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Modes of the Finite

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Part Five

Modes of Conduct

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Chapter 1

The place of this discussion

I had originally planned to treat the modes of relating, dealing with the various ways in which we interact with each other (as "independent" persons and as cooperative members of society), before going on to discuss the modes of conduct. But I found that as I started to do so, it was impossible to talk about how we *do* relate to each other as human beings without talking about human *conduct,* or whether these ways of relating were consistent or not (morally right or wrong).

So, while logically it might seem at first blush better to describe the various facets of our reality before we get into questions of how to act consistently with these facets, in practice this won't work when the "facets" are in fact inter*actions* we have with one another. Hence, this part on human conduct will precede the part on interrelations. I plan three basic sections here: First, the general principles of ethics; secondly, the applications of those principles to one's own individual life (questions such as whether it is wrong to sterilize oneself irrespective of its effect on others); and then thirdly a brief look at religion's place in human life. The other applications of ethics will then come up as the different ways we have of relating with each other are discussed.

Chapter 2

The starting-point

Let me begin this excursion into ethics by a quote that I ran across from J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*:

> What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty—say, causing pain just for fun—and the moral fact that it is wrong? It cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic necessity…How much simpler and more comprehensible the situation would be if we could replace the moral quality with some sort of subjective response which would be causally related to the detection of the natural features on which the supposed quality is said to be consequential.

His contention is that calling hurling grenades at children in busses objectively wrong is "queer."—because it supposes "objective values or intrinsically prescriptive entities." Blind! And none so blind as he who through closed eyes cries, "I see! I see!"

The answer to his difficulty, of course, is that facts are not "entities" (objects, properties) at all, but *relationships* that have a "hook" onto objects by their properties, as we saw in Chapter 6 of Section 5 of the first part. The fact *as such* does not exist, in the sense that it is not either a body, a part of a body, a spirit, or an activity;

but it is a fact nonetheless that objects are related in a certain way. The *relation* of fatherhood I have with my children is a fact, not an "entity," nor some real "string" connecting me and my children; and my fatherhood as a *property* can be expressed as a set of differences in me because I am the father of these two people. Those differences exist, of course; but the connection, the fact itself, doesn't.

But this is the case with *any* fact, including scientific facts such as the earth's belonging to the solar system. There is no "entity" of "belongingness" that can be observed. Hence, if Mackie is trying to find some "entity" called "wrongness" inside the act of deliberate cruelty, he is barking up the wrong tree. It is a *fact* that the act is wrong; and its wrongness is not a "thing" it *has*.

And of course the fact in question is that it is *inconsistent* for a person who doesn't want others torturing him to go about torturing others, as if this notion that he is inviolate from torture were some special privilege he had as an individual and not something we all have just because we are human. Now that's a fact, not an "entity."

But it *does* raise the issue of *why inconsistencies must be avoided,* which is the real moral issue. And in this sense, Mackie's wrong-headed approach does hit upon something significant.

That is, when we say "Doing that action is wrong" to someone, we expect that (a) we are informing him of a *fact* that he might not realize—that the act is inconsistent with him as a human being—and (b) that his knowing this fact *will induce him to avoid the act*. Mackie couldn't see what we were trying to inform the man of; but the more significant issue is why we expect that if a person knows something is wrong, he knows that he must avoid it.

There are all kinds of inconsistencies that don't seem to carry this imperative along with them. It is grammatically inconsistent, for instance, to use a double superlative; and therefore Shakespeare *had to* have avoided saying "This is the most unkindest cut of all"? It is logically inconsistent to use a double negative in a negative sense,

and therefore Spanish must revise its grammar?

But if something is *humanly* inconsistent—i.e., if it is something we think is an *inhuman* way to behave—why do we automatically think, "Therefore it must not be done"? Especially if it is to your advantage to do it.

It is *inconsistent* to say that something which is to your advantage must not be done by you, because if you say it *must* not be done, you are clearly not saying that you *can't* (physically) do it, but appealing to your *reason* to induce you to *avoid choosing* the act. But to give a reason for an act is to provide a motive, and a motive is a chosen *effect* of the act, as we saw in Chapter 6 of Section 3 of the third part. But if the act is to your *advantage,* then how is its inconsistency with your humanity an *effect* that would make you not do it? That fact would have to make it *disadvantageous, in such a way that it outweighs the advantage.*

We seem to have an effect here, according to the definition of effect back in Chapter 2 of Section 2 of the first part, and so we have the material for a scientific investigation into ethics.

Obviously, if you have read this far, you know that I think I have a solution to this problem: what the eternal consequences are of making a choice to act inconsistently with yourself. If that theory is upheld, then what is *wrong* (inconsistent) becomes automatically a *disvalue* (disadvantageous) if you know that it is wrong and choose it anyway.

But it is my purpose here to table this for the moment, state the basic effect dealing with morality as clearly as possible, and see whether any other hypothesis has a hope of resolving it. If not, then either the theory I advanced is Sherlock Holmes's: "The one remaining, Watson, however improbable, must be the truth"—or the whole area of moral discourse is nonsense, and even Mackie's (and, of course, his father Hume's and that of so many of his brothers and sisters in theory, like A. J. Ayer's) "solution" that we simply express

our disapproval is also nonsense, since what business do we have disapproving of what someone else is doing? Not to mention that none of us have any rights, if all we can do is "express personal disapproval" of someone's violating them.

One of the problems with ethical theory has been that up until Kant it was asking an objectively unanswerable question: "What is 'the good' for human beings"? Since "the good" is defined by the person's goals, as we saw in Chapter 10 of Section 5 of the first part, Chapter 6 of Section 3 of the third part, and Chapter 2 of Section 7 of the fourth part, then, though each person can come up with an answer to the question, the answers will not agree; and furthermore, they are all irrelevant to the issue of rightness and wrongness, which is basically where one *draws the line* between acts consistent with being human and those inconsistent with it. That is, "the good" deals with the *perfection* of a person's humanity, its self-defined upper limit, while rightness and wrongness deal with the *zero* of humanity as far as acts are concerned, where they begin to contradict the given reality of the agent. Even in Scholastic philosophy, which had some very accurate notions of right and wrong, this confusion prevailed, because it illogically supposed you could derive the notion of inconsistency from the alleged purpose of life to reach God. The arguments were ingenious, but in point of fact, ethical injunctions in fact don't tell you how to get to heaven fastest, or how to reach the highest place in it, but how to avoid hell—by stating the minimal characteristics of human nature and showing what was inconsistent with them.

Ayn Rand suffers from a variation of this. Following Aristotle, she takes "the good" as the criterion for morality, and for her "the good" is "what fulfills my objectively true self"—from which she got the idea originally of calling her philosophy "egoism," and later "objectivism." She derives "the purpose" of life from observing that living beings tend to preserve themselves, and therefore have

themselves as goals of their actions. Since this is the purpose of life, then it follows that what leads to fulfillment of the purpose ("man's life"—i.e. to self-preservation and development) is good, and what is inconsistent with it is evil.

