



Utilitarianism Revised

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MIND

A QUARTERLY REVIEW

OF

PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY



I.—UTILITARIANISM REVISED.

BY R. F. HARROD.

THIS paper is divided into two parts. In the first an attempt is made to state in bare outline a system of moral philosophy, which should probably be classified as utilitarian. The second provides a theory of the nature of moral obligation, which is consistent with the system, but in closer conformity with the ordinary view of obligation than those usually associated with the utilitarian position. The special contribution of this paper lies in part 2, and part 1 may be regarded as a necessary propædeutic. Some general re-statement of the utilitarian position, however, seems desirable, in view of the cogent criticisms which have been advanced against traditional utilitarianism.

A word about method. There is in existence a great body of opinion about moral questions. I conceive it to be the task of the moral philosopher to determine and explain the subject matter of that body of opinion. This is in accordance with Aristotle's teaching that moral philosophers should concern themselves with *δόξαι*. It is not enough to erect an abstract system of thought. It is required that the system should make sense of what may be called the common moral consciousness. There are, no doubt, serious difficulties. Moral opinion comprises many elements of dogmatism, survivals of the past, and prejudices due to the accidents of history. Moreover most men are content to remain in a condition of incomplete clarity. In resorting to a process of cross-examination with a view to isolating

and elucidating what is essential and what makes sense in common moral thought, one is often perforce driven to a self-examination consisting in an effort to think very clearly about the matter oneself. But there is all the difference between attempting to re-interpret in clear terms the essential nature of the *δόξα* and constructing an arbitrary system *de novo*.

I.

1. The first proposition is that the terms, good and right, well known to moral consciousness, are not indefinable; more broadly, that the fundamental concepts of moral philosophy are not indefinable, but on the contrary can be defined in terms belonging to studies outside moral philosophy. When I say this, I do not merely mean that I propose to use good, right, etc., for characters that may be defined, but I mean that in the common moral consciousness they are so used. And though there may in the universe be many indefinable characteristics, known or unknown to us, to which they could be applied by an arbitrary allocation of meaning, any such application would involve a break with the past and an abuse of the language which we inherit, and would fail to interpret correctly the essential nature of the common moral consciousness.

It must be recognised that these words challenge what is probably now the prevailing view among moral philosophers, that in particular they involve a position which Mr. Moore has called the "naturalistic fallacy". In defence of them I shall seek to stand or fall mainly by my success in propounding a system which does correspond to the concepts of the common moral consciousness. Criticism of the opposite view will be very brief.

Mr. Moore's *Principia Ethica* made such a profound impression on the philosophical world and has been cited so frequently as establishing the indefinability of good with success, that it may well be taken as a representative statement. Despite his serried array of devastating arguments, brevity is possible, for the greater part of them are concerned with showing the inconsistency of various views *on the assumption that the good is indefinable*. Arguments addressed to establishing that proposition itself occupy less space. There are, in fact, two.¹ The first is that good clearly stands for something simple and not a complex. But this in itself requires justification. And justification Mr. Moore does not give. I do not believe that the plain man would agree.

¹ See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ed. 1929, pp. 6-17.

If you ask him, "now tell me what exactly do you mean by good, morally good," he would say, "that is a long story; it could be explained, but the explanation would be a complicated one; I do not think I could give it myself, you must ask a philosopher." If you then said, "Oh, well, really my question was a booby-trap, because good is something quite simple like the feeling of cold or pain, which cannot be defined except in terms that presuppose an understanding of it," he would be genuinely surprised, and, indeed, sceptical.

Secondly Mr. Moore adduces the disagreement of those who have sought to define it. Surely if we mean, every time we use a word, to denote a complex, we ought to be able to say what the elements of the complex are. So the disagreements are attributed to an attempt to do the impossible, to the failure to recognise that the thing is in principle indefinable. But such an argument may be turned against Mr. Moore with as much or as little force. If when we use the word we know what we mean by it and that that is something indefinable, how has it come about that there have been all these attempts to define it? And that by men of philosophical disposition? If the thing was simple and known to be simple, are not these attempts passing strange? There should have been agreement about its simplicity. If there are disagreements about the meaning of a word, is it not more likely that it stands for something complex?

It is true that there have been attempts to define indefinable qualities. Mr. Moore very properly gives the sensation of yellow as an example of this. Any attempt to define this in terms, for instance, of the concepts of physics is fallacious. Agreement among persons of philosophical aptitude that this is fallacious is usually easy to secure. Unfortunately Mr. Moore admits that the analogy is imperfect since yellow belongs, and in his view good does not, to the world of nature.

