obligation" or "commitment" (ignoring the slight difference between these) has the consequence that, since according to this conception the main moral force of a promise is "endorsing" an institution, it becomes perfectly plausible to change one's mind when the time of action comes because it is <u>logically</u> consistent to do so, whether or not there have been competing claims in the interval between the promise and the action. That it is "logically" consistent to do so need not be denied. Nor does Mackie seem to assert that the obligation in question is <u>always</u> as a matter of fact overridden by external considerations; he is not committed to a nihilism of this sort. Mackie's position, however, seems unconventional, odd, and counter-intuitive. As a moral institution, promising seems to have more force than is allowed by a view which stresses individual acts of deciding to remain in the promising institution. Its force derives for the most part from the fact that more often than not we think and act <u>in accordance with</u> the promising institution, rather than <u>endorsing</u> it.

Nothing of the sort happens in Searle's account only because whatever happens in the interval between promising and acting as promised is external to the institution of promising, only because, everything else being the same, promising entails an obligation not only at the time of promise but also at the time of action, by virtue of the meaning of the words uttered, not merely or even essentially by virtue of "endorsing" the promising institution.

At one point Searle says that a promise entails an obligation only at the time of "the obligating performance", i.e. the utterance of the promise-words. (179.) If this were all he had to say, there would be no disagreement between Mackie and him; whatever I have said in this connection would be a verbal confusion, especially because both Mackie and Searle also agree that there is a distinction to be made between the internal and external points of view on an institution. But I do not think this is a merely verbal confusion, for it is important what our conception of "accepting" a moral institution is and how we use the distinction between the two points of view for an account of the obligations involved in that acceptance. (Note that we may, as I do, accept Mackie's account of the "content" of an institution and its constituent obligations--actions, attitudes and beliefs--without being committed to his conception of its "form". What I am objecting to is, as the reader might have expected by now, that for Mackie this form is different in the case of moral or evaluative "institutions" such as promising than in the case of scientific or descriptive "institutions" such as "stating".) I have tried to show that for Mackie these obligations, and consequently the conception of "accepting" a moral institution, consist primarily in "decisions" to enter into the

institution. As such, I tried to argue, they are odd and counter-intuitive. But what about Searle's conception of "accepting" a moral institution?

Searle distinguishes two different ways of taking the phrase "commits oneself to (accept) the institution of promising" (194ff): (i) "undertake to use the word "promise" in accordance with its literal meaning, which literal meaning is determined by the internal constitutive rules of the institution"; (ii) "endorse" the institution as a good or acceptable institution". Now Searle says that (ii), but not (i), implies a <u>subjectiveness</u> about that commitment, and it is only in sense (i) that we may speak of "accepting" the institution of promising. Earlier Searle says that this acceptance "is quite unlike the decision to accept a certain moral principle." (190.) It is "evaluative", but it is not <u>subjective</u> in the sense of being a "matter of opinion, not a matter of fact, or a matter of moral decision." (194.)2

What needs particular attention is Searle's remark that he is, in his argument for deriving "ought" from "is", in effect denying the so-called "classical theory of 'evaluative' statements" in one of its two parts. These parts consist of: (a) "the recognition of a particular class of statements intuitively felt to be evaluative (unfortunately it turns out that this is a very heterogeneous class indeed)"; and (b) "that all such statements must be subjective or a matter of opinion". What he is denying, Searle says, is (b), the claim that <u>all</u> members of the class of "evaluative" statements are subjective. The so-called "detached anthropological attitude" (196) or the attitude of the "neutral observer" (192 & 194), one who takes a point of view "external"

to an institution, is what the latter claim rests on. Such an attitude, stresses Searle, is however "irrelevant" to and does not invalidate the derivation of "ought" from "is" inside an institution. It is merely a "non-serious" form of speech. It is only too easy, he says, to use the distinction between the internal and external viewpoints with a "detached anthropological attitude", to change the literal meaning of some words such that accepting an institution is interpreted in sense (ii) above, and then to show that even the most obviously valid deductive arguments are invalid, that, e.g., "X is a triangle" does not "commit" one to "X has three sides". (196-7.)

Mackie points out that

> Searle's main reply to his critics is a protest
> against the 'anthropological attitude', that is,
> against the use of the distinction on which I have
> relied between speaking outside and speaking within
> the institution. He argues that if we rely on such a
> distinction here, we must, for consistency, do so
> with regard to all parts of language, and this would
> undermine the validity of arguments on all topics,
> not just this. But this is not so. Words like
> 'promise' and 'bags', as used within their respective
> institutions, have a peculiar logical feature not
> shared by most parts of language. (71.)

What I have said so far in connection with Searle's views shows that though, as Mackie points out, Searle is protesting against the anthropological attitude and its extension to all speech acts, he is not, contrary to what Mackie says, "against the use of the distinction" between external and internal viewpoints. As we saw, it is exactly by employing that distinction that Searle tried to refute the charge of conservatism noted earlier. I will consider the second part of Mackie's claim in a moment.

It is important to see how we could accept the distinction between the two perspectives on an institution, as Searle does, without falling back on Mackie's implausible _emphasis_ on that distinction. This can be done by granting that we do sometimes, especially in times of moral crisis, use that distinction in order to make decisions whether or not to endorse a moral institution, but this is by no means necessarily what we do, for we usually act and think within a moral institution; it is not, to use Searle's terminology, the "literal" meaning (or more precisely, use) of such words as "promise". That use is such that ordinarily when I promise I cannot be said essentially or primarily to "endorse" the institution of promising. Indeed, as was noted, there has to be an obligation in the first place, _prima facie_, in order for it to be overridden by other considerations, in order for a decision to be appropriate.

The same seems indeed true of words other than "promise". Take the word "cruel". This is an "evaluative" term, if anything is, even more so perhaps than "promise", though in my view not significantly different from it. (See Mackie's own reference to "meanness" on p. 73. There he suggests that "meanness", "generosity", and "courage" should be given the same logical treatment as "promise". Of course, it is doubtful whether cruelty may be called an institution in the sense of a general and regular form of social activity with its own rules and principles, as well as certain attitudes taken toward that activity. (Cf. 81.) In any case, "meanness", "generosity", and "courage", according to Mackie, "bridge the gap between description and prescription", and their core evaluative force is the same as that of "promising", i.e. prescription. Concerning the latter point, see

below.) But calling an act or attitude (more generally, a practice) "cruel" does not mean primarily <u>deciding</u> to act or think against the internal viewpoint of that practice; it is using the word "cruel" in a situation which may be very complex indeed. Calling a practice "cruel" may be to use the disposition of the word in an attempt to condemn the act or attitude, and to discourage others from doing it, but more importantly it is to "refer" to one's attitude of disapproval and to "show" sympathy for those who are treated with cruelty and whose interests are in danger. But this means that there may be important descriptive factors involved in the "logic" of "cruel" which the emphasis on "deciding" against a practice is likely to overlook or, in any case, underrate. Likewise, the logic of promise-words seems not primarily a decision to act when the time comes, but also a whole set of dispositions to think, speak, and act in harmony with one's other thoughts, words, and actions, as well as those of others.

We came across a similar difficulty in the discussion of Hare's prescriptivism, and there I suggested that making decisions of principle or choosing standards is only one, indeed a relatively isolated and "abstractive" one, among many uses of "value-words". (See 3.2.) Here too, it seems, making decisions to opt into or out of a moral institution is something which we do not often or ordinarily do. We may decide or guide others' decisions to reject the institution of worshiping the devil or burning the "witches"; we may decide to opt out of a conservative or fascist regime; but we do not normally use "promising", "kindness", or "cruelty" with such a force that keeping or breaking promises, treating others kindly, etc., would constitute essentially or primarily endorsing, opting into or withdrawing from the

respective "institutions". Even such words as "devil", "witch", "conservative", or "fascist" have normally a strong disposition not essentially to proscribe choices and decisions regarding the respective institutions, but also to be used, no less effectively, for stating, expressing and guiding our feelings, desires, wishes, and ends.

The claim that the utterance of a value-word or sentence involves mainly endorsing or withdrawing from an institution is appropriate only when there is some reason for supposing that the speaker (or those he tries to guide) does not normally act and think in accordance with that institution. Searle remarks at one point that we would not say "He is breathing" or "He has five fingers on his left hand", unless there is some abnormal feature of the situation, e.g. that he might have stopped breathing, or if we wish to remove the suspicion of his being the four fingered left-handed murderer. (143.) There is no reason why a similar point cannot be made in connection with moral institutions, especially since more often we think, speak, and act in accordance with the requirements of an institution, rather than deciding to remain in it. In fact both withdrawing and endorsing may be construed in terms of the internal perspective on an institution, but the converse does not hold. This brings us to the second part of Mackie's remark in the passage quoted above, p. 202.

In this regard too Mackie's remark seems somewhat at odds with Searle's point. True, Searle's main objection to his critics seems to be that the "anthropological attitude", the external viewpoint of a neutral observer, may lead to the denial of "objectivity" in even the most rigorous disciplines as mathematics and logic. But there is another premise here to which Searle refers in his objection: the

anthropological attitude would lead to the denial of objectivity in mathematics and logic if accepting an institution is interpreted in sense (ii), i.e. as a decision. (197.) What Searle is really saying is that it is misleading, to say the least, always to (re)interpret the notion of "accepting" an institution in this way, for if we did so, we would be committed to the very dubious, though not perhaps strictly "false", belief that, e.g., a "statement" (in the literal or ordinary sense of this term) does not necessarily "commit" one to avoiding self-contradiction, or that "X is a triangle" (again, in the literal sense of the term) does not necessarily entail commitment to the proposition that X has three sides.

The latter point makes it important to inquire about Mackie's reason for claiming that words like "promise" "have a peculiar logical feature not shared by most parts of language". In support of this claim he argues that such words combine in their "full within-the-institution meaning" a description as well as a prescription, and therefore to use them with this meaning "is already to endorse the institution in a substantial way, to adopt and support certain distinctive patterns of behaviour and to condemn others." (71-2.) But if the latter statement is taken, as Mackie seems to be taking it, to show that words like "promise" have a peculiar logic, the argument becomes a *non-sequitur*; the claim about the peculiarity of the logic of the words in question follows from the premises only if we assume that in their standard use the prescriptive aspect of their meaning has a privilege over the other aspects.

Mackie's claim about the peculiar or special logical feature of moral terms such as "promise" seems indeed to involve his (first order)

normative or practical projection into what he claims to be a second order statement about the logical status of moral language. It involves a normative or practical element in the sense that "peculiar" and "special" are value-words, if anything is, and conceal a focus on what is taken to be most important in moral discourse, this being, in Mackie's view, decision. But we are owed a justification for singling out this dimension of a linguistic situation at the risk of underrating other perhaps more important ones.

Mackie himself points out that "The distinction between the factual and the evaluative is not something with which we are presented, but something that has to be achieved by analysis." (73.) If there _is_ a (logical) distinction between the factual and the evaluative, then analysis does not so much "achieve" that distinction as uncovers or discloses it. But if there _is_ _not_ a (logical) distinction, then it is not clear what analysis can really achieve. It seems the former that Mackie has in mind. But in that case the alleged distinction is not, I think, sufficiently argued for; in the final analysis, it seems to be an indefensible assumption. More concerning this will be said in the next section.

(It may be worth noting that Austin's distinction between "performative" and "constative" utterances, mentioned earlier in 3.1., does not support Mackie's claim here, because (i) Austin himself, having started with that distinction, raises points which throw doubt on it, and he eventually replaces that distinction by one between types of illocutionary acts (see Chapter 5 for further detail); (ii) even if this distinction had more force, it would not follow that it is parallel to the one between "moral" (or "evaluative" in general) and descriptive

utterances. In this connection the reader may be referred to the discussion of Hare's prescriptivism in 3.1., where I tried to show that Hare's assimilation of the logic of moral discourse to that of imperatives is unsuccessful.)

Despite his prescriptivist bias, Mackie speaks of "reasons" in the context of his analysis of the meaning of "ought". This part of Mackie's analysis is particularly important for our purposes, because my objections to his prescriptivism (or prescriptivism in general) are motivated by and are the correlative of a defense of the partiality for reason and the related doctrine of universalizability of which I have spoken. Now Mackie offers a definition of "ought" which is meant to cover moral and prudential and hypothetically imperative "ought", as well as "epistemic". Examples of the epistemic use of "ought" are: "this ought to do the trick", "They ought to be across the border by now", "It ought to have dissolved; I wonder why it didn't". (73-4.) In a very general way, says Mackie, "ought" may be defined as "There is a reason for ...", and different uses of "ought" would introduce different "kinds of reasons". For example, the epistemic use would refer to reasons for expecting something to happen or result. (73-4.) And the hypothetically imperative use suggests, as we saw above, that given a certain state of affairs and the relevant causal and institutional relations, the agent's desires or purposes create a reason for doing what he ought to do. Likewise, an institution or practice to which the agent (the speaker or the hearer) is committed, in the moral sense of endorsing it, may constitute the reason for a certain kind of action which he ought to do, e.g. keeping a promise. "Ought", says Mackie, "is never purely egocentric; it always points to a reason of some kind

other than the speaker's attitude, though it can in part indicate that

the speaker gives that reason his backing." (76.)

I think we can fully subscribe to the statement just quoted,

without ascribing, as Mackie does, a distinctive force to "ought" or

reasons for action. He seems to regard "ought" as a kind of term whose

use has a special bearing on endorsing some sort of institution or

choosing to act in certain ways demanded by the rules of that

institution. He considers the question: "Do the desires and especially

the sufferings of other people, if known to me, constitute a reason for

me to do something, if I can, or to try to do something to satisfy those

desires or to relieve those sufferings?" Mackie's reply to this

question is in effect that they do only if I am prepared to speak within

the institution of helping others or showing concern for their well-

being (though perhaps it is less appropriate to speak of helping others

as an "institution" than, e.g., of promising, because, as Mackie

observes, the "institution of helping others is less thoroughly built

into ordinary language than that of promising" (79)). Desires and

sufferings of others will not constitute a reason for my helping them

unless I endorse the institution of helping others. Nothing commits me

"logically" to doing so. (78-9.) But Mackie does not offer any

argument for taking the force of the reasons which the use of "ought"

introduces to depend essentially on endorsing an institution. The

reasons invoked in the epistemic use of "ought", at least, are far from

depending for their force primarily on the speaker's decision to endorse

certain causal relations. The claim about a distinctive or peculiar

logic of "ought" should emerge as the conclusion of an argument, since

it is not self-evident. With Mackie, we may say that the logic of

"ought" contains reasons as well as an egocentric component (though his choice of the term "egocentric" does not seem to be accurate and "prescriptive" may be preferable). But, unlike Mackie, we may abandon the idea of a special logic of "ought".

Mackie's answer is not surprising, especially in the light of his attack on the logical thesis about universalizability (in all three stages), as we saw in the previous section. The claim that moral judgments are "checked or controlled at each stage of universalization" by an appeal to subjective elements which have "the logical status of a decision" (100) may be consistent in itself. What is wrong with it is that it privileges the prescriptive aspects of a total linguistic situation, as distinct from its descriptive aspects, and it does so without offering good arguments. In this sense, it is also counter-intuitive. In moral discourse, I suggest, universalized reasons are not primarily "checked" at each stage by decisions; it may well be that in an important sense decisions are checked by universalizable reasons.

Mackie insists that it is never by virtue of intrinsic or "objective" requirements alone that "ought" has the ordinary moral use or force that it has; the supposed intrinsic requirements are indeed fictitious. At best they are seen as supporting the other kinds of reasons: hypothetically imperative, institutional, and so on. (76.) And these institutions are not intrinsically authoritative, for there is no intrinsic necessity to endorse them. This point, however, as I will argue in more detail in the next section, does not affect the question of the logic of moral reasons in general. And it is with the latter that we are primarily concerned here. But if what has been said so far is correct, Mackie's prescriptivism about the force of moral reasons or

in general reasons appealed to in the use of "ought" betrays an essentially egocentric or individualistic defect. On Mackie's view, whatever degree of consensus there is in a group turns out to be more a matter of an <u>accidental</u> conglomeration of individual decisions than a reasoned consensus. (Note that in the narrow sense of privileging decision or choice, prescriptivism may be (dispositionally) associated with egocentricity, but not, as was noted above, in the broad sense that all speech-acts have a prescriptive component.) That it is a defect, of course, will not be established until we give adequate support to what we have been referring to as partiality for reason. It remains that Mackie's prescriptivism prevents him from the recognition that moral reasons as such are universalizable in the same sense in which scientific reasons are.

Mackie's analysis of "good" is not quite parallel to his analysis of "ought". If the interpretation given above of Mackie's text is correct, his treatment of "ought" betrays a prescriptivistic bias, as was shown. I do not think, however, that a similar bias could be discerned in his analysis of "good". Indeed, as we shall see, his proposed account of "good" is so general that it serves to strengthen the analogies between evaluative and descriptive languages on which my thesis in part depends. In what follows, therefore, I will expound on Mackie's analysis of "good" in the hope that by doing so more light will be cast on those analogies.

Mackie approaches the question of the meaning of "good" by first looking briefly at Moore's reasons for denying that the meaning of "good" is purely descriptive. Moore argued that trying to define "good" in purely descriptive terms involves a confusion between two questions:

what kind of things are good and what goodness itself is. Only the former can be answered in purely descriptive terms; a definition or analysis of "good" is an answer to the second question, not the first. Moreover, the definition of "good" in purely descriptive terms can be shown to be implausible by using what has been called the "open question" argument. Any proposed definition in purely descriptive terms, say, "conducive to happiness" can be met with the question: "But is what is conducive to happiness really good?" The openness of this question shows that the proposed definition is incorrect, that it involves what may be called a descriptive fallacy (though not, as Moore misleadingly labeled it, "naturalistic fallacy"). Mackie says: "We could add to the first [argument] that even the qualities that in some sense make something good have to be distinguished from goodness itself." (51.)

In much the same way as we have seen in Stevenson's and Hare's inquiries, Mackie sets out "to find either a single general meaning that the word ["good"] has in both moral and non-moral contexts, or at least a core meaning of which its other senses are outgrowths." (51-2.) He objects to Hare's notion of "commendation" as the definition of the core meaning of "good" and similar words. He argues that this definition is either "unilluminating", since it leaves us with the question "What is it to commend something?", or if commendation is defined as "to mention as being good", then the definition becomes circular. (54.) We may, says Mackie, break out of this circularity by further characterizing commendation as "to show (or purport to show) favour or support for ..." or as expressing or stating one's "endorsement" of certain requirements. But the problem will then consist in the fact that Moore's open question

argument can be applied to the definition; "while sincerely commending something from my own point of view, I can still make sense of the further question whether it is really good." (61.) This points to a certain narrowness in such a definition. For, according to Mackie, the functional and the so-called "inverted-commas" uses of "good" would fall outside the definition and cannot be accounted for, save by "gratuitously" stretching the definition.

The meaning of a functional term can be explained by pointing out what the thing the word refers to is used for or is supposed to do. And from knowing this we know the criteria which make the thing a good one of its kind. (53.) (Hare would say, as we have seen, that the definition of a functional word gives minimal criteria for the goodness of the thing to which the word refers.) Knowing what a knife is supposed to do, i.e. to cut smoothly, etc., is to know what makes a given knife a (minimally) good one. Conversely, whenever "good" is used in connection with a functional word, it points to the (minimal) characteristics which enable the referent of the term to perform that function. And this is why "egocentric commendation" is irrelevant in functional uses; whether or not I endorse the requirements which make a knife (minimally) good, a knife can be said to be good if it at least satisfies those requirements. The same may be said of the so-called inverted-commas sense of "good". According to Mackie, there is no inconsistency in saying "That is a good sunset, but the beauties of nature leave me cold." (55.)

In 3.2 I dealt at some length with the functional and inverted-commas uses of "good" and the difficulties they pose for Hare's account. Given that, I think Mackie's point here needs no further comment. Now

against the background of the above objections, Mackie states: "What is common to all these cases [i.e., uses of "good"] is that in each there is, somewhere in the picture, some set of requirements or wants or interests, and the thing that is called good is being said to be such as to satisfy those requirements or wants or interests. We can then offer a general definition of 'good': <u>such as to satisfy requirements (etc.) of the kind in question.</u>" (55-6.) According to the definition, something would be called good if it were such that (or had such characteristics as) it satisfied such-and-such requirings, interests, or wants. He goes on to say that the phrase "such as to satisfy" is meant to bring out counterfactual conditionals in the definition. Things may be called "good" even in abstraction from any <u>actual</u> requiring, interest, or want; it is enough that things are such that they would satisfy wants <u>if</u> they were wanted. And though the term "requirements" refers to the intrinsic features of the thing called "good", it accounts for the fact that in calling something "good" we do not strictly ascribe those features to the thing, but rather refer to them "obliquely and unexplicitly". Calling something good is neither strictly ascribing those characteristics to the thing, nor saying strictly that it meets those requirements. It is "saying something between these two" (56).

The definition is made general, says Mackie, because it can then cover not only egocentric commendatory uses, but also functional and the so-called inverted-commas uses. As such it leaves open whose interests or needs are in question. Mackie thinks that because his definition is in this way flexible, it can therefore resist Moore's open question argument. (61.) For although there is a certain descriptive constraint on the uses of "good", although "to be good something must be related to

something like interests" (63), nevertheless the flexibility of the definition, the fact that interests can be considered from different perspectives—egocentrically, functionally, etc.,makes the definition general and neutral enough to resist the open question argument and the charge of descriptive fallacy.

Mackie's definition may be viewed as an improvement on Hare's account of the (evaluative) meaning of "good" and other such value-words, for according to Hare "good" has the essential or distinctive force of "choosing"; it has a prescriptive or egocentric core. Moreover, Mackie's definition does seem successful in resisting Moore's open question argument, because it does not give an exhaustive definition of "good" in descriptive terms; as Mackie himself points out, the definition is flexible enough to allow uses of "good" other than the descriptive.

More important for our purposes is, I think, that with the introduction of a descriptive element in the very definition of "good", universalizability becomes part of the general meaning of this term, so long as the descriptive component in question is not exhausted by proper names or indexical terms and hence by reference to the interests of some one person, nation, etc. That universalizability is part of the meaning of moral terms and sentences entails the acceptance of the logical thesis about universalizability and is the ground for the possibility of rational consensus in morals, although it is at odds with Mackie's doubts concerning the truth of that thesis. Of course we must not confuse the logical thesis about universalizability with claims about what Sidgwick has called "good from the point of view of the universe". The latter, he says, refer to "a supposed objective moral value"; they

suggest that certain requirements are there, in the nature of things, without being the requirements of any person or point of view in particular. (59ff.) And, according to Mackie, ordinary language, particularly the main ethical use of "good", as well as traditional moral philosophy incorporate claims to such objective values. The logical thesis about universalizability, on the other hand, is a linguistic thesis; it says that it is part of the meaning or standard force of moral words that the judgments employing them are in principle universalizable. Hence, while accepting Mackie's suggestion that to argue for the satisfaction of all interests and wants at once on the basis of "good from the point of view of the universe" "is a vain hope" (61), I would argue for the possibility in principle of resolving conflicts and taking equal account of all relevant wants, interests, and the like (generally, "reasons") on the basis of the truth of that linguistic thesis, since the truth of that thesis, for which I have furnished and will develop reasons, implies both a logical and a practical demand for impartiality.

So, in spite of his objections to the logical thesis of universalizability, Mackie's own definition of "good" leaves room for the truth of the thesis. Now he seems to offer his definition of "good" as the definition of a value-word. This is evident from his announcement, early in Ethics, that he will consider the second order linguistic or conceptual question of the meaning or use of ethical terms. (18.) But at one point he speaks of "not purely descriptive terms" (62), as if there could be purely descriptive terms in ordinary language. I will argue in Chapter 5 that every word, insofar as it is meaningful, combines certain dispositions: dispositions to (be used such

that it will) call up images, trigger physical action, express or give rise to feeling, belief, desire, interest, and the like, as well as dispositions to be used in connection with other words or symbols. Ethical language is one in which the speaker is prepared to back up his utterances by universalizable reasons, reasons which in particular appeal to interests, desires or ends. Indeed, Mackie's definition of "good" is general enough to be applied to the so-called "scientific" or "descriptive" words as well. And the analogy between "red" and "good", explored in the previous chapter, suggested that even for "red" we could discern an analogue of "evaluative" (or "subjective" or mental) and "descriptive" meanings.

In the next section I will argue that Mackie's main interest in refuting the ontological claim as to the objectivity of values is not, as he would agree, logically related to his attack on the logical thesis about universalizability, that instead it seems to be his *a priori* separation of ethical (in general, evaluative) and scientific (more generally, descriptive) discourses that leads to his underrating rationality in the sense of concern for facts and appeal to universalizable reasons. Hence, we may grant Mackie's second order "scepticism" which denies objectivity to moral values, while still taking issue with his "prescriptivism", and defending the logical force of rationality in moral discourse.

4.3. "Objectivism" or Rationality?

Mackie distinguishes what he means by the "objectivity of values" from certain other issues with which it might be confused. One of these is "subjective agreement", i.e. agreement in "valuing" as an activity done by people. As such "subjective agreement", says Mackie, renders only intersubjective values, not "objective values" as the kind of things or actions or states of affairs belonging to "the fabric of the world". More specifically, "objectivity" must not, according to Mackie, be confused with "universalizability"; "someone might well be prepared to universalize his prescriptive judgments or approvals—that is, to prescribe and approve in just the same way in all relevantly similar cases, even ones in which he was involved differently or not at all—and yet he could recognize that such prescribing and approving were his activities, nothing more." (22-3.) What universalizability makes possible is intersubjective agreement among thinking and acting subjects. But, says Mackie, intersubjectivity does not render the objectivity which belongs to "hard facts" (62), states of affairs external to and independent of subjects. Of course, if there were objective values, judgments which reported them would be universalizable. But the converse relation does not hold.

The thesis of universalizability is relevant to the extent to which moral judgments, if not purely descriptive, have a descriptive meaning or use. (An interesting question is whether moral judgments are universalizable because they have a descriptive meaning, or they have a descriptive meaning because (or insofar as) they are universalized. Mackie tends to support the latter rather than the former. (See p. 86.)

I think it is very difficult to say whether descriptive meaning is prior or "universalization". Practically, the two are intertwined. "Good" and indeed any other word is used in concrete situations with "reference" to certain states of affairs (whether subjective or extramental) and in such a way that it would have no relatively constant disposition for the "learner", hence no meaning, if sentences in which it figured were not applicable to similar situations. Nor could a word be used by our "teachers" consistently if they had no descriptive meaning. In other words, universalizability may be said to be prior in the sense that learning meanings would be impossible without a consistent usage which, as we shall see in the next chapter, can be formulated in terms of general "syntactic" and "semantic" rules and universal rules of "pragmatics". But it is equally correct to say that without a descriptive meaning, words could not be used in a consistent and universalizable manner. Therefore, the answer to the question posed here need not be an either-or. It is true, of course, that, as was suggested earlier, descriptivity is only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for universalizability; moral judgments should employ generic terms or their proponents should be willing to replace proper names with general descriptions in order for (the first kind of) universalizability to hold.) At any rate, according to Mackie, descriptive meaning does not entail "objectivity of values". (23.) And certain moral judgments may be used such that the speaker is prepared to universalize, but this does not entail anything about the objectivity of values.

Nor is there, in Mackie's view, any logical inconsistency in holding that moral judgments are primarily prescriptive and, at the same time, that moral values are objective realities. He says that in fact

philosophers of many persuasions have held to this kind of "objective prescriptivism": Plato, Kant, and Sidgwick, to name a few. The possibility of the coexistence of prescriptivism and "objectivism" should not blind us to an important distinction. Questions of prescriptivity or universalizability are, says Mackie, "conceptual" questions concerning the meaning or use of moral language, and as such they are to be distinguished from objectivity as a doctrine about the ontological status of values in general. "The denial that there are objective values does not commit one to any particular view about what moral statements mean." (18.) (This leaves open the possibility that there could be a relationship between Mackie's prescriptivism and his doubts about the force of universalizability or rationality in moral discourse. To this question I will attend later.)

There is yet another sense of objectivity from which Mackie's sense must be distinguished. This is related to descriptive meaning, and we have had occasion in this and the previous chapter to consider it. It is the sense in which the basic standards in any field are partly validated in relation to the purposes or ends which those standards satisfy. The appropriateness or validity of the standards are neither completely determinate nor completely indeterminate, for there is a subjective element in the interpretation or application of the standards. Thus we may say that given any fairly well understood and sufficiently determinate standard, the evaluative judgments made in accordance with the standard are objective matters of truth, and yet recognize that since to endorse or to refrain from endorsing the standard is an open question, the objectivity of standards in relation to desires and ends which they satisfy or the objectivity of the

judgments in accordance to those standards is not the same as the objectivity of values in Mackie's sense. (26-7.) Another way of making this point is to say that the objective values attacked are those which guide action not contingently upon any present or future desires or choices of the agent or anyone else, whether or not all relevantly similar cases are treated in the same way, but absolutely or categorically. (29.) Moral goodness or rightness is, in this sense, the characteristics of things, persons, or actions as they are in themselves, not dependent on the desires of the agent or anyone else's desires, preferences, and so on, or the expression of those desires. (33.)

This is why, says Mackie, "So far as ethics is concerned, my thesis that there are no objective values is specifically the denial that any such categorically imperative element is objectively valid." (29.) Kant, he says, affirmed not only the categorical nature of moral maxims, but also held that they are objectively binding. For Kant, he says, "though a rational being gives the moral law to himself, the law that he thus makes is determinate and necessary." (31.) Likewise, for Aristotle, "the good for man" or "happiness" is not only desired but is "intrinsically desirable". (31.) This sort of objectivism about values has not only been advocated by many philosophers; "It has also a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even in the meanings of moral terms." (31.) The claim to the objectivity of values as interpreted by Mackie is not only a philosophical thesis, but indeed built into ordinary thought and language. Ordinary language, embracing these objectivistic tendencies, makes us "feel", as Russell puts it, that there is something external to the speaker, more authoritative than the mere expression of

desires. (34-5.) Moreover, because the claim that there are objective values has been incorporated in our moral terms, any analysis of the meaning or use of moral language which ignores that claim is incomplete. (35.)

In what way are "objective values" of the sort challenged by Mackie "incorporated" in ordinary language? His answer seems to be that in ordinary language there is a tendency for value-words such as "good" to refer to extra-mental entities, qualities or relations. I am not sure whether this is the case. It seems that only a more or less mythical attitude towards such words would allow for this possibility. Ordinary language seems more sophisticated than that. I will not enter into Mackie's arguments against the claim to the objectivity of values as a philosophical thesis, for as this claim is interpreted by him, i.e. as involving an appeal to such "queer" entities or qualities or relations as values, they seem to be strong enough. As I have suggested in 4.1., part of the difficulty is perhaps that the term "value" itself is very vague and does not seem to have any meaning other than desire, interest, and the like, in which case it may be taken to be an introspectible subjective entity of some sort, i.e. a mental disposition. And with this Mackie seems to agree. (Cf. 42-3.) What I wish to emphasize is that the rejection of the claim that values are invisible and perhaps intuitable "objective entities", in his sense of these words, does not constitute a good reason for rejecting or even doubting the force of rationality or its related principle of universalizability as a "logical" requirement of moral (or evaluative) discourse, and reserving it for "scientific" discourse.