Much of her philosophy is consistent with what I consider the truth, because in my view what is morally evil is acting as if you aren't what you objectively are, and so the negative aspects of morality are more or less the same. I would deny that you *must* fulfill yourself to the greatest extent possible (and this is also the quarrel I have with the Scholastics), since it would leave you no freedom whatever (since you are morally obliged to do what is better, even if the alternative is good)—and would leave no room for indifferent actions or saying that heroic actions are "above and beyond the call of duty," as they are universally recognized to be. To be free and not have any moral room to exercise one's freedom is not to be free in practice; and so is itself a contradiction of one's humanity as free.

No, we can do whatever we want, as long as it is not positively self-contradictory, even if there is something "more human" that is open to our activity. If you want to be an auto mechanic, you don't *have* to fulfill your talent as a mathematician. I mentioned this earlier in discussing the Parable of the Talents.

Rand also has the problem, since she doesn't think that life survives death, of why one should bother avoiding what is morally wrong if perpetrating the act fulfills a more important aspect of oneself. You have to forego living a prosperous, long life if the only way you can get there is by committing treason. And it is no argument to say that you "couldn't live with yourself" in that case, because (a) everyone who has, say, lied and gained something important by it recognizes that it is pretty easy to live with this minor frustration—and consequently, we can learn to live and "put behind us" practically anything if we gained by it; and anyway (b), you can always assuage your guilt by arguing that you have avoided the evil

connected with losing whatever it is you gained by the immorality, and that that is greater than the evil you brought on yourself by it. This sort of thing, however, is the same as saying that the end justifies the means, and then "morality" becomes a mere exercise in the abstract, which makes no practical difference. In essence, when a Randian does something that is against his objective self in order to fulfill a subjective goal, the only bad thing that happens to him is that people can say, "You did something wrong." And that, I submit, is no motivation in the area that everyone recognizes as the most serious area of human life.

Rand also says that we must make self-fulfillment the purpose of our lives because, since we are the originator of our actions, we must be also their goal. She dismisses "altruism" as a delusion or a lie; those who *think* they are acting for someone else *rather* than themselves don't realize that it's the *satisfaction they get* in feeling "noble" that is motivating them; and this is selfish.

First of all, as rational individuals, we can recognize that *objectively* we are no better or greater than any other human being, and *therefore,* there is *objectively* no reason why my actions have to have myself rather than someone else as their goal; the fact that they originate from me is an accident as far as the effect they have is concerned. Further, since the will is motivated by *reason,* and reason is capable of abstracting, I can abstract from my own fulfillment if I recognize, for instance, that an objectively greater good would be achieved if someone else happens to be the beneficiary of my act. Driving a friend to the hospital to see his dying sister might not be advantageous (might even be slightly inconvenient) to me, but the benefit to the friend and the sister objectively outweighs this by far.

I hasten to say that, as we will see later, it is immoral to *choose to do positive damage* to oneself for the sake of another's benefit, or even to avoid greater harm to another person. That is the essence of immorality: to choose to contradict oneself. As we will also see, there

is a way of keeping a harmful effect of one's *actions* out of the *choice* to act (the Principle of the Double Effect), which makes it not immoral to recognize that some (minor) harm will come to me from taking an action that saves someone else from a major harm. Thus, I can donate a kidney to another person who will die if he doesn't get it—because I don't really need two kidneys to live—even though there are risks involved in the operation. Everyone recognizes that we can do something to save *ourselves* from harm, even if it involves some (unintentional) harm to another (and so contradicts our "social selves," as in defending ourselves from an attack). If this is so, then given the fact that we do not live on a higher level than anyone else, we can also allow harm to ourselves to save others from graver harm.[1]

Rand misinterprets "altruism" as always meaning "doing harm to yourself to benefit others," and when one *chooses* one's own harm as a means of helping others, this *is* in fact immoral. But one may be morally altruistic in two ways, as I said: (1) by foregoing a *benefit* whose deprivation causes no positive *damage* in order for someone else to receive a greater benefit, and (2) by *permitting* a harm by an action which simultaneously saves someone else from greater harm.

Finally, Rand is, like most other ethicians, mistaken in taking the "good" or the "purpose of life" as the foundation of ethics, when ethics is really involved in *avoiding evil,* and doing good is left up to our freedom.

Not surprisingly also, when people like Hume, Ayer, and Mackie try to find "the good," they discover that it is subjective, and so

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[1]Thus, Jesus could decide to allow himself to undergo the crucifixion, if he recognized that every other human being would suffer eternal damnation if he was not crucified. He could not deliberately crucify himself, but he could *permit* it to be done to him because of the greater harm that was objectively avoided by it. Note that Jesus *did* speak in his own defense at his trials, so that he gave the accusers (including Pilate) reasons for acquitting him; it was they, not he, who actively chose his harm.

assume that moral rightness and wrongness are also subjective.[2] Hence, to approach the study of ethics from the point of view of "What is 'the good'?" is counterproductive, but even worse, misses the point.

It is much better to start with the following:

Basic effect: Every person thinks that what is wrong *according to his own definition of "wrong"* is something that he *must not* do—and in fact, something that *no one* must do. Yet it may be clearly advantageous to him to do the act, without there being any *observable* disadvantage.

Now as to the first part of the effect, that every person thinks that what is wrong must be avoided, this is simply an empirical fact. Psychologists tell us that even "pathological" people have *some* acts, however bizarre to the rest of us, that they think they must avoid—or in other words, there has been no instance of a person who is *so* pathological that he has no guilt about anything whatever. Most pathological people don't experience guilt at doing (or "see anything wrong with doing"—note how closely the phrase is connected with "feel any obligation to avoid") things that normal people think must

[2]Rand also has some pretty subjective ideas about what "the objective good" is. For instance, after defining "man's life" as the objective goal of one's actions (and therefore of morality), she points out that someone in an intolerable situation (as in the Gulag) can commit suicide, on the grounds that the life he is living is not "*man's*" life. But she based her notion of the objective purpose of life on the fact that all living beings tend to preserve themselves (i.e. stay alive), and so it is *the fact of being alive*, not some *type* of life that is the "man's life" that logically should be the purpose of life,. and therefore the *objective* good. Similarly, she chooses to say that the fetus is "not yet" living "man's life," because, basically, he can't think yet. But then does one lose "man's life" whenever he goes to sleep or is knocked out and can't think? But enough of Rand.

not be done, such as killing or lying or stealing; but each has *something* that is taboo to him.