I should prefer to compare good to the term circular, while freely admitting that the analogy is in many ways imperfect. Circular resembles good in being a character that is readily recognised in particular instances. From remote times men have probably recognised particular instances of circularity and have known quite well what they meant in using the word circle. When it comes to definition, it is a very different matter. Those not versed in the elements of geometry would be quite unable to proceed. Does it follow that what they have meant by circle is something indefinable? Our forebears may well have disputed hotly about the definition or urged that no definition was possible. It is possible indeed that a modern philosopher might argue that

the circle *can* be taken as an indefinable, and other mathematical concepts, line, point, etc., defined in terms of the circle. This may be so. I do not argue it. But it is very different to say that a thing *may* be taken as indefinable and, as Mr. Moore would say of good, that it *must* be. It is possible that good may, in this sense, be taken as indefinable; but that would involve defining concepts, such as man, sentient being, other, etc., in terms of good. As these concepts are used also in branches of study other than moral philosophy, the procedure would be inconvenient.

Mainly, however, I must rely on my own inability, when trying to be clear and honest with myself (and I can only appeal to others to share my experience), to apprehend any indefinable concept of the kind supposed. When I attempt to do so, it evaporates, so to speak, into thin air, and I am left empty-handed. An attempt will presently be made to sketch out a definition.

Before leaving the negative part I will only say this. It is possibly true, and, if so, we may be beguiled by the fact, that contemplation of instances of good gives rise to an emotion which is unique and unanalysable. I am not quite clear that this is so, but it does not seem unlikely. We may be able to isolate this feeling. But though the feeling may be indefinable, it would be fallacious to argue that what gives rise to it is. Just as it would be fallacious to argue that because the sensation of yellow is unanalysable, the physical state of affairs required for the presence of that sensation cannot be defined in terms of other physical magnitudes. There is danger that the presence of peculiar moral feelings, perhaps different in kind from all other feelings, may lead us to argue, wrongly, that the objects, the contemplation of which gives rise to those feelings, are indefinable.

2. The next point appears superficially to be in conflict with the major premise of utilitarianism. It is arguable, however, that it conflicts not with essential doctrine but only with misleading terminology.¹ The proposition is that the term good is not properly applicable to states of affairs but only to conduct considered in relation to states of affairs.

The view that states of affairs may be regarded as good, in an ethical sense, is associated with but not entailed by the view, that an act must be regarded as including the sum of its probable consequences. This last view is stressed in utilitarian philosophy and I regard it as wholly sound. It does not appear to be justifiable to draw a line at any point between the probable physical

¹ This point, however, would entail detailed examination of the views, not necessarily mutually consistent, of the various writers.

consequences of an act of volition which belong to the act and those which do not. But from the view that an act should be regarded as including the whole state of affairs expected to result from a volition, and that the goodness of an act depends essentially on what that state of affairs is, it does not follow that the state of affairs may itself be regarded as good.

May I give a very simple and obvious example? Suppose that the whole consequence of a volition is to cause pleasure to a friend. The act may be judged morally good. The friend might have done the act himself. Suppose the whole sum of consequences the same. Yet the act would not be judged a morally good one. This anyhow is the view of the common moral consciousness.

It is desirable to clear up one point in passing. Mr. W. D. Ross's terminology of act and action appears to be a convenient way of indicating a correct distinction. Moral attributes may apply to both, but not to the states of affairs considered apart from the volition. The act comprises the state of affairs brought about together with the situation of the agent objectively considered. The giving of pleasure to a friend is an act. And it is a good act. The quality of the action depends upon the motive. If the motive is anticipation of reciprocal favours, the action is not necessarily good, though the act is good. To the state of affairs brought about, *viz.*, the friend's pleasure considered by itself, the attribute good is not properly applicable.

Before leaving this topic, I want to draw support for my view from linguistic considerations. Outside moral philosophy I believe the word good is mainly used of means, *e.g.*, a good way of getting to a place, of opening a tin. Or when applied to craftsmanship, it denotes approximation to a perfect model, that perfection being relative to purpose. A good car, a good dinner, are adapted to serving the purposes required of them. In economics the term goods is used for material commodities that serve as means to ends, *e.g.*, articles of food, clothing, etc. But to the acts of consuming these commodities, that is to the ends towards which the commodities are means, the word goods is not applied. Food, cars and books are called goods, but never eating, joy-riding or reading.

In moral philosophy good does not, of course, mean *any* act well adapted to an end; it has a specialised sense. But I believe it to be quite inappropriate in any circumstances to use it of ends. This is often done in philosophy with resulting violence to literary sense. Is knowledge a good, the philosopher asks? But the plain man or the scholar with ear finely adjusted to the

proper use of language "have never heard such nonsense". Equally unnatural is the expression, the good. The fact that this usage has an ancient and honourable lineage in philosophical writing strengthens my argument. For the fact that, though present in philosophical writing, waiting to be taken over into general literature and common speech, it never has been taken over, is an indication that it is repugnant to common sense.