Of course, there is little or no evidence that Mackie argues in the way just noted; his distinction between the claim about the objectivity of values on the one hand and universalizability and descriptive meaning on the other is a clear evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, as we saw in 4.1., Mackie offers no satisfactory reason for casting doubt on universalizability; his scepticism in this regard seems to rest on an *a priori* and indefensible assumption that there is a logical distinction between "descriptive" (more specifically, "scientific") and "evaluative" (more specifically, "moral") discourses. Concerning Mackie's view on the difference between scientific and moral disagreements, we find the statement: "scientific disagreement results from speculative inferences or explanatory hypotheses based on inadequate evidence, and it is hardly plausible to interpret moral disagreement in the same way." (36.) But "evidence" is ambiguous; as we saw earlier, moral disagreements too may be said to arise from adherence to general rules or practices which do not accommodate enough exceptions to be universalizable, which are not put adequately to the "test" of experience or knowledge of people's desires and interests.

It seems indeed the assumption about the logical distinction between descriptive and evaluative languages that has motivated the search for a distinctive and special core meaning or standard use of such terms as "promise" and "ought". Indeed, Mackie's analysis of "good", as was suggested in the previous section, gains its plausibility from its generality, from the fact that it is applicable to almost any word. In connection with "ought", we may agree that it is a primarily prescriptive term, in the sense of being decision- or action-guiding (though even this seems doubtful to me). But it does not follow from

this that "ought" is a "value-term" and "is", e.g., is not. And

"promise", as we saw Mackie himself recognize, combines evaluative and

descriptive elements. Here it is most evident that ascribing a

peculiar, prescriptive logic to moral terms presupposes a broad logical

distinction between ethical and scientific languages, a distinction

which is far from self-evident and for which Mackie offers no good

argument.

These comments by no means exhaust the question with which we are

concerned. I will have more to say later in Chapter 5. What has been

said above will hopefully suffice to show that Mackie's choice of

prescriptivism as a theory about the core meaning or force of moral

discourse and his scepticism toward the logical thesis about

universalizability are independent of his refutation of "objectivism" as

an ontological thesis about the status of moral values. His

prescriptivism and attack on the logical thesis about universalizability

rest instead on his acceptance of the non-cognitivist assumption that

there is a formal difference between descriptive and ethical discourses.

In the course of this thesis, I have called this assumption into

question, though admittedly more remains to be said in this regard.

Therefore, consistent with my acceptance of Mackie's scepticism

concerning the ontological status of moral values--his claim that there

are no objective moral values and that values are nothing but subjective

desires and interests, I have argued against both his prescriptivism and

his scepticism toward the logical thesis about universalizability.

Indeed, there seems to be a hidden relationship in the shape of an

antagonism or tension (though perhaps not a strictly logical

contradiction) between prescriptivism and universalizability as parts of

the logic of moral discourse; they seem to operate as vectors which point in opposite directions--prescriptivism toward the individual and universalizability toward the community. The logic of moral discourse, I have suggested, is not the logic primarily of (personal) decisions, but the logic of rational attempts to reach universal intersubjective agreement.

Chapter 5

Ethics and Philosophy of Language

In the course of the previous chapters I tried to show that a
close attention to the writings on ethical or evaluative language
renders the sharp logical distinction between evaluative and descriptive
languages dubious. This distinction turns out to be not so much the
outcome of the analysis of the meaning and method of ethical discourse
as its presupposition. Nor is it the analysis of meaning as distinct
from use that gives rise to the difficulties we have noted. Despite a
more or less orthodox tendency to speak of or analyze the meaning of
language as distinct from its various uses, Stevenson, Hare, and Mackie
are keenly aware of the fact that meaning can best be characterized in
terms of (conventional) use. Indeed, as we have seen and will become
more evident, in their writings and in use-theory in general there is an
exaggerated stress on use or the practical dimension of language. The
problem seems to be that these writers are preoccupied, without good
reasons, with the enterprise of finding the distinctive or special
meaning or use of ethical or evaluative discourse. What an account of
meaning in terms of use would underline is the variety and multiplicity
of uses, each of which would represent a focus on one or the other
dimension of the totality of a linguistic situation. (What these
dimensions are will become clearer in the course of this chapter.) It

would be only in conformity with this variety if we denied the evaluative/ descriptive dichotomy.

Language, I am arguing, has many uses, no single one of which is exclusively evaluative or descriptive. What is important to recognize is that prescriptive and descriptive elements are present throughout language, in its diverse uses, and that these elements are inseparable from one another, such that we cannot have one without the other—we cannot draw a logical or metaphysical distinction between them, though we can distinguish them as various aspects or dimensions or modes of any meaningful linguistic usage. Moreover, as we shall see, language in general is the expression of freedom and of (potentially) universalizable reasons. If these claims are correct, ethical (or the so-called practical) discourse can be assigned the same status as scientific discourse, in respect of rationality, truth, and objectivity (in the senses which will be explored in this chapter). In fact, upon scrutiny, the universalistic aspect of language will indeed turn out to be an outgrowth of that freedom. This is why I suggested that in a wide sense of "practice" (or "action") and "choice", not the narrow sense conveyed in Hare's and Mackie's works, there need be no tension between prescriptivity and universalizability, or between freedom and reason. Sometimes the tension arises when "practice" or "action" is interpreted primarily in behavioristic or physicalistic terms. But even when, as seemingly in Hare and Mackie, "action" is interpreted so as to include speech-acts, it is, as with "choice", attributed a peculiar logic of its own. In effect, both decisions to act and choices are privileged over (other) mental facts like feelings, desires and beliefs (all the so-called propositional attitudes).

The logical division of linguistic functions into descriptive and prescriptive (or action-guiding or "expressive", in the narrow sense of these terms) is, as S. Lovibond has pointed out, the reformulation of the empiricist wedge between passive and active modes of judgments:

> Thus in our capacity as describers of the world, we
> passively read off what we say from the facts (as
> displayed by our senses) according to a set of rules
> (the definitions we have given to our words): while
> in our capacity as judges of value, we are active in
> the sense that we are responding, emotionally, to
> those facts, and perhaps making a bid to exert
> control over the emotional dispositions of others.
> (*Realism and Imagination in Ethics*, 21. All future
> references to Lovibond's ideas are from this book.)

This opposition between the two modes of judgment gets translated by non-cognitivism into one between evaluative judgments as a form of active expression (and evocation) of the individual's attitudes or will on the one hand, and the propositions of natural science as inferences from the data of senses received passively from facts on the other.1

Now in the earlier chapters appeal was made to such counter-examples to prescriptivism as suggested in the ordinary moral force of "promise", "noble", "cruel", and the like. There was also an appeal to the fact that moral language and argument proceed more often in accordance with rules and principles than by way of endorsing certain institutions. Attention was also drawn to certain analogies between scientific or descriptive discourse on the one hand and ethical discourse on the other. "Red", e.g., was suggested to be analogous to "good" not only in the ways pointed out by Hare, but also in having a "subjective" (component of) meaning that is distinguishable from the criteria of its application. And I suggested, with Hare, that a moral judgment is the analogue of a scientific judgment in that the speaker is

prepared to universalize it, or in the way in which it passes the "test" of as much experience (feeling, desire, end, and the like) as possible. The universalizability of both descriptive and ethical languages, I suggested, is due to the presence throughout language of generic words. More will be said about the logical identity of scientific and ethical discourses in this chapter, especially in connection with Bernard Williams' denial of that identity in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* and the implications of that denial for the possibility of truth and knowledge and the limits of reflection in ethics. What remains to be further supported is also the claim that there are prescriptive and descriptive elements throughout language, and that these elements are not separable. Given this and the analogies between scientific and ethical discourses, the evaluative/ descriptive or moral/ scientific dichotomy becomes an indefensible presumption, moral discourse can logically and practically aspire to scientific rationality, and the meaning or force of moral discourse may consist in the extent to which linguistic usage in general is descriptive of (mental) facts of desire, interest, and the like, and is supportable by universalizable reasons. Indeed, as was suggested earlier, our discourse in general already is, as a rule-governed form of behavior, to a large extent universalized; more often than not we are prepared to make the same judgments, be it moral judgments or material-object statements, in relevantly similar circumstances or in respect of all relevant interests. And in this way our individual beliefs and desires find harmonious expression. This harmony is typically concealed or is at best in a precarious state under non-cognitivist premises. The

latter can neither adequately explain that harmony nor make room for its expansion.

As was suggested above, these claims can be made good only if our theory of ethical discourse is inspired by a philosophy of language which does not allow bifurcation of the functions of language into descriptive and evaluative. Now since the motivation of such a philosophy of language is primarily ethical (and political, in the wide sense of that term), and since ethical and political life are replete with non-linguistic signs; furthermore, since it is at least debatable whether non-linguistic signs are logically dependent on linguistic skills, I will approach the matter from the general and systematic perspective of semiotics. I will pose and try to answer the question "What is the meaning of a sign (or 'meaning')?", or "What is it for something to signify (or mean) something else?" We saw that Stevenson pays considerable attention to this question and much insight may be gained from his dispositional analysis of words. But more needs to be said on this topic.

I will suggest that the above question can best be answered by the dispositional analysis of the kind advanced here as the generic definition or the common core of meaning of "sign" or "meaning". The analysis of "meaning" will result in a special sort of definition which gives the complex of factors (dispositions) out of which a meaning- or sign-situation is composed. Moreover, I will argue that it is these factors or dimensions of a total linguistic situation that can ultimately account for the various (meaningful) uses of language; these uses or intentions involved in them would not in themselves exhaust meaning, as use-theories sometimes have it, but would (dispositionally)

depend on meaning. Indeed most of what will be said in this connection will be shown to have been anticipated, but not adequately recognized, by the speech act theory on the lines developed by Austin and Searle, although they seem to show some weakness for use as distinct from meaning. In this context, I will try to show that the correlation of factors in a meaning-situation, as represented by the proposed dispositional analysis, is such that it provides meaning with an objective aspect, an aspect which the strict reduction of meaning to use would rule out.2

Moreover, as we shall see, the definition points to a distinction between two species of sign. As such the result of our general inquiry into the meaning of "sign" will indeed be found consistent with the distinction drawn by such authors as H.H. Price, Ernst Cassirer, and C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards between two broad species of sign-- "signal" (or as it is more often called, "sign") and "symbol". (Throughout what follows the term "symbol" is used in a specialized sense. Words, for example, are considered as symbols, whereas ordinarily they are distinguished from symbols, the latter being interpreted in the narrower sense of religious and ritual actions, items of a certain school of fine arts, or scientific, mathematical, or logical notations. Language, as we shall see, is a system of type-symbols together with rules for their appropriate utterance and combination.) It is only for the latter that there are "conventions" of use, and the main points raised in the previous chapters will be elucidated in the context of the discussion of what is involved in a symbolic (in particular linguistic) situation and especially the way in which these situations, for all their variety and multiplicity, contain

cognitive and universalistic potentials. What is important to note is that in symbolic situations we seem to be faced not with any "primary" or "core" of meaning, but with a range of dispositions which cannot, without artificiality, be split into broad types, e.g. evaluative and descriptive. The descriptive/ evaluative dichotomy, as we have seen, has been the obsession of much writing on the language of morals. But that dichotomy will be rendered even more suspicious in the light of the more fundamental distinction between signal and symbol.

The discussion of symbolic practices, moreover, will serve to throw light on their autonomous character; they turn out to be fruits of the "practical" or "constructive" character of the human mind. Furthermore, that autonomy will be seen as a function of rationality and as constituted by systems of rule-governed social practices, rather than being detached from those systems and attached to free-floating individual subjects. This is how the tension between freedom and rationality may be resolved and consensus may be extended both to the whole of our discourse (and a *fortiori* to moral discourse) and beyond cultural limits. The arm of moral consensus could reach the limits of human nature.3 Moreover, in connection with the descriptive dimension of meaning or use of language, questions of "reference", "truth", "objectivity", "rationality", and "knowledge" are of special interest. I will critically discuss the relevant views on these topics in an attempt to show, once again, that such concepts can be applied to ethical discourse, no less than to scientific, so that the objectivity, truth, etc. (in a very non-peculiar sense of these words) of moral values and the possibility of transcendence beyond and convergence among our personal and group interests are further confirmed.

5.1. The Meaning of a Sign

Although our concern has been throughout mainly with language or speech, it may be useful to address the problem of meaning in connection with phenomena other than language, since language seems to be only one of the phenomena in which meaning is in a sense embodied and through which it is communicated. There are non-linguistic phenomena which in their meaning-capacity may resemble language in important ways. This is suggested by the fact that we use the word "meaning" or "signification" not only in connection with words and sentences, but, not too uncommonly, with natural objects, artifacts, facial expressions, gestures, diagrams, and the like. Thus, e.g., we say not only that "'pertinacious' means (or signifies) holding resolutely to an opinion or purpose", but also, with varying degrees of looseness, that "Clouds mean (or signify) rain", "Her gesture meant that she was angry (or signified her anger)", and the like.

The words "meaning" and "sign", however, need a specialized interpretation. This is because there are ordinary cases where we would not use either of these words. E.g. ordinarily we do not say "The picture on the wall means my sister" or "The circle on the board is the sign of the planet Earth". As it stands, neither "meaning" nor "sign" is general, wide, or flexible enough to be applicable in all cases of a similar sort, whatever the nature of this "similarity" may be. The terms "stands for" and "represents" fare no better than "means" or "signifies". For here too counter-examples may be found: it makes no sense to say such things as "The jammed keyhole represents that someone put a nail into it" or "His behavior stands for boredom".

We are seeking a specialized sense of "sign", the "common core" of its meaning, such that whatever is said about language or speech could be said about natural objects, artifacts, gestures, and the like. But first I want to consider certain alternative approaches to the question and argue that none of them is satisfactory. I will use Austin's insights in "The Meaning of a Word" (*Philosophical Papers*, 71ff.) without, however, intending to suggest that either Austin or Aristotle, to whose views Austin alludes, attempted to arrive at a common core of meaning of "sign" or "meaning". Indeed with Austin quite the contrary was the case; the analogies he discusses in that paper are meant to throw doubt on the notion of "meaning" or "similarity" between meanings altogether and to replace it by "use". In using Austin's insights I will be simply arguing that the formulation of meaning in terms of use need not require that the notion of the common core or generic definition of meaning be abandoned.

Different things may be said to be a sign or to have a certain meaning by virtue of "derivation" from a primary sense of "sign". Aristotle's example of "healthy" is helpful here. In *Metaphysics* he says: "Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it produces it, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, another because it is capable of it." (Bk IV, Ch.2; 1003a,34-1003b,1.) "Healthy" is predicated of many things, or many things are called healthy, by virtue of one producing health, another being a symptom of health, and so on. These are the many senses of the term "healthy", but all of them "refer to one starting-point" or "common notion" or "central meaning". (*Ibid.*, 1003b & 1004a,ff.) This may be said to be the sense

in which "healthy" is used of a body or a biological organism. Austin says that this sense is "contained as a part" in the other senses. There is nothing similar about these senses, he says, in the ordinary sense of the word "similar", though they are related by virtue of "containing" the specific sphere of application to a body. The relation between the various senses of "healthy" is then captured by Austin's phrase "contained as a part" or Aristotle's "referring to a central meaning or starting point". That relation, we may notice, is not analogous to the relation between a genus and its species. A healthy complexion and a healthy medicine may be causally related to a healthy body, but there is no common characteristic (genus) shared by them.

It is not clear how the different uses of the word "sign" could be related to one another in the way described above. There seems to be no primary, central meaning to which "reference" is made, for among the classes of things we may call "signs" no single one is ordinarily prior to the others. We have neither a semantic convention nor the ability to imagine some one kind of sign as primary and all the others as derivative. Angry faces, photographs, or words, do not signify by virtue of "containing" the way in which clouds signify rain or squeaking noises signify too much friction in mechanical devices; they do not signify by virtue of "containing" causal signification. Nor are signals (like clouds and squeaking noises) and what may be called representational signs (like pictures and diagrams) called signs by virtue of containing or referring to, say, linguistic signs or words.

We may use "good" as an example to show the difficulties involved in trying to designate the core meaning of a term (as we shall see, a term is a kind of sign) as the primary sense involved in a particular

sphere of the term's application, and its other senses as derived from that primary sense. "Good" seems predicable of almost every class of objects, as we saw earlier (especially Ch.3), but in no case primarily. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 3, there is in this respect at least no difference between "good" and descriptive property-terms like "red". But there might be a temptation to think that value-words are applicable in the human realm primarily, and in all other spheres, non-human animate or inanimate objects secondarily. However, this would clearly imply an anthropocentrism for which there seems to be no justification. To take an example which takes the point to its logical extreme, the sense in which courage may be said to be good does not seem prior to that in which I regard my hat to be a good hat, though these senses may have something in common. (The authors I have selected for detailed discussion in the previous chapters, would, as we have seen, give different accounts of what the various uses of "good" have in common. But this is not what we are directly concerned with now. Insofar as the present question is concerned, among them Mackie does seem to put forward what I just referred to as anthropocentrism: divine, animal, and human infant and handicapped goods are all derivative from or extensions of the normal adult human good. See *Ethics*, 193ff & 227ff.)

The claim that the central meaning to which all the other senses of "good" are "referred" is that involved in predicating the term of a divine supreme being is faced with the same essential difficulty that although there may be some connection between the uses of "good" in "God is good" on the one hand and its uses in "Socrates was a good man" or "I am wearing my good hat today", nevertheless it is not self-evident that the first use of "good" is prior to the other two. Of course, here the

charge of anthropocentrism would not apply, at least not from logical
and ontological viewpoints.

Nor does the more usual contention that "good" as predicated of
the divine is prior to its _moral_ sense or use in relation to human
beings, fare any better. In support of this contention it might be
argued that God has imparted rationality to his human creatures so that
their exercise of this capacity (through language and other "symbolic"
activities) has some relation to God's own, so that they may emulate the
divine in their most reasoned, moral moments. But from an
epistemological standpoint this view does not seem entirely devoid of
anthropocentrism, and from an ontological standpoint it needs to assume
(most likely without _proof_) the existence of God and the reality of
revelation. There remains only the logical possibility that the use of
"good" in the religious sphere be prior to its moral use, but logical
possibilities are not instructive here.

The example of "good" then helps to some extent show the
difficulties involved in specifying the primary sphere of application of
a term, and therefore the difficulty in assimilating its core meaning,
if it has any, to a primary sense from which its other senses are
derived. Let us consider other ways in which different things may be
said to be signs.

It might be said that different things are called "signs" due to
a kind of "similarity" which consists in an identity of relations. Thus
A and X may be regarded as analogous to each other when A:B :: X:Y (A
stands in relation to B as X stands in relation to Y). We find the
following example in Aristotle's _Nicomachean Ethics_: "as sight is in the
body, is reason in the soul, and so on in the other cases." (Bk 1, Ch.6;

1096b,25-33.) Austin gives an example in which A and X are not only analogous, but are indeed called by the same name: the foot of a mountain (A) stands to its top (B) as the foot of a list (X) to its top (Y). The foot of a mountain and that of a list are analogous in this way, though it would be misleading to say merely that they are "similar". (*Op. cit.*, 72.)

Using this model for the different things we call "signs", i.e. for gestures, diagrams, words, etc., we may get, for instance, the following result. Gestures:B :: diagrams:Y. But it is not clear what B and Y in this formula could be. Suppose we insert "feelings" for B and "structures" for Y. According to our analogy, gestures:feelings :: diagrams:structures. But this would be incorrect, for gestures express feelings, whereas diagrams may be said to represent structures, and representing and expressing are two different functions, whereas we are looking for a "common core" of meaning or function of signs. Taking "good" as an example again, we see that the term may be said in one respect to express the attitude of approval or a positive feeling, in another respect to commend choices or decisions to act, and in still another respect to convey information, to describe or report a pro-attitude or a belief about the characteristics of objects.

Of course, the diversity of functions does not necessarily imply that there is no single function or relation in terms of which "sign" might be defined. Nonetheless, it does not seem clear at all what kind of function the various sorts of sign perform together, in what way their different functions are "similar" or comprise a single whole, save perhaps in the uninstructive sense that the cognition of all things in the world as well as outside it in the divine realm together is aimed at

a single end or *telos*. Natural objects, words, gestures, pictures, and diagrams do not seem to perform a single function together in the same way as, e.g., cricket ball, bat, and umpire together constitute the game of cricket. The difficulty is again reflected in the example of "good": this term has an instrumental use, as well as commendatory, inverted-commas, and intrinsic uses, as Hare and Mackie have shown.

(Of course, as I have suggested, there may be a core meaning or definition of "good" and other such words, e.g. a use of the word which is or can be supported by universalizable reasons. But such a definition (if we may call it so) is really not a definition of "good" as such, but of all that may be called a linguistic sign (or more generally, a "symbol"). It serves to bring out the fact that, as we shall see, all symbolic activities involve commitment to a rational form of life and aspire to a fuller realization of human rational capacity. But the definition of "good" as a use of the word which is supportable by universalizable reasons does not seem to affect the point at issue, that the functional use of "good" is one among many uses or functions of the word—commendatory, inverted-commas, and so on.)

So far we have no clue as to the common core of "sign" or "meaning". The search for the common core of meaning of "sign" has been regarded by Wittgenstein as traceable to a dislike of the specific and a tendency to the general which in turn stem from the idea that the less general is incomplete. (*The Blue Book*, 19.) But the failure of the above attempts to formulate a common core of meaning of "sign" need not force us to abandon the search. It seems to me that we <u>can</u> find features that are common to all kinds of sign. However, Wittgenstein's example in *The Blue Book* of what happens if from 4:00 till 4:30 A

expects B to tea does seem to be helpful. (20.) No one activity or state of mind, he says, goes on throughout the interval, but a great many different ones: looking at the diary at 4:00 and seeing B's name; preparing tea for two; thinking "Does B smoke?"; putting out cigarettes; imagining B as he will look when he comes into the room; and so on. No single feature is common to the above processes.

This example brings out first the fact that the generic meaning of "sign" may consist in a set of dispositions, and secondly that the meaning of some signs should be given (at least, in part) in terms of use. What it "means" for A to expect B to tea is really determined by the range of activities he is disposed to undertake during a certain period of time, not some one characteristic. Let us keep this in mind and proceed to explore other senses in which different kinds of sign or the different functions of "representing", "expressing", "causing", etc., may be related. I will consider two such senses, those involved in "behaviorism" and "ideational" theory as two general theories about the meaning of "sign", each of which has a crude as well as a sophisticated version. The sophisticated versions, I will argue, can be combined to render the definition we have been seeking.

In the ideational theory, "A is a sign of B for X" is to be expanded as "A calls the idea of B to X's mind" or more precisely as "A would call the idea of B to X's mind if X were to perceive A" (where X stands for a conscious entity of some sort). To be even more accurate, it is preferable to formulate "A is a sign of B for X" as

I. "A has a disposition to call up the idea of B to X's mind if X were to perceive it".

(As we saw in 2.2, a sign may be said to have a "dispositional" property in the sense that it satisfies one of the conditions for a response such that the response in question would occur if other conditions were satisfied. In other words, by virtue of its dispositional property, a sign has the potential for changing the situations into which it enters such that given other conditions certain "psychological" states are produced.)

It is important to note that ascribing a disposition to a sign should not mislead us into identifying that disposition or meaning with a subsistent entity of some sort. On such a reification of dispositions indeed the description of a sign as having a disposition would sound peculiar. But given the notion of a disposition as simply a _factor_ in a situation, there would be no mystification involved in ascribing disposition to signs. Moreover, as we saw in 2.2, although meaning needs to be flexible enough to account for the complexities of actual sign-situations, it must nevertheless be relatively constant across the contexts in which a sign is present (or used). Compared to the psychological reactions to or associations of a sign, for instance, its meaning is relatively unchanging. It is primarily for this reason that I have followed Stevenson and spoken of the meaning or _disposition of a sign_. Again, we may remember the point made in 2.2 that although there is the alternative of saying that _people_ have a disposition to respond in certain ways in the presence of a sign, it is more consistent with the ordinary usage to ascribe the disposition to the sign. (Cf. above, p. 61.) However, we may locate meaning or disposition in any one factor among the several factors involved in a sign-situation, as long as we

can infer from the correlation of the factors involved to some relatively constant basis.

The ideational theory can do better with a dispositional formula given above (I) because the idea produced by A may not be any particular idea, say, that of B; under certain circumstances different ideas may be called up to X's mind. The idea called up by the sight of burnt wood, as I walk through the forest, may be not that of people camping, but that of lightning. Burnt wood in a forest has a disposition to bring either one of these ideas to the mind.

Now the ideational account would be tenable only if for every sign there were a relatively constant set of ideas associated with it such that when the sign occurs, it calls up an appropriate idea. Only a relatively constant set of ideas could match the relative constancy of meaning. Given this, there seems to be some truth to the ideational theory, reflected in the fact that, e.g., the standard cases of meaningful linguistic words or utterances are those where there is a relatively constant set of ideas regularly associated with the word or the utterance. With this theory, however, there is the problem that we cannot specify what the idea called up by such words as, for example, "substance" could be, except what one is likely to get when one knows the meaning of the word. But this account would be plainly circular. In his paper, "Meaning", H.P. Grice offers an account of meaning in terms of the intended effect of an utterance. This account reflects an essentially ideational conception of meaning, and as such it seems to me inadequate in the way just explained.

Ideational theory would still be inadequate even if it appealed to "images" by way of making "ideas" more specific. "A is a sign of B

for X" may be interpreted as "A has a disposition to call an image of B

to X's mind if X were to perceive A", but an objection similar to the

one raised above would apply to this version of the ideational theory.

For it is far from clear what the "image" regularly called to mind by,

say, "justice" or "good" could possibly be (though an image

corresponding to "brown" or "square" would seem much clearer). Many

signs perform their signifying function sometimes without being

associated with any one image or a relatively constant set of images.

Instead, given certain circumstances, they may trigger action or be used

for guiding action. Of this sort is the significance of, e.g., a gun-

shot for the runners at the beginning of a race. Imperative sentences

perform a similar function of triggering action, though the occurrence

of mental images is in many cases also part of the response to such

sentences. Note that "action" may in this case be not only physical

behavior, but also a speech (or in general a linguistic) act. "Shut the

door" may give rise to the action of going to the door and shutting it,

but it may be responded to by the utterance of such sentences as: "No, I

won't" or "Why don't you shut it yourself?" or "By all means". Thus

ideational theory even in its imagist version is to be rejected. This

brings us to the alternative general analysis of "sign".

"Behavioristic" sign-theory approaches the analysis of "A is a

sign of B for X" from the viewpoint not of ideas or images, but of

physical behavior. In its crude form the theory purports that a sign

(A) functions as a stimulus whose response is the same overt or covert

physical or bodily action as that of B. Charles Morris has called

attention to this crude form of behaviorism in his *Signs, Language, and

Behavior* (7ff. All references to Morris' ideas are from this work.)

According to this view, he says, "A is a sign of B for X" means "A produces the <u>same</u> response in X that B would if B instead of A were to be perceived". This version of behaviorism is too crude because, to use Morris' example, the man who hears that a certain road on which he is driving is blocked would respond <u>differently</u> (perhaps by turning off the road before reaching the obstacle) than he would if he went directly to the place where the road is blocked. Again, a dog, conditioned to respond to the sound of a bell by going to the place where it obtains food, responds differently to the bell sounding than it would to the food if it saw or smelled it. In the former case, the dog would go in "search" of food (and salivate, this too being a form of behavior, though not a conscious one); in the latter case it would perhaps eat the food.

(It is worth noting that the analogy between these two examples need not lead us to think that all human actions are of the same nature as the behavior of the dog. Nevertheless, the use of the terminology of stimulus and response in both cases is, I think, quite compatible with, though it does not seem to fully account for, the more or less accepted thesis that human actions are not necessarily and exclusively <u>conditioned</u> responses, that they are "conventional" and as such in part expressions of "freedom", as was noted in 2.2 and shall be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The examples given above are not to be taken to suggest any more than what they are meant to illustrate, i.e. a point about the deficiency of crude behaviorism. Animals, as we shall see, seem capable of cognitive apprehension and behavior, though perhaps not of "abstract" or "symbolic" thinking and activity.)

In order to account for the difference in the responses made to A and B we need a dispositional analysis. For an analogous reason, it may be noticed, we had to revise the first formulation of the ideational theory. But based on the definition of a disposition to respond to something in a certain way as "a state of an organism at a given time which is such that under certain additional conditions the response in question takes place" (*ibid.*, 9), Morris arrives at a conclusion about the meaning of a sign which can be formulated as follows: "A would dispose X (an organism) to respond in a way similar to (but not necessarily identical with) B."

I do not think this statement would be accurate enough. Under the vague term "similar" is hidden the very difficulty which the dispositional analysis was meant to overcome. There is indeed nothing "similar" in the above example between the action of turning off the road before reaching the obstacle and what one might do upon the direct encounter with the obstacle, e.g. waiting to see what happens, perhaps thinking that it is too late to turn back, that it is getting dark and the road may be opened sooner than the darkness sets in, or perhaps consulting someone else in the neighborhood, and so on. Nor is there a clear "similarity" between the dog eating the food and searching for it (even though eating may "include" what searching accompanies, i.e. salivating). The difficulty with the crude behavioristic approach to the meaning of "sign" does not consist in the fact that it confuses "identity" of the behavioral responses to A and B with "similarity" between them, as Morris suggests, but that it takes to be identical or one what is potentially many.

This is so particularly because the sign serves as only one condition among those present in the situation, e.g. the beliefs and attitudes of the agent, and therefore the response is modified by the combined influence of these conditions. Depending on my attitude, the response produced in me by the announcement "There is a dog over there" may vary from running away (if I am generally afraid of dogs) to getting some dog-food and feeding the animal (if I am generally well-disposed toward dogs). Depending on the other conditions obtaining in the situation, whether mental conditions of belief, interest, desire, and the like, or the physical or external ("environmental") conditions, the range over which the behavioral response to a sign may vary is wide.

So, the sophisticated, as opposed to crude, version of the behavioristic approach to sign-theory would need to explain "A is a sign of B for X" in the following terms: "A and B have a disposition to produce in X one among the same relatively constant set of behavioral responses, if X were to perceive A and B" or, alternatively,

II. "A and B have a (second order) disposition to produce or activate in X a (first order) disposition to the same relatively constant set of actions, if X were to perceive A and B".