And anthropologists and sociologists point out that taboos are one of those "cross-cultural constants": things that appear in every culture without exception. Granted, the *acts* that are considered taboo or forbidden vary (often vastly) from culture to culture; but the *fact that there* ***are*** *taboo acts* is found in *every* culture. Let me now add something of my own:

Empirical finding: Every person's notion of what is wrong and therefore must be avoided follows from his notion of what it is to be a human being. The wrong act is recognized as wrong because it is understood to be *inhuman,* in the sense of inconsistent with what he is as human.

I find this true, not only among cultures and individuals within a culture, but also *every ethical theory,* even if it repudiates "natural law" ethics, surreptitiously bases itself upon the theorist's notion of what humans are, and therefore what acts are inconsistent with this.

Let me give some examples. Mackie's position, above, is that calling things "objectively" right and wrong is "queer." Now insofar as that theory is just an interesting discussion of how funny we are, it could perhaps stand. But insofar as it implies, "Therefore, we really ought not to act as if moral rightness and wrongness are objective," it (a) contradicts itself, and (b) supposes that *since* there is nothing objective to base morality on, *no human being should act as if there was.* If he does, he is mistaken, and if he realizes that there is no objective basis, he should refrain from pretending that there is one. In other words, it is *inconsistent* with a person who knows that morality has no objective basis to *act as if* morality had one; and therefore, he shouldn't do this.

Now even if Mackie doesn't (in the name of consistency) precisely draw this conclusion, certainly most of his readers do. It is clear from the tone, if not the explicit statements, of moral relativists that they "disapprove" of moral absolutists, especially when the moral absolutists set about passing laws that "impose their moral standards" on those who don't happen to possess them.

Why would a moral relativist *seek to stop* an absolutist from passing a law forbidding, say, the reading of pornography, if the absolutist thought it was his moral *duty* to see to it that no one engaged in this practice? Certainly plenty of anti-pornography people believe they have a positive obligation to prevent anyone from reading pornography. But if the relativist actually wants to *stop* him from "imposing his moral standards on those who don't share them," then *he is imposing the moral standard of non-interference on someone who does not share it,* and so is violating *his own* moral standard (which applies only to himself) in the name of seeing to it that *others* don't violate it.

That is, the moral relativist who doesn't want interference with his behavior on the part of the "self-righteous" is self-righteously interfering with their following their conscience. He is therefore in practice assuming that *his* moral prohibition of non-interference *is an objective moral standard* applicable to *everyone*.

And why? Because it is *inconsistent,* on his view, for a person to apply subjective moral standards as if they were objective. Hence, his view is that reasonable people must not act unreasonably (because recognizing inconsistency and avoiding it is reasonable).

The cultural moral relativist is in the same position. He can justify the authority's imposing moral standards on the rest of the culture, insofar as the authority enjoins what those acts that are the basic consensus of right and wrong for that culture; but he gets very hot under the collar when one culture presumes to impose its moral standards on those of another culture.

It happens to be close to the quincentennial of Columbus's discovery of America; and cultural relativists are already saying that we shouldn't be celebrating but deploring the act. I have read vilifications of the Spanish missionaries who came over to the New World and rammed Christianity down the throats of the poor Indians, completely "ruining" a culture which "worked" perfectly well for them, even if it included ritual human sacrifice and so on. Who were the Spaniards to think that *their* morality was so much "better"?

Well who are these cultural relativists to tell the Spanish missionaries what to do? By whose standards to they say the Spanish "ruined" the Aztec and Inca cultures? By *their own* standards. The Spaniards thought they *improved* the cultures. Who are the cultural relativists to think that leaving them alone is so much "better" than not doing so?

That is, the cultural relativists are in fact trying to impose their own standards of non-interference on *everyone* who would try to export his moral standards beyond his culture; and the fact that they castigate those who interfere, and in fact try to prevent its happening in the present day, show that *they* are exporting their own standard beyond their own culture, and judging other cultures by it.

And the reason for this, once again, is the idea that morality is supposedly arrived at by social consensus, and *it is inconsistent* therefore with a society to export its internal standards, and force them on other cultures. Such a thing is *inhuman,* these people think, and *therefore* not to be tolerated. Intolerance, in other words, must not be tolerated, because intolerance, on their view, is the one inhuman act (and it's the one inhuman act precisely because they think that there is no such thing as "human nature" that we all possess).

Marx decried "bourgeois morality" as something that was used by the bourgeoisie to keep down the proletariat; and so it would seem

that his philosophy had no moral code. But it certainly did, as anyone studying Communism can see, by the fervor by which *any* action which was to lead to the overthrow of capitalism and the inauguration of the classless society was one that was to be done and every "reactionary" act, however humane it might seem, was to be crushed. And why? Because until the classless society existed, every person was "alienated" from his own humanity—or in other words, was not really human. People would be human *only* when the classless society existed, and therefore you couldn't do anything inhuman to people as they now existed—*except* lead them further away from the goal of being human. If you starved a million peasants in Ukraine, this was perfectly all right, because they weren't humans, and this step would (presumably) bring about the classless society faster. It all makes sense on Marx's definition of what it is to be human.

Sartre's notion of "bad faith" (which clearly he thinks is to be avoided) is making an "object" of yourself by refusing to choose (i.e., choosing not to choose) and letting someone else do the choosing for you; and this is clearly inconsistent with the "for itself's" being nothing but nothingness or absolute freedom. With Sartre, it doesn't matter *what* you choose, and so it would seem that for him nothing is immoral; but you *must not choose not to choose*. Again, perfectly consistent, if to be human is to be nothing but freedom.

Of course, Heidegger's "inauthenticity" is the same sort of thing. Instead of being *dasein,* you are acting as if you were just an object in the world when you act inauthentically; and therefore, you are acting inconsistently with what you are as human.

Hume's condemning those who base morality on reason instead of on emotions is based on his view in the *Treatise on Human Nature* that human beings are so constructed that reason can only understand relationships, and so can do nothing more than tell you whether a given act leads to a given end, and cannot tell you whether

the end is desirable, because reason cannot desire. Only "sentiment" can desire. *Therefore,* as he says, "reason is *and ought to be* the slave of the passions." [My italics.] It's one thing to say that it *is,* but when you say it *ought* to be you are implying, "And don't act as if it weren't." So it is because of his idea of what human nature *is* that he thinks that morality must not be based on a person's idea of what human nature is.

Kant's view that the moral imperative is "always act so that the maxim behind your action could be made a universal law applicable to everyone" is based on *his* view that reason is what makes the laws of our experience; and therefore reason *demands* that at act *must be reasonable*—because, of course, if it isn't, then this is inconsistent with reason, which is the basis of the action.

The Scholastics' view of what is morally wrong is, as I said, not really based on the possession of God as the purpose of life, but, as I learned it, "You may never fulfill any aspect of yourself when it means violating some other aspect of yourself." In other words, it isn't the fulfillment that forms the obligation but the injunction against inconsistency.