3. Definition. *Acts are morally significant when they affect the ends of other people and they are morally good when they promote those ends.* These are not meant to be synthetic propositions but to define the words moral and good. Before elaborating this, it is necessary to deal with two objections which may be urged at the outset.

i. It may be held that certain purely self-regarding actions fall within the common sense view of morality, specifically, long-sighted actions which imply conquest of conflicting impulses. It is possible that such actions are regarded as moral, only instrumentally, as the *ὄν ἀνεν ὄν* of a moral life. It is the subject's duty to keep himself alive and efficient. But it is not necessary to quarrel with the opposite view. The actions in question have certain attributes in common with many altruistic actions, namely those connected with self-control, the overcoming of natural inclinations. And for certain purposes it may be useful to group them with certain types of altruistic action and bring them within the sphere of moral consideration. I accept this view as a legitimate one though I shall make no further reference to it. I only note in passing that it has no bearing on the indefinability of good, for this class of actions may readily be defined in terms of natural inclination, the long-period, etc., which are concepts *not* presupposing a knowledge of an indefinable good. The proposition bringing them within the sphere of morality and goodness may be regarded as a definition.

ii. A more important objection may be made to this demarcation of morality. It may be urged that no individual is so self-contained as not to be concerned with the affairs of others, and, further, that in so far as he does take the cares of humanity upon his shoulders, their affairs become a not unimportant part of the content of his consciousness and his life. This comprehensive generalisation that whatever a man concerns himself with becomes in a certain sense a part of himself is no doubt true, and may be of great importance in the psychological problem of how altruistic conduct is possible—anyhow for the kind of determinist who believes that there is such a problem. But for the purpose of demarcating the sphere of morality, a valid distinction may be

upheld. Morality begins when the interests of others are considered from *the point of view of their interests, i.e.,* as a Kantian kingdom of ends. This demarcates morality even if the interests of others are also the interests of the agent.

To elaborate, acts are good when they promote the ends or interests of others, bad when they frustrate them. Of the special nature of a moral obligation much will be said presently.

Now it may be at once objected that good acts must not be regarded as those which promote any ends of others but only good ends, so that good remains to be defined. It is necessary, of course, to deny this. It is true that the end of another person B may be bad if it conflicts with or frustrates the ends of yet another C. That is already covered by the original definition. A in promoting B's end would thus be frustrating C's and his action might then be a bad one. Ends may be good or bad according as they promote or frustrate the ends of others, but in this aspect they have the characteristic of means. Ends as such are neither good nor bad, in the sense intended in moral philosophy.

I hold that the common moral consciousness takes the good man to be one who concerns himself with promoting the ends of others and that that is what is meant by calling him good. What others? The family or nation? In its crude form moral consciousness may consider limited units only and be regardless of the repercussions of the interests of a limited group on the outer world and, as will be explained in the section on obligation, even a more refined form may have to give special consideration to limited units. But, generally, the moral consciousness which takes a broader view, considering the interests of all sentient beings integrated over future time, is rightly regarded as the higher one.

But, the subtle objector will urge, if you speak of the higher and lower morality are you not committing Mill's fallacy with regard to pleasures, of adopting an external criterion for assessing these conflicting notions of morality? This objection may be met. The broader view may be regarded as better simply because it carries the principle implicit in any moral view to its logical conclusion. The essence of morality being regard for the interests of persons not oneself, extending the purview of persons is simply bringing the principle more fully into operation. The essence of morality is that the end considered should be that of others. If the group of persons included is one more or less closely associated with the self, the moral principle is still cloyed with egoism.

It may be objected that this wide view of all sentient beings, considered throughout future time, is too cold, and pays too little regard to the virtues of love and affection, is too much biassed, for instance, in favour of the disinterested seeker after truth. This is a mis-conception. Human nature differs, a division of labour is desirable, and various types of virtue must be recognised. It is true that the discoverer of truth may make a boundless contribution to the promotion of human ends ; on the other hand the chances that he will are not so great. What the more homely virtues lack in scope of benefit aimed at, they gain in the higher probability that some contribution will actually be made. The happiness conferred by human affection is assured and visible. It is desirable that each should develop the faculties he has. To do this may itself be counted a virtue, for by it the greatest promotion of the common interest will be realised.

A last objection must be met. Granted, it may be said, that the scope of virtuous action has been correctly described. None the less it must be recognised that to call it virtuous is to make a synthetic proposition ; otherwise all the proposition amounts to is that promoting the greatest common interest is promoting the greatest common interest. This is not very illuminating and leaves us without any reason for doing so or for praising such conduct.

I can only meet this objection by persisting in my ways. I have only risen to this extent above tautology, in that I hold that when people use the terms good, right, virtue, etc., promotion of the common interest is what they mean. I have given no reason for promoting the common interest. It is beyond the power of reason to prescribe ends. Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. Reason can determine means to ends, and the mutual consistency of different ends. Of ends as such it is altogether beyond its scope and capacity to say, "choose this, reject that". As for praising virtue, I have indeed given no reason for praising virtue. For to do that too would be fallacious. But let us praise virtue !

