BLOOMSBURY REVELATIONS

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

AFTER VIRTUE

'A remarkable synthesis, it offers a diagnosis of the present state of moral philosophy which expands into a diagnosis of the present state of modern society.'

RICHARD RORTY

BLOOMSBURY

After Virtue

A Study in Moral Theory

Alasdair MacIntyre

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Contents

Prologue to the Third Edition *After Virtue* After a Quarter of a Century

If there are good reasons to reject the central theses of *After Virtue,* by now I should certainly have learned what they are. Critical and constructive discussion in a wide range of languages—not only English, Danish, Polish, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Italian, and Turkish, but also Chinese and Japanese—and from a wide range of standpoints has enabled me to reconsider and to extend the enquiries that I began in *After Virtue* (1981) and continued in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), and *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), but I have as yet found no reason for abandoning the major contentions of *After Virtue*—'Unteachable obstinacy!' some will say—although I have learned a great deal and supplemented and revised my theses and arguments accordingly.

Central to these was and is the claim that it is only possible to understand the dominant moral culture of advanced modernity adequately from a standpoint external to that culture. That culture has continued to be one of unresolved and apparently unresolvable moral and other disagreements in which the evaluative and normative utterances of the contending parties present a problem of interpretation. For on the one hand they seem to presuppose a reference to some shared impersonal standard in virtue of which at most one of those contending parties can be in the right and yet on the other the poverty of the arguments adduced in support of their assertions and the characteristically shrill, and assertive and expressive mode in which they are uttered suggest strongly that there is no such standard. My explanation was and is that the precepts

that are thus uttered were once at home in, and intelligible in terms of, a context of practical beliefs and of supporting habits of thought, feeling, and action, a context that has since been lost, a context in which moral judgments were understood as governed by impersonal standards justified by a shared conception of the human good. Deprived of that context and of that justification, as a result of disruptive and transformative social and moral changes in the late middle ages and the early modern world, moral rules and precepts had to be understood in a new way and assigned some new status, authority and justification. It became the task of the moral philosophers of the European Enlightenment from the eighteenth century onwards to provide just such an understanding. But what those philosophers in fact provided were several rival and incompatible accounts, utilitarians competing with Kantians and both with contractarians, so that moral judgments, as they had now come to be understood, became essentially contestable, expressive of the attitudes and feelings of those who uttered them, yet still uttered *as if* there was some impersonal standard by which moral disagreements might be rationally resolved. And from the outset such disagreements concerned not only the justification, but also the content of morality.

This salient characteristic of the moral culture of modernity has not changed. And I remain equally committed to the thesis that it is only from the standpoint of a very different tradition, one whose beliefs and presuppositions were articulated in their classical form by Aristotle, that we can understand both the genesis and the predicament of moral modernity. It is important to note that I am not claiming that Aristotelian moral theory is able to exhibit its rational superiority in terms that would be acceptable to the protagonists of the dominant postEnlightenment moral philosophies, so that in theoretical contests in the arenas of modernity, Aristotelians might be able to defeat Kantians, utilitarians, and contractarians. Not only is this evidently not so, but in those same arenas Aristotelianism is bound to appear and does appear as just one more type of moral theory, one whose protagonists have as much and as little hope of defeating their rivals as do utilitarians, Kantians, contractarians.

What then was I and am I claiming? That from the standpoint of an ongoing way of life informed by and expressed through Aristotelian concepts it is possible to understand what the predicament of moral modernity is and why the culture of moral modernity lacks the resources to proceed further with its own moral enquiries, so that sterility and

frustration are bound to afflict those unable to extricate themselves from those predicaments. What I now understand much better than I did twenty-five years ago is the nature of the relevant Aristotelian commitments and this in at least two ways.

When I wrote *After Virtue*, I was already an Aristotelian, but not yet a Thomist, something made plain in my account of Aquinas at the end of chapter 13. I became a Thomist after writing *After Virtue* in part because I became convinced that Aquinas was in some respects a better Aristotelian than Aristotle, that not only was he an excellent interpreter of Aristotle's texts, but that he had been able to extend and deepen both Aristotle's metaphysical and his moral enquiries. And this altered my standpoint in at least three ways. In *After Virtue* I had tried to present the case for a broadly Aristotlian account of the virtues without making use of or appeal to what I called Aristotle's metaphysical biology. And I was of course right in rejecting most of that biology. But I had now learned from Aquinas that my attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do. So I discovered that I had, without realizing it, presupposed the truth of something very close to the account of the concept of good that Aquinas gives in question 5 in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae.*

What I also came to recognize was that my conception of human beings as virtuous or vicious needed not only a metaphysical, but also a biological grounding, although not an especially Aristotelian one. This I provided a good deal later in *Dependent Rational Animals*, where I argued that the moral significance of the animality of human beings, of rational animals, can be understood only if our kinship to some species of not yet rational animals, including dolphins, is recognized. And in the same book I was also able to give a better account of the content of the virtues by identifying what I called the virtues of acknowledged dependence. In so doing I drew on Aquinas's discussion of *misericordia,* a discussion in which Aquinas is more at odds with Aristotle than he himself realized.

These developments in my thought were the outcome of reflection on Aquinas's texts and on commentary on those texts by contemporary

Thomistic writers. A very different set of developments resulted from the stimulus of criticisms of *After Virtue* by those who were in radical disagreement with it. Let me approach their criticisms by beginning from one that seems to result not from a misunderstanding, but from a careless misreading of the text. Because I understand the tradition of the virtues to have arisen within and to have been first adequately articulated in the Greek, especially the Athenian *polis*, and because I have stressed the ways in which that tradition flourished in the European middle ages, I have been accused of nostalgia and of idealizing the past. But there is, I think, not a trace of this in the text. What there is is an insistence on our need to learn from some aspects of the past, by understanding our contemporary selves and our contemporary moral relationships in the light afforded by a tradition that enables us to overcome the constraints on such self-knowledge that modernity, especially advanced modernity imposes.

We are all of us inescapably inhabitants of advanced modernity, bearing its social and cultural marks. So my understanding of the tradition of the virtues and of the consequences for modernity of its rejection of that tradition and of the possibility of restoring it is indeed a peculiarly modern understanding. It is only retrospectively from the standpoint of modernity and in response to its predicaments that we can identify the continuities and discontinuities of the tradition of the virtues, as it has been embodied in a variety of cultural forms. The kind of historical enquiry that I undertook in *After Virtue* only became possible in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Vico was the prophetic originator of that kind of historical enquiry and my own greatest debt in this area was to R. G. Collingwood, although my understanding of the nature and complexity of traditions I owe most of all to J. H. Newman.

What historical enquiry discloses is the situatedness of all enquiry, the extent to which what are taken to be the standards of truth and of rational justification in the contexts of practice vary from one time and place to another. If one adds to that disclosure, as I have done, a denial that there are available to any rational agent whatsoever standards of truth and of rational justification such that appeal to them could be *sufficient* to resolve fundamental moral, scientific, or metaphysical disputes in a conclusive way, then it may seem that an accusation of relativism has been invited. (The word 'accusation' is perhaps out of place, since I have been congratulated on my alleged relativism by those

unable to recognize that those enquiries are in fact condemned to sterility and frustration.

It is of course important that for very, very long periods of time rival traditions of moral enquiry may coexist, as Thomistic Aristotelianism, Madhyamaka Buddhism, and modern European and North American utilitarianism have coexisted, without any one of them having had occasion to take the claims of its rivals seriously, let alone having conducted the kind of enquiry that might issue in one of these traditions suffering rational defeat at the hands of another. And it is also true that such an enquiry may not in fact lead to any definitive outcome, so that the issues dividing those rival traditions may remain undecided. Yet what matters most is that such issues can on occasion be decided and this in a way that makes it evident that the claims of such rival traditions from the outset presuppose the falsity of relativism. As do I and as must any serious enquirer.