Even St. Augustine's notion that morality is based on love rather than "human nature" comes from this: "You have made us for yourself, Master, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." And as he spells this out in *The City of God,* either a person loves himself to the contempt of God (and so sins), or he loves God even to the contempt of himself (and so has the correct orientation of his will: toward God). So the sin is love, but self-love, which is inconsistent with his notion that we were made for God, and therefore God must be first.

You can test any other philosopher you want to name by this criterion, and as soon as he indicates that some act is to be avoided, you will find that this is based on what he thinks is involved with being a human being, and that he thinks this act is inconsistent with

this view.

If we step outside philosophy, we also find that the taboos of a culture spell out the culture's view of what acts are inconsistent with its view of what it is to be a human being. Our own culture now does not in fact regard fetuses as human beings, and therefore we permit abortions whenever a woman wants one. Two hundred years ago, Blacks were not thought of as human beings in our culture, and therefore what was the problem with owning them, as long as you weren't cruel to them? (The notion that it is inconsistent with your humanity to be owned by another person actually became clear only with Locke's notion of human rights as inherent in the individual rather than in his relation to society, as I will mention when I come to rights in the next part.) In some cultures, such as what used to prevail among the Eskimos, giving your wife to a guest for the night was considered perfectly all right; and in that culture, women were not considered as really human. Polygamy exists in cultures where women are regarded as not fully human, but as like children and retarded people. Suicide was morally required in Asian cultures like China and Japan; but in those cultures, one wasn't thought to be human *in himself* (your bodily life was your animal life, not your human life), but *by reason of his belonging to* his family or his group; and so if he brought disgrace—moral ruin—on the family, he could rectify the wrong by giving up his animal life for it.

That same notion that bodily life was "animal" and social life (one's "reputation") was the "really human" life was what was behind the practice of dueling in the European Middle Ages. If someone insulted you, he destroyed what was *human* about you; and so to "resurrect" that humanity, so to speak, you had to go to the "field of honor" and put the bestial life you had at risk. The Indians of our culture committed all kinds of atrocities—against those of other tribes. There were two sources of this: first, that *bravery* was where your humanity lay, and therefore, not running risks was to

show yourself inhuman; and secondly, as some tribes' names even showed, "the people," (i.e. the "human beings") were members only of the tribe itself; everyone else was thought of as simply not really human. We hear today about the horrors the Whites perpetrated against the Indians. Certainly there were many; but we are not told that the people the Whites were trying peacefully to live with were people who regarded them as animals (literally) and who liked to show their own humanity by performing outrageous and therefore extremely risky acts. It is also true that those anthropologists who began living with cannibals (talk about running risks!) found to their surprise that when the members of the tribe spoke of outsiders as "dogs" and "pigs," they meant the terms literally. Well, if you can eat a dog or pig, why not a Mandinka or an Englishman? They'd probably be even more nourishing, because they're so close to being human. But you don't eat *people* (members of the tribe).

And so on. Whenever something is forbidden in a culture, with the culture's *mores,* its taboos, as opposed to its folkways or rules of etiquette, you will find that that prohibition is a logical consequence of the culture's notion of what it means to be a human being. So I am going to take this as empirically established.

Given that, we are now in a position to define *conduct* as opposed to *behavior*.

Human behavior **is any overt act that a human being chooses to perform. That is, it is any act that a human being can either perform or not perform by choosing one way or the other: an act under the control of choice.**

Human conduct **is human behavior looked at from a moral point of view, as to whether the behavior is consistent or inconsistent with being a human being.**

But human conduct is simply the moral way of considering human behavior; and, as I said in Chapter 6 of Section 3 of the third part, since sometimes we can *do* something which normally would have followed from a choice by having our action taken over by instinct; and sometimes we can do things that are different from what we chose to do because of neurosis—or even choose to do something because of a delusion caused by ignorance or psychosis—there have to be some further distinctions that I made in discussing the difference between morals and values in Chapter 1 of Section 7 of the fourth part.

An *act* (i.e. an instance of conduct) is *morally right* if it is consistent with the reality of the agent. This is something *objective*, and does not depend on whether the agent (or anyone else) knows it or not.

An *act* is *morally wrong* if it is inconsistent with the reality of the agent. Again, this is simply a fact about the act, and need not be known.

A *choice* is *moral* if it is a choice to do an act known to be morally right. In order for a choice to be moral, there must be no *evidence* that it is wrong. I will discuss this later; but I want to refresh your mind about the term now.

A *choice* is *immoral* if it is a choice to do an act for which there is any factual evidence of its moral wrongness.

So only choices are moral or immoral, strictly speaking. Morally wrong acts can be called "immoral" by analogy, because they are the

kind of act which you can't choose to do (if you know what you're doing) without making an immoral choice. But the act in itself is morally neutral; if you do it without choosing it (as when you are asleep or insane), or if you choose it without realizing that it is wrong, you are not guilty of immorality. The act is still *wrong,* morally; but there was no violation of morality in its performance, because it was not deliberate.

With that distinction, we can have some clarity in talking of conduct. I will use "right" and "wrong" to refer to acts without intending to impute *blame or culpability* in those who perform them, because I am not assuming that those who perform the acts know that they are wrong or can prevent what they are doing. I am simply, by calling something morally wrong, stating that as far as I can see, it is an act which is *objectively inconsistent* with the reality of the agent.

On the other hand, when I say that something is *immoral,* I will be referring to the *choice itself,* and *not* necessarily to the act (because you can choose to do something and not be able to carry out your choice in action). I will be supposing, in saying that something is immoral, that the person in question *knows* or at least *has reason to believe* that the act he is choosing is wrong (whether in fact it is or not) and chooses to perform it anyway.

But I will, as I say, discuss this below at some length. Let this suffice for reminding you of the language I am using to refer to human conduct.

Now then, let us make a little closer *observation* about this sense that what is wrong (however defined) is forbidden. When we do, we find the following characteristics:

1. The "command" or imperative invariably deals with what is *forbidden* or "bad" in the culture or person, and *only includes those "good" acts whose omission is the practical equivalent of doing something forbidden.* That is, the taboos set *minimum* standards of

conduct (the definition of basically which acts or omissions are wrong, if you use my terminology), and leave without any *command* the acts considered "morally good" or even "morally heroic." The best moral acts are regarded in every culture as "over and above the call of duty," meaning that the culture does not think that they *have* to be done.

This in itself is a sub-effect of our basic effect. Why do only *some* cases of conduct have an imperative attached to them? If people tend to think that morality deals with what is "good" for human beings, why don't the *best* acts carry any obligation with them at all, and why is it only the most reprehensible of them that have an obligation attached to them?

2. Every person or culture surreptitiously thinks that what is *forbidden* for him is "really" forbidden for everyone. This is true, as I tried to show, even for those cultures or people which embrace cultural or personal moral relativism. They think that people who try to impose their standards on others *shouldn't* do it, and (a) should be enlightened as to the wrongness of what they are doing and/or (b) should be prevented from doing it if they are so perverse as to insist on it in spite of persuasion. The fact that those the *contents* of whose taboo forbids imposing standards actually try very hard to impose the standard of non-interference on others is an indication of how universal this view is.