I hold that when people say that this or that is morally good, they mean that this or that is what, properly considered, promotes the common interest, and that if they say that promoting the common interest is good, the proposition is either a definition or means nothing. It is possible that men do sometimes slip into this tautologous method of speech. I give two reasons why that might naturally happen. 1. Much of what we seek to bring about, many of our proximate ends, are really means,—for example, the preservation of the human race and of an ordered society. The preservation of the human race is a means to the maximum

realisation of ends integrated through time. The word good is rightly used of these proximate ends, which may indeed be very remote. Constant use of the word of these remote proximate ends may naturally, through force of habit, though fallaciously, lead us to slip over to using the term of true ends. 2. It is possible that the proposition "promotion of the common interest is good" may have a synthetic meaning, the word good now being used in a slightly different sense. It may be used for "what I stand for, what I intend to encourage by my praise, discouraging the opposite by blame and censure". If it be then suggested that I praise it because I think it good, that would be again fallacious. There is no ultimate, as opposed to proximate, reason for doing or praising anything. Ultimate ends are a matter of pure choice. The view that the reason or intellect is able to discern an objective imperative residing in the nature of things is in my judgment fallacious and might well be called, borrowing Mr. Moore's catching rhythm, the rationalistic fallacy.

4. I now come to the question--what are the ends of sentient beings? This question, I think, can only be answered by introspection and observation. These ends are directly given. It is not that we recognise things to have a certain quality and therefore judge them to be ends. They are directly presented to us as ends. It would not, I think, take one far from the meaning I seek to convey if I defined end as the desired. Ends might then be bad, not as such, but because they conflicted with the ends of others. An object of desire which does not conflict with the desires of others considered through time is not bad.

But though the desired is a useful concept in that it may bring home what I mean by directly given, I am not quite happy about identifying end with the desired. I am not merely thinking of foolish desires. A man's desire is foolish if its satisfaction generates a state of affairs which he then desires not to be in. This difficulty is met by identifying the end with the least amount of outstanding unsatisfied desire, considered through time. But I suspect that there may be a deeper difficulty, which may perhaps be solved by a suitable definition of desire. Desire as commonly understood is especially associated with congenital impulse and with well-known types of emotional malaise, *e.g.*, Prof. Watson's palpitating stomach.

I take end to be whatever is found by experience to be capable of acting as a motive to action. But, of course, many of our motives are proximate ends and these must be excluded. To discover what ultimate ends are capable of acting as motives requires very careful scrutiny.

The Utilitarians attempted a great generalisation and affirmed that the sole ultimate end is pleasure. It is not clear that they were successful. Compare pleasure with the desired. It is true that if foolish desires are eliminated by the process I have called integration through time, there may be a much greater measure of consilience between pleasure and the desired than appears at first sight. There may be complete consilience, but I think it is over-dogmatic to assert that there is. Pleasure is certainly an end, but I am not clear that there may not be a conflict between pleasure and desire, even when desires are integrated.

Nor am I clear that pleasure and desire cover the whole field of ultimate motive. If a conflict between pleasure and desire is possible on principle, why not between desire and other things which experience shows to be capable of acting as a motive? The prospect of discovery may certainly act as a motive; it may also evoke desire. But is the strength of the desire always in proportion to the strength of the motive? No doubt on a certain definition of desire, they would always be proportional. If the definition of desire required for that is correct, *cadit quaestio*. But it is possible that such a definition would conflict with that required for certain branches of psychological investigation.

An end, then, is defined as that which is *de facto* found in and by itself to constitute a motive for sentient beings. And since conflicts of ends are not only possible but rife, to determine morality the ends must be ranked in importance. They must be ranked according to the strength of the motive. A calculus is necessary. A host of subsidiary problems will no doubt arise. I mention one. It is possible that certain ends, though not themselves bad (*i.e.*, conflicting with the ends of other people), usually present themselves to people, by some inner psychological law, many of whose ends are bad. When a detailed system of casuistry is developed, it is possible that these ends should not be given the full status, which the *de facto* strength of the motive entitles them to.

It may be objected that this philosophy does not generate a very clear system of casuistry, since strength of motive is not easily measurable. The objection lies against ordinary utilitarianism and all systems involving a calculus. Is this definition of good really consistent with the common moral consciousness, with its hard and fast notions? It is doubtful if this objection really is as strong as it seems. Many of the rigid rules are explained by the theory of obligation (*vide infra*). And for the rest is the plain man always so very sure where the path of goodness lies? Furthermore the great proximate ends, preservation of

the human race and of an ordered civilization, are justified with a very high degree of probability without nice measurement of particular motives. Given clearly defined proximate ends, the casuist has considerable scope.

II.