Let me turn now to a very different criticism, that of those defenders of liberal and individualist modernity who frame their objections in terms of the liberalism versus communitarian debate, supposing me to be a communitarian, something that I have never been. I see no value in community as such—many types of community are nastily oppressive—and the values of community, as understood by the American spokespersons of contemporary communitarianism, such as Amitai Etzioni, are compatible with and supportive of the values of the liberalism that I reject. My own critique of liberalism derives from a judgment that the best type of human life, that in which the tradition of the virtues is most adequately embodied, is lived by those engaged in constructing and sustaining forms of community directed towards the shared achievement of those common goods without which the ultimate human good cannot be achieved. Liberal political societies are characteristically committed to denying any place for a determinate conception of the human good in their public discourse, let alone allowing that their common life should be grounded in such a conception. On the dominant liberal view government is to be neutral as between rival conceptions of the human good, yet in fact what liberalism promotes is a kind of institutional order that is inimical to the construction and sustaining of the types of communal relationship required for the best kind of human life.

This critique of liberalism should not be interpreted as a sign of any sympathy on my part for contemporary conservatism. That conservatism

is in too many ways a mirror image of the liberalism that it professedly opposes. Its commitment to a way of life structured by a free market economy is a commitment to an individualism as corrosive as that of liberalism. And, where liberalism by permissive legal enactments has tried to use the power of the modern state to transform social relationships, conservatism by prohibitive legal enactments now tries to use that same power for its own coercive purposes. Such conservatism is as alien to the projects of *After Virtue* as liberalism is. And the figure cut by present day conservative moralists, with their inflated and self-righteous unironic rhetoric, should be set alongside those figures whom I identified in Chapter 3 of *After Virtue* as notable characters in the cultural dramas of modernity, that of the therapist, who has in the last twenty years become bemused by biochemical discoveries, that of the corporate manager, who is now mouthing formulas that she or he learned in a course in business ethics, while still trying to justify her or his pretensions to expertise, and that of the aesthete, who is presently emerging from a devotion to conceptual art. So the conservative moralist has become one more stock character in the scripted conversations of the ruling elites of advanced modernity. But those elites never have the last word.

When recurrently the tradition of the virtues is regenerated, it is always in everyday life, it is always through the engagement by plain persons in a variety of practices, including those of making and sustaining families and households, schools, clinics, and local forms of political community. And that regeneration enables such plain persons to put to the question the dominant modes of moral and social discourse and the institutions that find their expression in those modes. It was they who were the intended and pleasingly often the actual readers of *After Virtue*, able to recognize in its central theses articulations of thoughts that they themselves had already begun to formulate and expressions of feeling by which they themselves were already to some degree moved.

In my opening chapter, I alluded to *A Canticle for Leibowitz,* that extraordinary novel by Walter M. Miller, Jr., and in the closing sentences of my final chapter I alluded to that fine poem by Constantine Kavafis, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, over-optimistically expecting both those allusions to be widely recognized. Since they have all too often not been recognized, let me now acknowledge explicitly these and other debts of the imagination, debts as important in their own way as the

intellectual debts acknowledged in the text. I should also make it clear that, although *After Virtue* was written in part out of a recognition of those moral inadequacies of Marxism which its twentieth-century history had disclosed, I was and remain deeply indebted to Marx's critique of the economic, social, and cultural order of capitalism and to the development of that critique by later Marxists.

In the last sentence of *After Virtue* I spoke of us as waiting for another St Benedict. Benedict's greatness lay in making possible a quite new kind of institution, that of the monastery of prayer, learning, and labour, in which and around which communities could not only survive, but flourish in a period of social and cultural darkness. The effects of Benedict's founding insights and of their institutional embodiment by those who learned from them were from the standpoint of his own age quite unpredictable. And it was my intention to suggest, when I wrote that last sentence in 1980, that ours too is a time of waiting for new and unpredictable possibilities of renewal. It is also a time for resisting as prudently and courageously and justly and temperately as possible the dominant social, economic, and political order of advanced modernity. So it was twenty-six years ago, so it is still.

A. M.
2007

Preface

This book emerged from extended reflection upon the inadequacies of my own earlier work in moral philosophy and from a growing dissatisfaction with the conception of 'moral philosophy' as an independent and isolable area of enquiry. A central theme of much of that earlier work (*A Short History of Ethics,* 1966; *Secularisation and Moral Change,* 1967; *Against the Self Images of the Age,* 1971) was that we have to learn from history and anthropology of the variety of moral practices, beliefs and conceptual schemes. The notion that the moral philosopher can study *the* concepts of morality merely by reflecting, Oxford armchair style, on what he or she and those-around him or her say and do is barren. *This* conviction I have found no good reason to abandon; and emigration to the United States has taught me that when the armchair is in Cambridge, Massachusetts, or in Princeton, New Jersey, it functions no better. But at the same time as I was affirming the variety and heterogeneity of moral beliefs, practices and concepts, it became clear that I was committing myself to evaluations of different particular beliefs, practices and concepts. I gave, or tried to give, for example, accounts of the rise and decline of different moralities; and it was as clear to others as it ought to have been to me that my historical and sociological accounts were, and could not but be, informed by a distinctive evaluative standpoint. More particularly I seemed to be asserting that the nature of moral community and moral judgment in distinctively modern societies was such that it was no longer possible to appeal to moral criteria in a way that had been possible in other times and places—and that this was a moral calamity! But to *what* could I be appealing, if my own analysis was correct?

At the same time, ever since the days when I was privileged to be a contributor to that most remarkable journal *The New Reasoner*, I had

been preoccupied with the question of the basis for the moral rejection of Stalinism. Many of those who rejected Stalinism did so by reinvoking the principles of that liberalism in the criticism of which Marxism originated. Since I continued, and continue, to accept much of the substance of that criticism, this answer was not available to me. 'One cannot,' I wrote in responding to the positions then taken by Leszek Kolakowski, 'revive the moral content within Marxism by simply taking a Stalinist view of historical development and adding liberal morality to it' (*New Reasoner* 7, p. 100). Moreover I came to understand that Marxism itself has suffered from grave and harm-engendering moral impoverishment as much because of what it has inherited from liberal individualism as because of its departures from liberalism.

The conclusion which I reached and which is embodied in this book—although Marxism itself is only a marginal preoccupation—is that Marxism's moral defects and failures arise from the extent to which it, like liberal individualism, embodies the *ethos* of the distinctively modern and modernizing world, and that nothing less than a rejection of a large part of that ethos will provide us with a rationally and morally defensible standpoint from which to judge and to act—and in terms of which to evaluate various rival and heterogeneous moral schemes which compete for our allegiance. This drastic conclusion, I need scarcely add, is not to be attributed to those whose generous and just criticism of my earlier work enabled me to understand much, although perhaps as yet not all, of what is wrong with it: Eric John, J. M. Cameron and Alan Ryan. Nor should blame attach for that conclusion to those friends and colleagues whose influence has been continuous for a number of years and to whom I am exceptionally indebted: Heinz Lubasz and Marx Wartofsky.

Two of my colleagues at Boston University read large portions of my manuscript and made many helpful and illuminating suggestions. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Thomas McCarthy and Elizabeth Rapaport. Colleagues elsewhere to whom I am in debt in a variety of ways for similar suggestions are Marjorie Grene and Richard Rorty. For typing and retyping this book I am deeply grateful to Julie Keith Conley, and for several kinds of help in the production of the manuscript I have to thank Rosalie Carlson and Zara Chapin. I am also greatly indebted to the staffs of the Boston Athenaeum and the London Library.

Parts of this book have been read to various groups and their extended critical responses have been most valuable to me. In particular I must

and those contexts which would be needed to make sense of what they are doing have been lost, perhaps irretrievably.

In such a culture men would use expressions such as 'neutrino', 'mass', 'specific gravity', 'atomic weight' in systematic and often interrelated ways which would resemble in lesser or greater degrees the ways in which such expressions had been used in earlier times before scientific knowledge had been so largely lost. But many of the beliefs presupposed by the use of these expressions would have been lost and there would appear to be an element of arbitrariness and even of choice in their application which would appear very surprising to us. What would appear to be rival and competing premises for which no further argument could be given would abound. Subjectivist theories of science would appear and would be criticized by those who held that the notion of truth embodied in what they took to be science was incompatible with subjectivism.