Note that it does not apply to what a person or culture thinks is *permitted* to it, morally. People who think that a given act is morally permitted can be quite comfortable with others who think that the act is forbidden and refuse to do it, as long as those others don't try to make *them* stop. For instance, the reason pro-abortionists like to call themselves "pro choice" is that, whether they would have an abortion themselves or not, they think that abortion is *permitted* morally. And they don't have any problem with other people who think that it is forbidden morally, as long as those other people apply

this only to themselves. On the other hand, since many of these people are ethical relativists, they will try to *stop* the pro-life people from passing laws against abortion, even if they (the pro-choice people) have no intention of ever actually getting one—because for *them* interference in conduct is forbidden, and therefore forbidden for everyone. I was amused during the Vietnam War by seeing the same people who were yelling at the "prudes" for imposing their moral standards on others were simultaneously picketing the Pentagon and trying to get the killing in Vietnam stopped—thereby imposing their moral standards against war on the the people they didn't want imposing sexual standards on them.

This fact, of course, is another sub-effect. Why, when it is so manifest that there actually are many different moral codes, do people persist in thinking that what is their own moral code is, as far as the prohibitions are concerned, the "really right" one?

3. The moral prohibition—the one that is connected with acting "inhumanly"—is *regarded as the most serious one of all*. All other prohibitions are thought to yield to this one, and it only yields to a "more serious" moral taboo. For instance, a person who thinks that a civil law commands an immoral act automatically thinks he cannot obey the law—as many of the draft evaders in Vietnam thought. It is universally held that one must suffer torture and even death rather than violate the moral prohibition, whatever it is thought to be.

The sub-effect connected with this, of course, is that its being "better" to die than to be immoral certainly on the face of it cannot be thought of as advantageous in this life. While there are some who might consider it worse than death to live in disgrace, why *must* we *all* look on things this way? Even Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) says, "A live dog is better than a dead lion."

Another sub-effect connected with the seriousness is the almost universal experience of at some time actually doing what is regarded as forbidden *and getting away with it*. You lie, and are believed, and

the earth doesn't open and swallow you up; and in fact no one finds out. You steal something and are not caught, and keep what you stole and use it just as if it were yours. The reason this is a sub-effect is that, having had this experience, you don't immediately say, "Oh, I was wrong; it isn't forbidden to lie" or steal or whatever; you feel, "Well, I got away with it that time—I think; but I'd better not do it again." It isn't until you've had a lot of practice in doing the act that you begin not to worry about the consequences. But why worry about the consequences at all if there are none?

4. The moral prohibition is thought, if not universally, still in almost every culture throughout the world and throughout history, to have come somehow from some *divinity,* who will take care of the punishment associated with it.

The sub-effect connected with this is that not all the cultures (in fact few of them) that believe this also believe that there is an afterlife with a reward and punishment that would make virtuous conduct better than vicious. Odysseus meets, for instance, the shade of Heracles, I believe it was, in Elysium, and Heracles tells him he would give up his whole existence here (in the Greek heaven) for one more day of life on earth. Even the Hebrew people, when Qoheleth wrote, believed that after death everyone was the same.

The question, then, before us is to devise some theory of morality which can explain why *for practical purposes every person finds a prohibition attached to his notion of acting inhumanly*—a prohibition with the four characteristics above.

Chapter 3

Theories that don't work

One of the classic problems connected with morality has in fact already been handled by the empirical finding above. People tend to become cultural or individual ethical relativists by noting the diversity of moral codes even between individuals in a given culture and the much wider differences between moral codes of different cultures.

But this is easily explained by differences in the *idea of what it means to be a human being* that different people have, and the different views of whether a given act is or is not consistent with being human. Thus, one culture, as I said, thinks that the real humanity of a person resides in his individual life, while another thinks that that life is only the animal life, and the human life is the social life we have; or one person thinks that doing something to prevent conception is inconsistent with the sex act, and another says, "But we prevent headaches with pills, and you see nothing wrong with that; why is it inconsistent to prevent ovulation with a pill?"

So my contention is that differences in moral codes aren't differences in *values* at all, but differences in *the factual information* the person possesses (or thinks he possesses) about what his reality is and whether and how his acts are or are not inconsistent with this reality.

Hence, moral arguments *are* resolvable in principle. They are no

more and no less resolvable *in practice* than scientific arguments are. Ethicians are apt to take a rather exalted view of the willingness of scientists to give up their own view when new evidence presents itself; but scientists are just as pig-headed as anyone else, for all their propaganda to the contrary. I ran into a case of this myself when I was working at *Sky and Telescope*. I was reporting on an article in *Science* in which the author had shown by very detailed experiments that Boring's theory of the "moon illusion" (why it appears bigger on the horizon) was untenable, and why his own theory was better. As it happened, Boring was teaching at Harvard University, with which *Sky and Telescope* was affiliated; and so our editor in chief sent my summary to Boring for approval—and he vetoed it, saying it was nonsense. It was never published in our magazine. The trouble Mendel had in getting people to listen to his theory of genetics (which is universally held today) is another example; and they tell me that people would throw tomatoes at Einstein in the early days of Relativity Theory.

Small wonder, then, if someone comes along with a new view of what humanity is, or whether some act is or isn't consistent with it, and is resisted by those who have always held the contrary. Not only is he telling them that they are factually wrong, but that correcting this error is going to involve changing their conduct—very often in disagreeable ways. Who wouldn't want to have something like that conclusively proved before he'd buy into it?[3]

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[3]This works both ways, by the way. Some reformer who comes along telling people that what they thought was forbidden is really permitted is apt to be hated by the "conservatives" as corrupting the people's morals; and of course, if he tells them something they thought was all right is really forbidden, the "liberals" get after him. Jesus was in many ways a victim of the first kind of persecution, and Martin Luther King and Jesse Helms are examples of the second.

I'll say a little more about this under the social pressure theory below; but for now, the fact that people don't agree doesn't mean that there isn't something basic in common underneath everyone's moral code; it just means that, beyond some obvious characteristics, it's not the most straightforward thing in the world to find what it means to be human, and it's even less simple to understand whether a given act contradicts some aspect of humanity or not.

But the fact that it's not simple and straightforward doesn't mean that it's hopeless. There isn't much danger any more of people's deciding or coming to discover that there's nothing inconsistent with being human in being owned by somebody else, or that Black people or Jews are some other species than human. We learn gradually, both by studying ourselves and by trying things out and finding that they are at cross-purposes with themselves. And as far as we ourselves are concerned, we have, after all, a pretty good idea of what the structure of being human is, with evidence to back it up; and so we can make some pronouncements that people might not agree with, but which they can disagree with only by refuting the factual evidence that we bring forward. For instance, I can show that the "evidence" that fetuses are not human is, however plausible it may sound at first, sophistry; and that the arguments given in favor of abortion logically would allow killing other people that those who give the arguments do not in fact think it is all right to kill.