As we saw in 2.2, these dispositions are rendered constant through "rules". To this point I shall return later. It is worth noting that taken as the definition of "A is a sign of (or signifies or means) B for X", the above formula would suggest that the sign-relation with which we are concerned is symmetrical and reflexive, such that, e.g., it would be as normal to say "Rain signifies dark clouds" as "Dark clouds signify rain". And it would seem that on this definition we could speak of something being a sign of itself, e.g. dark clouds

signifying dark clouds, rain signifying rain, and the like. The definition would also suggest that, as far as linguistic signs are concerned, synonymous terms such as, e.g., "obstacle" and "barrier" could be a sign of each other. But these implications are false: rain is not said to be a sign of dark clouds; nor is it said to be a sign of rain; more obviously, words could be said to be a sign of what they refer to, e.g. "rain" to be a sign of rain, but not *vice versa*. Moreover, these difficulties seem to arise not only against the background of the actual practice of ordinary language, but also due to the actual conditions in which something is said to signify something else. Ancient ruins may signify inhabitants in some remote past in the sense of provoking in us a disposition to act in certain ways (action being what the above definition is primarily concerned with, though, as we shall see, implausibly). But it is unlikely that there was anything about the actions of the people who lived in that location which would signify, for instance, an impending disaster (let alone the ruins perceived in a distant future). Again, words are normally considered to be a sign of their referent, but it is far from clear whether there is anything in common between the actions induced in most of us by certain words and those induced by their referent, e.g. between our reaction to the word "steam engine" and that to an actual steam engine.

To avoid the problems noted in the previous paragraph, it might seem advisable to change our definiendum from "A is a sign of (or means) B for X" to "A and B have the same meaning or significance" or, more simply, "A has a meaning or significance". The latter phrase would, of course, require the following alternative definition: "A has a (second order) disposition to produce or activate in X a (first order)

disposition to a relatively constant set of actions, if X were to perceive A". This way of defining a sign, however, does not give us any clues as to the signified object. Surely, the signified thing cannot be the first order dispositions to action. These would be psychological (or sub-activated physiological) reactions, which by no means exhaust meaning, though they have undoubtedly a role to play. Nor do we always regard psychological states as the things signified. Smoke, e.g., does not signify or mean our being disposed to act in certain ways; it means fire.

So, it seems best to preserve the definiendum "A is a sign of B for X", and instead to revise the sophisticated behavioristic definition (II) thus:

II'. "A has a (second order) disposition to produce or activate in X a (first order) disposition to a relatively constant set of actions with respect to B, if X were to perceive A".

In this way the signified object appears in both the definiendum and the definition, while at the same time the above-mentioned difficulties arising from questions of symmetry, reflexivity, synonymy, etc., for the earlier definition (II) seem to disappear.

Now the behavioristic analysis of sign has the advantage of drawing attention to observable states of affairs by giving an account in terms of behavioral responses. And it is usually for this reason that it is preferred to ideational theories. Shared by almost all behaviorists is the goal of prediction and control, hence "objectivity". The states of mind being private, the objectivity desired can only be afforded by observation of physical behavior. This is also why behaviorism usually restricts the scope of the term "behavior" or

"action" either to overt action or to covert but in principle observable action. Some such preference was expressed by Stevenson, notwithstanding his admission to the effect that a behavioristic approach can only supplement the so-called "introspective" approach, not replace it. Hare's analysis of the meaning of ethical language too betrayed a bias for "action" (and, of course, choice as well), though there was evidence that he would not restrict the meaning of "action" to a narrowly behavioristic sense, but would extend it to include speech-acts. As such Hare went to the extreme of denying the relevance of the talk about attitudes and emotions in connection with the "logic" of moral discourse (or even the talk of beliefs in relation to descriptive or scientific language). (See 3.1. Concerning beliefs, see *LM*, 6.) He claimed that reference to attitudes and beliefs does not say anything which a certain linguistic utterance does not already attest to.

Morris in his turn emphasizes the importance of the behavioristic approach and insists that the so-called "mentalism" does not provide a genuine "alternative" to a behavioral semiotic, if we are to treat the subject scientifically. (Cf. *op. cit.*, 27ff.) All that can be said about "ideas" in mentalism, he says, can in behaviorism be accounted for by dispositions to act. (30.) Morris' reasons for regarding this approach as "primary" seem to stem from his desire to accommodate the pre-verbal behavior of children and the non-verbal behavior of animals and insane persons, as well as the behavior of those persons whose verbal responses are often unreliable. (14.) For in such cases behavioral response is the best evidence for sign-cognition or the presence of a sign-process.

Nonetheless, Morris seems more cautious than this would suggest.
He stresses that the analysis offered is not to be taken as a
"definition" (providing the necessary and sufficient conditions), but
merely as a sufficient condition of "sign". (12 & 8.) He acknowledges
the fact that other more complex conditions are required for the
analysis of such phenomena as ordinary language, aesthetic and religious
discourses, mathematics, and the like. But these types of signs, Morris
claims, can be included insofar as there is a constant connection
between them and the conditions set forth in the analysis. (12. More
about this will be said in the next section when we come to consider
Morris' distinction between signs and symbols.)

But if so, I would argue that Morris' analysis turns out to be a
partial account of the meaning of "sign", an account which would have to
be filled in with respect to other, non-behavioral, conditions and the
relation between the two sets of conditions. Behaviorism, whether as a
complete theory or as a heuristic or methodological maxim, remains in
principle at odds with the talk of such "psychological states" as
wishes, interests, desires, and the like. These states may only
partially be interpreted as dispositions to overt or covert physical
action. "Images", of course, seem more important, because in general
more "determinate", than purely introspective or affective states of
bodily tension or passion, although due to their concreteness, images
tend to possess a greater extent of emotional intensity than many words
in ordinary language. Like words, however, they may be used as
instruments of thought and action, in partial independence from the
physical world. They are, as we shall see, "symbols" with respect to

which it is appropriate to speak of conventions of use and productive activity, rather than mere conditioned physical responses.

From the above remarks the following conclusion may be derived. The dispositional versions of ideational and behavioristic theories singly capture only part of the truth. For each gains its plausibility from the deficiency of the other and introduces inadequacies of its own. In particular, the behavioristic approach is misled by assuming a narrow conception of "behavior", one which is confined to physical or bodily or organic action. I propose, therefore, to combine the two formulations we derived from the two theories (I and II'), and given what was said earlier to the effect that the meaning of a sign may consist in a range of activities or uses, not in a single feature or function, I define "A is a sign of B for X" as:

"A has a (second order) disposition such that (1) if X were to perceive it, A would produce or activate in X a (first order) disposition to a relatively constant set of feelings, thoughts, and actions with respect to B, and (2) if X could produce it at will, A would serve X as an instrument for the expression of a relatively constant set of feelings and thoughts with respect to B" (where X is a conscious entity of some sort).

In this formula "action" is not confined to physical action, but covers linguistic or in general "symbolic" acts as well. Indeed, in order to take account of human creative or productive (what will be called "symbolic") acts, the "passive" disposition of a sign to be "used" was introduced. (See above, 2.2.) Thus a sign often produces or activates a disposition to use other signs (more properly speaking, symbols). This, as we shall see in greater detail later, suggests that

a necessary component of (symbolic or linguistic) meaning is the relation between symbols or words; the unit of meaning, in other words, seems to be not the individual symbol or word, but the relation between symbols or sentences. More about this will be said later. In particular, we shall be able to respond to the possible objection that such abstract and general words as "the", "ought", and "good" cannot be regarded as referential. Our response would be that although there is a force to that objection, the highly significant inter-symbolic or syntactic aspect of the use of these words (i.e. that they would be especially meaningless independently of the sentences or conversation in which they are employed) is in part responsible for the obscurity of their referential function, and that they do nonetheless make an important contribution to determining the referent, hence truth-value, of the <u>sentences</u> in which they occur. Of course, as we shall see later, the referent or truth-value in question cannot be reduced to physical facts; in the case of ethical terms in particular, reference seems to be primarily (though not exclusively) to mental facts such as feelings and attitudes.

Moreover, the division of our formula into two parts suggests that although there are certain factors common to all signs, nevertheless, as we shall see, two classes of sign must be distinguished: "signs" (or as it is sometimes called, "signals") which merely "happen" and are closely, though not primarily, related to action on the basis of "regularity", and "symbols" which are essentially "made" in accordance with rule-governed conventions. A more detailed development of this distinction will be undertaken in the next section. Needless to say, it is within the class of "symbolic activities", those

which involve (1) and (primarily) (2) in the proposed definition, that
we may speak of a variety of uses of language and of the task of
semiotics and philosophy of language to articulate and clarify those
uses and the rules underlying them.

In the above formula "thought" is meant in the broad sense which
covers intentions, desires, beliefs, images, and the like (propositional
attitudes), and dispositions to serve as instruments for expressing
feeling or thought are tied with the semantic or truth-functional
dimension of a symbolic situation. The notion of truth and the related
notions of reference and rationality underlying the above definition
will be developed in the next two sections. We will see, for instance,
how thinking and acting according to the prevailing (universalizable)
rules (hence, rationality) pervade various areas, and are indeed the
distinctive characteristic, of linguistic practice as a particular
symbolic system. To know the meaning of words in general is in part to
know, with the aid of tacit semantic and syntactic rules, what the
sentences in which those words occur "refer" to or are "true" of,
whether the objects of this reference are intentions, beliefs, images
(in general, mental facts) or extra-mental states of affairs, and
whether these states of affairs are actual or merely possible. This is
true for ethical discourse no less than for scientific discourse; the
partial dependence of meaning on truth and reference is not confined to
those parts of discourse which deal with physical objects, but rather
expands across language, and a *fortiori* moral discourse. Here the key
concepts are those of "rules" and, related to it, the concepts of
"rationality" and "universalizability". For, as we have seen in the
previous chapters and will be further shown in the discussion of Bernard

Williams' views, non-cognitivism banishes these concepts from the "distinctively" moral region of discourse.4 Indeed the concept of rules or conventions even as applied to ordinary language in general has been challenged by Donald Davidson, as we shall see in the next section.

By way of anticipating the further development of the points made in the preceding paragraph, we may contrast the definition of "sign" or "meaning" offered here with a certain interpretation of Frege's analysis of meaning which seems congenial to the non-cognitivist evaluative/ descriptive dichotomy. He distinguishes "sense" (*"Sinn"*) from "reference" or "nominatum" (*"Bedeutung"*) and both of these from "image" or "idea". He conceives of "sense" as the mode or the manner and context of presentation of the designated object of a sign (name, word combination, or expression) or the proposition of a sentence. More clearly, he notes, "The sense of a proper name is grasped by everyone who knows the language or the totality of designations of which the proper name is a part"; or "an expression has a sense if it is formed in a grammatically correct manner and stands for a proper name." ("On Sense and Nominatum", in H. Feigl and W. Sellars, eds., *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, 86, 87.) Reference, according to Frege, is the designated object of a sign or the truth-value of a sentence. As such it is to be distinguished from sense, because, he says, two expressions may have two different senses but the same reference. E.g., "The nominata of 'evening star' and 'morning star' are the same but not their senses." (*Ibid.*, 86.) And he points out that in some cases while there is sense, it is doubtful whether there is any reference (as in "the heavenly body which has the greatest distance from the earth"); and in

other cases, there is demonstrably no reference (as in "the series with the least convergence"). (87.)

There seems indeed to be a difference in meaning between "morning star" and "evening star", due to a temporal difference in the conditions in which they appear, or in the truth-conditions (though not truth-values) of the statements in which the words figure: in spite of the fact that both "morning star" and "evening star" designate the planet venus, the former expression presents that planet as the star visible near dawn, whereas the latter presents it as the star visible near sunset. But that in cases like this referent is the same and meaning different does not justify a logical distinction between reference and meaning. As will be evident in what follows, a confusion between reference and referent is likely to result in drawing that distinction, a confusion which we may prevent by translating Frege's term "Bedeutung" as "referent", not "reference".

Yolton has observed that the actual referent of a referring expression such as "The moon is smaller than the earth" does not "enter into" the expression; the expression does not entail an existential claim about the referent. "But significant reference does involve our knowing what the referent is that is talked about. In this sense, the referent does "enter into" our understanding and use of the expression, but it enters via thought." (*Metaphysical Analysis*, 159.) The suggestion seems to be that reference involves the knowledge of the circumstances under which a statement would be true or false; it does not imply our knowing whether or not those circumstances in fact obtain, whether or not the referent actually exists. Given this distinction between referent and reference, of which, as Yolton notes, Frege seemed

himself aware (*ibid.*, 150-160), we may go further and argue that in any

meaningful utterance, sense cannot be severed from reference.

There seems to be an intimate relation between sense and

reference, reflected in the fact that we cannot refer by means of single

terms without either presupposing their use in sentences or actually

using sentences in which they figure. As we shall see further in 5.3,

this fact calls for a more extended conception of reference than that

which seems to underlie a logical distinction between sense and

reference—pointing to things in the physical world and at best uttering

such simple sentences as "This is X". The so-called ostensive

definitions are more complicated than that. So, as was suggested above

(p. 253) in connection with the implications of our definition of sign,

reference can best be defined as a dimension of meaning "concerned" with

facts, not as logically distinct from meaning (sense) and

"corresponding" to facts. For this alternative, broad conception seems

to represent actual linguistic practice more adequately; it would seem,

to say the least, doubtful whether any sentence with full meaning could

be said to be devoid of reference. (See 5.3, below.) Apart from the

argument from the complexity and richness of ostensive definitions, this

claim can be further supported by pointing out that such sentences as,

e.g., "Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep" are

meaningful not only because they are grammatically correct, but also

because they refer to possible, though, in these cases, non-existent

objects or states of affairs (or false propositions). But possible

objects are all we need for reference. As Yolton points out, "the

thought of the referent enters into the sense of the sentence; otherwise

we would not even be able to go about determining its truth value."

(*Ibid.*, 160.) It is, of course, more tricky with <u>impossible</u> states of affairs such as "the series with the least convergence" or "the limit of $f(x) = \sqrt{x-1}$ as X approaches 1 from the left of $f(x)$". But not only is there no reference, because no possible referent, here, but also such expressions seem to make no sense; we cannot specify the conditions an item must meet in order to be designated by them. The second expression, for instance, seems meaningless because $f(x)$ (in the set of real numbers) is only defined for $x \geq 1$. (Mathematicians do indeed regard such expressions as the ones cited above meaningless, senseless, or undefined. See A. Mizrahi & M. Sullivan, *Calculus and Analytic Geometry*, from which the latter example is taken (72). On p. 4 they point out: "*No meaning is assigned to even roots of negative numbers, since any real number raised to an even power is nonnegative.*") Expressions which "refer" to impossible states of affairs, which really do not and cannot refer at all because we know neither their truth-value nor their truth-conditions, may be syntactically harmless, but they seem meaningless. They seem no more intelligible than the (also syntactically harmless) expression "potatoes in tangible dishonesty".

Also important for our purposes is that Frege excludes "image" or "idea" from meaning. Images, he says, are ."a part or mode of the single person's mind"; as such they are "subjective" and vary from person to person and even with the same person in different contexts. Sense and reference, on the other hand, are "objective"; they are "common property of many". (*Ibid.*, 88.) Unlike Frege, I have included images or dispositions connected with them in meaning. It does not seem that linguistic meaning is completely independent of images, that there is no relatively constant set of images connected with terms, though

admittedly in some cases, e.g. with mathematical or logical symbols, images are far from clear. Here we can test again the force of our dispositional definition of sign, as distinct both from its occurrent or non-dispositional version and from the ideational or behavioristic accounts taken singly. For on our account, images could be included in the definition, while making it possible that in some cases (or even in many cases, with mathematical and logical symbols) such dispositions remain unactualized. Frege himself takes "sense" to lie somewhere "in between" subjective image or idea associated with a term and its objective reference. (88.) There is, of course, a spatial metaphor employed here which cannot be interpreted literally. But this way of characterizing the concept of "sense" seems somewhat to blur Frege's own subjective/ objective dichotomy and make way for the inclusion of ideas or images in meaning.

This inclusion does not make meaning entirely dependent on the individual's use, for meaning in the above formula is regarded as dependent on the combined effect of signs, the users of signs and the environment. Here, of course, an important role is played by rules as part of the process which leads one to react more constantly to symbols and to use them with relatively constant meanings. In this way meaning is by no means at the mercy of the individual subject. It is properly characterized as "intersubjective" or (unless the objective is reduced, in an empiricist spirit, to the physical or material) "objective". As Lovibond has observed, "The possibility of discourse about an objective world is determined by the fact of intersubjective agreement; and conversely, where such agreement exists, the particular discourse

grounded in it can be called 'objective', regardless of its subject-matter." (*Loc. cit.*, 42.)

More important for our purposes is the point that the logical distinction between meaning and reference motivates the idea that there are two kinds of meaning or modes of judgment: evaluative and descriptive. For once reference and descriptive or cognitive meaning are restricted to correspondence with the physical or, at any rate, non-mental world, other relations with the world, e.g. relation to the social world as being the subject-matter of ethics, would have to be brought under an allegedly semantically different category—evaluative. (Of course, one may be a realist not only about the physical world, but also about "concepts", though such a view would appear odd.) From this there is a short step to denying the possibility of "truth" on "subjective" matters such as interests. The non-cognitivist accounts of moral language discussed in earlier chapters exhibit this pattern of thinking. From an ontological viewpoint, they regard as real, objective, and as part of the world "only those entities which are denoted by the terminology of the experimental scieces, or by other (more familiar) terminology which is reducible to that of the experimental sciences." (Lovibond, 20.) And from an epistemological standpoint, they assume "our 'ordinary way of knowing' to be ... the recording of canonical interpretations of our sense-impressions in a language acceptable to natural science." (*Ibid.*) On the view of linguistic meaning for which I have argued and which I will develop, on the other hand, reference is dispositionally dependent on meaning or, put somewhat differently, it is part of meaning. On that view, the

division of linguistic functions into two logically separate regions is not allowed.

In the remainder of this section I will attempt to show that the above dispositional account of sign or meaning, in particular insofar as it bears upon language, is hinted at and anticipated, though never adequately recognized, in Morris' as well as in speech act theories. (Of course, what we are concerned with here is essentially linguistic illocutionary acts, but, as both Austin (in *How to do things with Words*, 119-20) and Searle (in *Speech Acts*, 38-9) note, illocutionary acts may be performed outside language or non-verbally.) This is important in particular with respect to the basic contentions of speech act theories as developed by Austin and Searle, because there is a tendency there to over-emphasize use (or the expressive or practical aspect of language, in the narrow sense of these terms) at the cost of its objectivity—a characteristic which the dispositional analysis was meant to account for by locating meaning in part in signs themselves and in thought, and by taking meaning to be a function of the correlation between signs, conscious subjects, and the physical environment. As was suggested, linguistic meaning is intertwined with the inner and outer environment of thinking and acting subjects. (The speech act theory's emphasis on use goes back, of course, to Wittgenstein and before him to Marx and Engels, who stressed the practical dimension of language. But, as Lovibond has shown, these authors were keenly aware of the essential link between language, the mind, and the body or physical nature in general. (Cf. note 2, Ch. 5.) The epistemological counterpart of that emphasis on use too can be found in Marx who, e.g. in "Theses on Feuerbach" (Theses I & IX) criticizes "contemplative materialism" for

failing to understand sensuousness and the grasp of reality as practical

activities. (D. McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 156, 157.))

Morris' differentiation of the various modes of "signifying"

through linguistic signs reaffirms the proposed definition of sign and

serves to bring out more clearly the factors common to linguistic

expressions, or the various dimensions of what I have referred to as a

linguistic situation. Indirectly it helps us clarify the sense in

which, as I have been arguing, non-cognitivist analyses of ethical

discourse involve, in one form or another, emphasis on or assignment of

a privileged position to certain aspects of the totality of a linguistic

situation over others.

According to Morris, there are four factors in a sign-situation:

"designative", "prescriptive", "appraisive", and "identifying" or

"formative". A sign is designative to the extent it signifies "the

nature of the environment in which the organism operates." The

appraisive factor concerns "the import or relevance of this environment

for the needs of the organism." (The term "need", Morris points out, is

to be interpreted here as "motivation", not as something which promotes

"survival", for survival is neither a necessary nor a sufficient

condition for most needs to count as a need.) The prescriptive factor

concerns "the way in which the organism must act upon the environment in

order to satisfy its needs." (*Loc. cit.*, 62.) And to these three Morris

later adds another, namely, "identifying" factor. This factor has to do

with the spatio-temporal location of the signified object. (65ff.)

Thus "designators" typically signify the characteristics of

objects in the environment or the particular needs of the organism, the

interpreter of the sign, "appraisors" dispose the organism to

preferential attitude toward the environment, and "prescriptors" dispose the organism to actions conducive to attaining or preserving what satisfies the need in question. For example, "deer" becomes primarily a sign in the designative mode, since its appraisive and prescriptive components differ widely from one situation to another. "Fine", on the other hand, becomes primarily a sign in the appraisive mode, when its designative and prescriptive elements become vague. And "should" signifies action with respect to an object as its designative and appraisive elements are lost. (64.) In other words, the general preponderance of one or the other factor determines the mode of signification. What is important is that no one component alone may be present in a sign-situation, that indeed all components are present, although the so-called designators, appraisors, and prescriptors are predominantly in one mode or another. The point is that in virtue of these factors taken together, a sign has a disposition to produce in the interpreter a relatively constant disposition to respond to certain features of the environment preferentially, i.e. according to its needs, and in a certain specific manner prescribed by the sign. The words of someone who informs the driver about the road-block are designative of the conditions of the road, appraisive of these conditions as an "obstacle", and prescriptive of the proper response of perhaps turning off the road and taking a different route. Important for our purposes is the recognition of the fact that most so-called evaluative terms, say, "honesty", "cruelty", "malice", "courage", and the like, combine the above functions; they designate objects, i.e. physical or mental states of affairs, signify the importance of

something (as "reason") for the satisfaction of a certain need or interest, and move us to actions deemed appropriate.

This is, I believe, an important point which supports my suggestions in the former chapters that the so-called "emotive meaning" as a disposition to express and evoke attitudes and "prescriptive (or commendatory) meaning" as a disposition to guide choices or decisions are not separate kinds of meaning, but simply different modes or dimensions of meaning or signification. It is worth stressing that the various modes of signification are dispositions of a sign to be used for a certain purpose. There is no one-to-one correspondence between them and the actual uses. This is why, as Morris points out, "a designator may give information without being used to inform." (96.) And analogously for the other modes. A signifier which typically performs a certain sort of function may be used for a different purpose. In reality no sign merely designates or appraises or prescribes. (Similar observations can, as we shall see, be made with respect to different "types" of speech act.)

That a distinction between broad kinds of meaning is not allowed in the present analysis, and that a signifier which typically performs a certain sort of function may be used for a different purpose, support my thesis that both a hard and fast distinction between descriptive and evaluative meanings and the assimilation of the latter to the expression and evocation of attitudes (Stevenson) or to commendation in the sense of guiding choice or decision to act (Hare and Mackie) may be wrong. Not only does each of these accounts seem to underrate what the other takes to be the essential part of the "logic" of evaluative discourse,

but both relegate the descriptive dimension of signification, i.e. the designative factor, to the rank of secondary importance.

(Morris distinguishes four main uses corresponding _in general_ to the four modes of signification: "informative", "valuative", "incitive", and "systemic". The latter concerns the "combination" of signs and generally corresponds to "formators" or "identifiers" such as "or", "not", "+", "5", all the so-called logical, mathematical, and grammatical signs. I think if we take a word to be the unit of the linguistic sign in the sense of the most primary vehicle of linguistic meaning, then formators may be said to bring out a factor which may be classified under designative mode; we would therefore be able to reduce, insofar as linguistic signs are concerned, the modes of signification to three. On the other hand, if the unit of linguistic meaning is the sentence, then we seem to need the additional formative factor or its correlate, systemic use. The latter alternative seems preferable, since it leaves room for logic, mathematics, and grammar, as specific modes of discourse. It is also presupposed in the above definition of "sign" in the fact that one of the dispositions is that of activating or producing a disposition to use _other_ signs. And, as we shall see in the last section, the idea that the unit of linguistic meaning is the sentence provides a more satisfactory explanation of the referential aspects of language. So far I have mixed the talk of "sentence" and "word", and have referred in general to "language" or "speech acts", because the choice of the linguistic unit did not seem to affect the points at issue.)

In _How to do things with Words_ after having given an exhaustive list of illocutionary acts, Austin attempts (in "Lecture XII") a more

general classification of speech acts. Through that list the speech act theory indicates the multiplicity and variety of illocutionary acts and shows that "statements" or "descriptive" sentences are by no means unique among illocutionary acts, that the traditional notions of "statement" and correspondence with facts are abstractions from a total speech act in its context of utterance. To this point I shall return later. At the moment I wish to attend briefly to Austin's broad classes of speech acts and explore the parallelism between them and Morris' modes of signification in an attempt to reaffirm the proposed dispositional analysis and its implications for my criticism of non-cognitivism in morals, as discussed above. However, between Austin's and Morris' analyses there is the difference that while Austin is classifying illocutionary acts or uses, Morris seems to be distinguishing factors (and, as I tried to show above, dispositions) in the meaning of a sign, i.e. factors in what Austin calls locutionary acts. Nevertheless, on Austin's own admission illocutionary and locutionary acts are inseparable, and there are hints that each of the different "types" of illocutionary acts could be used to perform the function of others. (151ff.) So, it seems that it is the dispositions involved in locutionary acts that are brought to bear through illocutionary acts. The point is that Austin's classification anticipates, but due to a certain preoccupation with use, does not recognize the objectivity of meaning exposed in my dispositional analysis. It runs the risk of over-emphasizing use at the cost of that objectivity, and this would fail to represent a serious barrier against non-cognitivism, for it would be still open to the non-cognitivist theorist to select some one kind of use as distinctive of ethical

discourse, and another kind of scientific. A quite different ethical theory emerges from the dispositional picture of linguistic practice underlying the proposed definition of signification or meaning.

Austin distinguishes five general, related and overlapping, classes of utterance: "verdictives", "exercitives", "commissives", "behabitives", and "expositives". "Verdictives" are essentially the giving of a verdict, but also an estimate, reckoning, assessment, or appraisal. They are "essentially giving a finding as to something-- fact, or value--which is for different reasons hard to be certain about." (151.) Verdictives are capable of being correct or incorrect, right or wrong, justifiable or unjustifiable on the evidence. "Exercitives" are exercising of powers or giving of a <u>decision</u> in favor or against something, as distinct from a mere assessment or estimate of or verdict on it. An exercitive <u>advocates</u> something in virtue of the position of the speaker. Examples are warning, ordering, sentencing, choosing , advising, recommending, claiming, pardoning, etc. "Commissives" commit the speaker to a certain course of action. Promising, adopting, betting, and favoring are some examples. "Behabitives", says Austin, "include the notion of reaction to other people's behavior and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else's past conduct or imminent conduct." (160.) Apologizing and protesting are behabitives. "Expositives" "make plain how our utterances fit into the course of an argument or conversation, how we are using words, or, in general, are expository." (152.) Thus, analyzing, classifying, interpreting, arguing, assuming, etc.,would be examples of expositives.

The list and the treatment of these five classes given by Austin himself are comprehensive and sophisticated. They indicate the richness and complexity of language which the view of meaning or signification proposed here also attempts to capture. Now as part of his analysis, Austin points out with much acumen the ways or respects in which there are overlaps between these classes. For example, verdictives may well be exercitives, as when a judge's ruling <u>makes</u> law, or commissives, as indeed any speech act commits us to a certain future action consistent with the speech act, or may be implied by behabitives such as congratulating which, when sincere, is an expression of an attitude of approval, or by expositives in the contexts of clarifying the use of words. Exercitives, in turn, are closely connected with behabitives, as in approving, protesting, and the like, which involve taking up of an attitude, and with expositives in the context of an argument or conversation. And expositives may be taken as verdictives, in analyzing and interpreting, as exercitives, in conceding, urging, arguing, as commissives, in defining, maintaining, supporting, or as behabitives, in objecting.

Two points seem important for our purposes. First, there seems to be a "descriptive" element involved in all these classes, and this element is most frequently brought out in connection with commissives and behabitives, as in "I intend ..." or "I oppose ..." or "I commend ...", as well as expositives, as when we say "I insist ..." or "I interpret ..." or "I state ...", and especially when we "suit our action to words", as in "I turn next to ..." or "I quote ...". (See Austin's passing mention of these on 158 and 161.) Perhaps this connection between all the five classes isolated by Austin with the descriptive

element needs more emphasis, but it is certainly implied in his
insistence that illocutionary acts are inseparable from locutionary acts
which concern "meaning", i.e. sense and reference. We will have to
return to this point again, especially in the context of the discussion
of the concept of "rationality", for an important part of this concept
is appeal to correct evidence or reference to facts. Morris'
designative mode of signification serves, as we have seen, to underline
the same point, for it is concerned with a referential dimension present
in all signification.

Secondly, several features may be discerned in Austin's account
which echo the factors distinguished by Morris in his analysis of a
sign-situation. There is (i) an element of "appraisal" or "assessment"
of needs (motivations) or attitudes, common in Morris' appraisive factor
and Austin's verdictives and behabitives; (ii) relation to choice,
decision, and action, brought out in Austin's classes of exercitives and
commissives (and insofar as choice is an attitude, in the class of
utterances or factors listed under (i)) and in Morris' prescriptive
factor; (iii) relation to the object or referent, in Morris' designative
factor and in all classes of illocutionary acts in Austin's account; and
(iv) a concern for the systematic connection between utterances in the
course of an argument or conversation, in Austin's expositives, or
between signs, in Morris' formative or identifying factor.

Thus four main factors seem to emerge which are parallel to the
elements figuring in our formula for the meaning of a sign, and which
may be held to be involved in all types of speech act, due to the very
close connection between them pointed out above. They are:

(i) interests, beliefs, images, and choices (in general the "psychological states" expressed or referred to in the use of a sign or in a speech act which, as we have seen, operate as reasons;

(ii) actions (or decisions to act), physical as well as symbolic;

(iii) objects or referents of (i) in the external world;

(iv) relation to the rest of conversation or to other "symbols".

These features find confirmation in Searle's account of the types of illocutionary acts. In general, Searle follows Austin in denying that there are basic or unique illocutionary acts to which all the others are related as species to a genus. Part of his reason for this is that "the principles of distinction which lead us to say in the first place that such and such is a different kind of illocutionary act from such and such other act are quite various." (69.) Searle's principles are essential for our purposes. He distinguishes seven: (1) the point or purpose of the act (accounting for the difference between, e.g., a statement and a question); (2) the relative positions of the speaker and the hearer (accounting for such differences as holding between a request and an order); (3) the degree of commitment undertaken (with respect to which promising, e.g., differs from merely intending, and urging differs from ordering); (4) the propositional content (accounting for the difference between, e.g., thanking—for a _past_ act and requesting—a _future_ act); (5) the relation of the proposition to the interest of the speaker and the hearer (capturing the difference between, say, warning and predicting); (6) the psychological states possibly expressed (accounting for the difference between, e.g., a promise as an expression of intention and a statement as an expression of belief); and (7) the

relation of the utterance to the rest of the conversation (with respect to which replying, e.g., is different from objecting). (70.)