This imaginary possible world is very like one that some science fiction writers have constructed. We may describe it as a world in which the language of natural science, or parts of it at least, continues to be used but is in a grave state of disorder. We may notice that if in this imaginary world analytical philosophy were to flourish, it would never reveal the fact of this disorder. For the techniques of analytical philosophy are essentially descriptive and descriptive of the language of the present at that. The analytical philosopher would be able to elucidate the conceptual structures of what was taken to be scientific thinking and discourse in the imaginary world in precisely the way that he elucidates the conceptual structures of natural science as it is.

Nor again would phenomenology or existentialism be able to discern anything wrong. All the structures of intentionality would be what they are now. The task of supplying an epistemological basis for these false simulacra of natural science would not differ in phenomenological terms from the task as it is presently envisaged. A Husserl or a Merleau-Ponty would be as deceived as a Strawson or a Quine.

What is the point of constructing this imaginary world inhabited by fictitious pseudo-scientists and real, genuine philosophy? The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described. What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme,

parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, or morality.

But how could this be so? The impulse to reject the whole suggestion out of hand will certainly be very strong. Our capacity to use moral language, to be guided by moral reasoning, to define our transactions with others in moral terms is so central to our view of ourselves that even to envisage the possibility of our radical incapacity in these respects is to ask for a shift in our view of what we are and do which is going to be difficult to achieve. But we do already know two things about the hypothesis which are initially important for us if we are to achieve such a shift in viewpoint. One is that philosophical analysis will not help us. In the real world the dominant philosophies of the present, analytical or phenomenological, will be as powerless to detect the disorders of moral thought and practice as they were impotent before the disorders of science in the imaginary world. Yet the powerlessness of this kind of philosophy does not leave us quite resourceless. For a prerequisite for understanding the present disordered state of the imaginary world was to understand its history, a history that had to be written in three distinct stages. The first stage was that in which the natural sciences flourished, the second that in which they suffered catastrophe and the third that in which they were restored but in damaged and disordered form. Notice that this history, being one of decline and fall, is informed by standards. It is not an evaluatively neutral chronicle. The form of the narrative, the division into stages, presuppose standards of achievement and failure, of order and disorder. It is what Hegel called philosophical history and what Collingwood took all successful historical writing to be. So that if we are to look for resources to investigate the hypothesis about morality which I have suggested, however bizarre and improbable it may appear to you now, we shall have to ask whether we can find in the type of philosophy and history propounded by writers such as Hegel and Collingwood—very different from each other as they are, of course—resources which we cannot find in analytical or phenomenological philosophy.

But this suggestion immediately brings to mind a crucial difficulty for my hypothesis. For one objection to the view of the imaginary world which I constructed, let alone to my view of the real world, is that the inhabitants of the imaginary world reached a point where they no longer

realized the nature of the catastrophe which they had suffered. Yet surely an event of such striking world historical dimensions could not have been lost from view, so that it was both erased from memory and unrecoverable from historical records? And surely what holds of the fictitious world holds even more strongly of our own real world? If a catastrophe sufficient to throw the language and practice of morality into grave disorder had occurred, surely we should all know about it. It would indeed be one of the central facts of our history. Yet our history lies open to view, so it will be said, and no record of any such catastrophe survives. So my hypothesis must simply be abandoned. To this I must at the very least concede that it will have to be expanded, yet unfortunately at the outset expanded in such a way as to render it, if possible, initially even less credible than before. For the catastrophe will have to have been of such a kind that it was not and has not been—except perhaps by a very few—recognized as a catastrophe. We shall have to look not for a few brief striking events whose character is incontestably clear, but for a much longer, more complex and less easily identified process and probably one which by its very nature is open to rival interpretation. Yet the initial implausibility of this part of the hypothesis may perhaps be slightly lessened by another suggestion.

History by now in our culture means academic history, and academic history is less than two centuries old. Suppose it were the case that the catastrophe of which my hypothesis speaks had occurred before, or largely before, the founding of academic history, so that the moral and other evaluative presuppositions of academic history derived from the forms of the disorder which it brought about. Suppose, that is, that the standpoint of academic history is such that from its value-neutral viewpoint moral disorder must remain largely invisible. All that the historian—and what is true of the historian is characteristically true also of the social scientist—will be allowed to perceive by the canons and categories of his discipline will be one morality succeeding another: seventeenth-century Puritanism, eighteenth-century hedonism, the Victorian work-ethic and so on, but the very language of order and disorder will not be available to him. If this were to be so, it would at least explain why what I take to be the real world and its fate has remained unrecognized by the academic curriculum. For the forms of the academic curriculum would turn out to be among the symptoms of the disaster whose occurrence the curriculum does not acknowledge.

Most academic history and sociology—the history of a Namier or a Hofstadter and the sociology of a Merton or a Lipset—are after all as far away from the historical standpoint of Hegel and Collingwood as most academic philosophy is from their philosophical perspective.

It may seem to many readers that as I have elaborated my initial hypothesis I have step by step deprived myself of very nearly all possible argumentative allies. But is not just this required by the hypothesis itself? For if the hypothesis is true, it will necessarily appear implausible, since one way of stating part of the hypothesis is precisely to assert that we are in a condition which almost nobody recognizes and which perhaps nobody at all can recognize fully. If my hypothesis appeared initially plausible, it would certainly be false. And at least if even to entertain this hypothesis puts me into an antagonistic stance, it is a very different antagonistic stance from that of, for example, modern radicalism. For the modern radical is as confident in the moral expression of his stances and consequently in the assertive uses of the rhetoric of morality as any conservative has ever been. Whatever else he denounces in our culture he is certain that it still possesses the moral resources which he requires in order to denounce it. Everything else may be, in his eyes, in disorder; but the language of morality is in order, just as it is. That he too may be being betrayed by the very language he uses is not a thought available to him. It is the aim of this book to make that thought available to radicals, liberals and conservatives alike. I cannot however expect to make it palatable; for if it is true, we are all already in a state so disastrous that there are no large remedies for it.

Do not however suppose that the conclusion to be drawn will turn out to be one of despair. *Angst* is an intermittently fashionable emotion and the misreading of some existentialist texts has turned despair itself into a kind of psychological nostrum. But if we are indeed in as bad a state as I take us to be, pessimism too will turn out to be one more cultural luxury that we shall have to dispense with in order to survive in these hard times.

I cannot of course deny, indeed my thesis entails, that the language and the appearances of morality persist even though the integral substance of morality has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed. Because of this there is no inconsistency in my speaking, as I shall shortly do, of contemporary moral attitudes and arguments. I merely pay to the present the courtesy of using its own vocabulary to speak of it.

parents to go where they wish for education. Freedom thus requires not only the existence of private practice in medicine and private schools in education, but also the abolition of those restraints on private practice which are imposed by licensing and regulation by such bodies as universities, medical schools, the A.M.A. and the state.

These arguments have only to be stated to be recognized as being widely influential in our society. They have of course their articulate expert spokesmen: Herman Kahn and the Pope, Che Guevara and Milton Friedman are among the authors who have produced variant versions of them. But it is their appearance in newspaper editorials and high-school debates, on radio talk shows and letters to congressmen, in bars, barracks and boardrooms, it is their typicality that makes them important examples here. What salient characteristics do these debates and disagreements share?

They are of three kinds. The first is what I shall call, adapting an expression from the philosophy of science, the conceptual incommensurability of the rival arguments in each of the three debates. Every one of the arguments is logically valid or can be easily expanded so as to be made so; the conclusions do indeed follow from the premises. But the rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another. For each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept from the others, so that the claims made upon us are of quite different kinds. In the first argument, for example, premises which invoke justice and innocence are at odds with premises which invoke success and survival; in the second, premises which invoke rights are at odds with those which invoke universalizability; in the third it is the claim of equality that is matched against that of liberty. It is precisely because there is in our society no established way of deciding between these claims that moral argument appears to be necessarily interminable. From our rival conclusions we can argue back to our rival premises; but when we do arrive at our premises argument ceases and the invocation of one premise against another becomes a matter of pure assertion and counter-assertion. Hence perhaps the slightly shrill tone of so much moral debate.