So don't be misled by all the talk that ethical questions can't be settled. Who are these people to say that it's a *fact* that they can't be settled, when *in fact* they have been, as in the Civil Rights movement and the anti-slavery movement before it?

Now then, let us consider the possible sources of how this prohibition got attached to behavior that is considered inhuman.

Some theoreticians think that we just decide on our own code of conduct, the way we choose a set of values, taking our cue, as we do with values, by what we see other people doing and what we happen

to like about what we see. And this is all there is to the moral code a person has.

But there has to be more to it than that. If we're talking about the moral *code*, we're not really talking about what's morally good, as I said under the first characteristic of the prohibition; we're talking about what we consider *forbidden* to us. Now it is true that a person can consciously resolve to forbid himself some action, as when we make New Year's Resolutions. But no one ever thinks, in the first place, that his New Year's Resolutions apply to anyone else, and yet the second point of the moral prohibition is that we think that in reality everyone is forbidden what we feel morally forbidden to do. Furthermore, the fact that not many people actually bother to give themselves New Year's Resolutions is an indication that we would find vast numbers of people with no sense of moral prohibition at all if the two were similar. Finally, not to beat what is obviously a dead horse any further, we know, as with New Year's Resolutions, that if we give them to ourselves (and even assign some punishment if we fail to live up to them) we can take them away whenever we want; and in this case, why would we consider the prohibition the most serious one of all, even superseding the law?[4] No, you could *say* that the prohibition you give yourself was very serious, but you would *know* that it wasn't. He who can give himself a law can rescind it at his pleasure; and therefore it is not really binding.

Could it be that the sense of a prohibition is innate in us? If so, this would mean that it is either explicitly so, and we would presumably have a fully developed moral code from the start, or it is

[4]Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is a novel about a person who was testing whether he could do away with the moral prohibition against his conduct and just murder someone. He found that as soon as he committed the crime, he could not escape its guilt, and it haunted him until he was caught and could pay the penalty.

innate in the structure of rational behavior, as Kant seemed to think, the way the Principle of Contradiction is known implicitly in all our knowledge. That is, as soon as we discovered that something was inconsistent, we would automatically recognize that it was forbidden; and it would be just a case of finding out what acts were in fact inconsistent.

Thus, morality would be a question of knowledge, as Plato held; but this theory, as we find even in the *Meno,* doesn't seem to work in practice, because, as Socrates points out, if it is nothing but knowledge, it could be taught; and if it could be taught someone like Pericles would certainly have taught it to his children—but they grew up anything but paragons of virtue.

Further, if there were an automatic injunction by reason against doing what was inconsistent (the way there is an "injunction" against accepting a contradiction as a fact—we simply can't do it), then *any* inconsistency would be thought of as forbidden, and so you would feel it immoral to sing if you couldn't carry a tune (How I wish this were the case in church!), you would feel morally guilty over using "ain't," or any of the other thousands of ways we can be inconsistent without acting inhumanly.

No, children have to be taught what is morally wrong *and* that if it is morally wrong it is forbidden. True, they see later, when they grow up a little, how illogical it is for a human being to act as if he weren't what he is—and this is why teen-agers almost universally decry the "phoniness" or hypocrisy they see in everyone but themselves. Consistency is certainly an obvious standard with which to judge human behavior; but why, again, *must* a person be consistent?

So the notion that what is morally wrong is forbidden can't be something innate, even though it seems that you can't get beyond early childhood without having it.

This seems to indicate that something in our early life *fixes within*

us this attachment of a prohibition to whatever we are taught is morally wrong; and this leads us to our first really serious theory about the sense of "forbiddenness" that goes with moral wrongness: the theory that *events of early life create associations between acts called "wrong" and punishment, and the* ***fear*** *of some unknown punishment persists into adulthood, long after any punishment actually ceases being meted out.*

This is, of course, the view that Freud put forward in *The Ego and the Id* and more especially *Totem and Taboo,* where he linked religion to it. As he presented it, the theory suffers from a weakness which would make it an easy straw man to knock down: the notion of the Oedipus complex, which, if it were to work, would have to have a counterpart in girls by which the girl sees the *mother* as the all-powerful usurper of her father's affection, who must simultaneously be destroyed and placated. But there is no evidence whatever of this, let alone that women think of God as an avenging mother rather than in masculine terms.[5]

Still, from what we know of childhood experiences, both from the work Freud did and from other psychological sources, the theory has a lot to recommend it; and so I would like to present a sketch of it which does not have any unnecessary difficulties like the one I mentioned—to give the theory an honest examination, in other words—to see if it will account for the notion we have that what is morally wrong is prohibited.

I should point out here that, based on Occam's Razor, which we talked about in the section on scientific theory in Chapter 2 of

[5]This notwithstanding the efforts that feminists have made in recent times to make God a super-woman or to invest "him/her" with both "genders." God, of course, is beyond "gender," which is a limitation, and is no more both "genders" than clear glass is both black and white.

Section 4 of the fourth part, if this or some other this-worldly theory actually works as an explanation of the imperative connected with moral wrongness, then our theory, which supposes an afterlife with a reward and punishment *fails as an explanation of the force behind morality.*

That is, even if the analysis of the spiritual aspect of the human being leads to the conclusion that there *is* an afterlife, this afterlife would not be acceptable *as the cause* of why morally wrong conduct is thought to be punishable if some other theory which does not suppose this can do the job. So, for instance, if the theory that our early experiences produce in us a fear attached to wrongdoing actually fits all the facts, and if its predictions turn out to be verified, then the reasonable person would say that it is *why we think* that immorality is forbidden; and while it might be true that there *also* is an afterlife making it objectively disadvantageous to be immoral, that fact that it takes some sophisticated reasoning to establish, would be *unlikely* to be the reason *everybody* shies away from doing what is wrong.

Let me, then, give a brief description of what the theory holds, and then test it against what we know about people's idea of the prohibition (the four characteristics above); and finally, if it passes, see what else it demands would logically have to be the case, and see whether these predictions are verified.

The basic idea is this: When we are very young, we have no sense that anything is to be avoided. But we live in a partially hostile environment, and some of the things we do as infants expecting pleasure turn out to cause pain, even severe pain. A child tries to grab the pretty red rings on the stove and gets his hand burned. He wants to stick his finger into the electrical outlet and daddy slaps him. He slams the door and gets yelled at. And so on.

Now then, when something like this happens, children, like all animals, tend to avoid the act, remembering the pain it caused. The

worse the experience consequent upon the act, or the more often the unpleasant consequences follow it, the more the act tends to be avoided. Note that frequent repetition of small unpleasantness does the same job in the long run as a really traumatic event.