Searle's (4) is equivalent to (iii); (1), (5), and (6) are equivalent to (i); (3) is implied in (ii); and (7) is equivalent to (iv). (I am assuming that (2) can be fully accounted for in terms of the interests, beliefs, and other psychological states of the hearer and the speaker, as well perhaps as the relation of the utterance to the rest of conversation. In other words, I am assuming that differences of position, rank, or authority as such and independently of beliefs, desires, ends, etc., do not warrant the choice of one speech act over another. This assumption will be supported later in the discussion of rationality in 5.3.) If these comparisons are correct, Searle's principles of distinction between types of illocutionary acts seem to render the same features as those in (i)-(iv), i.e. the main features of a linguistic sign or speech act.

As I suggested above, the speech act theory and the analysis of meaning offered in this section are in essential agreement, though the latter makes the objectivity of meaning more explicit by stressing that meaning is a function of the relationship between signs, thought, action, as well as the body and the external world. In this way, we find a solid basis for cautioning ourselves that because of the variety of tendencies involved in any one illocutionary act, what may appear to count as a particular use may turn out to be a different one. This will force us to make our purposes clearer, and to demand the same from others; in this way we could minimize possibilities of manipulation and coercion through, for instance, persuasive uses of language. Our

language would no longer be subject to the individual's whim, for it would be tied to the community of language speakers and to human nature.

To select or choose one of the features of linguistic signs, e.g. choice or decision to act, as prescriptivism does, or the expression and evocation (though the latter is strictly speaking a "perlocutionary" act, not illocutionary) of attitudes, as in emotivism, as having a special or primary connection with moral or evaluative discourse does not cohere with our analysis. For if all meaningful linguistic or symbolic use refers to objects or states of affairs inside and outside the speaker, is dispositionally related to decisions and physical action, covert or overt, and to the rest of a discourse, conversation, or argument, if these factors are dispositionally related to and inseparable from one another (as our definition of sign in terms of a conjunction of dispositions implies and as was suggested in connection with Morris' modes of signification and Austin's "types" of illocutionary acts (261ff. & 264)), if no single one of them exhausts the function or meaning of a particular linguistic expression, then a hard and fast, "logical" distinction between broad "kinds of meaning" or "kinds of "discourse" turns out to be unacceptable. And where there is no logical division within the whole of our discourse, there is nothing logically primary or special about its different regions. As I tried to show in the previous chapters, non-cognitivist theories reflect a normative or practical preoccupation on the part of the analyst, which tends to take some one aspect of a total speech situation to be more important or central than others to the subject-matter of the inquiry. This normative preoccupation may be useful in itself; it is, for instance, what seems to go into Morris' modes of signification and

Austin's and Searle's broad classifications of the types of speech act. In fact, the dimension of choices and interests already suggests that, as we shall see in greater detail, all linguistic acts (including the so-called second order statements of the analyst) are guided in part by interests and depend on "discriminative" acts as to what is important and what is not. But that abstraction becomes objectionable when a logical gap is opened between the descriptive (and by implication, referential) dimension of linguistic acts on the one hand and all the other dimensions on the other. For as we saw above, there is a richness and complexity about linguistic acts which accounts for a close connection between various types of illocutionary speech acts discerned by Austin such that, e.g., an expositive may perform the function of behabitives. And in the same way, there is only a general correspondence between Morris' modes of signification and the actual uses of linguistic signs such that a designator, e.g., may be used for the purpose of prescribing. No one factor may be found in isolation in a linguistic sign-situation.

Not only does each non-cognitivist thesis seem to underrate what the other takes to be the essential part of moral discourse, but they all relegate the descriptive dimension of signification in evaluative language to the rank of secondary importance by excluding that dimension from the logic of moral language. By mistakenly drawing a sharp logical line between the so-called evaluative and descriptive kinds of discourse, non-cognitivism as a theory about moral language detracts from the force of descriptive elements--feelings, desires, interests, and ends--and their correlative, universalizability, as well as the possibility of reaching a global consensus autonomously and rationally.

More about this will be said in the following sections. As we shall see further, the way in which moral judgments involve decisions, attitudes or feelings seems the same as that in which scientific or material-object statements do.

It is time to develop the philosophy of language emerging from the above considerations by clarifying the distinction between "symbols" and "signals" as two broad classes of signs. (Since "signal" as a sub-class of "sign" is often referred to simply as "sign", from here on I will adopt this conventional terminology and unless otherwise mentioned, use the term "sign" to refer to signals. The distinction between the generic and specific senses of "sign" should always be kept in mind.) This will hopefully bring out the sense in which language, as one kind of symbolic activity, and a *fortiori* ethical language, is an expression of interest or freedom and embodies universalizable rules (rationality). Against the background of that distinction we should also be able more adequately to explore (in 5.3) the complexities of "reference" and "truth" and the way in which these concepts may find their ways into ethical discourse. The points which will be made in these connections may be taken in part as the elucidation of the features (i)-(iv) which have emerged from our discussion.

5.2. Signs and Symbols

The distinction we are about to examine is by no means new, but there are different views as to where roughly we should draw a line between signs and symbols. For example, Ogden and Richards draw a

distinction between signifying and symbolizing which seems to be parallel to that between the expression of feelings and "reference". They write: "Besides symbolizing a reference, our words also are signs of emotions, attitudes, moods, the temper, interest or set of the mind in which the references occur." (*The Meaning of Meaning*, 223. Here Ogden and Richards seem to run attitudes and feelings together, failing to recognize the important distinction noted by Stevenson. See above, 2.2. They also suggest that only in relation to extra-mental states of affairs can we speak of reference. This suggestion, as we saw in the previous section and will be further noted later, is loaded with empiricist presuppositions which are indeed conducive to the non-cognitivist theory of ethics.) Of course, symbolizing reference or an act of referring may not be separable from signifying feelings and attitudes. There may, in other words, be some "expressive" element involved in the referential act of symbolizing. Nevertheless the two must not be confused. The following passage makes the point clearer:

> It is because the non-verbal sensations and images
> which accompany references are such unreliable signs
> that symbols are so important. We usually take our
> symbolization as our guide to our meaning, and the
> accompanying sign feelings become indistinguishably
> merged in the feelings of our symbols. The fact,
> however, that on some occasions all the available
> symbols can be felt to be inappropriate to the
> reference which they are required to symbolize, shows
> that other feeling-signs are attainable. We are thus
> not completely at the mercy of our symbols. (203.)

To this we may add that the same "feeling sign" may be accompanied by different references. The suggestion here is that though in practice an utterance could be taken as a sign of feelings and as symbolizing a reference at the same time, nevertheless the signifying function of utterances is in essence different from their symbolizing function. A

word could be taken as a sign in the sense that given sufficient past experience of the cases where the sign and the feelings signified occurred together, one can infer the presence of the latter from the experience of the former. (Cf. *ibid*, Ch. III: "Sign-Situations".) For symbolizing a reference, however, we need in addition certain rules, what Ogden and Richards call "canons of symbolism". (Ch. V.)

The above paragraph implies that what we are dealing with in a proper distinction between signs and symbols may be parallel to that between the causal "regular" connections among a certain kind of phenomena (those which, as we shall see, merely happen) and the rule-governed nature of a certain other kind of phenomena (which, as we shall see, are made or produced for a conscious purpose). In conformity with this, in an early passage in their book, Ogden and Richards write: "those signs which men use to communicate one with another and as instruments of thought, occupy a peculiar place. It is convenient to group these under a distinctive name; as for words, arrangements of words, images, gestures, and such representations as drawings or mimetic sounds we use the term *symbols*." (23.) Here symbols are taken to be "instruments of thought" and "communication" and as such a species of signs which may be different from other signs in an important and essential way; the distinction is one which corresponds to a distinction between causal and rule-governed relations.

In the light of these insights and despite the hints as to an essential difference between signs and symbols, it is, I think, somewhat misleading when Ogden and Richards indicate at several points that they are prepared to extend their so-called "causal" or "contextual" theory from signs in general to symbols as a sub-class or species of signs.

According to the "contextual" theory of signs, when part of a past context recurs in a sufficiently analogous form (or *gestalt*) and is experienced as such, it stands out as the sign of the rest of the context through a causal association in the mind of the perceiver. (*Ibid.*, Ch. III.) In this way signs generally give rise to a tendency or a state of anticipation for what is to occur in order for the experienced context to be completed as a satisfactory *gestalt* or configuration. What this means essentially is that "A is a sign of B" is equivalent to "A causes (or has a disposition to cause) in X's mind an expectation of B." And depending on how we interpret "expectation", i.e. whether it consists in a readiness for action in the form of muscular or sub-activated levels of tension (dispositions to physical action) or in "ideational" phenomena of "feeling", "belief", "imagery", or "choice", the contextual account may be said to be able to accommodate what in the previous section were referred to as the sophisticated behavioristic and ideational approaches. Thus having started with behavioristic examples, Ogden and Richards hold that the theory "can be extended to cover all beliefs, ideas, conceptions and 'thinkings of'." (73.) Earlier they point out:

> The contextual theory of signs to which, then, we
> first proceed, will be found to throw light on the
> primitive idea that Words and Things are related by
> some magic bond; for it is actually through their
> occurrence together with things, their linkage with
> them in a 'context' that symbols come to play that
> important part in our life which has rendered them
> not only a legitimate object of wonder but the source
> of all our power over the external world. (47.)

In passages like these Ogden and Richards tend to suggest that the contextual theory of signs may be extended to cover all "thinkings of". But this seems to be only part of the truth; though it is true that

words gain much of their power through association with things in contexts, we must not forget that such an association cannot be established if words are not used consistently or according to rules. In other words, the rule-governed character of language, and symbolic activities in general, seems to be logically prior to the causal connections established between it and the world, though the latter is equally important. An attempt to account for the "power" of words simply in terms of the contextual theory would lose sight of the essentially autonomous or free character of symbolic activities of which the use of words is an example and to which Ogden and Richards themselves draw attention.

As we shall see in the next section, there is a similarity between "sign-cognition" and the kind of process whereby words acquire their meaning. As signs become signs through a more or less constant conjunction of events in experience, so through the process of "ostension" or "ostensive definition" sounds or marks become connected with mental or external matters of fact and thereby become endowed with meaning. To be sure, unless some words become related with facts, we cannot think and communicate with or in words. Hence, the sign-aspect, as it were, of verbal symbols, is an important part of their meaning. But their use as instruments of thought or communication, the fact that they possess syntactic and semantic (more generally, pragmatic) rules is an important feature of symbols which distinguishes them from signs. I pointed to some evidence that Ogden and Richards are themselves aware of this. Perhaps the best evidence in this connection is the following passage: "For the listener the word is the sign, and without it the required reference does not occur. Possibly for some mental types an

exactly similar process occurs in the speaker, with the sole difference that the words are not given from without, but arise through some sort of internal causation." (215.) And this means that the contextual or "causal" theory cannot without some qualifications or additions be extended to explain and illuminate that "internal causation" or symbolic thought and action. In other words, the latter cannot be assimilated or reduced to inductive correlations between signs and objects. It is worth remembering that the formula for the meaning of "sign" offered in the previous section was divided into two parts, and the suggestion was made that only symbols, one of the two species of signs in the generic sense, be regarded as combining the dispositions formulated under those parts.

Now given the essential difference between signs and symbols just pointed out (of which Ogden and Richards themselves are to some extent aware) and the fact that symbolizing a reference or simply an act of referring may not be separable from expressing the set of mind in which reference occurs, the suggestion made by Ogden and Richards that the distinction between signifying and symbolizing is parallel to expressing a mental state and referring seems to be misleading. And I think that the problem stems from assigning too narrow a sense to "reference" and "expression". As was noted in 5.1, there is a sense in which all speech acts have a descriptive or referential component, or all signification involves a designative factor. (As I will suggest later, in this sense, to refer means to "show concern for" or to "attend to".) The different dimensions of a speech situation or modes of signification are the result of analysis; in reality we are not presented with any single one in isolation from the others. There are really too many overlaps

between the functions of various illocutionary speech acts or signifiers
to think that in actual linguistic situations "symbolizing reference"
and "expressing or signifying mental states" are unique and independent
kinds of linguistic acts. What Ogden and Richards should have said is
that (the use of) words, or indeed all symbols, apart from involving a
referent of some sort external to the speaker, implies a relation to
mental states of feeling, belief, preference, interest, and the like.
And while as symbols, the use or production of words for reference of
some sort is in question, as signs their effect on the hearer is of
interest. We shall return to these points later.

Another attempt to distinguish two kinds of signs may be gleaned
from S.K. Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*. There she writes: "Man,
unlike all other animals, uses "signs" not only to *indicate* things, but
also to *represent* them.... We use certain "signs" among ourselves that
do not point to anything in our actual surroundings. Most of our words
are not signs in the sense of signals. They are used to talk about
things, not to direct our eyes and ears and noses toward them. Instead
of announcers of things, they are reminders." (30-31.) Elsewhere, she
says: "The sign is something to act upon, or a means to command action;
the symbol is an instrument of thought." (63. In the same vein Ernst
Cassirer insisted, before Langer, on a distinction between a merely
"practical attitude" and "symbolic attitude" in *An Essay on Man* (33)
and, following Herder, called the latter "reflective" thought. (39ff.))

But the distinctions between "announcing" and "reminding",
"indicating" and "representing", do not seem to cut deeply enough. For,
as Langer herself suggests, they are distinctions which may be drawn
between different uses of language (which, Langer agrees, is essentially

a symbolic system). In the second passage quoted, however, a distinction is drawn between thinking with a symbol and acting upon a sign. This distinction seems important, for, as we shall see, signs are more closely connected with action than symbols. But certain uses of language, e.g. prescriptions, may be primarily action-guiding without ceasing to be symbolic acts. Therefore, the fact that symbols too may be primarily action-guiding shows that the distinction between signs and symbols is not the same as that between entities which command action and those which are instruments of thought. If these remarks are correct, the more essential distinction between signs and symbols in terms respectively of "happening" and "being made or used", causal and rule-governed relations is reaffirmed.

Charles Morris too has drawn attention to certain ways of distinguishing signs (or "signals") from symbols. In an attempt to give a behavioristic explanation of their difference, Morris makes the following comparisons. (1) Signs are generally more "reliable" than symbols, because more closely connected with external relations in the environment. (2) Signs are more "specific" in their indication and characterization of the environment. "If a person merely hears someone say 'rain', the indication of whether it is raining now or has rained or will rain, or whether the person speaking is referring to all instances of rain, is absent in a way it is not if one hears the patter of rain - and hence the "evidential" value of the term 'rain' is relatively slight." (*Loc. cit.*, 51.) (3) Related to (1) and (2) is the point that the relative unreliability and unspecificity of symbols result in hesitant behavior. (4) Both symbols and signs cause dispositions to respond which depending on certain conditions of motivation and

environment may or may not lead to behavior, but there may be differences between sign and symbol with respect to "the degree of absence or presence of the supporting conditions under which dispositions to behavior issue in overt behavior." (52.)

The last point (4) does not seem at all to point out a distinction between sign and symbol, for it concerns the supporting conditions for the actualization of a disposition, not the disposition itself. (3) serves to emphasize the closer connection between signs and action which is also pointed out by Langer and Cassirer. (1) and (2) are very important indeed. Although a misunderstanding might result from the use of comparatives "more reliable" or "more specific", in that the distinction might be conceived of as merely one of degree, nevertheless, there is a hint especially in (2) about a logical distinction. As we shall see in a moment, "sign-cognition" is "tied" to the external world whereas symbolic thought is essentially "free" or "autonomous" thought. This does not mean, of course, that there are no relations between symbols and the external world. The point is more precisely that these relations are established in a different way than that in which signs are connected to the external environment. They result, as we shall see, from mental acts of "attending" or "showing concern" which operate in the "ostensive" processes through which we teach and learn language. (1), insofar as it concerns the greater "reliability" of signs, is disputable, however. It would be valid if we placed particular emphasis on the physical features of the environment as distinct from the precision of the instruments with the help of which we can effect changes in the environment, a precision which is the fruit of reflective thought. It is, of course, to be noted that some examples

of sign-cognition show a great deal of accuracy and precision, greater than verbal thinking can achieve (see below). But this does not make signs _always_ or even _in general_ more reliable than symbols.

To develop these points I next turn to H.H. Price whose analysis of signs and symbols in _Thinking and Experience_ is comprehensive and well qualified to meet the concerns mentioned in connection with the views examined above, as well as those discussed in the previous chapter. Those concerns were directed mainly to the _actual_ practice of ordinary language (as a symbolic system) to which moral language properly belongs. But since we are interested in the nature of language in general, our investigations must be such that the resulting philosophy can accommodate the facts about scientific or artificial languages as well. I will highlight Price's main points about "sign-cognition" and symbolic thought in an attempt to develop such a philosophy of language.5 The previous section may indeed be seen as representing some progress towards that philosophy. In the course of what will follow I will also discuss some of the views which tend to oppose or resist the emerging picture.

"Sign-cognition" has the following general features. First, it involves a relationship between three things: a sign, the thing signified, and a conscious being or a "mind" that is capable of perceiving and recognizing the sign. For example, black clouds are a sign of rain for a conscious being that can learn or retain a relatively constant association between the experience of black clouds and that of rain. Sign-cognition involves a threefold relationship which is expressed in saying "A is a sign of B for the conscious entity X". It is important to note that, as we saw in the previous section, the copula

"is" in the above formula need not lead us to interpret the statement in an "occurrent" sense, for, to be more accurate, we must say "A has a disposition to produce in X the thought or expectation of B if X were to perceive A". This means that the perception of A by X is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the thought or expectation of B; that A need not be perceived by X in a particular situation, and that it may be for X a sign of other things than B. As a sign, A is a disposition, or has a dispositional property; it is one of the conditions in a complex of interrelated factors in a situation. (See above, especially 2.2 and 5.1; see also *Thinking and Experience*, 93. All future references to Price's ideas are from this book.) Note that it is not the "existence" of A as such that appears in the analysis of sign-cognition, but its perception or experience, for a visual or in general a sensory image of A would do the work. It is true, however, that, even perhaps in the so-called "hallucinatory" cases, the "perception" or experience of a sign presupposes its existence in some form (more or less complex) either at the time of sign-cognition or before it or both, though not necessarily after it. (This last point will be taken up again in the context of the discussion of the ontological commitment involved in "reference". See below, 5.3, and above, pp. 256-7.)

It is to be noted that the perception of objects is itself a form of sign-cognition. For to perceive an object as an "individual" is not merely to perceive a set of qualities or characteristics. The latter are the immediate data of sense-experience. Perception of individual objects, on the other hand, involves what Price calls "secondary recognition", as distinct from "primary recognition" of sense-data. For

instance, the perception of black clouds as black clouds is itself cognition by means of signs, by means of the visual qualities--the shape, size, color, and so on, of the clouds. In other words, the recognition of black clouds as material objects and not merely as a set of perceptible qualities is indirect or mediate; the huge pieces of objects covering the sky are taken, on the basis of tacit inference from past experience or in a habitual manner, to be clouds which have other characteristics not directly observed or observable.

Sign-cognition, then, involves both perception or experience and expectation or "thought" in general, for on perceiving A one may expect B as what is signified by A. Now it is important to note that sign-cognition involves thinking "in absence". (This was already suggested above with respect to secondary recognition which, as we said, is "indirect".) Black clouds are said to signify rain independently of the rain-event. Looking at the sky and seeing the clouds, we think: "It is going to rain", or perhaps it has already started raining, or the rain is stopping and the clouds are drifting apart. The perception of black clouds is not itself the experience of rain, in the same way as the discovery of ancient ruins is not the discovery of their inhabitants themselves.

It is because sign-cognition is thinking in absence that it is fallible or capable of being erroneous. On perceiving A, I may take it to be a sign of B, whereas in reality there is no relation between A and B. The sound which I hear and take to be caused by hammering next door, may in fact be caused by the heavy footsteps of my neighbor. The fire in the woods may have been caused not by what I think it is, by human carelessness, but by the lightning. The fallibility of sign-cognition

and the judgments made on its basis is suggestive of its "intellectual" nature.

That "intellectual" character is indeed more pronounced than it may appear at first glance. It is evident in the fact that even such abstract words as "if", "and", "or", and the like, which are most clearly examples of verbal thinking, signify relations which can be found in sign-cognition. Consider the relation signified by the word "not". Often on experiencing a sign, what is signified does not occur; while an expectation is aroused, the signified object fails to occur and satisfy this expectation. Seeing the black clouds I expect rain. But it does not rain, and the clouds soon begin to scatter. As Price remarks, it is disappointed expectations such as this that bring "not" into our lives. (124. This does not imply, of course, that "not" means the same as disappointed expectation. The origin of a sign must not be confused with its meaning. See below, 5.3.) When A signifies B and B fails to be experienced, we experience instead a negation. Indeed if this situation obtains regularly enough, A becomes a "negative sign" or the sign of the non-occurrence of B. (*Ibid.*, 126.) Likewise, the experience of "if" in what may be called "conditional signification" is an important aspect of sign-situations, particularly those which involve "weak" signs. "Weak" is not used here in any pejorative sense. Weak signs are those which do not signify with any considerable certainty and are in this sense ambiguous. For this reason, they put us in a state where the class of all possible events which may be expected is considerably large. The number of possible events expected could then be restricted if we conceive of certain conditions. In this way we experience an "if" in the signified. The temperature of $100\,^{\circ}C$ is a

sign that water will boil _if_ the atmospheric pressure is at 760 millimeters. At a different atmospheric pressure, say, at about 420 mm., water would have a different boiling point, about 84°C. In cases involving action we are prepared for or guard against those conditions by our action. The road-sign signifies that we will be home soon _if_ we keep up the same speed. Better education is the sign of social progress _if_ overt and covert restraints on the freedom of speech are abolished.

Another important feature of sign-cognition is that it is a pre-verbal (or more accurately, "extra-verbal", since the point is not merely historical) form of cognition, though with the ability to use words it can be articulated. And just as sign-cognition is logically independent of words, so is it logically independent of images. Moreover, the degree of this independence is likely to increase with the extent to which the signified event is spatio-temporally close to the sign. When lightning is followed by thunderclap, I do not form an image or speak even sub-vocally of the "anticipated" event. I may do so only when the thunderclap is somewhat late in its occurrence. The best example in this connection is perhaps "secondary recognition" of individual objects which, as was noted, is a form of sign-cognition. The book in front of me consists of parts which are not directly visible. Nevertheless, these observable parts are the sign of the object which is the book without my having an image of its invisible or unobserved parts. And this is to be accounted for in part by the proximity of the parts of the book. It is much more difficult for me to conceive of the building in which I am working as a whole without picturing to myself at least some of its salient features which are now outside my perceptual field. This independence of sign-cognition from

words or images was, however, to be expected, for words and images, in
the sense which we shall see more clearly in a moment, are "symbols"
which are used "freely" for the purpose of thinking or communication.

The pre-verbal or extra-linguistic character of sign-cognition
seems to be related to its close, though not necessarily direct,
connection with action in the sense of physical behavior of some sort.
In this regard Price's insight is keen. He writes:

> Gamekeepers and poachers are not usually very expert
> in handling mathematical symbols, but they may be
> excellent marksmen for all that. Indeed, in some
> people at any rate, and perhaps in all, such pre-
> verbal estimation shows an accuracy and a delicacy,
> and a rapidity too, which are much greater than
> verbalized thinking can achieve. It is commonly
> supposed that pre-verbal thinking--if it is allowed
> to count as thinking at all--must always be vague and
> clumsy in comparison with the thinking which is
> conducted in words. I am not sure that this is
> wholly true even of image-thinking, the only sort of
> pre-verbal thinking which philosophers have usually
> considered. But it certainly is not true of all
> sign-cognition. Indeed, in examples like the one we
> have been considering the truth is the other way
> round. In such significational estimations, pre-
> verbal thinking shows itself superior and not
> inferior to verbalized thinking. Its only defect is
> that it is incommunicable. It can be demonstrated
> but it cannot be told. Like tact, which is an
> exercise in sign-cognition in social relations, it
> cannot be taught by means of verbal instructions.
> (102.)

The connection between sign-cognition and action is very close in many
cases, and despite its fallibility, it is marked sometimes by a high
degree of accuracy and subtlety. Moreover, the more the skill exercised
in a physical activity, the less it seems the need for images or words
or for deliberation and reflection with them when the activity is
performed. A practical skill is instead "internalized" and transformed
mainly into states of bodily readiness, muscular tension, and the like.

Activities such as hunting when performed with skill are exercises in sign-cognition and involve more or less stable dispositions, good judgment and sensitivity to the nuances of a practical situation. The position and movements of the fish in the river are signs to the native of its exact position a moment hence when he thrusts his spear into the water. In such instances as these sign-cognition seems to blend thought and experience with action in the most inextricable manner, but the connection may not be always so strong or direct. On observing the first signs of thunderstorm, we may hurry to take shelter and avoid getting trapped in rain. But suppose the situation is such that there is no such a risk. Suppose we are enjoying the security of being at home and while attending to the signs of thunderstorm wonder about the immensity of nature's power and vigor. Calmly anticipating rain and storm, we may be far from taking action, even from being in a state of readiness to act or alertness in response to the signs; the first signs of thunderstorm may be signs neither for incipient nor for full-scale action. With secondary recognition of individual objects indeed the connection with action is almost, though not entirely, absent. As we shall see presently, the logical line between sign-cognition and symbolic thinking could be drawn not in terms of action, but in terms of a distinction between "tied" and "free" thinking.

In sign-cognition we are in touch with or "tied" to the external world in the sense that, as we have seen, the sign must be experienced in order for signification to take place. However, the tie between the sensory experience of the sign and the thought of what is signified is not always strong. That tie becomes "loose", as it were, under some circumstances, though never completely severed, except perhaps in

religious thought. (Price's account of these circumstances appears on pp. 100 and 106ff.)

When the sign is "weak", when there is little or not a great chance that the signified will occur or has occurred and can therefore be verified by experience or action—in short, when it is hard to believe strongly in the occurrence of the signified, one is forced to "suspend judgment". More precisely, our "judgments" become protracted and long. We await the result and anticipate the signified more or less independently of the sign. Perhaps we begin to reflect and think harder as sense-experience, the gateways through which we first become aware of the sign is pushed more and more to the background. The weaker the sign, the more decisive the impulse to withdraw from the external world into "thought". The sight of the mailman is a weak sign that I will receive a letter today, for some of the postal workers are on strike. I shall wait, then, and see what happens next, while the "thought" of a letter occupies me. The headline in the newspaper (though this is essentially a symbol) may function as the sign of a possible misfortune, but only a weak one; I have to read the column, while the "thought" of the doom may persist.

The connection between the experience of a sign and the thought of the signified may also be "loose" when the sign is a long-range one, when the spatio-temporal distance between the sign and the signified is wide. The road-sign tells me that we are near our destination, but there are still two more hours to go. A moment later, however, the sign will be out of my sight, and soon thereafter out of my mind.

Finally, when the signified is highly interesting to the perceiver, the tie between perception and thought becomes again loose.

The thought of the story fills me long after I see the film. All I can do in the meantime is to summon the images and retain them before my mind independently of the sign (or, properly speaking, the symbol in its sign-aspect). It is perhaps this interest in the signified object which is responsible for the emotional overtones of sign-cognition as well as "symbolic thought".

These three factors, the weakness of the sign, its long range, and interest in the signified, are important for our purposes, because they mark a transition from sign-cognition to symbolic, and in particular linguistic, thinking. We begin to deliberate about and reflect on things when there are scant clues in our environment as to the possible outcome of a situation, or when the existing clues are too ambiguous or conflicting to provide a determinate response. More obviously, we tend to reflect when there is ample time to reflect, or when the object of our feelings, beliefs, interests, or ends are of vital importance, when the matter is highly serious and of enormous interest. Uncertainty and the conflict of vital "claims" or the seriousness and the interest which the situation holds for us are not peculiar to any specific realm of what in general may be called symbolic thought and activity; they are paramount in science as well as in morals, in art as well as in law. And these are spheres of symbolic activity which seem to be impossible to enter into without the help of language or speech. In Wittgensteinian terms, all linguistic games are on the same "metaphysical" footing. We see here that the emerging conception of language denies the possibility of drawing "logical" distinctions between parts of our discourse, notably the non-

cognitivist's favorite distinction between evaluative and descriptive kinds of meaning or discourse. (See note 5, Ch. 5.)

It does not follow from the above remarks, however, that all symbolic or linguistic thinking is deliberation and reflection. The phenomenon known as "automatic writing" is perhaps a good example of linguistic thought or activity that is not deliberative but habitual. The point is simply that, logically speaking, symbolic thinking represents a "break-through" in sign-cognition and is particularly conducive to deliberation and reflection.

Of course, as was noted above and we shall see at greater length, the connection between symbolic thinking, i.e. thinking with words, diagrams, pictures, mental images, and the like, on the one hand, and perception or experience on the other is never completely broken, save perhaps in religious thought. For symbolic thinking is the manifestation of the memory-dispositions which are in turn cashable partly in terms of the experience of empirical objects and situations. Nevertheless what we are dealing with in symbolic thinking is essentially or logically something other than sign-cognition. For symbols with or in which we think or communicate can be projected or invoked or in general used through mental acts, whereas signs as such are things which happen or occur in the outer environment and are given through sense-experience.

One is tempted to introduce the adjective "natural" in speaking of signs, thus using the expression "natural sign", in order not only to isolate a specific class from the class of all signs, but also to indicate the "givenness" and the connection with external world which they are characterized by. But, as was just suggested, even symbolic

acts are connected with the external world, though that connection is typically loose, and logically secondary to the autonomous character of such acts. Moreover, symbolic thought may be said to be constituted in and carried out through "nature", and hence its products may be entitled to the name "natural symbol", in the wider sense that it is specific to the human form of life and nature. In these respects, then, the adjective "natural" may be misleading if used only in conjunction with signs and not with symbols as well, especially because the issue here is the distinction between two classes or species of sign in general, regardless of whether or not signs and symbols are natural phenomena. My own view is that symbolic acts are indeed natural to the human species, and that therefore the popular distinction between "nature" and "culture" does not apply within the human realm in the same logical sense as it may apply between the human and the non-human worlds. That distinction does, at any rate, point in the direction of the distinction between sign-cognition and symbolic thought which we have been considering. These observations also go some way to support the universalistic morality which I have been defending in this thesis. For they show that the limits of consensus and (cultural) unity among language speakers (more generally, symbol-using entities) can be pushed back to the limits of human nature, and that in this way convergence among various cultural groups can be a real possibility. (See note 3, Ch. 5, and the discussion of relativism in 5.3.) It seems, however, that with questions as to the sense in which something is "natural", we enter into "transcendental" metaphysics where, as Kant rightly pointed out, we are faced with antinomies which point to the limits of human reason. Such a conception in needed simply as the condition of

possibility of our experience mediated by language. It is, as Lovibond observes, the idea of "something on which our (human) categories of rational criticism can get no purchase, because it is 'outside the world' of discourse to which those categories belong." (223.)