But that shrillness may have an additional source. For it is not only in arguments with others that we are reduced so quickly to assertion and counter-assertion; it is also in the arguments that we have within ourselves. For whenever an agent enters the forum of public debate

he has already presumably, explicitly or implicitly, settled the matter in question in his own mind. Yet if we possess no unassailable criteria, no set of compelling reasons by means of which we may convince our opponents, it follows that in the process of making up our own minds we can have made no appeal to such criteria or such reasons. If I lack any good reasons to invoke against you, it must seem that I lack any good reasons. Hence it seems that underlying my own position there must be some non-rational decision to adopt that position. Corresponding to the interminability of public argument there is at least the appearance of a disquieting private arbitrariness. It is small wonder if we become defensive and therefore shrill.

A second, equally important, but contrasting, characteristic of these arguments is that they do none the less purport to be *impersonal* rational arguments and as such are usually presented in a mode appropriate to that impersonality. What is that mode? Consider two different ways in which I may provide backing for an injunction to someone else to perform some specific action. In the first type of case I say, 'Do so-and-so'. The person addressed replies, 'Why should I do so-and-so?' I reply, 'Because I wish it.' Here I have given the person addressed no reason to do what I command or request unless he or she independently possesses some particular reason for paying regard to my wishes. If I am your superior officer—in the police, say, or the army—or otherwise have power or authority over you, or if you love me or fear me or want something from me, then by saying 'Because I wish it' I have indeed given *you* a reason, although not perhaps a sufficient reason, for doing what it is that I enjoin. Notice that in this type of case whether my utterance gives you a reason or not depends on certain characteristics possessed at the time of hearing or otherwise learning of the utterance by you. What reason-giving force the injunction has depends in this way on the personal context of the utterance.

Contrast with this the type of case in which the answer to the question 'Why should I do so-and-so?' (after someone has said 'Do so-and-so') is not 'Because I wish it', but some such utterance as 'Because it would give pleasure to a number of people' or 'Because it is your duty'. In this type of case the reason given for action either is or is not a good reason for performing the action in question independently of who utters it or even of whether it is uttered at all. Moreover the appeal is to a type of consideration which is independent of the relationship between speaker

and hearer. Its use presupposes the existence *of impersonal* criteria—the existence, independently of the preferences or attitudes of speaker and hearer, of standards of justice or generosity or duty. The particular link between the context of utterance and the force of the reason-giving which always holds in the case of expressions of personal preferences or desire is severed in the case of moral and other evaluative utterances.

This second characteristic of contemporary moral utterance and argument, when combined with the first, imparts a paradoxical air to contemporary moral disagreement. For if we attended solely to the first characteristic, to the way in which what at first appears to be argument relapses so quickly into unargued disagreement, we might conclude that there is nothing to such contemporary disagreements but a clash of antagonistic wills, each will determined by some set of arbitrary choices of its own. But this second characteristic, the use of expressions whose distinctive function in our language is to embody what purports to be an appeal to objective standards, suggests otherwise. For even if the surface appearance of argument is only a masquerade, the question remains 'Why *this* masquerade?' What is it about rational argument which is so important that it is the nearly universal appearance assumed by those who engage in moral conflict? Does not this suggest that the practice of moral argument in our culture expresses at least an aspiration to be or to become rational in this area of our lives?

A third salient characteristic of contemporary moral debate is intimately related to the first two. It is easy to see that the different conceptually incommensurable premises of the rival arguments deployed in these debates have a wide variety of historical origins. The concept of justice in the first argument has its roots in Aristotle's account of the virtues; the second argument's genealogy runs through Bismarck and Clausewitz to Machiavelli; the concept of liberation in the third argument has shallow roots in Marx, deeper roots in Fichte. In the second debate a concept of rights which has Lockean antecedents is matched against a view of universalizability which is recognizably Kantian and an appeal to the moral law which is Thomist. In the third debate an argument which owes debts to T.H. Green and to Rousseau competes with one which has Adam Smith as a grandfather. This catalogue of great names is suggestive; but it may be misleading in two ways. The citing of individual names may lead us to underestimate the complexity of the history and the ancestry of such arguments; and it may lead us to look

for that history and that ancestry only in the writings of philosophers and theorists instead of in those intricate bodies of theory and practice which constitute human cultures, the beliefs of which are articulated by philosophers and theorists only in a partial and selective manner. But the catalogue of names does suggest how wide and heterogeneous the variety of moral sources is from which we have inherited. The surface rhetoric of our culture is apt to speak complacently of moral pluralism in this connection, but the notion of pluralism is too imprecise. For it may equally well apply to an ordered dialogue of intersecting viewpoints and to an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments. The suspicion—and for the moment it can only be a suspicion—that it is the latter with which we have to deal is heightened when we recognize that all those various concepts which inform our moral discourse were originally at home in larger totalities of theory and practice in which they enjoyed a role and function supplied by contexts of which they have now been deprived. Moreover the concepts we employ have in at least some cases changed their character in the past three hundred years; the evaluative expressions we use have changed their meaning. In the transition from the variety of contexts in which they were originally at home to our own contemporary culture 'virtue' and 'justice' and 'piety' and 'duty' and even 'ought' have become other than they once were. How ought we to write the history of such changes?

It is in trying to answer this question that the connection between these features of contemporary moral debate and my initial hypothesis becomes clear. For if I am right in supposing that the language of morality passed from a state of order to a state of disorder, this passage will surely be reflected in—in part indeed will actually consist in—just such changes of meaning. Moreover, if the characteristics of our own moral arguments which I have identified—most notably the fact that we simultaneously and inconsistently treat moral argument as an exercise of our rational powers and as mere expressive assertion—are symptoms of moral disorder, we ought to be able to construct a true historical narrative in which at an earlier stage moral argument is very different in kind. Can we?

One obstacle to our so doing has been the persistently unhistorical treatment of moral philosophy by contemporary philosophers in both the writing about and the teaching of the subject. We all too often still treat the moral philosophers of the past as contributors to a single debate

with a relatively unvarying subject-matter, treating Plato and Hume and Mill as contemporaries both of ourselves and of each other. This leads to an abstraction of these writers from the cultural and social milieus in which they lived and thought and so the history of their thought acquires a false independence from the rest of the culture. Kant ceases to be part of the history of Prussia, Hume is no longer a Scotsman. For from the standpoint of moral philosophy as *we* conceive it these characteristics have become irrelevances. Empirical history is one thing, philosophy quite another. But are we right in understanding the division between academic disciplines in the way that we conventionally do? Once again there seems to be a possible relationship between the history of moral discourse and the history of the academic curriculum.

Yet at this point it may rightly be retorted: You keep speaking of possibilities, of suspicions, of hypotheses. You allow that what you are suggesting will initially seem implausible. You are in this at least right. For all this resort to conjectures about history is unnecessary. The way in which you have stated the problem is misleading. Contemporary moral argument is rationally interminable, because *all* moral, indeed all evaluative, argument is and always must be rationally interminable. Contemporary moral disagreements of a certain kind cannot be resolved, because *no* moral disagreements of that kind in any age, past, present or future, can be resolved. What you present as a contingent feature of our culture, standing in need of some special, perhaps historical explanation, is a necessary feature of all cultures which possess evaluative discourse. This is a challenge which cannot be avoided at an early stage in this argument. Can it be defeated?