I now come to the special nature of obligations. The quite correct view, as I hold it, of the common moral consciousness that certain types of act are obligations has given rise to much erroneous speculation. *Prima facie* it might appear that the morality of the common interest is inimical to this notion of obligation, that in any situation there are various alternatives shading off into one another, each contributing more or less to the common interest. It is best to choose that which contributes most, better to choose that which contributes more than that which contributes less, and so on. Where is the hard and fast obligation?

Objection to the common interest philosophy can be carried further along these lines. For simplicity suppose the common interest philosophy to be identical with utilitarianism. There may be circumstances in which common moral consciousness would hold it to be obligatory to speak the truth, though no increment of pleasure could be foreseen as a result and certain pain would be caused. No doubt there are also cases, if the pain is very severe and no good served, when the common consciousness would justify a lie. But I think it must be admitted that there are cases when there is a seeming conflict between the common consciousness and the utilitarian principle.

Now to this problem I believe that Kant made a contribution, which is a vital and essential part of any moral system, but he mistook the significance of his own discovery and put it in a setting of fallacy. I refer to his proposition that morality requires action on a maxim that may be made a general law. At first sight this may seem to have no relation to Utilitarian philosophy; but I believe it to be indispensable to it.

The Utilitarian says "always choose that action which will contribute to the greatest happiness". Such a maxim is general enough. Its fault is that it is on too high a plane of generality. It is necessary to look in greater detail into human arrangements. Take the case of the lie. The Utilitarian, it would seem, should say, always lie when the probable consequences including the speaker's loss of credit and the possible general loss of confidence in the spoken word involve more happiness than those produced

by the truth. If everyone lied in those circumstances and in those circumstances only, all would apparently go well. But as a matter of fact this is not the case.

Communication by language is a notable invention of man for the furtherance of his ends. It is of great importance that communications should be reliable for their truthfulness. Now if the Utilitarian rule of life in its crude form, as set out above, were adopted, they would become markedly less reliable and great consequential damage might ensue. But it might be pleaded that the loss of confidence is allowed for in the crude Utilitarian maxim—and *some* loss of confidence is allowed for. The plea nevertheless is fallacious.

If this plea were correct the consequences indicated by the crude utilitarian principle would always be identical with the consequences deduced by the application of Kant's principle. The consequences of the act considered in, and by itself would not be different from the consequences of such an act when always performed in precisely similar relevant circumstances. This brings us to the essence of the matter. *There are certain acts which when performed on n similar occasions have consequences more than n times as great as those resulting from one performance.* And it is in this class of cases that obligations arise. It is in this class of cases that generalizing the act yields a different balance of advantage from the sum of the balances of advantage issuing from each individual act. For example, it may well happen that the loss of confidence due to a million lies uttered within certain limits of time and space is much more than a million times as great as the loss due to any one in particular. Consequently, even if on each and every occasion taken separately it can be shown that there is a gain of advantage (the avoidance of direct pain, let us say, exceeding the disadvantages due to the consequential loss of confidence), yet in the sum of all cases the disadvantage due to the aggregate loss of confidence might be far greater than the sum of pain caused by truth-telling.

He who wishes people so to act that the ends of sentient beings should be best served, must wish them to act in accordance with the Kantian and not the crude utilitarian principle. He will find it necessary to refine the crude utilitarian principle by applying the process of generalization in all relevant cases, that is in all cases where the consequences of *n* similar acts exceed *n* times the consequences of any one.

In constructing a system of morality, it is necessary, then, to choose between the crude Utilitarian principle and the Kantian principle, between the lie of expediency and the obligation of

truthfulness. A more refined Utilitarianism will decide in favour of the obligation, owing to the greater loss of advantage when the lie is generalised. Of course this may not be true in the case of the particular illustration given: the loss of confidence due to the universal lie of expediency may not be so great as the gain of advantage. This is a question of fact. The experience of generations, crystallized in moral consciousness, appears to be against the lie. But whichever side is right in the case of the lie, the point of principle has been established that an act which is expedient in the circumstances but would be inexpedient when done by all in precisely similar relevant circumstances must be judged to be wrong by a more refined utilitarian system. Thus the Kantian principle is embodied in utilitarian philosophy.¹

It should be noted in passing that what I call the Kantian principle does not condemn all lies. A lie is justified when the balance of pain or loss of pleasure is such that, if a lie was told in all circumstances when there was no less a balance of pain or loss of pleasure, the harm due to the total loss of confidence did not exceed the sum of harm due to truthfulness in every case. This doctrine, which I believe to be conformable to the common moral consciousness, puts the human interlocutor into a much stricter strait-jacket with regard to truthfulness than the crude utilitarian principle quoted at the outset.

Along with lies must be reckoned breaches of promises, of the law, of many, though not all, current standards of morality. The test is always—Would this action if done by all in similar relevant circumstances lead to the breakdown of some established method of society for securing its ends? I believe it will be found that this principle lies at the root of all so-called obligations. Their rigidity is precisely due to the fact that the relevant considerations are not the consequences of the particular act, but the consequences of the act when generalised.