Free as opposed to tied thinking, therefore, is the distinguishing mark of symbolic thinking. Symbols enable us to think <u>at will</u> about something when it is not present. Words, images, pictures, and gestures have this in common with signs that they enable us to think about the objects they "represent" when those objects are not present in a certain situation. But whereas signs <u>happen</u> or are <u>discovered</u>, symbols are <u>made</u> by someone (a human being or perhaps even a non-human animal or a conscious entity of some other sort) for a conscious purpose. (Cf. *Thinking and Experience*, 163ff.) This is why the thought or expectation of a signified object depends on or is tied to perception or sense-experience of a sign, whereas symbols are "invoked" or "used" at will in order to think with or in. I use symbols when, for reasons explained above in connection with the factors which lead to the loosening of the tie with the external world, I am not content with and cannot fall back on what happens in my external environment. An example may help.

A sign on the side of the road bearing the picture of a deer cautions me about deer crossing the road and gives me a strong inclination to believe that deer exist or existed not too long ago in the neighborhood. I would fail to have such an inclination (in the absence of other reasons to the same effect) if I did not discover the sign, if the sign did not occur or happen to be where it is. In all likelihood I would merely encounter the deer, the object signified.

However, just before I embarked on forming and giving this example, I was not given, did not happen to notice, any sign of deer in my environment. I invoked it as a symbol for myself and for the purpose of illustration of a point; I used the word "deer" and had a mental image of that animal. If I were to use a more complicated example perhaps to illustrate a more complex issue, I might draw a diagram or picture on the paper. In all such cases one produces the symbol with which one thinks, communicates, and "works". What one really does is to produce a symbol by activating some of the memory-traces which have to do with the concept of "deer", i.e. dispositions to think or talk about or draw pictures, etc., of deer.

Of course, not all the symbols we invoke or use are complete or determinate. When we are least familiar with a concept, as when we are thinking something out for the first time, our symbols tend to be "scrappy" or "sketchy" (or the rules according to which we think with or in symbols are rough and inexact). Likewise, when we are most familiar with a concept, as in habitual thinking about an issue, we use scrappy or incomplete symbolism. It is when our thoughts or concepts are reasonably familiar that we tend to use full-bodied and complex symbolism, whether in the form of images, or words, or pictures, and so on. (*Ibid.*, 308.)

Moreover, this last point suggests that we often, if not always, think, know, or "see" more than what we can publicly or privately say, "imagine", or symbolize in other ways. It was the general "awareness", the "thought" of the distinction between "sign" and "symbol" (which must not be taken to be an introspectable entity of some sort) which I was trying to explain above that guided me in finding the adequate way of

symbolizing it by using the word "deer" as well as other words, not the other way round. An instance of the priority of thoughts to symbols may be found in the common experience we often have of thinking of something the words for which are only "on the tip of our tongues", and though we have access to words for other associated concepts, we experience a feeling of inadequacy as several symbols are brought to mind until our concept or thought is appropriately captured by a symbol. This is not to say that thoughts are logically prior to symbols. There is certainly a truth to the claim that our (symbolic) thoughts are from the outset embedded in language and other social institutions, and that they could not have developed without the aid of such institutions. (See note 2, Ch. 5.) The two are logically inseparable. The priority of one to the other may be seen merely as a contingent fact. (As an extreme example of the priority of symbols to thoughts, see the phenomenon of automatic writing, noted above, p. 291.)

The point to emphasize is that unlike signs, symbols acquire through learning a disposition to be _used_ by us for a conscious purpose, though they may at the same time have, as signs, dispositions to produce or effect certain thoughts or expectations, beliefs and attitudes in us. Using the vocabulary of the speech act theory (though this theory is specifically about linguistic symbols), we may say that symbolic acts have illocutionary force and in some senses, those explained by Austin under "taking effect", "securing uptake", and "inviting responses", are connected with certain effects or consequences. (See 3.1 and below.)

That in some cases, i.e. in the cases where the phenomenon we are dealing with is a symbol and not merely a sign, one and the same thing functions as both a sign and a symbol need not be paradoxical or

weaken the distinction on which we have been focusing. It shows rather that symbols, unlike signs, are as symbols "double-faced", that there are two perspectives from which we may consider a symbol. The circle drawn on the board may be regarded as a sign that the geometrician is about to explain a geometrical theorem, though it is also a symbol, an abstract one, for that matter, with which we and the geometrician think about the properties of circular objects. During a certain tribal ritual a certain dance may both signify that a human sacrifice is about to take place and be used to symbolize the fear of gods. "It is raining" operates as a sign, because it tends to induce a belief or expectation in the hearer who knows its meaning or use, but it is also a symbol in and with which the speaker thinks and communicates. Indeed it is likely to function as a sign even for the speaker _after_ it is uttered, vocally or sub-vocally; it may give rise to certain other thoughts and expectations or actions—that, e.g., he has left his newly purchased bicycle outside or that he needs to phone and cancel the game of tennis. However, it remains that unlike "It is raining", the rain itself cannot also be (or, at any rate, normally is not) _produced_ for the purpose of thinking or communication or action. If it could, it would have to be called a "symbol". "It is raining", on the other hand, can be so produced, even though the context of its production or utterance may involve the perception of signs, e.g. rain, as one looks through the window or hears the rattling sound on the roof.

It is important to stress that even when a symbol operates as a sign for the hearer or the speaker, as was explained above, it performs its signifying function successfully only if its use is understood by the hearer; he must be able to correctly interpret what he hears as a

symbol, as something he could think with freely and independently of the particular situation in question. Of course, there must be a relatively constant connection between the word "rain" and the rain-event and perhaps also the usual consequences of that event, e.g. things getting wet, in the hearer's experience in the form of memory-traces in order for the sentence "It is raining" to discharge its signifying function. Moreover, it is this signifying function that might account for "a kind of Natural Selection among speech-habits which ensures that only the fittest will survive; the fittest, that is, for directing attention to those properties of objects (especially their causal properties) which are important for the guidance of our expectations and our conduct." (*Ibid.*, 271.) But this function is secondary to the function of the word as a symbol. To be disposed in a certain way, to expect or think of or act with respect to the thing signified, upon hearing a word or sentence or seeing a diagram, and the like, presupposes the knowledge of the use of the word, sentence, diagram, etc., according to certain prevailing social rules. (As we shall see below, another way of saying this is that linguistic symbols must, as symbols, "secure an uptake" and "take effect", in Austin's words, before, in the specifically logical sense of "before", they can "invite a response".) To put this somewhat differently, there is a distinction between dispositions to produce a response, whether in the form of "thought" or action, and a disposition to be used (or more accurately, a disposition to bring to bear the knowledge of the appropriate use) in the case of symbols, which is absent in the case of signs. For signs are not used or made at all; they merely happen. Symbols, on the other hand, are used or produced freely or independently of experience.

Of course, it is not enough that words be merely produced for
them to be symbols. If a parrot produces words, we do not usually say
it is speaking. Speech or language is symbolic insofar as it is or can
be produced for a conscious purpose. (This is not to say, of course,
that parrots and other animals are not conscious; they certainly are,
but the consciousness they manifest is perhaps limited to the level of
sign-cognition.) For the same reason, it is doubtful, to take another
example, whether talking in one's sleep could be regarded as using
symbols as such. Such a phenomenon seems intimately tied to sensations.

Needless to say, symbols may be used for a conscious purpose
without at the same time being used for communication, although
communication does normally involve thinking with symbols, except in a
few cases where because of difficulty in communication one is forced to
concentrate wholly on the physical movements of producing noises or
marks—as shouting to someone very far away, or whispering. (See *ibid.*,
158-9.) Of course, teaching or learning the use of symbols seems to
presuppose communication. In other words, the use of symbols for or in
communication seems historically prior to their use for thinking, but
logically speaking, the use of symbols in thinking seems primary, though
it may be difficult to draw a sharp line between the historical *and* the
logical aspects of the question. It is, in other words, very difficult
to determine whether language is "essentially" (whether in the
historical or logical sense) a means of communication or thought. Most
likely it is both.

That symbolic thinking depends on autonomous mental acts finds
confirmation in most writings on the philosophy of symbolic thought and
language. It can be seen as the unifying theme of Cassirer's philosophy

of symbolic "forms". In *An Essay on Man* he stresses that the acquisition of speech, the passage from pre-linguistic to linguistic thinking, consists in the transition from an "emotional attitude" to a "theoretical attitude". The theoretical attitude is bound up with attempts to universalize one's experience in order to organize it, and it finds its highest expression in scientific and mathematical thinking. But that transition is at the same time marked by a progressively "active" as opposed to receptive employment of language. (131-2. Note that the notion of "active" here is much broader than that which implies mere physical action. This point has been emphasized several times already.) The words we use to call things by names are partly determined by our interests which direct our attention to certain features of things, but not others. For instance, Humboldt points out, according to Cassirer, that the Greek and Latin terms for the moon, although they refer to the same object, do not express the same concept; the Greek term connotes the function of the moon to measure time, and the Latin term connotes the moon's lucidity or brightness. In all names there is a tendency to concentrate on and to single out or select certain features of the object named. (134-5.) Cassirer cites the fact that in Arabic there are five to six thousand terms for camel which express concrete details about the shape, the gait, the color, or the age of the animal, but there is no general term referring to the biological concept. (135.)

Again, according to Dorothy Lee, the people of the Trobriand island apparently have no word equivalent to "good". Hence, a good taytu (a species of yam), i.e. one which is ripe, large, and perfectly shaped, and has no blights, etc., is simply called "*taytu*". When a

Trobriander wants to indicate deviations from the "standard characteristics" of a good taytu, he uses different names: "*bevanawa*" for unripe taytu, "*yowana*" for over-ripe, and "*usasu*" for misshapen taytu, etc. Things are good as part of a whole pattern of relations with the rest of society and nature. Gift-giving, to take another example, is neither "virtuous" nor "altruistic", for these terms involve relational concepts which are as such meaningless for a Trobriander. The gift-giver is concerned only with fulfilling his role or place in a pattern of relations. There are indeed other names for taytu depending on the occasion and the status of those who give and receive it as a gift! (*Freedom and Culture*, 90ff.)

At the root of this diversity of names or the relative determinacy of concepts lies, of course, an interest in the concrete, as distinct from the abstract. For instance, being a very general term, "good" cannot adequately satisfy this interest in the concrete. Indeed, as we saw earlier, "good" can be used in connection with any class of objects. (Cf. above, e.g. p. 158.) And it can be used to change the evaluations attached to less general words. (Cf. above, p. 163.) This is why medieval thinkers regarded it as a "transcendental" term, found in different categories. It is not accidental perhaps that Plato regarded the grasp of the idea of "Good" as the highest achievement of the human rationality. Nonetheless, as we saw, e.g. in the context of the discussion of Mackie's definition of this word, even with such a general term there is a necessary relation to <u>interests</u>. And the relation to interests, whether in the case of general terms or that of more specific ones (more obviously in the latter case) must be explained in terms of the speakers' acting autonomously on the world, for

otherwise the diversity of names would remain a mystery. (This does not mean, as we have seen, that relation to action or choice is the <u>primary</u> aspect of ethical or evaluative terms. What we are concerned with here is language in general and as it is ordinarily used, prior to any non-cognitivist bias in favor of its active or preferential dimension.) That diversity goes hand in hand with the act of discriminating or singling out the qualities of objects or relations. Indeed the same act when developed further gives rise to general concepts, words, and theories.

In language and in science, indeed in all the so-called "symbolic forms" including myth, art, religion, says Cassirer, we encounter man's productivity and spontaneity, his "theoretical" and constructive work. In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Volume I, it is argued that language is not a copy of sensations, but essentially an intellectual formation. "If the sign [by which Cassirer means here linguistic symbol] were nothing but a repetition of a determinate and finished, particular intuitive or ideational content, we should be faced with two questions. What would be accomplished by a mere copy of something already present? And how could such an exact copy be accomplished?" (107.) The "copy theory" of language can explain neither why we have language, nor how our language could possibly duplicate intuitive reality. Language seems to fall short of the diversity as well as the concreteness of sensations and intuitions, and this disparity between language and sensation cannot be explained by a theory which attempts to assimilate words to sensations. For this reason, says Cassirer, "it is the reflection not of an objective environment, but of man's own life and action that essentially determines the linguistic view of the world,

as it does the primitive mythical image of nature. Man's will and action are directed toward *one* point, his consciousness strains and concentrates on it, and so he becomes ripe, as it were, for the process of linguistic designation." (285.)6

In *How to do things with Words* Austin points out that there is a connection between the physical actions of making movements with the vocal organs and the act of saying something in the sense that any locutionary act is necessarily the uttering of noises, and the uttering of noises may be regarded as a (physical) consequence of the movements of vocal organs. But, he says, "the uttering of a word is *not* a consequence of the uttering of a noise, whether physical or otherwise." (115.) In other words, there is a logical break between a "phonetic act" (the act of uttering certain noises) and a "phatic act" (the act of uttering certain vocables or words belonging to a certain vocabulary and conforming to a certain grammar), such that the latter is never a consequence of the former. It is indeed due to this peculiar character of speech acts, as distinct from physical actions, that strictly speaking illocutionary acts do not have "consequences" in the sense of bringing about changes in the natural course of events, but rather, as we saw in 3.1, they may "take effect" (in the sense that certain subsequent acts would be out of order), "secure an uptake" if performed "happily" (in the sense of bringing about understanding of the meaning and force of the locution), and "invite a conventional response" or sequel, all of which are to be distinguished from perlocutionary effects. Illocutionary acts are, unlike perlocutionary acts, "conventional", as Austin has pointed out, and the conventional character of symbols is another aspect of the distinction between signs

and symbols, as we have noted before (e.g. above, pp. 244, 251) and

will attend to later.7 Conventions are necessary for linguistic usage,

but not for the production of change in the natural course of events.

The main point here is that we may take Austin's conception of a logical

break between phonetic and phatic acts as comparable to the logical

break between sign-cognition and symbolic thinking, for both phatic acts

and symbolic thinking are autonomous, and both phonetic acts and sign-

cognition are tied to sensation.

It seems then that as the fruit of mankind's theoretical and

constructive work, language, whether scientific or otherwise, is an

expression of freedom. As such it is throughout, and not merely in the

so-called moral or practical discourse, marked by a practical element

which is the reflection of the speakers' interest and their tendency to

focus on or single out certain aspects of the object-domain of a

linguistic situation as more important than others. The alleged logical

distinction between moral and scientific discourses, or that hetween

evaluative and descriptive meanings, betrays a tendency to ignore the

presence of a constructive or practical element throughout language or

for that matter any symbolic activity. And it is the same ignorance

which leads to the paradox I have been attributing to the so-called

purely second order statements about the core meaning or standard use of

the distinctively moral language. Such statements, as I attempted to

show, conceal a first order, practical, normative claim as to what is

and what is not central or primary or special in moral language, while

at the same time they purport to be (relatively) neutral second order,

non-normative or non-practical statements. What was said above shows

that "neutral" statements, those which do not involve interests or

preferences are indeed impossible. And the qualification "relatively" does not seem in itself helpful in deciding how much neutrality is and how much is not appropriate in a second order statement. I suggested, therefore, that the way to remove the paradox is not by abandoning the inquiry or by attempting to make it as pure and non-normative as possible, but by abandoning the premise which gives rise to the paradox, i.e. the hard and fast, logical distinction between types of discourse or meaning. The considerations made in this chapter support the idea of abandoning that distinction.

In sum, if what has been said so far in this section is correct, it is not only in moral or evaluative language that we encounter freedom, but in all language. For if all language is the expression of mankind's "constructive", "willful", "theoretical", or "active" attitude, then isolating a specific kind of discourse as "moral" too turns out to be a "theoretical", "practical", or "prescriptive" enterprise. It is, I have argued, the recognition of this fact that is missing in most writings on the meaning or use of moral language, writings which contain attempts to discover and formulate a core of meaning or a standard use of moral <u>as distinct from</u> descriptive or scientific language. The lack of this recognition has led to an analysis of moral language which, seen against the puritanical separation by the authors of scientific or second order statements from evaluative or first order statements, becomes paradoxical. The difference between moral language and the rest of the uses of language is not that the former is somehow peculiarly prescriptive or expressive and evocative of attitudes and the latter are not; since a meaningful linguistic situation has prescriptive, expressive, and evocative

dimensions in the broad senses noted above, and since these dimensions are, as dispositions, inseparable from one another, any sentence could be used such that, depending on the context, it is primarily prescriptive, expressive or evocative, though admittedly some utterances are more conducive to some one of these functions than to others. The difference in question is not one of form or logic, but perhaps one between the kinds of facts we are primarily concerned with in each of those languages, whether physical, mental, or institutional. The point to stress is that as language speaking entities we are (or should be) prepared to support our linguistic judgments by reasons which involve appeal to facts of some sort and are universalizable. For meaningful language is not only prescriptive, expressive, and evocative; it involves either an explicit or an implicit referential or descriptive component, and is governed, implicitly or explicitly, by universal rules.

So far we have concentrated on the respects in which all language could be said to involve a practical element, the respects in which it is an expression of freedom. But throughout reference was made to its rule-governed and hence universalizable and rational feature, the feature which is shown by Cassirer (cf. above, pp. 298ff. and note 6, and especially *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. III) to be indeed the extension of the same freedom that marks out symbolic thought from sign-cognition. "Our linguistic and our first scientific names", he says, "may be looked upon as the result and offspring of the same classifying instinct. What is unconsciously done in language is consciously intended and methodically performed in the scientific process." (*An Essay on Man*, 210.) And <u>in principle</u> there can be no

other explanation for the fact of mathematics and logic than that we give for science and ordinary language. The fact that from its beginnings science has been intimately related to mathematics and has throughout its progress aspired to pure mathematical and logical rules is evidence for this. Natural science, and mathematics and logic, those regions of discourse which possess a large degree of semantic rigor and are therefore marked by more or less universal consensus, represent the progressive development of an essentially autonomous symbolic activity. However, our conception of ordinary language as a symbolic system (we shall see later what it means to speak of language as a system) governed by (social) rules or conventions should meet the views which deny the force of rules in ordinary language.

There have been attempts to downplay the significance of conventions or rules in determining meaning in ordinary language. Davidson, e.g., has rejected the idea that social conventions or rules link meaning with the speaker's purposes. ("Communication and Convention", *Synthese*, 59 (1984), 3-17.) He appeals to non-standard cases of linguistic usage where "literal meaning" plays no role and where the spontaneous intentions of the speaker, his "ulterior purposes" prevail. And in standard cases, he suggests, meaning is not a matter of rules but just a convergence of skills, luck, and intuition. Likewise, in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (*Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 47 (1973-74)) he offers an explanation for the inter-translatability of languages in terms of the principle of "charity": "We make maximum sense of the words and thoughts of others when we interpret in a way that optimizes agreement" or

"enlarg[es] the basis of shared (translatable) language or of shared opinion." (19.)

This appears a harmless doctrine. But with any account of this sort there is, first, the problem that in excluding conventions it fails to explain how we learn and teach language, how we reveal our intentions and understand the intentions of others. Of course, conventions of meaning or use need not be more than rough and approximate. Nor do they have to be always explicit. Ordinarily linguistic judgments have the force of internalized <u>habits</u> of thinking and acting in accordance with rules, though in extraordinary cases we need to articulate the rules or even appeal to new or unconventional idioms in order to say what we want to say. Linguistic conventions, then, are not explicit agreements entered into in order to speak and act in certain ways. For this would seem fictitious; at least, it is highly doubtful whether this is the way ordinary language or any system of symbols and the rules for their combination can be characterized. At best, only such technical words as used in sciences and more or less specialized arts like medicine or music and games like chess could be said to be conventional in that sense. As Price points out, "even though these words did originally acquire their meaning by explicit and conscious agreement, this is certainly not the way in which they keep it." (*Thinking and Experience*, 181.) In the proper sense, a convention is a habit we "slip into", a habit of using certain symbols in more or less the same way as our elders use them. Obviously, it does not follow from this that ordinary language is perfect as it is. Most words and sentences do not have a strict meaning or rule for use. The meaning they may have depends in part on the extent to which we are prepared to give it. This is not

really a defect. To think it is, says Wittgenstein, "would be like saying the light of my reading lamp is no real light at all because it has no sharp boundary." (*The Blue Book*, 27.)8

So, the tacitness of conventions does not make them devoid of explanatory power. Rules are important in providing more or less precise tests for determining when a symbol's meaning has changed and to what extent it is vague and in need of more precision. (This, of course, echoes Stevenson's views in connection with descriptive meaning, as discussed in 2.2. He could not, however, give good reasons for driving a wedge between descriptive and emotive meanings. What we are saying about rules or conventions applies to the whole of our discourse.) We should simply say that meanings or rules of use are rough and approximate, and this is why in extraordinary cases we need new or unconventional idioms in order to describe what ordinary language may overlook.

Secondly, the rejection of conventions cannot account for the fact that we regard meaning to be relatively constant and deviations from a pattern of usage wrong, defective, or unreasonable, or at least requiring explanation.9 Davidson arrives at his happy-go-lucky conclusion about meaning only by concentrating on non-standard cases and by generalizing on that basis, such that literal meaning and intentions become logically or metaphysically distinct and thus independent. On the view I have been defending, on the other hand, meaning is a function of the inter-relationship between the external world and mental dispositions as well as dispositions in the linguistic signs themselves, as we saw in the previous section. Thus, though intentions play a significant role, they are inseparable from meaning. Moreover, the

connection between inner and outer nature and linguistic signs is established through semantic and syntactic rules in the process of learning meanings.

Before turning to a more detailed examination of these rules in the next section, I wish to consider an attempt to throw doubt on the force of rules or principles (and thereby theoretical reflection) specifically in <u>moral</u> discourse, the attempt made by Bernard Williams. In ways which will become clear, his rejection of rules is comparable to Stevenson's denial of the force of appealing to principles to support our moral judgments (see above, p. 92) and Mackie's scepticism about rationality and universalizability as a logical thesis about the status of moral discourse. (Hare's insistence on universalizability as a logical requirement of moral discourse, as we saw, does not exclude him from the list of non-cognitivists. For there was a tension in Hare between his universalizability thesis and his prescriptivism. The latter indeed forces him to be content with the first kind of universalization, as was suggested in Chapter 3 and is most evident in his later book, *Moral Thinking*, 157, 166-7, and Chapter 12.) As such Williams' rejection of rules turns out to be one aspect of his philosophy which is a direct descendant of non-cognitivism. Before we accept the thesis I am offering, we must meet his challenge. I will reserve the discussion of the other aspects of Williams' philosophy and their relativistic consequences for the next section.

Williams is clear that what he is challenging is a set of principles which are supposed to underlie the intuitive and shared understanding of the core cases which fall under the use of ethical terms. (*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 96ff. All future

references to Williams' views are from this book.) Given that
supposition, the "objectivist" view of ethics, according to Williams, is
then enabled to account for the application of such terms to hard cases
on the basis of the degree of similarity between these cases and the
core ones. And there are presumably rational criteria for determining
what is and what is not an adequate similarity. This objectivist view
could, for instance, represent adherence to a semi-linguistic variant of
the logical thesis of universalizability, discussed in 4.1., according
to which a judgment is ethical if it can be (and to the extent it is)
applied to relevantly similar circumstances—these circumstances
excluding numerical differences and differences among people's special
qualities, relations, and status, etc., depending on the stage of
universalizability involved. As we saw, the words "relevantly similar"
point to the indeterminacy of the role of rationality and the relative
lack of objectivity or intersubjective agreement in ethics. (Cf. above,
pp. 169ff.) For the objectivist, at any rate, there must be something
rational which is internalized, such that when a new case arises there
are at least *prima facie* ("intuitive") responses to the situation. And
that internalized something may, for instance, be traceable to
participation in a certain linguistic community. (Cf. Lovibond, *loc.
cit.*)

Williams argues, however, that "it is not obvious what that may
be. In particular, it is not obvious that it must be a
(universalizable) principle, in the sense of a summary and discursively
stateable description that does not rely too much on vague references to
degree ...." (97.) And he goes on to say that "we do not need to
suppose that there is some clear discursive rule underlying that

capacity" (97), for in particular in respect of ethical situations, the capacity to "see" similarities and accordingly make judgments in the new cases "goes beyond anything that can adequately be expressed in language" (98). This latter point we need not dispute. But why does the transcendent character, as it were, of this capacity render even a partial explanation in terms of stateable rules invalid? Williams seems particularly concerned about the fact that if we were to invoke principles, they would be "too vague". But can we not perhaps allow some vagueness, instead of rejecting principles altogether? There is no reason why we cannot. But if we do, it is not clear what would count as "too much" vagueness, and what as too little. Vagueness is inescapable, given the complexities of ethical language and life, even with respect to such "thick" concepts as, e.g., "treachery", "gratitude", and the like. Likewise, moral principles which were so rigid that they took no account of differences between situations we encounter in real life would be difficult to come by, and even if they were formulated, they would be almost empty and as such useless. The relative vagueness of moral terms and principles, indeed, makes it incumbent on us to make clear to ourselves what the principles are which might underlie judgments in which the words figure, whether they can adequately capture the complexities of new situations, and, if not, how they should be qualified.

In part Williams bases his argument on a comparison between ethical and linguistic intuitions in general. In the interest of "understanding", linguists often form theories (principles) on the strength of some prevailing intuitions and discount anomalies, i.e. those intuitions which conflict with the core, prevailing ones. But,

according to Williams, "the aim of [ethical] theory is not simply, or even primarily, to understand conflict. We have other ways , historical and sociological, of understanding it. The aim of theory is rather to resolve it, in the more radical sense that it should give compelling reason to accept one intuition rather than another." (99.) And as many passages in the book indicate, Williams does not think that ethical theory has any such authority.

To discuss the inadequacies of many ethical theories would be outside the scope of the present thesis. In fact we are interested not in which theory is correct, but whether any theoretical reflection, any attempt to ground our ethical judgments in principles, can be valid. (However, if we can establish the validity of theoretical reflection, it can, I think, be shown that egalitarianism is the most viable theory. (See above, pp. 185-6.)) We may note only that the passage just quoted reveals Williams' basic presupposition that there is an essential logical or "metaphysical" difference between scientific understanding and moral resolution. So, in the next section I will explore further resources in Williams' philosophy which bear on this assumption. As we shall see, it is this assumption, which needs ultimately to be rejected, that places barriers to the possibility (in principle or by means of principles) of cross-cultural convergence in morals. As it stands, the arguments from the extra-linguistic character of intuitions and the disanalogy between linguistic and ethical intuitions does not establish Williams' case against the explanatory force of principles in ethics, and the remarks made above in support of those principles stand undefeated. What we need, however, is to work out in further detail the philosophical grounds for the possibility of transcendence beyond the

limits of specific cultural institutions, i.e. the possibility of overcoming parochialism and attaining to global consensus. This too will be undertaken in the following section.

5.3. Rationality: Scientific and Ethical

In the previous section, we noted that the philosophy of language we are developing as an alternative to the one presupposed by non-cognitivist ethical theories needs to take account not only of the actual practice of ordinary language, but also of that of scientific discourse. The philosophies of H.H. Price and E. Cassirer drew attention to the idea that scientific discourse and mathematics may be seen as the progressive and refined outgrowth of the same "classifying instinct" or theoretical propensity as that expressed in ordinary language, i.e. the capacity for autonomous, symbolic thinking according to rules or principles, what on a few occasions I referred to as rationality. As such freedom or autonomy seems to be embedded in rationality, in the sense that as long as universalizable reasons (whether in terms of physical facts or mental facts of desire, want, and interest) can be given for our judgments, we are free to think and act accordingly. I suggested that what is involved in rationality may be understood in terms of a combination of semantic and syntactic rules operating throughout language, the former being concerned with reference and truth, thereby with fact, and the latter with formal considerations of consistency and universalizability, and thereby with harmony among facts. Moreover, the dispositional view of meaning or signification

offered in 5.1 led to the conclusion that meaningful discourse as a whole has several dimensions which cannot without artificiality be divided into such allegedly logically distinct categories as evaluative and descriptive or such regions as ethical and scientific. I suggested that this is precisely where the non-cognitivist fallacy lies: having driven a wedge between descriptive and non-descriptive (action- or choice-guiding; expressive and evocative) aspects of a total linguistic situation, non-cognitive theorists allocate different primary functions to ethical and scientific discourses. As such, their discussions often become marked by paradox and fall short of capturing the realities of ethical life and language.

Before developing these thoughts further, it would be helpful to consider Bernard Williams' argument against attempts of the sort we have been making to assimilate the ethical to the scientific, an argument which might be held finally to make a successful case for non-cognitivism, and thus to rescue it from rationalist criticisms. It is of some importance that Williams claims that a proper approach to the question of the fundamental difference between scientific and ethical rationality does not attempt to understand disagreement and the methods whereby it can be resolved. In this respect there seems to be a difference in approach between Williams and moral philosophers we have considered in the previous chapters. One of the lines of attack we took against them tried to show that it is indeed their emphasis on disagreements or conflicts that leads Stevenson, Hare, and Mackie to develop (non-rational) views of kind they do about the logic of moral discourse.10 For Williams, the basic distinction between scientific and ethical discourses "lies rather in our reflective understanding of the

best hopes we could coherently entertain for eliminating disagreement in the two areas. It is a matter of what, under the most favorable conditions, would be the best explanation of the end of disagreement: the explanation ... of convergence." (*Loc. cit.*, 135.)

The difference is that whereas convergence in science is guided by "how things actually are", convergence in ethics cannot be explained in that way. (136.) The idea here is simply that given a conception of the world as independent of us, perceivers or investigators, there are degrees in which our beliefs and theories, from different perspectives, represent that world. This "absolute conception" of the world consists of "nonperspectival materials available to any adequate investigator, of whatever constitution" (140). But the problem with this conception is that it is not clear who this "adequate investigator" is. Is it one who satisfies the criteria established within a whole community? If so, then the criteria in question are determined intersubjectively, not absolutely as Williams assumes. The idea of things as they are is, of course, reminiscent of Kant's "things in themselves", or the noumenal world. But Kant made it clear that he did not think we could have access to that world; unlike the phenomenal world, it could not be schematized under the categories of understanding. Williams' absolute reality, free from human perspectives, however, is presumably available to an adequate investigator. To this point I will return in a moment.

Thus if it is asked whether it is possible to transcend the (intersubjective or phenomenal) conceptual framework of the community in which one has, as a matter of accident and luck, been brought up and lived, or, taking the question from the opposite direction, whether it is possible to have insight into a conceptual framework without totally

identifying with it, Williams' answer would seem to be affirmative in the case of scientific and perceptual concepts involving causal relations (see his example of magic on 145-6 and color-concepts on 139 & 149) and mathematical concepts, but negative in the case of ethical concepts. The former can be contradicted by concepts which figure in more sophisticated theoretical statements. Ethical concepts cannot be thus overruled by reflection, for once we slip out of the shared perceptions within which these concepts are found meaningful, we either have to go to a different social world, or we lose ground altogether. (Williams' suggestion that this is really what philosophical or theoretical reflection would have to come to grips with appears clearly in his objections against Kantian ethics, the so-called Ideal Observer theory, as well as in the Postscript, 200-1. Also 114: "We may be able to show how a given practice hangs together with other practices in a way that makes social and psychological sense. But we may not be able to find anything that will meet a demand for justification made by someone standing outside those practices.") Different cultures, e.g., have different and conflicting conceptions of human excellence. Scientific and perceptual concepts, on the other hand, are tied to and explainable in terms of a single physical world. (150.)