One philosophical theory which this challenge specifically invites us to confront is emotivism. Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character. Particular judgments may of course unite moral and factual elements. 'Arson, being destructive of property, is wrong' unites the factual judgment that arson destroys property with the moral judgment that arson is wrong. But the moral element in such a judgment is always to be sharply distinguised from the factual. Factual judgments are true or false; and in the realm of fact there are rational criteria by means of which we may secure agreement as to what is true and what is false. But moral judgments, being expressions

theorists supposed, it might be plausibly claimed, if the evidence was adequate, that in using such sentences to *say* whatever they mean, the agent was in fact *doing* nothing other than expressing his feelings or attitudes and attempting to influence the feelings and attitudes of others. If the emotive theory thus interpreted were correct it would follow that the meaning and the use of moral expressions were, or at the very least had become, radically discrepant with each other. Meaning and use would be at odds in such a way that meaning would tend to conceal use. We could not safely infer what someone who uttered a moral judgment was doing merely by listening to what he said. Moreover the agent himself might well be among those for whom use was concealed by meaning. He might well, precisely because he was self-conscious about the meaning of the words that he used, be assured that he was appealing to independent impersonal criteria, when all that he was in fact doing was expressing his feelings to others in a manipulative way. How might such a phenomenon come to occur?

Let us in the light of such considerations disregard emotivism's claim to universality of scope; and let us instead consider emotivism as a theory which has been advanced in historically specific conditions. In the eighteenth century Hume embodied emotivist elements in the large and complex fabric of his total moral theory; but it is only in this century that emotivism has flourished as a theory on its own. And it did so as a response to a set of theories which flourished, especially in England, between 1903 and 1939. We ought therefore to ask whether emotivism as a theory may not have been both a response to, and in the very first instance, an account of *not*, as its protagonists indeed supposed, moral language as such, but moral language in England in the years after 1903 as and when that language was interpreted in accordance with that body of theory to the refutation of which emotivism was primarily dedicated. The theory in question borrowed from the early nineteenth century the name of 'intuitionism' and its immediate progenitor was G.E. Moore.

'I went up to Cambridge at Michaelmas 1902, and Moore's *Principia Ethica* came out at the end of my first year . . . it was exciting, exhilarating, the beginning of a renaissance, the opening of a new heaven on a new earth.' So wrote John Maynard Keynes (quoted in Rosenbaum 1975, p. 52), and so in their own rhetorical modes Lytton Strachey and Desmond McCarthy and later Virginia Woolf, who struggled through

Principia Ethica page by page in 1908, and a whole network of Cambridge and London friends and acquaintances. What opened the new heaven was Moore's quiet but apocalyptic proclamation in 1903 that after many centuries he had at last solved the problems of ethics by being the first philosopher to attend with sufficient care to the precise nature of the questions which it is the task of ethics to answer. What Moore believed that he had discovered by attending to the precise nature of these questions was threefold.

First that 'good' is the name of a simple indefinable property, a property different from that named by 'pleasant' or 'conducive to evolutionary survival' or any other natural property. Hence Moore speaks of good as a non-natural property. Propositions declaring this or that to be good are what Moore called 'intuitions'; they are incapable of proof or disproof and indeed no evidence or reasoning whatever can be adduced in their favor or disfavor. Although Moore disclaims any use of the word 'intuition' which might suggest the name of a faculty of intuition comparable to our power of vision, he none the less does compare good as a property with yellow as a property in such a way as to make verdicts that a given state of affairs is or is not good comparable to the simplest judgments of normal visual perception.

Secondly, Moore takes it that to call an action right is simply to say that of the available alternative actions it is the one which does or did as a matter of fact produce the most good. Moore is thus a utilitarian; every action is to be evaluated solely by its consequences, as compared with the consequences of alternative possible courses of action. And as with at least some other versions of utilitarianism it follows that no action is ever right or wrong *as such.* Anything whatsoever may under certain circumstances be permitted.

Thirdly, it turns out to be the case, in the sixth and final chapter of *Principia Ethica,* that 'personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments include *all* the greatest, and *by far* the greatest goods we can imagine . . . ' This is 'the ultimate and fundamental truth of Moral Philosophy'. The achievement of friendship and the contemplation of what is beautiful in nature or in art become certainly almost the sole and perhaps the sole justifiable ends of all human action.

We ought to notice immediately two crucial facts about Moore's moral theory. The first is that his three central positions are logically independent of each other. There would be no breach in consistency

if one were to affirm any one of the three and deny the other two. One can be an intuitionist without being a utilitarian; most English intuitionists came to hold the view that there was a non-natural property of 'right' as well as of 'good' and held that to perceive that a certain type of action was 'right' was to see that one had at least a *prima facie* obligation to perform that type of action, independently of its consequences. Likewise a utilitarian has no necessary commitment to intuitionism. And neither utilitarians nor intuitionists have any necessary commitment to the values of Moore's sixth chapter. The second crucial fact is easy to see retrospectively: the first part of what Moore says is *plainly* false and the second and third parts are at the very least highly contentious. Moore's arguments at times are, it must seem now, *obviously* defective—he tries to show that 'good' is indefinable, for example, by relying on a bad dictionary definition of 'definition'—and a great deal is asserted rather than argued. And yet it is this to us plainly false, badly argued position which Keynes treated as 'the beginning of a renaissance', which Lytton Strachey declared to have 'shattered all writers on ethics from Aristotle and Christ to Herbert Spencer and Mr. Bradley' and which Leonard Woolf described as 'substituting for the religious and philosophical nightmares, delusions, hallucinations in which Jehovah, Christ and St. Paul, Plato, Kant and Hegel had entangled us, the fresh air and pure light of commonsense' (quoted in Gadd 1974).

This is great silliness of course; but it is the great silliness of highly intelligent and perceptive people. It is therefore worth asking if we can discern any clues as to why they accepted Moore's naive and complacent apocalypticism. One suggests itself. It is that the group who were to become Bloomsbury had already accepted the values of Moore's sixth chapter, but could not accept these as merely their own personal preferences. They felt the need to find objective and impersonal justification for rejecting all claims except those of personal intercourse and of the beautiful. What specifically were they rejecting? Not in fact the doctrines of Plato or St. Paul or any other of the great names in Woolf's or Strachey's catalogue of deliverance, but those names as symbols of the culture of the late nineteenth century. Sidgwick and Leslie Stephen are being dismissed along with Spencer and Bradley, and the whole of the past is envisaged as a burden that Moore has just helped them cast off. What was it about the moral culture of the late nineteenth century which made it a burden to be escaped from? That is a question to

which an answer ought to be deferred, precisely because it is going to be forced on us more than once in the course of the argument and later on we shall be better equipped to answer it. But we ought to notice how dominant the theme of that rejection is in the lives and writings of the Woolfs, of Lytton Strachey, of Roger Fry. Keynes emphasized the rejection not only of the Benthamite version of utilitarianism and of Christianity, but of all claims on behalf of social action conceived as a worthwhile end. What was left?

The answer is a highly impoverished view of how 'good' may be used. Keynes gives examples of central topics of discussion among Moore's followers: 'If A was in love with B and believed that B reciprocated his feelings, whereas in fact B did not, but was in love with C, the state of affairs was certainly not as good as it would have been if A had been right, but was it worse or better than it would become if A discovered his mistake?' Or again: 'If A was in love with B under a misapprehension as to B's qualities, was this better or worse than A's not being in love at all?' How were such questions to be answered? By following Moore's prescriptions in precise fashion. Do you or do you not discern the presence or absence of the non-natural property of good in greater or lesser degree? And what if two observers disagree? Then, so the answer went, according to Keynes, either the two were focusing on different subject matters, without recognizing this, or one had perceptions superior to the other. But, of course, as Keynes tells us, what was really happening was something quite other: 'In practice, victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility' and Keynes goes on to describe the effectiveness of Moore's gasps of incredulity and head-shaking, of Strachey's grim silences and of Lowes Dickinson's shrugs.

There is evident here precisely that gap between the meaning and purport of what was being said and the use to which utterance was being put to which our reinterpretation of emotivism drew attention. An acute observer at the time and Keynes himself retrospectively might well have put matters thus: these people take themselves to be identifying the presence of a non-natural property, which they call 'good'; but there is in fact no such property and they are doing no more and no other than expressing their feelings and attitudes, disguising the expression of preference and whim by an interpretation of their own

utterance and behavior which confers upon it an objectivity that it does not in fact possess.