I believe that whereas Kant was wrong in supposing his principle to be at the basis of all morality, it is at the basis of those particular moral acts which are usually thought of as obligations.

¹ It should be noted that approval is only given to Kant's principle, and not to the grounds on which he sought to base it. He defended it not by reference to the advantages of its adoption, but as required by logic, e.g., so that human conduct should not be "self-contradictory". The notion that action may be self-contradictory is found also in Hobbes (*cf. Leviathan*, ed. W. G. Pogson-Smith, 1909, p. 101). It is doubtful if any such notion can be defended. The defence of Kant's principle in the text has no relation to it. But a code of action may be self-contradictory. And it is pointed out below that Utilitarian casuistry, unchecked by the Kantian principle, might easily tend to develop a self-contradictory code.

If the act is of a sort to which the Kantian principle is applicable, it is much more likely that there will turn out to be a balance of advantage in its favour. Hence the rigidity with which we regard those acts commonly called obligations. If there is a question of helping some one, this and that consideration are taken into account, and it is quite likely to turn out on balance even from a purely moral point of view to be not worth doing. But if it is a question of speaking the truth, it is considered very improbable that this should not be done—and this, even though the positive advantage that flows from this particular piece of truthfulness is not greater than that which flows from the particular act of kindness. The difference is due to the fact that in one case the Kantian principle does and in the other does not make a difference to the crude utilitarian principle.

This account explains the *prima facie* view that there is something in the recognised nature of an obligation that conflicts with any philosophy of ends. The conflict, we have seen, is apparent only. It also accounts for the fact that the quasi-instinctive emotions of disgust, which such actions evoke, often seem unreasonably strong. Only those societies could attain stability in which they were strong, because it is precisely in the case of these actions that the individual not understanding the Kantian principle might, if left unmolested, be most tempted to say—"well, why on earth should I?" One may even add that it is the subtlety and difficulty of the principle, which cannot be explained to the average man, that has made an arbitrary and authoritarian element in the moral sphere necessary to the evolution of stable society. This enlightened age has its dangers. Perhaps the philosophers of indefinable obligation still have their part to play, and it may be inexpedient that they should be put to public shame by the votaries of expedience.

It is interesting to notice that the system of free competition does not allow for the application of the Kantian principle in the purely economic or katallactic field. And it is precisely the phenomena of "Increasing Returns"—analogous to those requiring the application of the Kantian principle in everyday conduct—which have given one of the strongest arguments in justification of the demand for "economic planning".

Now it is not to be expected that the humble man in the street will be quick to jump spontaneously to what I for brevity call the Kantian point of view. Pessimism about him should not indeed be overdone. "Well, if everyone behaved in that sort of way" is a familiar phrase of condemnation. It will be found, however, that it is most frequently used for breaches of established

conventions. It is owing to this weakness of the average man that types of act to which the Kantian principle is applicable are often associated with *recognised practices and institutions*. In the process by which stable society—temporarily stable society at least!—has evolved, those systems have survived which have established recognised practices and institutions giving effect to the Kantian principle, and allowing members to reap the additional advantages which adherence to it can yield. I am thinking of codes of honour, truthfulness, honesty, discharge of debt, performance of promises, etc., and of states with systems of law and recognised obligations of loyalty.

First consider *practices*. The Kantian principle is applicable if the loss due to n infringements is greater than n times the loss due to one. But suppose that in fact it is generally infringed. Suppose that I live in a society in which the spoken word is seldom to be relied on or men go about in constant fear of their lives. The community is not in fact reaping the benefit which could be reaped by the application of the Kantian principle. What is my obligation? It appears to be doubtful whether it is appropriate in these circumstances to apply the refining process to the crude utilitarian principle. Of course the example of an upright or peaceably minded man may be potent. But the direct effect of example is, it will be remembered, allowed for in the crude utilitarian principle. I think the common moral consciousness would judge the refining process to be inappropriate.

But it ought to be possible to put a finer point upon the argument. The common moral consciousness having endorsed the doctrine of common interest, it ought to be a question of fact whether the application of the refining process will in any case subserve it. Now when the process is applied there will be loss of advantage in particular instances; but there is a gain if it is applied in a large number of instances. The Utilitarian must wish it applied widely. I believe that, where the practice is not general, a second refining process is required. Will the gain due to its application by all conscientious, *i.e.*, moral, people *only* be sufficient to offset the loss which the crude utilitarian principle registers? It may be objected to this that there are no moral people, but only more or less moral people. To meet this, for the word moral in the second refining principle, say people sufficiently moral to act disinterestedly in this kind of case. It may be noticed that the second refining principle introduces some complicated mathematics into moral philosophy. This must not be held as an objection, if the facts demand it! It is needless to say that in practice the calculation will only be implicit and

the roughest approximations possible. The game of refined calculation would not be worth the candle, and, anyhow, precise data are lacking.