It is very frustrating to see that instead of offering some argument in support of the distinction in question, Williams really begs the whole question. For it is far short of an adequate argument to say that we live in different social worlds many of which conflict, but in one uniform physical world, that there simply is "no hope" of convergence on a body of ethical truths, and that we cannot even form a coherent picture of what such a convergence may look like. (151-2.) In

response to this, we may say that the actual variety of cultural systems in no way excludes the possibility of their harmonious coexistence. Nor are we forced to live in different social worlds on pain of losing ground completely if we consider real options which transcend the limits of our own outlook. (See above, pp. 215-16 where I suggested that universalizability should not be confused with "the point of view of the universe", if this phrase means that the force of moral judgments is independent of all interests.) If we can argue for the possibility of transcendence beyond our cultural system while participating in the basic "rational" structures which confer cohesion on the system, then that indeed may affect the way in which we see the limits of such a system, in the same way as if we despair of such transcendence and ultimately convergence with other cultures and values, there would be in principle nothing to prevent us from affirming our own values and rejecting those of others, though, of course, there may not be any justification for adopting a policy of hostility towards others either. (Cf. Lovibond, 212, and Williams, 168.) Of course, we may suspend ethical judgment in this regard, as Williams seems to propose. (162.) And this would indeed be most consistent with a relativism which regards moral judgments of a particular community applicable only to that community, not to others. But that suspension of judgment and the relativism on which it is based would have to be backed up by conceptual or logical reasons. As it stands, it is in fact very unrealistic, for cultures constantly meet one another and exchange ideas which are tied to their value-systems. In the context of such confrontations, making evaluative and moral judgments seems inevitable.

Now underlying the convictions that our physical environment is one but our social environment many, that convergence on truth of a body of propositions is possible in science, but not in ethics, lie more fundamental assumptions. And this is where Williams' scientific/ ethical dichotomy gives out. The assumptions are, first, that the physical is <u>independent</u> from us, but not the social.11 (This is reminiscent of the natural/ cultural dichotomy which we found disputable, to say the least, in the light of the more basic distinction between sign-cognition and symbolic thought.) And underlying that assumption in turn lurks the conception that there is a logical or metaphysical distinction between consciousness and body, such that, when we grasp things as they actually are, we can be said to do so as pure consciousnesses, separated from our bodies. In this way, secondly, Williams' claims seem based on an ideal conception of truth as correspondence (of mind or language) with things as they actually are, with reality, purged of all human perspectives.

I will consider the correspondence theory of truth later in this section. Regarding the first assumption, we must be reminded of the fact that human beings are neither consciousnesses nor bodies, but body-subjects. Language indeed is evidence for this: the idea of a consciousness being capable of producing sounds and marks to think in or communicate with is simply incoherent. (Cf. note 2, Chapter 5.) If it is as body-subjects that we practice science and perceive the world, then we cannot in principle attain to, and thus hope for convergence on the knowledge of the world in the absolute sense of "nonperspectival materials" of which Williams speaks, something independent from all perspectives.

It follows, then, that in respect of the first assumption in Williams' distinction between science and morals, the relevant question is not who "we" are or where we draw the line in the human community, whether there are many social worlds or just one. These turn out to be empirical questions. Indeed, on Williams' assumptions even as much as there is a community in the sense of a shared, uncoerced form of social life cannot be explained. Here too language provides the best example, for, as we saw in the previous sections, it is as social entities that human beings have linguistic practices. This is not to deny that we can transcend our limited viewpoints, nor is Williams denying that to sciences. The point is that if in scientific discourse we can and do transcend such viewpoints, then in the absence of reasons to the contrary, we can do so in other symbolic activities, in particular ethical discourse, as well. And what is more, we transcend relativity in ethics _in the same way_ as in science, i.e. through symbolic acts of embodied subjects who are participants in social practices and think and act in accordance with the prevailing rational norms.

I wish to go back now to the notion of rationality, for one part of that concept is related to reference and truth, and another part to the transcendence which we have just been considering. Our purposes are to challenge Williams' second assumption, noted above, i.e. his correspondence view of truth, to establish the possibility of transcendence throughout language in terms of the notion of "syntactic" or "systematic" structures, and to develop the philosophy of language which we have been seeking as an alternative. I will then develop these ideas in terms of the analogy between science and ethics, and later return to Williams' non-cognitivist challenge against the practical

force of ethical theory, and the anti-rationalist and relativistic implications of such attacks, mentioned above.

Discourse and the rationality reflected by it may be understood as a form of behavior in accordance with semantic and syntactic rules which are species of "universal pragmatics" (rules which underlie all utterances in the appropriate contexts), and are specific to particular languages. Semantic and syntactic considerations are closely connected with one another, but they can be separated in the following way.

Semantic or "propositional content" rules have to do specifically with the relation between language and facts, or simply reference. Although within a particular language, say, English, semantic rules concern the referential relation of particular sounds or marks and are as such only general, nevertheless they are as _type_ of rules, i.e. as part of pragmatics, universal across languages. Semantic rules of language are important for establishing the point I have been making about the "descriptive" constraints as well as the requirement of "universalizability" built into language as a whole--scientific and mathematical, as well as ordinary language, including moral.

According to Austin, "demonstrating the semantics" of a word such as "racy" requires the activity of "getting the questioner to _imagine_, or even actually to _experience_, situations which we should describe correctly by means of sentences containing the words 'racy', 'raciness', &c., and again other situations where we should _not_ use these words." ("The Meaning of a Word", _Philosophical Papers_, 57.) The suggestion here is that semantic meaning is explained and learned through what is usually called "ostensive definition". In general, this is a process whereby sounds or marks are used in connection with objects or events in

the environment common to the speaker and the hearer, such that those sounds or marks become linguistic symbols for the hearer, and the hearer can thereafter use them for the purpose of thinking or communication independently of those objects or events. What is involved in explaining the semantics of or in ostensively defining a word may be understood in terms of E. Cassirer's conception of "meaning" as an activity which transforms sounds into linguistic units which have demonstrative or objective significance. In *Language and Myth*, for instance, he says: "Before the intellectual work of conceiving and understanding of phenomena can set in, the work of naming must have preceded it, and have reached a certain point of elaboration. For it is this process which transforms the world of sense impression, which animals also possess, into a mental world, a world of ideas and meaning." (28.)12

Ostensive definition is not, however, as simple a process as taking the one who is learning the meaning of a word by the hand, pointing to physical objects in the environment and uttering such sentences as "This is so-and-so". (Notice that Austin's description of the process of learning the semantics of a word involves not only "experiencing", but also "imagining" the appropriate situations.) As Price has pointed out (*loc. cit.*, 214ff.), ostensive definition is more subtle and less "ceremonious" or "ritualistic" than this suggests. We do not always <u>hear</u> or <u>see</u> sounds or marks in conjunction with objects, nor are the referents of words always present and "pointed to" in the process of ostensive definition; often all we encounter is the speaker's "perceptual concern" with the things he is defining. He may "direct his gaze at the object, or walk towards it, or touch it or handle it" (217),

or in general do something with varying degrees of perceptual concern.

As learning the meaning of the king in chess is learning what moves can

be made with it according to the rules of chess, so learning the meaning

of a word or expression is learning the rules or conventions for its

use--what can be and what cannot be done by its use in different

circumstances. (See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, pars.

33-35.)

Implied in these remarks is the notion of "doing something by way

of showing concern". We can adopt this notion for understanding

"reference", because, first, it captures our common practice, without

prejudicing the issue in terms of the empiricist belief that reference

is some one-to-one relation of correspondence between physical facts or

reality and the immediate data of consciousness or language. (Cf.

Lovibond, 19-21.) And secondly, because that notion is general enough

to be applied not only in perception, but also in connection with non-

observable, mental states of affairs (feelings, wants, desires, ends,

and the like), and indeed throughout language. Therefore, it can help

us clarify the conception of language which we have been seeking as an

alternative to the one underlying non-cognitivist theories--the one

which regards reference and its related concept, "truth", to be

logically separable from and especially relevant in descriptive or

scientific discourse. Given that notion, we could understand better the

idea developed in 5.1 that reference is one of the dimensions of any

meaningful linguistic (more generally, symbolic) practice.

To continue with the conception of ostensive definition, we

should add that many words or symbols are learned in an untaught way,

just by observing the utterances made by others and the circumstances in

which they are used, rather than by explicit teaching. Nor is ostensive definition something that occurs once and for all. Our understanding of words is often provisional and has to be modified in accordance with further experience.

A related point is that we must in many cases already understand some words and have a more or less vague understanding of some others in order for an ostensive definition to discharge its function successfully and for us to acquire or improve our knowledge of the meaning of a certain word. For, although we may not learn a language by first learning sentences, nevertheless what we learn is usually given in the context of sentences or some combination of linguistic and non-linguistic symbols. Consider how we may learn the use or meaning of "four". Merely pointing to a group of apples and saying "There are four apples here" will not give the definition of "four". Is it the group of apples, or their color, or size, that is in question? Likewise, if I point to a chair and say "This is a chair", it is not clear to one who does not know the meaning of "this", "is", and "a" whether I am talking about the chair's color, its shape, or size, etc. As Wittgenstein points out, "an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case." (*Philosophical Investigations*, par. 28.) But if I know the meaning of "apples" and "green", then pointing to the group of apples and saying "four green apples" is more likely to be successful in teaching me what the word "four" means in the sense of what it "refers" to.

Connected with this point is another one, that the sentences uttered need not even be of the form "This is so-and-so"; the word for which "so-and-so" is a variable may occur in a variety of sentences.

Indeed it is more helpful if it does occur, for then the sound may be more easily noticed or distinguished from others. The sound "mountain" gradually acquires a meaning (in the sense of "referent") as the common element in the series: "There is a mountain here", "This mountain is hard to climb", "What a beautiful mountain!", etc., uttered in situations which, though are unlike in other respects, involve the common object, mountain. For reasons which are obvious by now, this is also partly the way in which we seem to learn the syntax or the possible combinations of words in a language. Ostensive definition is in part an inter-symbolic activity, where one word is defined in terms of others.

To the idea of syntactics I will return later. As we shall see and as it is already suggested in the above remarks, syntactics can account for the possibility of transcendence beyond given semantic meanings, for it provides for new symbolic inter-relationships independently of those through which semantic meaning is taught or learned. And it is this same kind of transcendence that we are concerned with in attempting to overcome relativism and parochialism in moral discourse. The point to emphasize here is that ostensive process is a complex phenomenon. From a philosophical standpoint, this complexity is the correlate of the vagueness of such terms as "fact", "environment", "objectivity", "truth", and "reference"; it indicates that the notion of semantic meaning or reference is wide enough to allow not merely "correspondence" (a magical connection) with physical facts, but a connection with a whole set of other factors, psychological facts, physical actions and the use of other symbols.

Now the ostensive, "referential", or semantic connection between words and the "environmental" matters of fact suggests that in an

important sense semantic meaning is related to the notions of truth and falsity; by virtue of their referential function, linguistic propositions are said to be true or false. The word "mountain" when heard or seen in a more or less regular and systematic manner in the presence of mountains (or their picture or physical replica) comes to have meaning for us. But this meaning is such that if afterwards we hear or see the word in sentences such as "There is a mountain there" or "What a beautiful mountain!" in the presence of a mountain (or its picture, etc.), the statement will come to be for us not only meaningful, but also true. Of course, it is conceivable that the same statement might have been false instead, as when there is no mountains (etc.) in the neighborhood to confirm it.

This shows that there is an important similarity between sign-cognition and the process whereby words acquire their meanings. As was suggested in the previous section (e.g. pp. 285, 291-7), signs give rise, by virtue of the experience of constant conjunctions and its retention in memory, to expectation or states of readiness which can then be "verified" or "falsified" by our experience or action. It is this sort of "falsification" that brings "not" into our lives. Of course, as Price notes, the terms "verification" and "falsification" are not accurate here, since they suggest that the habit of expecting something upon the experience of a sign is an inductive _hypothesis_ of some sort which is explicitly formulated and then subjected to an empirical _test_. (_Thinking and Experience_, 218-9.) It seems more appropriate to say that a habit of expectation or a disposition "grows up" in us or "breaks down", rather than is "verified" or "falsified". One learns the rules of behavior in more or less the same way as one

learns language (though, as was suggested, the two processes are in practice inseparable)--by trial and error. In S. Hampshire's words, they are learned "by imitating others and by being corrected, with greater or less generality, when he goes wrong. He need not have learnt a code of manners, explicitly formulated any more than he need have learnt the rules of grammar applicable to his native tongue. In both cases one could speak of rules and conventions being internalized." (*Morality and Conflict*, 103.) It remains, however, that it is partly through a process analogous to sign-cognition, i.e. through the experience of constant conjunction between sounds and marks, on the one hand, and environmental objects on the other, as well as the retention of this experience in the form of memory-traces, that symbols get their meaning for us.

In seems that, as 5.1 anticipated, <u>in every case</u> to know the meaning of words is in part to know their semantic meaning; it is to know what they refer to or what the statements in which they occur are true of. More accurately, understanding sentences or words consists in part in the ability to recognize the objects or state of affairs of which they are true or to which they refer if we were to perceive them, whether or not we actually do. For instance, in connection with terms whose referents are non-existent but possible objects such as "the king of France", P.F. Strawson points out:

> The sentence, "The king of France is wise", is
> certainly significant; but this does not mean that
> any particular use of it is true or false. We use it
> truly or falsely when, in using the expression, "The
> king of France", we are in fact mentioning some one.
> The fact that the sentence and the expression,
> respectively, are significant just is the fact that
> the sentence *could* be used, in certain circumstances,
> to say something true or false, that the expression

> *could* be used, in certain circumstances to mention a
> particular person; and to know their meaning is to
> know what sort of circumstances these are. ("On
> Referring", *Mind*, 59 (1950), 330-1.)

Likewise, it is quite possible, though not as obviously as in the above

example, to know the meaning of a word without even being able to

observe its referent. A word like "dragon" or a sentence, say, "A

dragon is flying over our heads in outer-space" is entirely meaningful,

despite the fact that a dragon, being a fictitious entity, cannot be

observed. This point seems true in particular with respect to complex

and abstract symbols. (See below, concerning abstract symbols. The

theme of the perception of possible objects will be developed later in

the context of the question of linguistic capacities for transcendence

beyond given or actual conceptual frameworks.)

The explanation for the meaningfulness of "the king of France",

"The king of France is wise", "dragon", and "A dragon is flying over our

heads in outer-space" is that our understanding of these expressions is

not independent of rules which connect the words with the objects we

have actually observed. Leaving such locutions as "the", "a", "of",

"over", "is", and the like, aside for a moment, we may note, in

connection with "dragon", that if this word is the equivalent of

"winged, fire-breathing lizard", the words which constitute the inter-

symbolic definition of "dragon", namely "winged", "fire", "breathing",

and "lizard", are themselves either defined in connection with physical

objects or can be cashed in terms of other words which are so defined,

e.g. "four-footed" and "reptile", and so on. And a similar remark may

be made with respect to "flying", "head", "outer-space", "king",

"France", and "wise" (given a relatively common standard of wisdom for kings).

The point to be stressed is that all symbols must be either directly cashable empirically or be "translatable" into other symbols which are. As Price says,

> There must be basic or primary or 'ground floor'
> symbols which are directly connected to the world,
> tied to observable things and qualities and
> situations, if anything is to be for us a symbol at
> all. And the tie or connection can only be provided
> if these symbols are used veraciously by our
> neighbours, at any rate much more often than not....
> Sentences referring to sensible qualities and
> relations, such as 'green', 'squeaky', 'in', 'above',
> can only get their meaning in this way. Or at least,
> in uttering these sentences in our presence our
> neighbours must be either truthful or else
> *systematically* (not randomly) mendacious. (209.)

Hence, if there is a rule for applying a given word or symbol or their combination to objects or states of affairs in general, it must be ostensive in the wide sense explained; it must be in part, though not entirely, cashable in empirical terms. For what else could be the case (save perhaps the possibility that meaning depends exclusively on divine revelation)? It cannot be by mere fiat of the will, for even if one invents *ex nihilo*, as it were, what is sometimes called "private" symbolism, one is using an "ostensive rule" in order to apply it to something or other (hence the term "ostensive") and in a relatively constant manner (hence the term "rule"), for a certain purpose (even doing it out of vanity would constitute a "wish"), and in connection with other private symbols. Otherwise, the thinker who invents the symbol could not be said to understand its meaning or think meaningfully with or in it. (Of course, in order to be able also to communicate with

others by means of invented symbol, the thinker would have to establish a connection with "public" symbols as well.)

Understanding "meaning" then seems to depend on, though it is by no means exhaustible by, "reference" to physical objects or objects and relations in the external or public world; it is also connected with mental facts (the abilities to recognize referents in the external world), as well as the understanding of the meaning or use of other terms. For example, the meaning of "dragon" is not the same as that of "winged, fire-breathing, lizard", though the two locutions may be said to have the same "extension"—the set of things a term is true of.

Searle has claimed that some utterances, e.g. "Hello", "Hurrah", or "Ouch", do not have a "propositional content rule" whereby they refer. (*Speech Acts*, 30 & 64.) This does not seem to me to be the case. Ignoring the differences in their emotive aspects, "Hello" may be expanded as "I greet you", "Hurrah" as "I am enthusiastic about", and "Ouch" as "That hurts". (Note that, as we saw in the context of the discussion of Stevenson's emotive theory (2.2), "Ouch" and "Hurrah" and, more obviously, "Hello" have a place in language; they are not merely "natural expressions".) In the case of "Hurrah" and "Ouch", the propositional content seems to be in part that about which I may be enthusiastic and that which caused pain. With "Hello" or "I greet you" it is more difficult to determine what the parallel propositional content could be, but it is not gratuitous to say that greeting is usually directed toward someone and as such has an outside referent. Moreover, each of these utterances, if sincere (which, of course, it does not have to be), is an expression of a psychological state and thus implies the truth or falsity of a proposition about the psychological

state of the speaker ("sincerity rule"). The implicit proposition, of course, need not be made explicit in all cases. But the fact that it can be made explicit by competent speakers of a language requires that it be present in a dispositional sense. As Austin points out in his discussion of "behabitives", an example of which is greeting, "There are obvious connexions with both stating or describing what our feelings are and expressing, in the sense of venting our feelings, though behabitives are distinct from both of these." (*How to do things with Words*, 160.) And it is, I suggest, correct to say that in the case of "Hurrah" and "Ouch", the expressive aspect is dominant over other aspects, and that the sincerity and the propositional content rules are closely connected with each other and with other aspects of the situation, not that there are, as Searle holds, no sincerity or propositional content rules.

The linkage with the external world can be shown even in the case of abstract and mathematical concepts. In the light of what has been said concerning the complexity, specifically with respect to the inter-symbolic character, of semantic meaning, I think we can go as far as claiming that even such general words as the definite article "the", the indefinite article "a", the copula "is", as well as mathematical and logical symbols "+", "√", "-" ("not"), "v" ("or"), "-->" ("if, then") play a crucial role in determining reference, though they do not strictly speaking have a "corresponding" referent. In other words, what has been said about symbols in general seems to be *eo ipso* true of general and abstract words and mathematical and logical symbols. To the question of definite descriptions using "the" I will attend in a moment. We saw earlier (p. 278) that "not" symbolizes disappointed expectations, and "if" symbolizes conditional signification. It may be added that

"or" seems to symbolize a choice between alternatives, and "and" ("+")
the conjunction of things in space. All of these have also a place in
sign-cognition (which is tied to experience) and seem to be derived from
it. Numbers and mathematical and logical symbols seem to concern
various ways in which objects are related to one another in space and
time. If space and time are external realities, as I think they are,
arithmetic, geometrical, and logical symbols do seem to be originated in
and therefore in a sense related to the external world. This does not
entail, of course, that the "intuition" of mathematical and logical
relations is reducible to the experience of the external world. Nor
does it entail that the origin of the use of the symbols in question is
the same as their meaning. For example, "not" may be used by someone to
deny a claim, without experiencing any disappointed expectation. To
equate questions of meaning with those of origin would mean neglecting
or in certain respects abstracting from the complexity of a linguistic
situation, in the same way as the denial of an original connection with
the external world would constitute an abstraction from that
complexity, though in another respect. I suggest that the inter-
symbolic dimension of mathematical and logical terms is the dominant
aspect of their meaning. And this is the reason why, more than other
kinds of terms, it is the sentences in which such terms figure, not the
terms themselves, that have referents.

In this connection it is sometimes held that the degree of
abstractness and generality of symbols is inversely proportional to
their descriptive power. This view, however, seems misleading.
Scientific symbols like "NaCl" (for sodium chloride) or "F = m.a"
(Dynamic force = mass x acceleration), though abstract and general, by

no means lack descriptive power. Their descriptive power is very high indeed. But it might be argued that the claim about the inverse relation between generality and descriptive power applies strictly to mathematics and logic; the symbols used in these discourses convey no information about the external world. "2 x 2 = 4" or "P -> (Q v R)" designates a _formal_ pattern or schema which can be filled in with any values. "P -> (Q v R)" may be rendered as "The arms race leads either to massive destruction of life or to greater exploitation of those who are politically and economically less powerful." Alternatively, "If the temperature drops, there will be either frost or snow." Thus, it might be argued, in mathematical and logical discourses connections between symbols and facts are typically ignorable.

But it is not necessary to deny this in order to argue that there is a connection with the "factual" world even in the case of mathematical and logical discourses. In these discourses we simply "abstract" from facts (mental and physical) for the purpose strictly of exposition or formal analysis.

According to P.F. Strawson, referential expressions differ depending on (1) the extent to which their referent is determined by the context of utterance (thus, personal pronouns like "I" and "he" are highly contextual and definite descriptions such as "the author of Waverly" seem non-contextual); (2) the degree of descriptive power (thus, proper names seem to be minimally descriptive and definite descriptions maximally descriptive). ("On Referring", _Mind_, 1950, 338.) It is apparent that a _definite description_, and not the word "the" by itself, has descriptive power. The word "the" does not seem in and by itself, in isolation from other words, to refer to anything in

any ordinary sense. Of course, this is true of all words; the unit of linguistic meaning, we may remember, is the sentence, and therefore the meaning of any word in a language is a function of its role in sentences of that language. However, in the case of "the", as in the case of mathematical and logical symbols, the fourth dimension of a linguistic situation (5.1), i.e. the inter-connection between words in sentences and between sentences in an argument or dialogue, is most dominant. The difference between "the" and, say, "he" is in part that, as (1) suggests, "the" is much more intimately related to other words than "he" whose use concerns more than anything else the object to which reference is made. The same point applies also to reports of the "inner" and unobservable states of feeling, images, and the like, for the meaningfulness of the talk about these states depends in part on the identification of the speaker as an object or, more precisely, as a body-subject. And the point about "the" seems equally true of terms such as "is", "a", and the like.

These remarks reaffirm the point made earlier (above, pp. 322 & 324) that "reference" and "truth" cannot be reduced to some such notions as correspondence with the physical or external world, without doing injustice to the complexity of various kinds of discourse (or "language games"). In this connection, Nagel's remark in his *The Structure of Science* seems particularly insightful; he writes:

> sense experience normally is a response to complex
> though unanalyzed patterns of qualities and
> relations; and the response usually involves the
> exercise of habits of interpretation and recognition
> based on tacit beliefs and inferences, which cannot
> be warranted by any single momentary experience.
> Accordingly, the language we normally use to describe
> even our immediate experiences is the common language
> of social communication, embodying distinctions and

> assumptions grounded in a large and collective
> experience, and not a language whose meaning is
> supposedly fixed by reference to conceptually
> uninterpreted atoms of sensation." (121-2.)

The points made above about perceptual, mathematical and logical judgments, as well as judgments involving abstract and general terms, can be extended to the practice of natural science. For, as Quine has observed, there is in essence no difference between truths of logic and the ordinary hypotheses in natural sciences; in both logic and natural science there seems to be "some indirect but eventual confrontation with empirical data. However, this confrontation can be remote; and, conversely, some such remote confrontation with experience may be claimed for pure mathematics and elementary logic. The semblance of a difference in this respect is largely due to over-emphasis of departmental boundaries." ("Carnap and Logical Truth", *Synthese*, 12 (1960), 363.) Elsewhere Quine writes:

> no statement is immune to revision [in the light of
> experience, this being apparent from the context of
> Quine's writing]. Revision even of the logical law
> of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means
> of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what difference
> is there in principle between such a shift and the
> shift whereby Kepler superseded Ptolemy, or Einstein
> Newton, or Darwin Aristotle? ("Two Dogmas of
> Empiricism", *From a Logical Point of View*, 43.)13

In particular, the idea of "correspondence" receives a strikingly non-empiricist treatment in Nagel's study of the logic of scientific discourse in *The Structure of Science*. "Correspondence rules" (which are, according to Nagel, equivalent to "semantic rules", "coordinating definitions", "operational definitions", "epistemic correlations", and "rules of interpretation" (93)) are "a set of rules that in effect assign an empirical content to the abstract calculus [the "logical

skeleton" or "relational structure" of a theory] by relating it to the concrete materials of observation and experiment." (90.) Correspondence rules, then, provide a link between a theory and observable materials; they perform a referential function in a scientific theory. For example, Bohr's atomic theory gives correspondence rules for linking the experimental notion of a spectral line (and hence, the wave-length of a light ray) to the notion of an electromagnetic radiation emitted by an electron jump from one orbit to another. (94-5.)

Important to note are the interrelated points stressed by Nagel, first, that rules of correspondence do not provide explicit definitions. Theoretical and experimental languages are coordinated through correspondence rules, but they are not intertranslatable. (97ff.) The meaning of "a spectral line" is not the same as that of "an electromagnetic radiation resulting from an electron jump". Secondly, theoretical notions can indeed be coordinated with more than one experimental concept. For example, the notion of electron transition may be coordinated not only with spectral lines, but also with temperature changes. This is why it is not possible to formulate correspondence rules with precision; such rules, says Nagel, "are protean in form." (101.) Thirdly, a complex and sophisticated theory contains elements with no primary referential function. This indeed permits the extension of a theory to new experimental areas. For example, there are no correspondence rules for the theoretical notion of instantaneous velocity of a gas molecule. And the correspondence rule for Avogadro's number (the number of molecules in a standard volume of gas under standard conditions of pressure and temperature) is a relatively late development in the history of kinetic theory. (101-3.)

These points serve, I think, to bring out the opacity of reference and the complexity of meaning in scientific language. For they suggest that correspondence rules are neither precise nor unique; that even in scientific discourse correspondence with the world and truth or falsity are, though by no means ruled out, an abstract and idealized dimension of meaning. What the scientist regards as important for the purposes at hand, and interrelations between various parts of the structure of a theory are inextricably bound up with the "object"-domain of scientific discourse.

Now, as we have seen in the previous chapters, part of the difficulty in explicitly defining or giving a precise formulation of the "correspondence rules" for such words as "good" and "ought" seems to be due to the generality of these words. Of course, "good" and "ought" are terms of ordinary discourse; they are not embedded in a complex and sophisticated theory, and the criteria of their application are not determined in the same way as wave-lengths are determined through spectral analysis. As I suggested earlier, the descriptive component of the moral use of such terms as "good" and "ought" is primarily the mental facts of desires and interests of the parties involved, facts which are downplayed in scientific discourse. But this does not affect the logical point I have been making. Statements containing "good", e.g. "It is good to be honest", or "ought", e.g. "One ought to pay one's debts", refer and are therefore capable of truth, in the (not uncommon) sense that they would be unintelligible, stupid, and at best perplexing if they could not be supported by reasons invoking certain values (desires, interests, ends, and in general motives) which can belong to everyone in a relevantly similar situation, and which to some extent are

held in common in a group. (The speaker, of course, need not be able to articulate such reasons.) For something which could not and, to some significant degree, did not satisfy all relevant interests of the kind in question, would be neither _meaningfully_ appraised in terms of goodness, nor _meaningfully_ involve an obligation. Due to its essentially egoistic or individualistic tendency, the idea of moral discourse as a means of self-expression and influencing or guiding action or choice can only detract from the force of that appraisal or obligation. If I say "You ought to pay your debts", and then continue "Of course, that is your decision" or, less subtly, "Of course, I am only expressing my own, and trying to influence your, attitude toward paying your debts", I cannot thereby hope to have put a moral point across. I would succeed in doing so only if you are already disposed favorably toward paying your debts. Nor is it very intelligent of me to think that by saying "You ought to pay your debts" I could guide your action or influence your feelings about or attitude toward paying your debts. For either you already are morally disposed in such a way as you do usually pay your debts or feel ashamed or guilty if you do not (in which case my "ought"-statement as such would be ineffective), or if you are not, in supposing that I could influence your feelings or attitudes or guide your choice of action, I should be taking you to be on the whole intellectually weak and relatively incapable of deliberating and making a rational assessment of the situation and the feelings and interests involved in it, your own as well as those of others; I should be taking you to be such a person as would in general act upon mere impulse and lack sophisticated feelings, feelings which originate in or are cultivated by thought. Indeed, feelings, desires, and interests,

unlike choices and preferences, are not things which we could choose or
decide about, due perhaps to a strong element of belief tied up with
them, in the sense that each person's interest can be taken as showing
or implying that he believes he has such an interest, though not
necessarily that it ought to be satisfied or is worthy of satisfaction.
The fact that interests and desires imply beliefs, however, makes it
possible to describe and reason about them and to bring them into
harmony with those of others.

The above points suggest indeed that emotivism and prescriptivism
underestimate our rational powers, powers which underlie and are built
into the use of moral terms and concepts in the context of a certain
prevailing, rule-governed form of life, and which make the grasp of
moral truth and consensus among various forms of life in principle
possible. Our rational powers are implicit in the judgment "You ought
to pay your debts" in the sense that the judgment is meaningful to us
because it refers to or is about not only a certain kind of action which
constitutes the paying of debts, but also, and primarily, about certain
interests of participants in a cohesive community; it is about certain
universalizable interests, interests which rest for their satisfaction
in part on the paying of debts and which, as was noted above, can be
described and reasoned about, so that they can coincide or coexist in
harmony with one another. It is in the same sense that paying a debt
constitutes the fulfillment of an "obligation". If I said "You ought
(or are obligated) to pay your debts", it would seem self-defeating to
continue "but paying one's debts is not (or I do not think or believe it
is) conducive to universalizable interests". (These remarks, of course,
recall my defense of the truth of the logical thesis of universalization

in all its kinds. They also imply a consequentialist account of moral

obligations. These two points will be developed in what follows.)