It is, I take it, no accident that the acutest of the modern founders of emotivism, philosophers such as F.P. Ramsey (in the 'Epilogue' to *The Foundation of Mathematics,* 1931), Austin Duncan-Jones and C.L. Stevenson, were pupils of Moore; it is not implausible to suppose that they did in fact confuse moral utterance at Cambridge (and in other places with a similar inheritance) after 1903 with moral utterance as such, and that they therefore presented what was in essentials a correct account of the former as though it were an account of the latter. Moore's followers had behaved as if their disagreements over what is good were being settled by an appeal to an objective and impersonal criterion; but in fact the stronger and psychologically more adroit will was prevailing. It is unsurprising that emotivists sharply distinguished between factual, including perceptual, disagreement and what Stevenson called 'disagreement in attitude'. But if the claims of emotivism, understood as claims about the use of moral utterance at Cambridge after 1903 and its heirs and successors in London and elsewhere rather than about the meaning of moral expressions at all times and places, seem remarkably cogent, it turns out to be for reasons which at first sight seem to undermine emotivism's universal claims and with them emotivism's apparent threat to my original thesis.

What makes emotivism convincing as a thesis about a certain kind of moral utterance at Cambridge after 1903 are certain features specific to that historical episode. Those whose evaluative utterances embodied Moore's interpretations of those utterances could not have been doing what they took themselves to be doing because of the falsity of Moore's thesis. But nothing whatsoever seems to follow about moral utterance in general. Emotivism on this account turns out to be an empirical thesis, or rather a preliminary sketch of an empirical thesis, presumably to be filled out later by psychological and sociological and historical observations, about those who continue to use moral and other evaluative expressions, as if they were governed by objective and impersonal criteria, when all grasp of any such criterion has been lost. We should therefore expect emotivist types of theory to arise in a specific local circumstance as a response to types of theory and practice which share certain key features of Moore's intuitionism. Emotivism thus understood turns out to be, as a cogent theory of use rather than a false theory of meaning,

of philosophy as that of deciphering the meaning of key expressions in both everyday and scientific language; and since emotivism fails precisely as a theory of the *meaning* of moral expressions, analytical philosophers by and large rejected emotivism. Yet emotivism did not die and it is important to note how often in widely different modern philosophical contexts something very like emotivism's attempted reduction of morality to personal preference continually recurs in the writings of those who do not think of themselves as emotivists. The unrecognized philosophical power of emotivism is one clue to its cultural power. Within analytical moral philosophy the resistance to emotivism has arisen from the perception that moral reasoning does occur, that there can be logical linkages between various moral judgments of a kind that emotivism itself could not allow for ('therefore' and 'if ... then ...' are obviously not used as expressions of feeling). Yet the most influential account of moral reasoning that emerged in response to this critique of emotivism was one according to which an agent can only justify a particular judgment by referring to some universal rule from which it may be logically derived, and can only justify that rule in turn by deriving it from some more general rule or principle; but on this view since every chain of reasoning must be finite, such a process of justificatory reasoning must always terminate with the assertion of some rule or principle for which no further reason can be given. 'Thus a complete justification of a decision would consist of a complete account of its effects together with a complete account of the principles which it observed, and the effect of observing those principles. . . . If the enquirer still goes on asking "But why should I live like that?" then there is no further answer to give him, because we have already, *ex hypothesi*, said everything that could be included in the further answer' (Hare 1952, p. 69).

The terminus of justification is thus always, on this view, a not further to be justified choice, a choice unguided by criteria. Each individual implicitly or explicitly has to adopt his or her own first principles on the basis of such a choice. The utterance of any universal principle is in the end an expression of the preferences of an individual will and for that will its principles have and can have only such authority as it chooses to confer upon them by adopting them. Thus emotivism has not been left very far behind after all.

To this it might well be replied that I am only able to reach this conclusion by omitting to notice the wide variety of positive positions

incompatible with emotivism taken within analytical moral philosophy. Such writing has characteristically been preoccupied with attempts to show that the notion of rationality itself supplies morality with a basis and a basis such that we have adequate grounds for rejecting emotivist and subjectivist accounts. Consider, it will be said, the variety of claims advanced not only by Hare, but also by Rawls, Donegan, Gert and Gewirth, to name only a few. About the arguments which are adduced in support of such claims I want to make two points. The first is that none of them in fact succeed. I shall later on—in Chapter 6—use Gewirth's argument as an exemplary case; he is to date the latest of such writers, he is self-consciously and scrupulously aware of the contributions of other analytical moral philosophers to the debate and his arguments therefore provide us with an ideal test case. If they do not succeed, that is strong evidence that the project of which they are a part is not going to succeed. And, as I shall show later, they do not succeed.

Secondly, it is very much to the point that such writers cannot agree among themselves either on what the character of moral rationality is or on the substance of the morality which is to be founded on that rationality. The diversity of contemporary moral debate and its interminability are indeed mirrored in the controversies of analytical moral philosophers. But if those who claim to be able to formulate principles on which rational moral agents ought to agree cannot secure agreement on the formulation of those principles from their colleagues who share their basic philosophical purpose and method, there is once again *prima facie* evidence that their project has failed, even before we have examined their particular contentions and conclusions. Each of them in his criticism offers testimony to the failure of his colleagues' constructions.

I therefore take it that we have no good reason to believe that analytical philosophy can provide any convincing escape from an emotivism the substance of which it so often in fact concedes, once that emotivism is understood as a theory of use rather than meaning. But it is not only analytical moral philosophy of which this is true. It also holds of certain at first sight very different moral philosophies in Germany and France. Nietzsche and Sartre deploy philosophical vocabularies which are in large part alien to the English-speaking philosophical world; and in style and rhetoric as well as in vocabulary each differs from the other as much as from analytical philosophy. Nonetheless when Nietzsche sought to

indict the making of would-be objective moral judgments as the mask worn by the will-to-power of those too weak and slavish to assert themselves with archaic and aristocratic grandeur, and when Sartre tried to exhibit the bourgeois rationalist morality of the Third Republic as an exercise in bad faith by those who cannot tolerate the recognition of their own choices as the sole source of moral judgment, both conceded the substance of that for which emotivism contended. Both indeed saw themselves as by their analysis condemning conventional morality, while most English and American emotivists believed themselves to be doing no such thing. Both saw their own task as in part that of founding a new morality, but in the writings of both it is at this point that their rhetoric—very different as each is from the other—becomes cloudy and opaque, and metaphorical assertion replaces argument. The *Übermensch* and the Sartrian Existentialistcum-Marxist belong in the pages of a philosophical bestiary rather than in serious discussion. Both by contrast are at their philosophically most powerful and cogent in the negative part of their critiques.

The appearance of emotivism in this variety of philosophical guises suggests strongly that it is indeed in terms of a confrontation with emotivism that my own thesis must be defined. For one way of framing my contention that morality is not what it once was is just to say that to a large degree people now think, talk and act *as if* emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint may be. Emotivism has become embodied in our culture. But of course in saying this I am not merely contending that morality is not what it once was, but also and more importantly that what once was morality has to some large degree disappeared—and that this marks a degeneration, a grave cultural loss. I am therefore committed to two distinct but related tasks.

The first is that of identifying and describing the lost morality of the past and of evaluating its claims to objectivity and authority; this is a task partly historical and partly philosophical. The second is that of making good my claim about the specific character of the modern age. For I have suggested that we live in a specifically emotivist culture, and if this is so we ought presumably to discover that a wide variety of our concepts and modes of behavior—and not only our explicitly moral debates and judgments—presuppose the truth of emotivism, if not at the level of self-conscious theorizing, at least in everyday practice. But is this so? To this latter issue I turn immediately.