Now of course, the more the act is avoided, the less vivid the actual memory of the punishment becomes, precisely because it is not refreshed. Nevertheless, there stays with the act a kind of warning as the habit of avoidance is formed, which eventually becomes, "Don't do that, or else..." where the *fact* of the "or else" is there, but what exactly is going to happen is not clearly known, except for the fact that it is felt to be really bad.

Note further that with most children, these bad consequences come more often from the *action of the parents* rather than things like burning yourself or breaking your leg—precisely because parents are trying to shield their children from damage. Hence, it would be much more likely for the fear associated with this avoidance later to appear as, "Don't do that or else you'll get punished" rather than "Don't do that or else you'll get hurt."

Thus, in adulthood, some kind of *person* would seem to be hovering behind these prohibitions, rather than their being simply warnings of danger, such as we feel when we walk down a dark alley, even knowing it to be safe. On the other hand, these feelings of prohibition would be analogous to the sense of danger, in that they "belong" to the anticipation of the act irrespective of what we know it to be.

Thus, the moral code, insofar as it has an imperative attached to it, is on this theory a generally benign kind of neurosis; and insofar as we were trained in early life to avoid the kinds of things that are socially or otherwise damaging to ourselves, we would feel no need to try to get rid of it, the way we want to get rid of maladaptive compulsions. Morals, on this theory are simply adaptive

compulsions.[6]

Now then, does the theory fit what we know of the moral imperative that people actually experience? First of all, if this theory is the explanation of it, it would be inevitable that everyone would feel *some* sort of imperative, because even if you weren't strictly brought up, you can't get to adulthood without undergoing quite a number of quite unpleasant experiences. Those who think of childhood as a time of innocent bliss have very selective memories and haven't been around children much.

I might point out as extra verification here that those children who were brought up by parents who didn't want to "inhibit" them seem to tend as adults to have a less strong sense of moral prohibition. This is just what you would expect if this theory is true.

So we can take it that the basic effect is verified. As to the first characteristic, the negativity of the imperative, it has abundantly been shown, B. F. Skinner notwithstanding, that pain is a much stronger reinforcer than pleasure. While there doubtless *are* enticements toward certain virtuous acts in this superego we have, there is good reason to believe that they wouldn't be as strong in adulthood as the prohibitions against others. First of all, people being what they are, parents tend to punish children far more often—and more severely—for doing what they don't like than reward them for doing

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[6]Note, by the way, that Freud by no means was in favor of letting children grow up without punishments and without creating these compulsions in them. If the little dears are permitted to do just what they please, they will grow up without the inhibitions that *adapt* them to adult life, and will be unable to cope with the real world without great difficulty. Those who were inhibited from doing things like fighting or grabbing their neighbors' toys won't have any inclination to fight or steal as adults, and so are better off. It just goes to show how a good idea can get perverted by the "compassionate" who don't know what it's trying to say.

what is good. Parents tend to *expect* good behavior as more or less a matter of course; and children tend to expect benefits as accruing to them because of what they are rather than because of what they have done.[7] But punishments by basically loving parents tend to be associated with the *action* rather than the "badness" of the *self*.[8] Hence, the normal person would feel the prohibition connected with the actions as much more significantly affecting him than the moral ideals he was shown.

It would be easy to explain on this theory why every person tends to think that what is prohibited for him is "really" forbidden for everyone, because he can't point to *an actual damaging consequence* of doing the act, but fears doing it nonetheless—even when he has done it before and gotten away with it. He may be able to give *reasons* why it is undesirable for a person to do the act, but these are like the reasons the alcoholic gives for not quitting today; they are really rationalizations, even when they are true. Thus, not fighting others can be justified in terms of better social order and the rights of others to be left alone; but the person who thinks it is *morally forbidden* to avoid fighting does so not for these reasons but because he has been punished for fighting when he was young and now fears it.

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[7]This is even true in the animal world, interestingly enough. I remember giving my dog a treat in the morning (she normally ate at night), as a reward for something she had done. When she repeated the act for several days, she got another reward. One day, she didn't repeat the act, and was not given the reward, though she clearly expected it, associating it with a "morning snack," and not with her behavior. The withdrawal of the reward was looked at as a kind of punishment.

[8]Of course, when parents keep telling children, "You're a bad boy!" instead of "You shouldn't have done that!" then the children will begin to believe it—and this can be the source of later problems of self-hatred.

Note that he will not *remember* the punishment, but only *feel* that it is going to happen, just as the neurotic who is afraid of the dark does not know *why* he is afraid, because he does not remember how he got bitten by the family dog when he was three and stepped on its tail as he ran into a dark room.

But since the person who feels a moral prohibition *can* make out a reasonable case why the act should be avoided (the more so the better trained he was, of course), then he will naturally tend to think as well as feel that he is right; and arguments on the other side will tend to have no relevance to him. Furthermore, since parents in a given culture tend to train their children in more or less the same way, he will find that most of the people around him basically agree with him, and this will tend to confirm in his mind that he is objectively right. In those areas where his early experiences were different from others (and there will be bound to be some), he will tend to think that the others don't quite see the truth, rather than that he is mistaken and they aren't. After all, he just *knows* you can't do this.

And this seems to be just what we experience in moral matters. To the extent that the society is closer-knit, people are in greater agreement on what is forbidden; to the extent that it is more diverse culturally, with many subcultures, to that extent there is greater diversity in what is thought to be forbidden. This makes perfect sense if people in different subcultures are brought up differently.

The reason, thirdly, why the moral prohibition would be felt to be the most serious of all is twofold: First, the adult does not know what will happen if he violates it, but is nonetheless afraid that *something* terrible will follow; and he can't shake that feeling even when nothing in fact happens after a violation. The sense that retribution *will* come, is what many psychologists say is the reason why a person who has violated a serious tenet of his moral code often becomes accident-prone; he feels incomplete without punishment

and without consciously realizing it, puts himself in harm's way "to get it over with."

In any case, the unknownness, even the secrecy, of the consequences would tend to magnify them in a person's mind, making this prohibition seem to be the one that overrides all others.

The second reason why the prohibition would be felt to be serious is connected with the fourth characteristic: that the imperative is felt as coming from some divinity. Here, we don't need Freud's avenging *father*-figure, because in fact the gods of many cultures included goddesses as well; but *all* of them were parental with respect to human beings: superior in power and capable of punishing. In fact, one might even say that Freud was thrown off by taking what was going on in Judaeo-Christian Europe too seriously as a model for the whole of human experience.

But since parents (either fathers or mothers or both) do tend to do the punishing, as I mentioned, then the prohibition seems to come from some superior *person* who is giving orders and who is invisible (it's certainly not Daddy and Mommy any more, because they're weak while I'm now strong—or they may even be dead). The fact that some cultures, as Freud pointed out, actually *do* worship the dead ancestors shows that the invisible person has a lot to do with the feeling that he is a parent.