We need further examples. (Apart from the discussion in the

earlier chapters of the force of such terms as "cruelty", "promise",

"noble", etc., in Chapter 1, pp. 13 and 30, I cited examples of moral

dialogues which begin and are likely to continue mainly in terms of

beliefs about interests, needs, or ends of those who may directly or

indirectly be affected by certain kinds of action (plagiarism and the

government's policies), not by way of guiding action or choice or

expressing and influencing attitudes.) Consider the heated debates

surrounding the issue of "Free Trade" between Canada and the U.S. In

spite of much rhetoric (unfortunately often an effective means of

acquiring and exercising political authority), the Canadian public and

perhaps the other parties involved in the debate were very much

concerned about knowing which industries and whose interests, in what

manner and to what extent, would be affected if a trade agreement were

reached between the two countries. This rather than efforts to

influence choice or decision seemed to be what made, as it still makes,

the issue an ethically intense one. The disaster of the American

involvement in Vietnam or of the shooting down by the American Navy of

an Iranian airliner over the Persian Gulf was unethical precisely

because it was the result of aggressive military action, on the part of

both an imperialist super-power and local irrational regimes, without

sufficient thought, deliberation, and foresight about the lives and

interests of all those affected (though admittedly it is difficult to

make predictions in human affairs). It was by no means a mere accident

(caused, in the Gulf case, by inevitable human error in relation to

technology) or ethical bad luck. Nor was it a consequence of
incommensurable ethical world views. In spite of many differences in
their specific norms of conduct, Islamic and Indo-Chinese ideals of
individual freedom and brotherhood, loyalty, justice, friendship, even
marriage and sexuality have much in common with those of the American
way of life. In any case, a great deal more thought and deliberation
goes into decisions with moral character, decisions which affect the
livelihood and well-being of those involved, than is suggested by the
idea that morality or moral discourse is about self-assertion or
influencing choice or action. (For similar examples to the ones just
cited, see Lovibond, 215.) We may not on some occasions strike a
balance between all viewpoints (a viewpoint consisting in needs,
interests, ends, and the like). But this would be a limitation imposed
not by something in the nature of moral situations as such, but by the
limitations of our powers as human beings. It remains that we perform
our moral task insofar as we do bring our rationality to bear upon the
satisfaction of as many interests, etc., as humanly possible, without
sacrificing the legitimate interests of some for the sake of promoting
those of others, and in this way open the way for wider harmony and
agreement among different viewpoints. This is not to say that the
fulfillment of the interests of all is a single individual's motive,
rule of action, and responsibility. Such a thing would no doubt be too
much to expect. It seems also unreal, for moral rules are both created
and maintained as social conventions, not by individual will. What is
practicable, however, is openness to reason and effort on the part of
the individual to think and act cooperatively with others, so that the
balance of interests is reached collectively.

It is worth noting that in spite of certain differences in the force of such terms as "good", "ought", or "right" which we noted in the earlier chapters (that, e.g., "ought" is more action-guiding than "good", and "good" is more relevant to thought or deliberation), it may still be true that as a part of ethical discourse in general, such terms are primarily conducive to thought, reasons, and truth. It is the latter point that I have been trying to establish, a point which may escape us if we, like the theories we have discussed in the earlier chapters, focus on such general terms or concepts, instead of more descriptively loaded and "thick" concepts such as "cruelty", "promise", "treachery", "courage", and the like. Because of the relatively "thin"--relative, that is, to other moral concepts--descriptive aspect of "good" and (especially) "ought", reflected in the fact that we do say things such as "Courage is good", but not "good is courage", "good" and "ought" may appear to be conducive primarily to non-descriptive ends. But if what was said above (pp. 336-340) is correct, both "good" and "ought" are strongly descriptive, and their differences, just pointed out, become relatively insignificant.

We can support the above point further as follows. Before proceeding, however, it should be noted that the thesis about moral language I have been developing in this chapter is not made to depend on the particular ethical theory outlined below (pp. 342-5). But the examples I will give are meant to reinforce the above argument that both "good" and "ought" are primarily descriptive words and as such conducive to rationality and truth. However, those examples may also help develop the implications of the linguistic theory advanced here for (further) actual cases of moral reasoning; in this way they may contribute to the

establishment of the egalitarian or universalistic ethical theory I have been defending, though as it stands they cannot pretend to support that ethical theory adequately.

It seems that the method whereby some end is attained is right if and only if that end is good—that we ought or are obligated to do the act whose relevant principle expresses and is likely to promote or is unlikely to frustrate (universalizable) interests, and that the moral character or obligatoriness of an action depends on the extent to which its rule is the expression of and tends to promote those interests. I will take the necessary condition first. Here we must be careful not to deny the fact that there are principles of the deontological kind, principles which apply to actions on the basis of the descriptions of actions which are entirely non-consequentialist. The principle of fidelity, that one ought to keep one's promises, is a deontological principle, and to advocate equal allocation of resources on the basis of labor of equal value (supposing we know the measure of value) combines deontological and consequentialist considerations. (Likewise, athletic activities and the state of being healthy are considered good both in themselves and for their consequences.) The point is, however, that in all cases justification of a consequentialist sort seems to be possible. For activities (even those inspired by "ideals") cannot be in themselves or intrinsically right, i.e. even in partial independence from their effects on, or what they imply in terms of, universalizable interests. Leaving theological supports aside, claims about intrinsic rightness or wrongness would have to rest on the queer metaphysical claim that values are part of the external world, i.e. that they are independent of our feelings and interests, as well as such unimpressive epistemological

foundations as moral sense or intuition. (Cf. above, 4.1 & 4.3, especially pp. 183 & 222.) The latter indeed can support the vilest acts, acts which most of us would condemn as immoral. If these claims are correct, and if the objections raised against non-cognitivism in the earlier chapters have force, then, in the light of the previous examples and the ones that will follow, it may be that our deep-seated universalizable interests, combined with the systematic and habitual implementation of the rules which express and promote (rather than frustrate) those interests, make certain activities appear morally right (rather than morally wrong) in themselves. The appearance, however, would seem to mask those interests.14

Here too some examples can be adduced. Actions such as lying, breaking promises, or murder may be wrong (ultimately) not in themselves, but because the relevant rule of action expresses and is likely to promote anti-social attitudes and results. Moral rules which condemn killing, etc., imply *prima facie* obligations, heuristic precepts which can be overridden, revised and modified in the light of new experience, but (and this is the main point) their rationale seems to be that they aim at the good of all. If my conception of "good" is significantly impoverished, if, e.g., it is restricted to bodily pleasure or to what is good for a particular individual (e.g. myself), in a special position or with special qualities, etc., I ought not to do that which is conducive to that "good". For a common pursuit of bodily pleasures at the expense of other goods such as friendship, or a systematic and thoroughgoing egoism of the kind in question, would seem to make social life, as we know and live it, almost impossible. The absence of a moral obligation (in the sense of an obligation not to do

something) can be explained by a defect in the interests which our principle of action expresses and is likely to reinforce.

To take a more concrete example, understanding a moral situation in terms of a conflict between, e.g., the (intrinsic) right to life and the (consequentialist) right to the enjoyment of what accompanies or results from life (sanctity vs. quality of life), or between the corresponding obligations, often leads to intellectual and practical impasse. On the other hand, if we understand such situations in terms only of the consequences of certain more or less well established (*prima facie*) obligations, e.g., not to do harm or kill (actual or potential) human beings, we may facilitate decision-making. We may find it morally acceptable to terminate life when the interests of all parties involved, especially those of the one whose life is in question, are at considerable risk. The strength of this line of thought seems most clear to us in the particular cases where life has become significantly degrading, when its quality is considerably diminished, but it seems equally plausible in other cases. It seems untenable to condemn capital punishment on the ground that killing human beings is intrinsically wrong, though to advocate it under the aggregative utilitarian principle that it is conducive to the maximization of general well-being and security would seem no less indefensible. To be sure, there are those who as a matter of fact condemn capital punishment as absolutely (as distinct from *prima facie*) and intrinsically (as distinct from consequentially) wrong. (Likewise, there are those who condemn abortion or euthanasia as unconditionally and intrinsically wrong.) But, as was suggested above, such a view would seem rationally indefensible; it seems much more reasonable to argue against capital punishment (I cannot

think of a good argument _for_ it which would not raise a havoc) by pointing out that as a community of individuals we have, at first glance, an obligation towards everyone's existence (in the sense which includes both life and its quality)—that, in other words, unless something impoverishes existence to a substantially low level, we must protect and promote it—and that capital punishment is in fact unlikely to have the deterrent effect which it aims at, is more likely indeed to increase aggressiveness and violence and hence the destruction of social existence. Similar consequentialist considerations seem essential for a good argument against terrorism.

"Good" seems also to be a sufficient condition of "ought", in the sense that if a rule of action is such that it expresses a cooperative, social, or universalizable attitude and is likely to reinforce similar attitudes, then we seem obligated to do it (rather than omit it) insofar as it is physically in our power. Of course, there is no guarantee that we will recognize this obligation, in the same way as there is no guarantee that we know the good. Nor is there a guarantee that if we do recognize our obligation, we will act accordingly. There are such things as moral blindness and weakness of will. The point is that we do to a significant degree (still) live within (know and act according to the rules constitutive of) societies and institutions which reflect and promote universalizable interests.

To further support the ethical theory outlined above we need more arguments of a strictly ethical sort, but that would take us beyond the scope of the present thesis. However, the above considerations show that just as in the context of moral life our (implicit or explicit) knowledge of universalizable interests may be necessary and sufficient

for our moral obligations and commitments (in Socratic terms, just as knowing the good is pursuing it), so in the context of moral discourse as a whole "good" may be the necessary and sufficient condition of "ought". In this sense, "good" and "ought" would seem inseparable, and in spite of the fact that "ought" is more action-guiding than "good", they may both be geared primarily to deliberation, reasons, and truth. This should reinforce our attempt to extend rationality to ethical discourse as a homogeneous and unified whole, reflecting and influencing the values embodied in social practices and embracing such terms as "ought", "right", "good", as well as "promise", "loyalty", "courage", and the like.

So far we have seen that the complexity and subtlety of "ostensive definitions", the opacity of reference ("showing concern"), and the protean nature of correspondence rules point to strong analogies between moral and empirical discourses. These discourses seem much closer to one another than non-cognitivism could allow, and the claim on behalf of their formal identity seems to have a solid basis in our actual linguistic practice. For all meaningful uses of language or other symbols seem to involve in part reference to objects or states of affairs, inside and outside the speaker, a relation to decision and physical action, covert or overt, and a relation to the rest of the discourse. No single one of these factors exhausts the meaning of a particular linguistic expression. Moreover, these factors cannot be logically separated; meaningful discourse cannot have some, to the exclusion of others. Among these factors, reference is of particular interest, for it is too often assumed to be a unique sort of relation between a linguistic expression (descriptions or statements) and

observable facts. On the other hand, our study of the concepts of

symbol in general and speech act in particular, showed that reference is

ubiquitous (however difficult it may be, due to its opacity, to isolate

the object or state of affairs referred to) and inseparable from the

other dimensions of meaningful discourse. And it is not a

characteristic merely of scientific or descriptive language that they

necessarily refer or have a propositional content, but of all meaningful

utterances, even such obviously expressive single-term utterances as

"Ouch" and "Hurrah". (See above, pp. 329-30.)

This is why, as Austin points out, a statement, an utterance

which "corresponds" to facts, is nothing pure or simple or unique; it is

an idealized version of the "rightness" or "appropriateness" (or, as he

would say, "happiness" or "felicity") of an utterance. He says:

> In general we may say this: with both statements
> (and, for example, descriptions) *and* warnings, &c.,
> the question can arise, granting that you had a right
> to warn and did warn, did state, or did advise,
> whether you were right to state or warn or advise--
> not in the sense of whether it was opportune or
> expedient, but whether, on the facts and our
> knowledge of the facts and the purposes for which you
> were speaking, and so on, this was the proper thing
> to say. (*How to do things with Words*, 145.)

The point to stress is that out of the factors involved in a certain

situation, i.e. the purposes and beliefs of the speaker and hearer, the

kinds of actions which are dispositionally related to the utterance

taking effect, the referent of the utterance, and the relation to the

rest of the conversation or argument and the symbols used therein, a

"statement" concentrates on the referent.15 Nevertheless, as the

passage just quoted from Austin indicates, it is always relevant in

relation to a particular linguistic utterance to ask whether it was

appropriate, and it is the knowledge of the factors involved in the situation that could provide an adequate answer to this question. We may generalize and say that "evaluation" is implied in all meaningful discourse, that it can be made explicit in terms of judgments of appropriateness, and that such judgments have a necessary or essential relation to knowledge or reasons which invoke beliefs about facts, such that their truth-value is no less important than the truth-value of descriptive or scientific statements.

It might be objected that non-cognitivist analyses of ethical discourse do not deny that there is a descriptive component to ethical statements which makes questions of objectivity and truth relevant. For Stevenson, e.g., "This is good" means "I approve of this", and reasons which invoke beliefs about the descriptive characteristics of the objects of an ethical judgment certainly play a role in ethical discourse. Likewise, the objection continues, for Hare, moral judgments not only have the force of prescribing choices or actions, but are also rational and universalizable in the sense of implying reciprocity, such that it does not matter whose preferences are in question. So, it seems that our analysis of moral language is compatible with those of non-cognitivists.

To this objection we may reply that for non-cognitivists descriptive aspects and rationality are relatively unimportant in "typically" ethical discourse (or, in other words, ethical discourse as a distinct "type"), such that it is held to be possible, in principle, to make a meaningful (or, using Austin's term, felicitous) moral judgment without referring to anything (whether mental or physical facts), a reference which could then be made explicit in terms of

belief-sentences and thus reasoning about facts. In ethical discourse
as such, according to non-cognitivism, expression of belief, reasons,
and the truth-values of our propositions are irrelevant. Stevenson
indeed made reasons relevant to the actual _use_ of ethical discourse not
logically (thus it could not be said that in _saying_ "This is good" the
speaker _necessarily_ implies "I approve of this" or "This has such-and-
such characteristics"), but _psychologically_. And Hare's bias for the
non-descriptive dimension of meaningful ethical discourse, reflected in
his driving a wedge between ethical (more generally, evaluative) and
scientific discourses, in turn is responsible for the tension we have
noted between his two doctrines of universalizability (and the related
issue of the force of rationality) and prescriptivity. And the tension
cannot be resolved without abandoning one of the doctrines, as he does
in effect disclaim the force of the second and third kinds of
universalization, though not the first. (As we saw, having already
embraced prescriptivism (his analysis of "good" notwithstanding), Mackie
capitalized on that tension and discarded the logical force of
rationality and universalization in all of its three stages or kinds.)

Thus, in spite of their concessions about descriptivity,
emotivism and prescriptivism are incompatible with the view of language
in general, and ethical language in particular, which I have tried to
advance and support by means of some positive arguments and examples.
(See above, pp. 336-340, for arguments in connection with ethical
discourse in particular.) I argued for the replacement of the notion of
linguistic meaning as a single characteristic by a definition in terms
of a range of activities or uses, for a dispositional account in
general, and for a combination of behavioristic and ideational

approaches as opposed to each taken singly. I argued for the
proposition that meaning cannot be semantically or logically
distinguished from reference and truth, that the nature of symbolic
thought in general and the actual (ostensive) processes whereby we teach
and learn language point to the complexity and richness of our language
in general, and of such conceptions as "objectivity", "reference", and
"truth". On our emerging philosophy of language, indeed, the sharp,
logical borderline between logical and psychological, analytic and
synthetic or experiential, theoretical and practical, meanings or uses
of language or aspects of a linguistic situation breaks down; meaning is
inseparable from use and consists in a dispositional relation between
thinking and acting subjects, signs, and environmental objects;
reference is "showing concern", and truth is "coherence" or consistency
among (referential) expressions.

With the rejection of the correspondent theory, both assumptions
underlying Williams' logical distinction between the scientific and the
ethical have been discredited. (The other related assumption, as we saw
earlier in this section, was the possibility of grasping what is
"independent" from us.) It remains to be shown that, transcendence
beyond the given conceptual system is possible not only in scientific
discourse, but also in ethical. This is basically what Williams is
denying when he challenges the role of theoretical reflection or reason
in attaining to truth and knowledge in ethics. Instead, he falls back
on a notion of moral value as "merely a consolation prize you get if you
are not in worldly terms happy or talented or good-humoured or loved"
(195). If we are to believe that moral value is based on more than
luck, that moral considerations concerning, e.g., the fundamental right

to the fruit of one's productive labor, the keeping of promises, gratitude, and the like can at least *prima facie* override personal and private consideration, we need to show that there is a necessary relation between the immanent and the transcendent in ethics, that there are rational constraints built into any system of values deserving praise and capable of moral progress, much in the same way as there are rational criteria according to which a scientific practice is accepted and further improved.

In order to deal with this question we can attend to the syntactic rules and to the idea of language as a symbolic system. We may understand syntactics by contrasting it with semantics. As we have suggested several times, syntax and sematics may be viewed as two dimensions of the meaning of sentences in general; they concern respectively the combination of words in sentences (and sentences in the whole of an argument or conversation) according to syntactic rules, and the relation of the sentences in which the words may occur to (possible or actual) facts according to semantic rules. This difference accounts for the fact that compared to their semantic force or their possible connection with facts, so-called "belief sentences" such as "She believes that there is a God" have a relatively unproblematic syntax. (Cf. D. Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", *Synthese*, 17 (1967), 308.)

According to Austin, "explaining the syntactics" of a word such as "racy" consists in giving "examples of sentences in which one might use the word *racy*, and of others in which one should not." ("The Meaning of a Word", *loc. cit.*, 57.) Two points seem to be suggested here. The first is that insofar as syntactics are concerned, it is the sentence, not a single word, which is the unit of meaning and with which a

"complete" speech act is performed. The second point is that language is a system of symbols interconnected according to certain specifiable rules which restrict the number of the possible patterns of sentences which can be constructed. For instance, the sentence "Run us let" would be meaningless, since it would be an illegitimate form or pattern of combination of the verbs "run" and "let" and the pronoun "us".

Syntactic meaning, then, is a function of the rule-governed relations among linguistic symbols in sentences. Of course, a sentence is made up of more basic units, words, and single words are often used outside sentences without any loss of sense. But the point is that meaning in cases where we use single words presupposes the use of single words in sentences. Thus when I say "Run" on observing the first signs of thunderstorm, I do something which you can understand only if you know the meaning or use of such sentences as "It is time to run", "Let us run, or we will be trapped in rain", and the like. The reason I do not use these ("complete") sentences and instead use the single word (or the sentence consisting of the single word) "Run" is most likely that there are sufficient signs in the environment or the context of utterance to make the utterance of such sentences superfluous. (In general, in situations involving signs (which are relatively strong or short-range or their signified object is not highly interesting or serious (5.2.)), in "informal" conversations, games, in ceremonious activities, and in poetry, and the like, single words and "incomplete" sentences serve to get the point or purpose across in an effective and often insightful manner.) Nevertheless, with the utterance of "Run" I have used something which receives its force in part from the syntactic qualities of language—the system of symbols which is a combination of

sentences in a conversation or argument. This can be seen by noticing what happens when, to continue with the example, upon uttering the word (or the single-word sentence) "Run" I see a look of puzzlement on your face; to make the meaning clear, I would most likely utter one or more of the above sentences. In other words, we cannot clarify our usages and reasons in such contexts without to some extent shifting toward a different approach, the approach taken in "formal" or, more accurately, technical contexts of, e.g., scientific discourse or mathematics which usually require the use of "complete" sentences.

As we saw above, syntactic or inter-symbolic considerations, the fact that meaningful discourse is one which has a systematic character, is in part responsible for the complexity of ostensive processes whereby language is taught and learned, as well as for the ambiguity or opacity of "reference". I suggested that the importance of the inter-symbolic dimension of such general words as "good" and "ought" (indeed any other general word such as "the", "is", and the like) is partly responsible for the mistaken supposition that such words make no contribution to the referent or truth-value of the sentences in which they occur. But, in an obvious sense, insofar as they are predicated of (or in general applied to) objects or facts in the external world and their use is connected with beliefs about the characteristics of those objects or facts (criteria for application), words like "good" and "ought" do refer. Less obviously, they (especially "good") refer to, or imply beliefs about, subjective, mental facts of feeling, desire, interest, and end. (See above, pp. 336ff.) If in the latter respect, not merely in the former, there is a necessary descriptive component in the meaning of "good" and "ought", a "logical" space may indeed be opened in moral

discourse for universalizability and intersubjective consensus, reached rationally and autonomously. For universalization, the taking into account of all actual points of view (a point of view consisting primarily of feelings, desires, and interests), and the rational settlement of moral disputes bear upon beliefs, and it is beliefs that descriptions serve to bring out.

These remarks, of course, already suggest a shift toward semantics and a close relation between syntactic and semantic considerations. But they also suggest that it is possible to transcend beyond the referents or truth-conditions of certain given linguistic judgments in which a stock of words is used, and that such transcendence is due to the syntactic rules of a linguistic system as a whole, whether scientific or ethical. Through these rules we can manipulate our language and imagine or contemplate possible states of affairs. Likewise, confronting new scientific or moral situations in our own world or new communities or world-views, we can locate, through the same manipulation of our language by means of its syntactic resources, those new phenomena in relation to the facts with which we are familiar. In this way, "The sentences which our competence with language – a linguistic *system* – enables us to produce will include some whose truth-conditions transcend our powers of recognition." (S. Lovibond, 75-6. As she points out, this is the Wittgensteinian linguistic counterpart of the Kantian idea, at least according to one interpretation (that of Ralph C.S. Walker), "that we construct the phenomenal world in such a way that not everything contained in it is accessible to our awareness." (77. See also 73.))

The idea of reasoned transcendence beyond a given outlook is bound up with the recognition of those possible states of affairs which can change a community's set of beliefs or outlook, or in any case produce a new set of beliefs. It is the question of "their becoming disposed to make a change in their assignment of truth-values to particular sentences, or to assign a truth-value to a sentence about which they were previously agnostic." (Lovibond, 79.) Now to our assimilation of the ethical to the scientific it might be objected that changes in or production of new moral outlooks happen more slowly than changes in scientific beliefs about the external world (even when such scientific changes occur within a given paradigm or in "normal" scientific practice, to use Kuhn's terms). Related to this, the objection continues, is the fact that moral concepts do not have fixed boundaries, such that moral judgment and consensus are related primarily to decisions and attempts to guide or influence decisions to act, not to mere deliberation or discovery of facts. (*Ibid.*, 79ff.) In these respects, there is no analogy between scientific and moral discourses.

The facts to which the above objection draws our attention, i.e. the relative slowness of change and lack of consensus in moral matters, need not be denied. They are emphasized by the non-cognitivist theories of moral discourse, as we have seen in the previous chapters. What that objection fails to see, however, is that those disanalogies in no way justify the metaphysical or logical distinction we have been considering throughout this thesis. In respect of objectivity, rationality, and transcendence, the disanalogy of the kinds noted between moral and scientific statements "can be maintained without recourse to metaphysics: it can be maintained as a *Phenomenological* distinction;

i.e. a difference in the 'physiognomy' of moral and physical discourse respectively." (Lovibond, 81. See also 68.) To put this insight in different terms, the distinction between scientific and moral discourses is plausible not as a logical distinction, but only as a distinction between the _facts_ of these modes of discourse, the repertoire of terms and concepts used and the objects with which they are concerned: scientific discourse with physical or material objects, moral discourse with mental facts of feeling, desire, preference, end, and the like.

To summarize, we have seen that considerations about truth or reference and the systematic character of discourse may be applicable in an essential way throughout language and not to a specific region, scientific discourse. This conclusion was anticipated in 5.1 and 5.2 where I attempted to formulate a general conception of linguistic meaning or signification which incorporates thought, action, and relation between words and sentences as several dimensions of a total linguistic situation. All meaningful discourse, it was argued, is necessarily related to facts. And as scientific discourse or ordinary descriptive language may be seen as an abstraction resulting from focusing on the referential dimension of a total linguistic situation, so can those utterances which primarily express and evoke attitudes or commend or endorse things or actions in the sense of guiding choices and action be viewed as an abstraction resulting from a focus on the personal aspects of a linguistic situation. In reality both scientific and (first order) ethical statements embody the four factors which we have discerned in the totality of a linguistic or symbolic situation, and neither of these statements may be reduced in their meaning to one or the other factor.

These points contribute to a homogeneous conception of discourse, one which would not only do more justice to the actual practice of ordinary language, but would also enable us to accommodate scientific language. In this way an alternative conception of language has emerged against the non-cognitivist attempts to drive a wedge between linguistic functions, to open a metaphysical or logical gap between the scientific and the moral, and to deny the possibility of meaningful talk about objectivity, truth, rationality, and knowledge in the moral realm. The end-result of such attempts is that the possibility of convergence in moral viewpoints (desires, interests, preferences, and the like) is regarded as a vain hope; science is seen as having a monopoly on truth and on universal consensus.

The analogies between the language of science and that of morals discussed in the course of the previous chapters were further developed in the present one. The differences between them were held to be "phenomenological" differences, in particular a difference between the kinds of facts with which they are primarily concerned, not logical or metaphysical differences. Most importantly, we were led to the conclusion that as rational human beings who participate in shared systems of moral institutions we are also enabled to transcend the limits of our moral outlook. Our reflective (even theoretical) attitude does not require us to sever ourselves from all perspectives and to take the standpoint of the universe, as it were. There is no evidence that we do, or indeed could do, any such thing in science either. To pretend otherwise, as Williams seems in effect to do, to suggest that the only real moral options are, in Lovibond's words, "total defiance" and "total surrender" to moral authority, is "to make the price of deviancy appear

so high that an unreserved incorporation into *Sittlichkeit* will appear inviting by comparison." (Lovibond, 203. Note that the alternative of "universal toleration", recognizing the relativity of values, but leaving things where they were, is (I think rightly) discarded by Williams as a "confused reaction" (159). Of course, this is not the alternative for which I have been arguing. Toleration of the defiant in that sense is consistent both with the defiance and the surrender or co-option; it is as such confused indeed and does not represent a genuine option.)

We may understand non-cognitivism in morals, particularly prescriptivism, as operating under that attitude of "total defiance". The motive behind prescriptive theories is primarily reform and a challenge to the authority of the accepted and traditional moral beliefs. This is a legacy of the Enlightenment and its affirmation of the freedom and the inalienable rights of the individual against (or, at any rate, in contrast to) traditional religious dogmas, often sanctioning hierarchical political structures, which had for a long time dominated mankind's moral perception at the expense of his material well-being. Non-cognitivism may be seen as a reaffirmation of the individual's freedom and his ability to invent new values in the face of the disappearance of the religious morality, especially in a modern world where lonely confrontation with a naked existence and insecurity make nihilism, the subjectivist revolt against all forms of life, and the will to power (hence, totalitarian tyranny) even more attractive in some eyes and more of a real danger than they were two or three centuries ago. In many ways the challenge introduced by the Enlightenment *philosophes* is laudable indeed. Much of the appeal of our

modern "democracies" rests indeed on the fact that in spite of much inequity, both within advanced capitalist countries and throughout the world under the impact of capitalism, individual rights are upheld and defended significantly under the law. But that inequity is reason for thinking that the Enlightenment affirmation of individual freedom, in the unqualified sense of mere absence of hindrance to action or the expression of opinion, having served its historical function, can no longer be regarded as the supreme value or the core of morality in our world. It is not surprising that such a view of morality indeed fails to transcend the limits of positive laws, however important those laws may be for the preservation of the moral fabric of societies. And it is in the same way that, as was suggested above, it cannot pose a serious challenge to the totalitarian rule of the powerful. For both non-cognitivism and totalitarianism underestimate our rational powers in defending or (re-)evaluating our values, and make it possible for the exercise of legal and political authority to mask the individual's (or the nation's) search for power and advantage over others. The rise of fascism in Europe and the atrocities committed by super-powers in the underdeveloped and developing parts of the world (indeed even in their own nations, in relation to certain minority-groups) in this century are examples, in extreme form, of the dangers of taking freedom to be the core of morality.

But other than its doctrine of individual rights and liberties, there was in the Enlightenment thought a very strong rationalistic tendency, reflected in its emphasis on (conventional) social interests and culture, as opposed to "natural" self-interest. Diderot, e.g., at times insisted that morality, although it is based on social

conventions, is natural for human beings. For all his individualism,

Locke affirmed that even the "state of nature" is bound by a rational

and moral order on which the well-being of social individuals rests.

And Rousseau's "general will" and Marx's communism were tributes to

human rationality. However, it remained more or less for later

generations to work out in detail the epistemological and linguistic

foundations on which reason, already rendered devoid of a *telos* or a

divine origin, could coexist with nature, a community could be formed

which did not compromise the rightful and legitimate interests of

certain of its individuals or minorities. The theories which have come

to be known as utilitarianism strived toward the integration of the

individual into the community. But they often inherited, and still hold

to, certain narrow metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions as

well as conceptions of language and meaning. For instance, Hare

attempts to establish a preference-satisfaction version of

utilitarianism, while advocating prescriptivism as a thesis about the

meaning of ethical language. (See especially *Moral Thinking*.) But

prescriptivism and preference-utilitarianism imply a special view of

language in general, and evaluative language in particular, which

resists the idea of universalizability or "community", because, as was

pointed out earlier, "preference" or "choice" is just not the kind of

thing which could be shared with others; it is a deeply individualistic

notion which does not in itself imply belief. Prescriptivism and its

sister-doctrine of "scepticism" (see 4.3) tell us, indeed, that nothing

can be good or desirable "objectively", that values are not in the

world, and that even if they were, we could not know them, that the

languages of good and obligation (different as they may be, in view of

the concepts and terms which they employ) are not as such truth-
functional, that they do not as such lend themselves to rational dispute
and will-formation.

The view put forward in this thesis will hopefully show that we
may preserve the utilitarian or the Enlightenment aspiration to
integrate the individual into the society without accepting some of the
theories which are proposed for that purpose. I cannot go into the
details of utilitarian theories of morality, their merits and
weaknesses. I have only tried to show how, because of certain
theoretical (and, I am afraid, practical, for the two are intertwined)
biases, fundamentally libertarian-elitist biases, such attempts may fail
to accomplish what they seek, and how they may indeed leave ample room
for the possibility of abuse and manipulation of those same individual
interests and freedoms which they attempt to safeguard. On the view I
have been defending, we can affirm *prima facie* the reality and the
knowledge of the good and of obligation, we can preserve the validity of
a form of life, while rejecting a close-minded and self-referential
subservience to, or authoritarian imposition of, that form of life, as
well as an egoistic and nihilistic revolt against it. On our view,
alternative moral values (whether material values or "higher" values of
thought and artistic creativity, and the like) can be compared in
respect of rationality and worth, and hence any truly open attitude
towards other values, whether of other cultures or of sub-groups within
the same community, goes hand in hand with rational assessment of or
critical reflection upon one's own values as well as those of others in
the light of new experience, experience in relation both to the physical
and to the social and cultural world. (On p. 185 I offered the

criterion of productive labor for rational comparison of values. On
that criterion, values or available resources (i.e. goods and services--
both material, such as health care, food and housing, and cultural, such
as education) are distributed on the basis of the amount of productive
labor--labor which is the free expression and development of one's power
and skill and which does not place impediments on similar labor on the
part of others. This seems to be the cornerstone of any modern
community worthy of moral praise.) I have suggested that in this way
global harmony, coexistence, or unification (which does not mean
uniformity) of various interest groups becomes a real possibility.
Future generations too can be included as one sort of interest group,
though only insofar as their interests are reasonably clear to us.
Indeed man's relation to his physical environment (including his body)
and to other animals too is right and meaningful insofar as it is
rational, insofar as it does not promote the interests of culture at the
expense of physical and animal nature, or *vice versa*. In this way the
empirical or historical limits of universal consensus turn out to be
just that: empirical or contingent. There are divergent and conflicting
purposes and ends, and we do not always, some of us scarcely, direct our
efforts towards promoting the well-being of all. Temporary or even
permanent lack of moral considerations may prevent universal moral
consensus. But there seem to be no necessary barriers to it, nothing in
the nature of things which could prevent it in a community of thinking
and acting rational human beings, and there seems to be enough of it
already in our social practices (reflected in and influenced by our
language as a whole) to make the hope for its wider realization a
reasonable one.