Chapter 3

Emotivism: Social Content and Social Context

A moral philosophy—and emotivism is no exception—characteristically presupposes a sociology. For every moral philosophy offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social world. Even Kant, who sometimes seems to restrict moral agency to the inner realm of the noumenal, implies otherwise in his writings on law, history and politics. Thus it would generally be a decisive refutation of a moral philosophy to show that moral agency on its own account of the matter could never be socially embodied; and it also follows that we have not yet fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be. Some moral philosophers in the past, perhaps most, have understood this spelling out as itself one part of the task of moral philosophy. So, it scarcely needs to be said, Plato and Aristotle, so indeed also Hume and Adam Smith; but at least since Moore the dominant narrow conception of moral philosophy has ensured that the moral philosophers could ignore this task; as notably do the philosophical proponents of emotivism. We therefore must perform it for them.

What is the key to the social content of emotivism? It is the fact that emotivism entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations. Consider the contrast between, for example, Kantian ethics and emotivism on this point. For

One which is obviously important is that provided by the life of organizations, of those bureaucratic structures which, whether in the form of private corporations or of government agencies, define the working tasks of so many of our contemporaries. One sharp contrast with the lives of the aesthetic rich secures immediate attention. The rich aesthete with a plethora of means searches restlessly for ends on which he may employ them; but the organization is characteristically engaged in a competitive struggle for scarce resources to put to the service of its predetermined ends. It is therefore a central responsibility of managers to direct and redirect their organizations' available resources, both human and non-human, as effectively as possible toward those ends. Every bureaucratic organization embodies some explicit or implicit definition of costs and benefits from which the criteria of effectiveness are derived. Bureaucratic rationality is the rationality of matching means to ends economically and efficiently.

This familiar—perhaps by now we may be tempted to think overfamiliar—thought we owe originally of course to Max Weber. And it at once becomes relevant that Weber's thought embodies just those dichotomies which emotivism embodies, and obliterates just those distinctions to which emotivism has to be blind. Questions of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent; conflict between rival values cannot be rationally settled. Instead one must simply choose—between parties, classes, nations, causes, ideals. *Entscheidung* plays the part in Weber's thought that choice of principles plays in that of Hare or Sarte. 'Values', says Raymond Aron in his exposition of Weber's view, 'are created by human decisions . . .' and again he ascribes to Weber the view that 'each man's conscience is irrefutable' and that values rest on 'a choice whose justification is purely subjective' (Aron 1967, pp. 206–10 and p. 192). It is not surprising that Weber's understanding of values was indebted chiefly to Nietzsche and that Donald G. Macrae in his book on Weber (1974) calls him an existentialist; for while he holds that an agent may be more or less rational in acting consistently with his values, the choice of any one particular evaluative stance or commitment can be no more rational than that of any other. All faiths and all evaluations are equally non-rational; all are subjective directions given to sentiment and feeling. Weber is then, in the broader sense in which I have understood the term, an emotivist and his portrait of a bureaucratic authority is an emotivist portrait. The consequence of

Weber's emotivism is that in his thought the contrast between power and authority, although paid lip-service to, is effectively obliterated as a special instance of the disappearance of the contrast between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations. Weber of course took himself to be distinguishing power from authority, precisely because authority serves ends, serves faiths. But, as Philip Rieff has acutely noted, 'Weber's ends, the *causes* there to be served, are means of acting; they cannot escape service to power' (Rieff 1975, p. 22). For on Weber's view no type of authority can appeal to rational criteria to vindicate itself except that type of bureaucratic authority which appeals precisely to its own *effectiveness.* And what this appeal reveals is that bureaucratic authority is nothing other than successful power.

Weber's general account of bureaucratic organizations has been subjected to much cogent critcism by sociologists who have analyzed the specific character of actual bureaucracies. It is therefore relevant to note that there is one area in which his analysis has been vindicated by experience and in which the accounts of many sociologists who take themselves to have repudiated Weber's analysis in fact reproduce it. I am referring precisely to his account of *how managerial authority is justified* in bureaucracies. For those modern sociologists who have put in the forefront of their accounts of managerial behavior aspects ignored or underemphasized by Weber's—as, for example, Likert has emphasized the manager's need to influence the motives of his subordinates and March and Simon his need to ensure that those subordinates argue from premises which will produce agreement with his own prior conclusions—have still seen the manager's function as that of controlling behavior and suppressing conflict in such a way as to reinforce rather than to undermine Weber's account of managerial justification. Thus there is a good deal of evidence that actual managers do embody in their behavior this one key part of the Weberian conception of bureaucratic authority, a conception which presupposes the truth of emotivism.

The original of the character of the rich man committed to the aesthetic pursuit of his own enjoyment as drawn by Henry James was to be found in London and Paris in the last century; the original of the character of the manager portrayed by Max Weber was at home in Wilhelmine Germany; but both have by now been domesticated in all the advanced countries and more especially in the United States. The two characters may even

on occasion be found in one and the same person who partitions his life between them. Nor are they marginal figures in the social drama of the present age. I intend this dramatic metaphor with some seriousness. There is a type of dramatic tradition—Japanese Noh plays and English medieval morality plays are examples—which possesses a set of stock characters immediately recognizable to the audience. Such characters partially define the possibilities of plot and action. To understand them is to be provided with a means of interpreting the behavior of the actors who play them, just because a similar understanding informs the intentions of the actors themselves; and other actors may define their parts with special reference to these central characters. So it is also with certain kinds of social role specific to certain particular cultures. They furnish recognizable characters and the ability to recognize them is socially crucial because a knowledge of the character provides an interpretation of the actions of those individuals who have assumed the character. It does so precisely because those individuals have used the very same knowledge to guide and to structure their behavior. *Characters* specified thus must not be confused with social roles in general. For they are a very special type of social role which places a certain kind of moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit them in a way in which many other social roles do not. I choose the word 'character' for them precisely because of the way it links dramatic and moral associations. Many modern occupational roles—that of a dentist or that of a garbage collector, for example—are not *characters* in the way that that of a bureaucratic manager is; many modern status roles—that of a retired member of the lower middle class, for example—are not *characters* in the way that that of the modern leisured rich person is. In the case of a *character* role and personality fuse in a more specific way than in general; in the case of a *character* the possibilities of action are defined in a more limited way than in general. One of the key differences between cultures is in the extent to which roles are *characters*; but what is specific to each culture is in large and central part what is specific to its stock of *characters.* So the culture of Victorian England was partially defined by the *characters* of the Public School Headmaster, the Explorer and the Engineer; and that of Wilhelmine Germany was similarly defined by such *characters* as those of the Prussian Officer, the Professor and the Social Democrat.

Characters have one other notable dimension. They are, so to speak, the moral representatives of their culture and they are so because of the

way in which moral and metaphysical ideas and theories assume through them an embodied existence in the social world. *Characters* are the masks worn by moral philosophies. Such theories, such philosophies, do of course enter into social life in numerous ways: most obviously perhaps as explicit ideas in books or sermons or conversations, or as symbolic themes in paintings or plays or dreams. But the distinctive way in which they inform the lives of *characters* can be illuminated by considering how *characters* merge what usually is thought to belong to the individual man or woman and what is usually thought to belong to social roles. Both individuals and roles can, and do, like *characters,* embody moral beliefs, doctrines and theories, but each does so in its own way. And the way in which *characters* do so can only be sketched by contrast with these.

It is by way of their intentions that individuals express bodies of moral belief in their actions. For all intentions presuppose more or less complex, more or less coherent, more or less explicit bodies of belief, sometimes of moral belief. So such small-scale actions as the mailing of a letter or the handing of a leaflet to a passer-by can embody intentions whose import derives from some large-scale project of the individual, a project itself intelligible only against the background of some equally large or even larger scheme of beliefs. In mailing a letter someone may be embarking on a type of entrepreneurial career whose specification requires belief in both the viability and the legitimacy of multinational corporations: in handing out a leaflet someone may be expressing his belief in Lenin's philosophy of history. But the chain of practical reasoning whose conclusions are expressed in such actions as the mailing of a letter or the distribution of a leaflet is in this type of case of course the individual's own; and the locus of that chain of reasoning, the context which makes the taking of each step part of an intelligible sequence, is that particular individual's history of action, belief, experience and interaction.