The point is this. The double set of considerations are interlocked. When the practice is not generally observed, the conscientious man has to take into account not only the amount of crude utilitarian loss due to his particular act but also the amount of conquest of counteracting impulse which observance of the practice in his type of case entails. He may not observe the practice *either* because the direct loss is too severe *or* because the temptation to do the opposite in this case is so great that there would not be sufficient upright men overcoming it in similar circumstances to secure a net gain through wider performance of the practice. He has not only to write down a function showing in the case of various contingencies the relation of gross gain when the action is generalised to the amount of crude loss, but also one for a different but overlapping variety of contingencies showing the relation of the number of people prepared to overcome temptation (and the consequent net gain) to the intensity of the temptation, and he has to study the interaction of the functions. I will refrain from pursuing this line of thought further, and only state my belief that implicit calculations of this kind are actually carried out in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life by moral men.

It may be of greater interest to draw attention to the fact that a properly conceived utilitarianism does involve that the obligatoriness of a certain practice depends on the degree to which it is observed by others, and that that in turn partly depends on the prevalence of sanctions embodied in the moral sentiment of disapprobation. Hobbes was substantially right when he held that there are no obligations in a state of nature, *i.e.*, when none of these practices are generally observed, and in the reasons which he gave for that proposition. He was probably right in holding that without sanctions of force one cannot proceed far in getting practices sufficiently widely established to make, in my language, the two refining principles taken together yield much result. But he was wrong to hold that there can be no morality in a state of nature. For even then the crude utilitarian principle is applicable and will be applied by virtuous people.

Before leaving the topic of practices, I may refer to a principle which occupies a central position in the common moral consciousness, which I will call the Principle of Publicity. It has been seen that the obligatoriness of certain acts depends on a (reasonably) wide observance of the practice in question. In a large class of cases the gain of advantage is due to the mainten-

ance of confidence, *e.g.*, in the reliability of informative utterance for truthfulness, of promises for being kept, etc. It might appear that if defalcation could be kept secret, as in the case of lies which could never be discovered, then, since no loss of confidence could ensue, the obligation would lapse and certain gain should not be sacrificed in the interest of truthfulness. Yet in fact common moral consciousness regards secret as more rather than less odious than public defalcations—and rightly. For if it can be shown that undiscovered lies are wrong, severer blame is required to overcome the greater temptation to commit those that will probably be undiscovered, and is therefore justified.

Take the case when the lie can never be discovered. The liar then has no debit due to loss of confidence to set against the interests served by the lie. If, in every case when there was a general balance of advantage and the lie could never be discovered, lies were told, there would be a sensible loss of confidence. Not, it will again be pleaded, if the lies are always to be kept secret. But what is this secrecy? If virtuous men are known to be acting on the crude utilitarian principle when secrecy is possible in the particular case, then it will be known that lies in this case will be told even by the most conscientious and there will be loss of confidence. What presumably is required is that all men should utterly forswear the crude utilitarian principle and at the same time act upon it when secrecy can be maintained. What doctrine is to be preached? The crude utilitarian principle because it is desired that all men should act upon it. Some anti-utilitarian principle because it is desired that all men should believe that no one is acting upon it. To such a system it almost seems that Kant was right to apply the much-abused expression, self-contradictory.

It may be that the common interest would in fact be best served by each man acting on the principle of crude expediency himself and believing that others were following certain arbitrary rules. Such a system would certainly be an interesting one. But it is not one which the word morality is used to denote. This may seem to be an appeal to brute fact. Such an appeal is highly salutary. The words moral obligation have always been used and can conveniently be used to apply to a system of behaviour which is commonly recognised by the participants. Now the system just outlined could not of its nature be commonly recognised. Moreover for a system of moral obligations to be workable—and this is an appeal to a different kind of brute fact—it is necessary that it should be closely connected with the emotion and expression of approbation and disapprobation. This again

would be impossible. Thus the utilitarian who wishes the advantages yielded by embodying the Kantian principle in publicly recognised practices to be reaped, must wish them observed whether or not defalcation can be kept secret.

One further point regarding practices. We have found one reason why the common moral consciousness regards obligations as relatively rigid, namely that their force does not spring from the consequences of the act in the particular case, but from wider considerations. There may well be another reason. To get certain practices generally recognised and enforced has not been an easy task. It is probable therefore that among all possible practices, the trouble requisite for their establishment and maintenance has only been taken in cases where the gain was clear and overwhelming. It is possible that in a highly refined society many other practices yielding a smaller advantage may be erected into recognised obligations. But there is danger in too much haste. For if there was too great a proliferation of obligatory practice, the sanctions with which they could rationally be upheld would be weaker and the exceptions recognised as admissible more numerous. Such a state of affairs might become unstable. For, human nature being what it is, there is a strong pull of common sense, on the part of those who simply cannot understand the Kantian principle, towards infringing obligations in the interest of direct advantage. This has no necessary connection with moral failure; for the motive may be purely altruistic, the visible advantages accruing to another. This being the state of affairs, it is well to delimit the sphere of obligatory practices, so that the quasi-sacrosanct character of those there are may be rationally defended.