Conclusion

I have been arguing that if scientific rationality in the sense of "concern" with or for facts, past, present, or future, is an explicit or implicit aspect of most uses of language and if universalizability underlies in a more or less latent form almost all linguistic expressions, then the claim as to the dichotomy between the logic of scientific and ethical discourses turns out to be an *a priori* and indefensible projection of the analyst. That claim is faced with the paradox that the so-called second order statements about the primary or special function or meaning of ethical utterances both are and are not first order evaluative statements. Nor can it explain the presence of extensive agreement about moral questions. To avoid these difficulties, therefore, I have advocated the abandonment of the claim about a logical or formal dichotomy in the light of a study of symbolic activities, particularly language, which shows that scientific rationality in the sense of concern for facts in accordance with universalizable social rules is ubiquitous in language, though only implicit and latent in many of its uses, and is best manifested in words for generic concepts.

Chapter 5 explored the idea of a single core meaning of a sign in general. This was done from the perspective of the philosophy of language and independently of the writings on evaluative or moral discourse. Exploring the various senses, ordinary as well as specialized and technical, in which something is said to be a sign of

something else, some of the possibilities for an account of the core meaning of a sign were considered but ruled out. But a combination of the sophisticated versions of ideational and behavioristic approaches to the question seemed to hold the promise of a formula for the meaning of "sign". So, a definition of "sign" was offered in terms of a set of dispositions out of which a sign-situation could be said to be composed, i.e. (second order) dispositions to produce or activate a relatively constant set of (first order) disposition to feel, think, act, or use other symbols. As a species of sign, all words, whether the so-called evaluative words or scientific ones, seem to combine these dispositions necessarily, and there is no reason to believe that value-terms, even the most general and abstract ones, possess exclusively or even primarily a disposition of a "non-cognitive" or "non-referential" kind.

Our discussion of the speech act theory showed that meaningful linguistic uses could be seen as different illocutionary acts and that descriptive utterances are by no means basic or unique; they result from emphasis on the descriptive element (propositional content) in a linguistic situation, the element which concerns "reference" and which is involved in all illocutionary acts. In other words, there seems to be no unique illocutionary act to which all the others are related as species to a genus, though as a dimension of locutionary acts reference is ubiquitous. The fact that reference and its correlate, descriptivity, underlies all meaningful linguistic acts, and that universalizability is paramount in linguistic usage due to generic terms or general descriptions, ultimately render claims which exclude universalizability from the so-called distinctive or special logic of moral language dubious and objectionable; these claims are objectionable

because they underrate a very significant portion of the totality of a meaningful linguistic situation, a portion which cannot be separated from that totality. Moreover, the speech act theory lends support to the point about the complexity of a linguistic situation. It shows that in a broad sense all meaningful linguistic uses express feelings and attitudes, but in this sense they also express beliefs. In a broad sense, all meaningful linguistic uses influence attitudes—in the sense of securing an uptake and taking effect, but in this sense they also influence feelings and beliefs. In a broad sense, that of inviting a response, all meaningful linguistic uses guide actions, physical as well as symbolic and, in particular, linguistic acts. And as was noted, in a broad sense, all meaningful linguistic acts are referential and involve a descriptive element. To single out the expression and evocation of attitudes (emotivism) or the guiding of action or choice (prescriptivism) as the distinctive or primary meaning or use of moral language is to drive an artificial and indefensible wedge within discourse as a unified whole.

The discussion of signs versus symbols served to throw some light on the autonomous nature of symbolic thought and activity and, as one instance of that activity, language. It was shown that it is neither in producing or activating a mental state of belief, desire, or preference, nor in triggering action that signs could be logically distinguished from symbols, but rather in terms of a distinction between tied and free thinking. It seems to be uncertainty, conflict of claims or disagreement, and the seriousness and the interest which a situation may hold for us as a community that are characteristics of its free or symbolic nature. And this is true not only of moral situations but of

all realms of symbolic thought and activity--science, art, and the like, all those spheres of activity which so vitally depend on the ability to use language. Moreover, the sign-aspect of symbolic thought, the fact that in spite of its essentially free character, symbolic thought is nevertheless tied to sense-experience and hence to the physical nature, supported an earlier thought that it is only as embodied entities and as related to the physical world that we take part in symbolic and social activities and possess the cultural values which we do. Thus, a proper understanding of symbolic thought in terms of the above considerations gives additional support to my objections against the logical dichotomy between ethical and scientific or physical discourses. For in the light of the more fundamental distinction between signs and symbols, that dichotomy appears even more artificial.

The descriptive/ evaluative dichotomy seems to result, though it does not follow in a strictly logical sense, from a narrow conception of semantics or truth-value of statements and ostensive definition which is essential for demonstrating and learning meanings. But the ostensive process is not necessarily the simple, ceremonious process of pointing to objects in the environment and uttering such sentences as "This is so-and-so". Indeed, we do not always hear or see signs (marks or sounds) in conjunction with the objects they are meant to refer to. Nor are those objects always present; ostensive definition may require an effort of imagination. And sentences of the kind "This is so-and-so" are by no means typical in the ostensive process. Nor is it true that with each word the ostensive process is something which occurs once and for all. It involves essentially showing concern for or directing attention to certain features singled out of a rich environment and in

the context of the use of other linguistic or non-linguistic symbols.
The complexity of ostensive process seems to be the correlative of the
vagueness and ambiguity of such notions as "meaning", "reference",
"truth", and "objectivity". And the "reference" of a word seems hardly
a matter merely of its "correspondence" with an object in the external
world (most obviously so in religious "discourse" which is perhaps the
only discourse that may be completely autonomous and independent of
sense experience); it is tied up with a whole set of factors:
psychological states, physical action, and the use of other symbols.
The (logical) dichotomy between evaluative and descriptive utterances
seems to go hand in hand with the ignorance of these complexities.

The autonomous character of symbolic acts seems to be related
both to the tendency in language to concentrate on and single out
certain features of the objects or the subject-matter and to the rise of
generic words and theories. For these are fruits of a "practical" or
"constructive" element in symbolic thought. If all language is
practical in this sense, and if all significant locutions are, in the
wide senses explained (and not in the narrow senses intended by
prescriptivism and emotivism), descriptive, prescriptive, expressive,
and evocative, if these dimensions are dispositionally related to and
inseparable from one another, then the difference between various uses
of language turns out to be not logical or formal, but a difference
dependent on the extent to which the speakers are prepared to bring the
implicit rational, i.e. referential and universalistic, tendencies of
language to bear upon a particular situation. The analogies between
scientific and moral language and method discussed in the previous
chapters served to further strengthen this argument.

To single out the prescriptive or evocative aspect of the totality of a linguistic situation as most important is not, of course, logically inconsistent with accepting the thesis of universalizability. Thus, for instance, in combining universalizability and prescriptivism as two logical features of moral language, Hare does not commit a logical fallacy. Nor is universalizability logically inconsistent with taking the expression and evocation of attitudes to be the primary function of moral discourse. Emotivism is not criticized for a logical mistake either. The criticisms directed against emotivism and prescriptivism are put forward with respect to our actual linguistic practice in general, and moral discourse in particular. They are meant to bring out an individualistic tendency in these theories which in turn results from a failure to do justice to the complexity and dignity of a moral standpoint. That complexity has to do with the richness and the multi-dimensional character of moral language, and that dignity with the fact that moral language seems in principle universalizable, that it seems both practically and logically possible to reach and preserve global rational consensus which would promote the well-being of all.

This is why emotivism and prescriptivism were criticized for placing artificial constraints of both logical and practical nature on universalizability and thereby on genuine consensus. And this they do by drawing a sharp logical boundary-line between scientific or descriptive language on the one hand and ethical language on the other, and hence by excluding universalizability and convergence from the logic of moral discourse. This carving of language into descriptive and evaluative halves is in part reflected in the fact that emotivism and prescriptivism, in general the so-called "non-cognitivist" metaethical

theories, capitalize on conflicts and their resolution through methods which aim at influencing attitudes or guiding choices and actions. It is indeed a fashionable view that conflict is somehow intrinsic to and part of the "nature" of moral life, that, in MacIntyre's terms, moral views are or have become "incommensurable" and moral disputes "interminable" or rationally unsettleable. But here again we must note that conflict is far from absent in other discourses such as science and art. To be sure, in science experience does not always conform to a particular theoretical scheme. But recalcitrant data do not always or even most of the time lead to the wholescale change of a scientific paradigm. In the same way, moral problems do not always require decisions as to whether a general principle or rule must be preserved or revised in the light of new situations. Decisions about principles of conduct or choices of standards are no more important in moral discourse than they are in scientific; to hold the contrary, as Hare's and Mackie's prescriptivism does, calls for argument.

Emotivism, on the other hand, does not even find any room for principles in its second order statement about the logical status or the primary meaning or use of moral judgments. Here conflict is held to be between attitudes, as distinct from beliefs, and its resolution is achieved essentially or primarily through persuasive methods. But here too no argument seems to be forthcoming.

Apart from its failure to do justice to the complexity of a total linguistic situation, the emphasis on persuasion to resolve conflicts of attitudes or on egocentric commendation to guide decisions about the principles which conflict either with one another or with new situations, makes the conjunction of freedom and reason appear in some

cases paradoxical, though perhaps not self-contradictory. The cases in question are those in which persuasion, being non-rational, becomes coercive and manipulative, or where decision or choice is not backed up by reasons.

To be sure, the freedom expressed in symbolic thought or activity seems to be responsible as much for the role symbols play in bringing forth common fulfillment as in being a source of alienation and dehumanization. If this is true, persuasion or egocentric commendation need not always be manipulative and coercive. The risk remains, however, and the emphasis on the non-rational aspects of language or methods of reaching agreement does nothing to diminish that risk. As Mary Douglas has pointed out, there is a "dangerous backlash in symbolic experience of which we should beware." (*Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, 182.) This occurs, she says, when symbols are imposed externally and in the strict form of "purity rules" which demand obedience to, e.g., a bureaucratic order. But, as we saw in Chapter 5, the autonomy of symbolic thought is in essence related to rationality, i.e. to the concern for facts and universalism. Moreover, freedom and rationality are, as we have seen, qualities of the members of a community who participate in a variety of rule-governed, symbolic activities, in particular language as a whole. Hence, *a fortiori*, as long as we use language to make and defend either first order scientific or second order normative statements, any further "logical" distinction is bound to be artificial. Given these, moral disagreements could be rationally settled and morality would seem to be on the right track as long as we recognized and implemented that essential relation between autonomy and rationality, for if we did not, we would tend to engage in

a self-defeating use of freedom (or, more accurately, use of the symbolic expressions of freedom in, e.g., ordinary language, art, science, and religion) against freedom; we would tend to deprive ourselves of the grasp of the desires and interests of all.

In 4.1. I argued for the exclusion of (moral) "ideals" from the list of the psychological facts with which, I suggested, moral discourse is primarily concerned. It seemed that unless ideals are associated with interests and needs, there is no room for them in our model. As Dewey remarks, "every ideal is preceded by an actuality; but the ideal is more than a repetition in inner image of the actual. It projects in securer and wider and fuller form some good which has been previously experienced in a precarious, accidental, fleeting way." (*Human Nature and Conduct*, 23.) Religious ideals hold a unique position, however, for the "object" of a religious belief transcends everything with which we are familiar in our world. But the importance of religious beliefs or ideals for morality as such seems to depend on the extent to which, whether of Buddhism, of Christianity, or of Islam, such ideals are capable of promoting in essence (not in catch-words perhaps) a sense of community and the universal interests of humanity. Although we have witnessed in history and still are confronted with conflicts among religious ideals or between religious and political or social ends, there does seem to be a core moral force in all such ideals which concerns the interests of humanity at large. If this is correct, those conflicts too stem not from something in the nature of religious ideals and beliefs, but for the most part from ignorance of facts, failure of imagination, and lack of sympathetic understanding of other people's interests and needs--in short, from the failure of morality. And the

downfall of morality, whether or not related to institutionalized religions, has always been the subversion of rationality, for, as I have suggested, moral discourse seems to be nothing but a discourse about desires and ends based on universalizable reasons.

It might be claimed that to speak of the universalizability of moral discourse is to hold to absolutism, in the sense that moral rules are unconditional and exceptionless. But this claim ignores the suggestion made throughout this thesis that universalizability is a principle with regard to which we organize our intersubjective relationships. As we have seen especially in the context of Hare's views, it is sometimes necessary to make exceptions to our rules in the light of experience and to modify them by accommodating these exceptions. (Such rules, of course, would turn out to be only "general", not "universal". In principle, however, moral rules are universalizable, in the senses explained in Chapter 4.) And universalizability does not entail the denial of the fact that there is much conflict between various moral dispositions, between impartiality and friendship, loyalty to family and to a nation, truthfulness and utility, and the like. Moral life is often, though not always or even primarily, the domain of conflict of claims and obligations within the individuals and between them, as well as cultural and international conflicts. Nor does universalizability entail the denial of the relative slowness of change in moral concepts and lack of universal consensus in moral matters.

The charge of absolutism is most likely motivated by the belief that somehow conflicts and hence decisions about fundamental principles and rules or persuasive methods of resolving conflicts between

particular judgments primarily constitute the logic of moral discourse. That charge could also underlie a confusion of "neutrality" in the sense of transcending all perspectives with universalizability as a requirement invoked in an attempt to subject our prevailing norms of thought and action to critical and rational scrutiny in the light of alternative and anomalous values which belong to sub-groups within our own community or to other communities. I have argued, on the other hand, that the force of moral discourse derives in general from the fact that the future is essentially unpredictable and indeterminable and that we, as members of communities with prevailing rational norms of behavior, have serious and vital interest in the realization of the objects of our desires and ends. And such a view indeed entails the denial of the absolutist claim that moral problems can be resolved in advance of experience by a single overriding principle of right or wrong, that for such a resolution no new considerations are needed. But this is evidence for the formal identity between scientific and moral discourses and hence the claim that moral discourse is, like scientific discourse, in principle universalizable; it is not evidence of a formal or metaphysical difference. The charge of absolutism, on the other hand, seems to stem from undue emphasis on conflicts in connection with moral discourse and the related premise about the dichotomy between science and morals, or from the confusion between universalizability and neutrality. It is against the background of that emphasis or confusion that universalizability takes on the air of absolutism.

It is worth noting that the denial of absolutism commits us neither to the acceptance of "pluralism" or "relativism" (that any decision of principle or way of life is as "valid" or morally justified

as any other, because none lends itself to considerations as to its truth or rationality) nor to the denial of diversity. As Stuart Hampshire has pointed out (though in a somewhat different context), "That there should be an abstract ethical ideal, the good for men in general, is not inconsistent with there being great diversity in preferred ways of life, even among men living at the same place at the same time." (*Morality and Conflict*, 39.) The diversity of desires, beliefs, and practices is not only desirable (if we wish to avoid the boredom, not to mention the oppressiveness of "uniformity"), it is in principle compatible with their unity in the sense of their peaceful coexistence and not "uniformity". The universalistic morality defended here is, as it were, a regulative maxim which can be supported by attending to the cognitive or referential dispositions inherent in the linguistic expressions of desires and beliefs about desires. As such it entails neither absolutism nor uniformity.

It might be insisted that a universalistic morality is, if not absolutism, at least a sort of utopian dream. For, it might be said (especially by non-cognitivists) that if universalization is only a matter of principle, then there is *no de facto* necessity to adopt it and to guide one's conduct and thought by it. There is an air of "positivism" and "conservatism" about this objection. Of course, in the (fluttering) light of the dogma of value-free apprehension of facts and truths, rationality in moral discourse as concern for the facts of desire, interest, and belief, as well as external facts and universalizability would be too fanciful a picture to be taken seriously, a mere projection of one's subjective hopes and wishes. And the positivistic minded opponent may rest content with rationality as he

finds it, as instrumental "success" or, at best, consent to moral authority. But it is necessary to bring to his attention the not too unfamiliar point that in spite of their instrumental "success", common-sense or ordinary so-called "descriptive" language and even the most carefully tested scientific hypotheses are not, as we have seen, devoid of subjective and practical elements. Related to this point is the fact that in scientific discourse in particular, the notion of what supports or falsifies a given theory, the notion of "evidence", in part depends on the scientist's interest in preserving the coherence of the theory. It is its accuracy, consistency, and comprehensiveness, as well as imagination, in short rationality, that has made science so successful. The positivist, then, would be faced with the alternatives of either denying this point or accepting it but at the same time drawing a sharp logical line between scientific and moral discourses. In either case he would have to proceed *a priori* and without reasons, for the former alternative is by now inadmissible to those with more adequate understanding of scientific method, and the latter alternative is, I have tried to argue, indefensible.

A more direct response to the conception of rationality as instrumental success would have to point out that the notion of "success" is very ambiguous; whose success and which means are in question? Even when means are "rational" in bringing about the desired ends of some, both the means and the ends themselves stand in need of justification. Acquiescence in the face of authority too, though it may be better than irrational defiance, is by no means always the right or rational thing to do. For these reasons, moral discourse often begins exactly where the positivistic minded sceptic leaves off.

Instead of intellectual doubt and lack of conviction in what he calls a utopian ideal, perhaps simultaneously with this doubt, the sceptic might campaign actively against the realization of the "ideal" by hiding evidence from others and perhaps from himself as well, the evidence of his own and other people's beliefs and desires. In this way, our failure to achieve the "ideal" becomes the self-fulfilling prophesy of some (pragmatic) sceptics. To say this is not to be unfair to the sceptic. For, although it does not follow from his lack of conviction in our "ideal" of rationality that he will take active measures to frustrate its realization, nevertheless this seems to be the danger involved in scepticism. For taking a dogmatic attitude toward facts, the sceptic is not likely to be satisfied with his own grasp of them, because language and in general symbolic acts are not mirrors in which the inner and the outer worlds are reflected; the "referential" component of linguistic meaning is not the same as "correspondence". Failing with facts, the sceptic is likely to fall back on choice and action or some sort of intuitive feeling of what the moral world is about. He might glorify action at the expense of thought. But with actions, says Chekhov's protagonist in *A Boring Story*, "everything is conditional. Tell me what you want and I will tell you what you are." (*Lady With Lapdog and Other Stories*, 101.) At least we may say, in conformity with the argument of this thesis, that the non-cognitivist's focus on actions or decisions to act or on influencing attitudes, as distinct from describing or expressing beliefs about attitudes (motives, interests, desires, and the like) as well as their origins and likely consequences, rests on an implausible conception of language in general, and that it is bound to render a distorted picture of what moral

discourse is about. Nor can it explain the fact that we usually do, to some significant degree, have agreement. In effect, emphasis on the expression and evocation of attitudes, on choice, or on decision and action seems to turn consensus into more or less an accidental matter of harmony between individual choices or actions, or one which is imposed externally, not rationally or autonomously. In fact the sceptic is half-conscious of all this, though, knowing that persuasive or choice- or action-guiding use of language is far from adequate with respect to empirical and analytic truths, he fastens upon morality (or sometimes "metaphysics" and aesthetics) as the realm in which that use plays an essential role.

But the sceptic is far from capable of vindicating the claims which we have examined in the previous chapters and I have been here attributing to him, because in effect he tends to isolate himself not only from the fact or the actual practice of moral language in all its complexity, but also from its relation to rationality. This he does by ruling the descriptive dimension of language and the related principle of universalizability out of the logic of moral discourse. And for the same reason, his views tend to leave open the possibility (though without strictly entailing) that the freedom which language as a symbolic act avails be exploited against other expressions of that same freedom, i.e., against the autonomous pursuit of one's desires and ends in harmony with those of others.

Chapter 1

1. Of course, these remarks are made by Mackie in the context of his discussion and criticism of "universalization". But they seem to be general enough to support my interpretation of Mackie's position on the nature of the distinction between first order and second order moral views or statements in general. That interpretation is at least consistent with Mackie's overall position on the special meaning or force of moral language which, as I will attempt to show in Chapter 4, is essentially prescriptivistic.

2. Such terms express concepts which Bernard Williams has referred to as "thick concepts" in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

3. The phrase "partiality for reason" is used by Jürgen Habermas in his *Legitimation Crisis*, 142f.

Chapter 2

1. Stevenson uses both the conjunction "attitudes and feelings" and the disjunction "attitudes or feelings". (See for example, pp. 71 and 79.) Both these seem harmless provided that they are used with care. "Attitudes or feelings" must not be taken to imply the identification of attitude with feeling, for attitude, as we saw above, is in part a <u>disposition</u> to feel. So the disjunction is simply meant to show that emotive meaning may include in part a (first order) disposition to express and evoke feelings, and in part a (second order) disposition to express and evoke attitudes. (See p. 60. It is this combination of first and second order dispositions that Stevenson seems to think is involved in ethical discourse.) "Attitudes and feelings" should be taken to serve the same purpose, unless the emotive meaning includes only a (second order) disposition to express and evoke attitudes, in which case "feelings" becomes superfluous, or if it includes only a disposition to feelings (as with "interjections"), in which case reference to attitudes becomes unnecessary.

Chapter 4

1. See also "What is a Speech-Act" in M. Black, ed., *Philosophy in America*, 238.

2. The sense in which Searle uses "subjectiveness" here should not be confused with the ontological sense that (moral) values are not extra-mental entities which belong to the nature of things in the external world, but are subjective or mental. More will be said about this alternative sense of subjectivity in the next section in connection with Mackie's rejection of "objectivism" concerning values. Searle's target turns out to be, I think, what I have referred to as prescriptivism in the narrow sense of a theory about the core meaning or use of ethical language which privileges decisions or choices. Both Hare and Mackie, I have tried to show, propound such a theory.

Chapter 5

1. Lovibond also holds that a specific view of language is presupposed by empiricism: language is conceived as an instrument for the communication of thought, and as such logically posterior to thought. (17-19.) It may be wrong to maintain that thought is prior to language. But this does not seem to me to render the view of language as an instrument false. Language, as will be shown in the next section, is an instrument both for thinking and for communication. And while Lovibond's argument that a conception of language as an instrument for the communication of thought "reflects an attempt to understand natural language on the model of a scientific calculus or symbolism" (18) may be sound, the view of language as an instrument of thought and communication need not underlie the attempt to impose the calculus-model on ordinary language. That the rules of ordinary language are not so exact as the calculus-model would have it, does not by itself undermine the instrumental conception (cf. 28). For further remarks in this connection, see 5.2, below.

2. It is, as we shall see, this objective aspect which confers constancy on meaning (whether linguistic or not). And this is in turn due perhaps to the fact that linguistic and other social institutions are spatio-temporal phenomena; they are embodiments of the human mind. Cf. Lovibond, 29-30 and 82-3.

3. On this point, I am indebted to Lovibond's insights in the final sections of her book.

4. Here again Lovibond's book, referred to above, is particularly insightful. See especially 42-3, where she regards her reconstructed Wittgensteinian conception of language as capable of "levelling up" evaluative and scientific discourses in respect of truth, assertability, rationality, and objectivity. More will be said on these topics in the course of this chapter.

5. A similar philosophy is developed by Lovibond. Her insights, however, are based mainly on Wittgenstein's "homogeneous" conception of language. (Cf., e.g., 25, 36, & 42.) As my references to Lovibond indicate, the thesis presented here is essentially similar to that conception and to Lovibond's own "moral realism" derived from it. (However, see note 1, Ch. 5.)

6. In *Symbol and Reality: Studies in the Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, 130-2, Carl H. Hamburg points to studies done by C.W. Mills (sociologist), Kurt Goldstein (psychologist), and Benjamin Lee Whorf (linguist) which confirm the view that language is a "construction" and is essential for the possession of concepts, ideals, and for action. It is not a mere mirror image of the external world or the expression of inner "ideas". Whorf, e.g., concludes: "We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or can be calibrated." (Quoted by Hamburg from Whorf's *Four Articles in Metalinguistics*, Washington, DC, (undated), 5.) The sense in which our linguistic backgrounds can be, indeed already are in a latent manner, "calibrated" and our "pictures of the universe" can converge has, I suggest, to do with pragmatic rules of language and their universalizability, as I will explain.

7. *How to do things with Words*, 103, 119, 121. As was suggested earlier, in 3.1., it is strictly speaking perlocutionary <u>effects</u>, not perlocutionary acts, that are non-conventional. Likewise, Searle asks us to imagine the "convention" of always making the noise BANG in order to cause each other pain. In such a case, he says, the conventional device would be one to achieve a natural effect, an effect which could be achieved independently of any convention. (*Speech Acts*, 39.) In this connection, the term "natural" seems ambiguous, though by no means inappropriate. For, as was suggested earlier, the capacity to use language or symbols in general may well be a natural capacity without being reducible to physical causality. Siding with Austin and Wittgenstein, Searle regards his analysis in terms of rules or the "institutional theories of communication" as a <u>deviation</u> from naturalistic theories of meaning, "those which rely on a stimulus-response account of meaning". (*Ibid.*, 71.) But the dispositional analysis offered in this thesis is not inconsistent with the rule-governed or conventional nature of language. (See below for further on this.) Moreover, holding to a "naturalistic" view of this sort may serve to remove the puzzle in what Searle regards as an "extraordinary fact", namely that different human languages are intertranslatable in virtue of being "different conventional realizations of the same underlying rules." (40.)

8. In this connection, Austin gives the interesting example of a man just after he has died. In such a case, it is possible to say that the man is neither at home nor not at home. ("The Meaning of a Word", *Philosophical Papers*, 67-9.) This example also shows, as we shall see, that true or false statements are idealized extensions of what in most

cases is merely a more or less rough description. (See also *How to do things with Words*, 143ff.)

9. See Searle, *Speech Acts*, 42: (1) with rule-governed behavior "we generally recognize deviations from the pattern as somehow wrong or defective"; (2) rule-governed behavior, unlike behavior based on inductive "regularity" in experience, "automatically covers new cases. Confronted with a case he has never seen before, the agent knows what to do." It is because of (1) that we either reject exceptions as wrong or extend our rules to accommodate them, and it is (2) that makes learning and teaching the behavior possible. Concerning the way in which deviations from institutional rules are considered wrong, see also Lovibond, 54-65.

10. Hare is very adamant on this. In his recent book *Moral Thinking*, he regards it as "intellectual sloth" to refuse to extend the considerations relevant in cases of conflict to cases of different sort. (39.) It is ironic that his own discussion of the cases he appeals to in order to defend utilitarianism against some objections (Chapter 8) attests to the relative scarcity of conflicts, a premise on which I have based my objections to his prescriptivism.

11. In the context of social and political philosophy, a similar view is advocated by Charles Taylor who writes: "political theories are not about independent objects in the way that theories are in natural science. There the relation of knowledge to practice is that one applies what one knows about causal powers to particular cases, but the truths about such causal powers that one banks on are thought to remain unchanged. That is the point of saying that theory here is about an independent object. In politics on the other hand, accepting a theory can itself transform what that theory bears on." (*Social Theory as Practice*, 12.) Thus the relevance of theory to practice is necessary in political theory, but merely contingent in science. Social scientific theories cannot "simply be *applied* in practice; they affect practice only in shaping or informing it." (27.) The verificationist overtones of these remarks cannot pass unnoticed. It is also interesting that Taylor, like Williams, is in general very sceptic about theoretical reflection in social and political sciences.

12. There is a tendency in this passage and indeed throughout Cassirer's writings, and after him in S.K. Langer's, to underrate the "mental" aspect of what we referred to as "sign-cognition" in the previous section, a form of thinking which other animals share with us. On another occasion Cassirer writes: "Only symbolic expression can yield the possibility of prospect and retrospect because it is only by symbols that distinctions are not merely made, but fixed in consciousness." (*Ibid.*, 38.) But conceptual processes and memory are not so much absent in other animals as intimately tied to sensation, and therefore it is not only symbolic or free thought that is capable of "prospect and retrospect", but also sign-cognition and hence the kind of thinking commonly, and perhaps correctly, assumed to be characteristic of animals. What animals lack is the capacity to think in or with symbols, though even that is disputable. For a strong defense of animal

mentality, see, apart from Price's *Thinking and Experience*, Mary
Midgley's *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*, especially Ch. 10.

13. In that paper, having challenged the hard and fast
distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, Quine goes on to
say: "the abstract entities which are the substance of mathematics--
ultimately classes and classes of classes and so on up--are another
posit in the same spirit. Epistemologically these are myths on the same
footing with physical objects and gods, neither better nor worse except
for differences in the degree to which they expedite our dealings with
sense experiences." (45.) It is important to note that this statement
concerns the epistemological status of physical and abstract objects.
Nothing that is said here challenges their ontological status. As I
have argued, there must be some connection, however remote, between even
the most general and abstract words and the physical and mental worlds,
though this connection is by no mean "correspondence". The mistaken
assumption that for every word or symbol there must be a corresponding
object or fact in the world, together with a relative neglect of that
dimension of symbolic activity which concerns the interconnection among
symbols (hence the mistaken view that the linguistic unit is a word),
may lead to the denial of the factual aspect of some words.

14. From this consequentialist standpoint, I find Lovibond's
remark that moral concepts "differ from other concepts in that they
alone exhibit the *unconditional* concerns arising out of our vision of an
intrinsically admirable life" (53) puzzling. We may attempt a
reconciliation here by pointing out that from the perspective of a
single unified form of life, what I have taken to represent a genuinely
moral outlook, actions which express and result in universalizable
interests are intrinsically and unconditionally right. But the
essential conceptual difference between consequentialist and
deontological considerations seems to render the bridge between them
implausible.

15. Of course, as Searle suggests, the reference need not be a
"unique description", a phrase which applies to the object uniquely,
such as "The first man to run a mile in under 3 minutes, 53 seconds"; it
may be a "demonstrative presentation", e.g. "That over there", which
more clearly depends on the immediate context or the appropriate
knowledge of the hearer, or it may be a mixture of demonstrative and
descriptive identification. See *Speech Acts*, 86.

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