Contrast the quite different way in which a certain type of social role may embody beliefs so that the ideas, theories and doctrines expressed in and presupposed by the role may at least on some occasions be quite other than the ideas, theories and doctrines believed by the individual who inhabits the role. A Catholic priest in virtue of his role officiates at the mass, performs other rites and ceremonies and takes part in a variety of activities which embody or presuppose, implicitly or explicitly,

the beliefs of Catholic Christianity. Yet a particular ordained individual who does all these things may have lost his faith and his own beliefs may be quite other than and at variance with those expressed in the actions presented by his role. The same type of distinction between role and individual can be drawn in many other cases. A trade union official in virtue of his role negotiates with employers' representatives and campaigns among his own membership in a way that generally and characteristically presupposes that trade union goals—higher wages, improvements in working conditions and the maintenance of employment *within* the present economic system—are legitimate goals for the working class and that trade unions are the appropriate instruments for achieving those goals. Yet a particular trade-union official may believe that trade unions are merely instruments for domesticating and corrupting the working class by diverting them from any interest in revolution. The beliefs that he has in his mind and heart are one thing; the beliefs that his role expresses and presupposes are quite another.

There are then many cases where there is a certain distance between role and individual and where consequently a variety of degrees of doubt, compromise, interpretation or cynicism may mediate the relationship of individual to role. With what I have called *characters* it is quite otherwise; and the difference arises from the fact that the requirements of a *character* are imposed from the outside, from the way in which others regard and use *characters* to understand and to evaluate themselves. With other types of social role the role may be adequately specified in terms of the institutions of whose structures it is a part and the relation to those institutions of the individuals who fill the roles. In the case of a *character* this is not enough. A *character* is an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them. He furnishes them with a cultural and moral ideal. Hence the demand is that in this type of case role and personality be fused. Social type and psychological type are required to coincide. The *character* morally legitimates a mode of social existence.

It is, I hope, now clear why I picked the examples that I did when I referred to Victorian England and Wilhelmine Germany. The Public School Headmaster in England and the Professor in Germany, to take only two examples, were not just social roles: they provided the moral focus for a whole cluster of attitudes and activities. They were able to discharge this function precisely because they incorporated moral

view, precisely to be able to stand back from any and every situation in which one is involved, from any and every characteristic that one may possess, and to pass judgment on it from a purely universal and abstract point of view that is totally detached from all social particularity. Anyone and everyone can thus be a moral agent, since it is in the self and not in social roles or practices that moral agency has to be located. The contrast between this democratization of moral agency and the elitist monopolies of managerial and therapeutic expertise could not be sharper. Any minimally rational agent is to be accounted a moral agent; but managers and therapists enjoy their status in virtue of their membership within hierarchies of imputed skill and knowledge. In the domain of fact there are procedures for eliminating disagreement; in that of morals the ultimacy of disagreement is dignified by the title 'pluralism'.

This democratized self which has no necessary social content and no necessary social identity can then be anything, can assume any role or take any point of view, because it *is* in and for itself nothing. This relationship of the modern self to its acts and its roles has been conceptualized by its acutest and most perceptive theorists in what at first sight appear to be two quite different and incompatible ways. Sartre—I speak now only of the Sartre of the thirties and forties—has depicted the self as entirely distinct from any particular social role which it may happen to assume; Erving Goffman by contrast has liquidated the self into its role-playing, arguing that the self is no more than 'a peg' on which the clothes of the role are hung (Goffman 1959, p. 253). For Sartre the central error is to identify the self with its roles, a mistake which carries the burden of moral bad faith as well as of intellectual confusion; for Goffman the central error is to suppose that there *is* a substantial self over and beyond the complex presentations of role-playing, a mistake committed by those who wish to keep part of the human world 'safe from sociology'. Yet the two apparently contrasting views have much more in common that a first statement would lead one to suspect. In Goffman's anecdotal descriptions of the social world there is still discernible that ghostly 'I', the psychological peg to whom Goffman denies substantial selfhood, flitting evanescently from one solidly role-structured situation to another; and for Sartre the self's self-discovery is characterized as the discovery that the self is 'nothing', is not a substance but a set of perpetually open possibilities. Thus at a

deep level a certain agreement underlies Sartre's and Goffman's surface disagreements; and they agree in nothing more than in this, that both see the self as entirely set over against the social world. For Goffman, for whom the social world is everything, the self is therefore nothing at all, it occupies no social space. For Sartre, whatever social space it occupies it does so only accidentally, and therefore he too sees the self as in no way an actuality.

What moral modes are open to the self thus conceived? To answer this question, we must first recall the second key characteristic of the emotivist self, its lack of any ultimate criteria. When I characterize it thus I am referring back to what we have already noticed, that whatever criteria or principles or evaluative allegiances the emotivist self may profess, they are to be construed as expressions of attitudes, preferences and choices which are themselves not governed by criterion, principle or value, since they underlie and are prior to all allegiance to criterion, principle or value. But from this it follows that the emotivist self can have no rational history in its transitions from one state of moral commitment to another. Inner conflicts are for it necessarily *au fond* the confrontation of one contingent arbitrariness by another. It is a self with no given continuities, save those of the body which is its bearer and of the memory which to the best of its ability gathers in its past. And we know from the outcome of the discussions of personal identity by Locke, Berkeley, Butler and Hume that neither of these separately or together are adequate to specify that identity and continuity of which actual selves are so certain.

The self thus conceived, utterly distinct on the one hand from its social embodiments and lacking on the other any rational history of its own, may seem to have a certain abstract and ghostly character. It is therefore worth remarking that a behaviorist account is as much or as little plausible of the self conceived in this manner as of the self conceived in any other. The appearance of an abstract and ghostly quality arises not from any lingering Cartesian dualism, but from the degree of contrast, indeed the degree of loss, that comes into view if we compare the emotivist self with its historical predecessors. For one way of re-envisaging the emotivist self is as having suffered a deprivation, a stripping away of qualities that were once believed to belong to the self. The self is now thought of as lacking any necessary social identity, because the kind of social identity that it once enjoyed is no longer

was Kierkegaard who first discovered the concept of radical choice, so it is in Kierkegaard's writings that the links between reason and authority are broken too.)

I have argued then that there is a deep incoherence in *Enten-Eller*; if the ethical has some basis, it cannot be provided by the notion of radical choice. Before I turn to ask why Kierkegaard should have arrived at this incoherent position, however, let me notice a third feature *of Enten-Eller.* It is the conservative and traditional character of Kierkegaard's account of the ethical. In our own culture the influence of the notion of radical choice appears in our dilemmas over *which* ethical principles to choose. We are almost intolerably conscious of rival moral alternatives. But Kierkegaard combines the notion of radical choice with an unquestioning conception of *the* ethical. Promise-keeping, truth-telling and benevolence embodied in universalizable moral principles are understood in a very simple way; the ethical man has no great problems of interpretation once he has made his initial choice. To notice this is to notice that Kierkegaard is providing a new practical and philosophical underpinning for an older and inherited way of life. It is perhaps this combination of novelty and tradition which accounts for the incoherence at the heart of Kierkegaard's position. It is certainly, so I shall argue, just this deeply incoherent combination of the novel and the inherited which is the logical outcome of the Enlightenment's project to provide a rational foundation for and justification of morality.

To understand why this is so it is necessary to turn back from Kierkegaard to Kant. Because of Kierkegaard's own ceaseless polemics against Hegel, it is all too easy not to notice Kierkegaard's positive debts to Kant. But it is in fact Kant who in almost every area sets the philosophical scene for Kierkegaard. It is Kant's treatment of the proofs of the existence of God and his view of what constitutes rational religion that provide a crucial part of the background for Kierkegaard's account of Christianity; and it is equally Kant's moral philosophy which is the essential background for Kierkegaard's treatment of the ethical. It is not difficult to recognize in Kierkegaard's account of the aesthetic way of life a literary genius's version of Kant's account of inclination—whatever else Kant may be thought, and it is difficult to exaggerate his achievement, he was as clearly *not* a literary genius as any philosopher in history. Yet it is in Kant's honest and unpretentious German that Kierkegaard's elegant but not always transparent Danish finds its paternity.