It is not necessary for me to add much about *institutions*. They may impose sanctions where moral sentiment is insufficient to get a practice established. But, of course, they do much more. They supply machinery for devising practices by which the advantages of the Kantian principle may be reaped, *e.g.*, systems of commercial law. Some of these practices and the consequent mutual obligations will be co-terminous with the sphere of influence of the institution.

The state is not the only institution which generates obligations. There is the family, the trade union, the university, etc. The question whether an individual ought to come out on strike in obedience to orders is clearly one, like the question whether to enlist in a war, to which the Kantian principle applies. I now discharge a promise, which I made earlier in this paper, to speak of morality as affecting *particular* groups of others, as distinguished

from *all* sentient beings including posterity in general. Application of the Kantian principle may secure net advantage; this advantage is sometimes only possible if recognised institutions exist to define a system of obligations. These institutions only spread their net over a section of the sentient world. The particular system of obligations only applies to their mutual dealings. It follows that morality may make definite claims on the individual in his treatment of the interests of others within limited groups that are absent in his treatment of sentient beings in general.

Of course his obligation is governed by the utility of the institution and of the system of rules which it sets up. Some might hold, for instance, that the family, whatever its services in the past, is in the modern world an outworn institution and not worth preserving at a sacrifice of other interests. The obligations which it imposes are *pro tanto*, weakened. This can hardly be said of the state until its many functions are taken over by an actual and effective international institution.

To conclude, it may be well to draw attention to my points of agreement and difference with the traditional utilitarian position.

1. The utilitarians were anxious to establish that the content of any system of moral behaviour is determined by the ends sought and must therefore vary if the most appropriate methods of achieving those ends vary. They would not countenance a system of obligations considered as binding on their own account without reference to the results of the behaviour prescribed. But this position, sound in itself, led them, on my view, to a serious error. Since the system of conduct characterised as good is generated by the ends sought, whatever is good in the conduct, they tended to argue, must spring from some good residing in the ends, and the ends must therefore be regarded as good. This at once gave a twist to their system which strikes the common moral consciousness as a-moral, *i.e.*, not genuinely expressing what is understood by that consciousness. Thus, according to their system no distinction of moral significance can be drawn between an act designed to secure a certain quantum of pleasure for the agent and an act designed to secure an equal quantum of pleasure for someone else. Thus they lost sight of the point that altruism is essential to the ordinary notion of moral goodness (but for a proviso about self-regarding moral acts, *vide supra*). On the ordinary view, it cannot be that the goodness of virtuous conduct is derived from goodness in the end, for an end ("state of affairs") indistinguishable in all respects from one, which would make an altruistic act good, would not make a selfish act good.

The introduction of altruism, however, as essential to virtue, is not inconsistent with the utilitarian view that the content of virtuous behaviour must be determined by the end and must be adapted from time to time as appropriate means vary. It is not inconsistent with the general principle of expediency.

2. I am in agreement with the inductive method by which the Utilitarians sought to establish the ends to which a system of moral conduct should be directed. This method consists in distinguishing by observation the ultimate from the proximate ends of conscious endeavour. It is in radical opposition to the view that there is some unanalysable quality, goodness, which can be detected as residing in some, but not in other, ultimate ends. In effect it rescues moral philosophy from the toils of mysticism and from the personal predilections of its practitioners. But I regard the generalization that pleasure is the sole ultimate end as non-proven.

3. Traditional utilitarianism strikes the common moral consciousness as unsatisfactory, also, for lack of a well-defined theory of obligation. It may be held that the substantial point presented in the second part of this paper was appreciated by the best writers. But the point was not argued with precision. Thus it may be claimed that a gap has been filled.

4. The common interest has been presented as the end of moral conduct. But I hold that no reason can be given for pursuing this or any ultimate end. The attempt to give a rational justification for morality, so that the decision to be moral appears to be inferred as a conclusion from premises, can but lead to confusion. Here Hume, right as usual, was on surer ground. He recognised that in this sphere reason is the servant and not the master.

Only in one way, I think, can reason assist in establishing the common interest as the end. The philosopher is shown the spectacle of striving, discordant humanity and is asked to make some observations. If he says that some of their ultimate aims are good and others bad, he is uttering an unjustifiable impertinence. But he can and should express neutrality as between one individual and another. It is not for him to favour any particular person. And by his neutrality the common interest with its consequential system of morality is established. He may indeed have a personal interest in a particular nation, but world philosophical opinion has not. And, since the philosopher expects no immediate recognition, the opinion to which he appeals has no personal interest in the present generation.