Therefore, you would expect, if this theory is true, most people to believe that there is a god of some sort, and a god precisely associated with the moral code, and one who is going to punish it in some way. But note that this punishment doesn't necessarily come in some afterlife; it is just that it will somehow come if you violate the god's (or the gods') will. And this is just what studies of world religions show us that people feel.

It is not hard, therefore, to see why this theory is widely held today. It seems to fit all the facts.

Well, not *quite* all.

People who propose a theory and advocates of it, not surprisingly, tend to show what facts the theory does explain; and if this is all you do, the theory can be very convincing. But it turns out that the theory predicts a number of things that are the opposite of what actually occurs.

First of all, if this theory is true, there is no reason at all why people would tend to equate "immoral" with "inhuman," as they do, if my empirical finding has any validity at all. The prohibition on this theory comes from the fear induced in you *by being actually punished* for doing what your parents (or the world around you) didn't want. I suppose I should point out that this punishment, when one is very young, need not be corporeal, or even what the *parent* thinks is punishment at all; the mere fact that the parent is angry can cause a fear in a child (of devastating harm, or even of being abandoned, one of childhood's perhaps greatest terrors). I remember my father's saying, in a quiet voice of barely controlled fury, "If you don't stop crying, I'll give you something to cry about!" and, though he never touched me, he scared me to death. But the point I am making here is that the fear that carries over into adulthood is the fear that was induced *by what happened to certain specific acts.*

We also saw that the more severe the unpleasant consequences of the act, or the more often they occurred, the stronger the fear would be, and therefore the more serious the prohibition would be felt to be. Now if you examine what acts children are punished for, you find that what parents seem to stress most is things like making messes, slamming doors and shouting when Daddy has a headache, interrupting, losing things, scuffing your best pair of shoes and running out to play in the dirt with your best pants on, and so on. It is not often the parents punish their children for murder, rape, theft, and such, for the simple reason that these seldom come up in the child's life.

Now it's true that parents tend to punish their children for

fighting, for sexual play, and for taking what doesn't belong to them; and so you could argue that what I just said is not true. The injunction against fighting would carry over to murder. But if you look harder at this punishment, you find that when Daddy scolds Junior for fighting, it's for *starting* the fight and not simply for defending himself; and Daddy's disapproval of fighting is not clearly shown when Junior sees him watching football, hockey, and the daily news on television, and when he allows Junior to see all those kids' shows in which your being one of the good guys is a license to commit all kinds of mayhem. How is it, then, that Junior grows up with the notion that killing a person is one of the worst things you can do?

The way we are brought up sexually is extremely instructive in this regard. Children are—and certainly were—brought up to avoid *all* sexual activity, whether solitary or with others, and were severely punished for all infractions, including such things as immodesty. But how is it that, ever since Adam, people as soon as they get married *drop* the notion that sexual activity, seductive display of your body to your spouse, and all the rest of it, is immoral?

Remember, the moral prohibition is supposed to be a kind of neurosis, not something that a simple change of social status can erase overnight; it is supposed to be a basically irrational fear induced from repeated unpleasant consequences, something that remains with us our whole life long, and which we can't shake just by telling ourselves there's nothing to be afraid of. But then how has just about everyone who ever married been able to slough this one off? Especially since Freud and many psychologists and psychiatrists think that sex is underneath most neurotic behavior, indicating that this is the prohibition that is strongest of all.

Before exploring this a bit further, because there is another implication in it that is significant, let me just point out clearly that *most* of what we got punished for as children (and which we do tend

to avoid) *is not thought by us as adults to have anything to do with* ***morally*** *wrong conduct*. Further, *we recognize as morally wrong acts which we were never punished for as children*.

And if you look at the adult's moral code, you see that he makes a clear distinction between *two* sorts of conduct that are forbidden: what William Graham Sumner called the "folkways," or the acts that are "not done," and the "mores," the acts that are morally wrong.

Conclusion 1: There is a distinction in people's minds between acts that are disapproved of as "not done," (folkways), and acts that are morally wrong and *must* not be done.

Not shouting, not interrupting, not using your knife as a fork, not putting your feet on the furniture, not washing, and so on, are *recognized* by people as not *morally wrong,* even though people's *disapproval* of these acts can be very strong indeed—even stronger than their disapproval of acts like lying or pilfering from the company's supplies, or even engaging in what might be called "sexual indiscretions," or getting drunk, or other things that these same people will say are morally wrong. Certainly parents, in training their children, spend a lot of time with acts that are essentially just folkways.

But if this theory is what accounts for why we think what is morally wrong is forbidden, it predicts that *we would also think that violations of the folkways are morally wrong,* because as far as the punishment in early life is concerned, there would be no distinction between the two.

Secondly, the acts that are thought to be *morally* wrong are acts that the adult thinks are *inhuman,* as I said, whether he was trained to avoid them or not. There is no reason why a person would associate what he was trained to avoid with the act's being

inhuman—because in fact, he was trained to avoid the violation of the folkways, and he recognizes that the acts have nothing to do with inhuman conduct, and are just cultural expectations. But if this theory is true, you would predict that the "rationalization" for avoiding morally wrong acts wouldn't be on the basis of their inhumanity.[9]

Thirdly, Freud actually predicted from his theory that *the moral code of a culture could not change quickly.* The reason is that the prohibitions do *not,* on his theory, come from reasoning, so that new evidence would affect them, but from a neurotic fear carrying over from childhood. He mentions that since parents have this fear, they would tend to train their children to avoid the acts they felt afraid of, and so the moral code would carry down from generation to generation, and only modify itself slightly, if at all, over time. This seemed to have been empirically verifiable in his day.

But in my own lifetime, I have seen two radical shifts in my culture's moral code (one of which I think was for the better, and another for the worse). The first was that of the treatment of the Blacks. When I was a child, "everyone" saw nothing wrong with the Blacks' being kept "in their place," doing the menial, physical jobs that they were "suited for," because we thought that they, poor things, just didn't have the capacity for anything involving thought. Less than twenty years later, it is universally thought in our culture that to "keep them in their place" is morally wrong.

The second drastic shift happened even more quickly: the "sexual revolution," which started as soon as the contraceptive pill was

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[9]It should be noted also that theories like Mackie's, that I quoted above, where there is simply some "consensus" reached about disapproval of certain acts, would also fail to be able to make a distinction between gauche behavior and immoral conduct. Disapproval is disapproval.

introduced. This allowed for sex without children; and very rapidly people realized that logically there was now nothing against extra-marital sex and homosexual sex. The point is that it was the *logical* consequence of thinking (a) that there was nothing "unnatural" or inhuman about taking a pill, and that therefore (b) sex no longer "naturally" involved the possibility of children, and (c) therefore, forms of sex where no child is possible were no longer "perversions." The whole culture before The Pill thought of certain sexual acts as perversions; now the culture as a whole thinks of them as "different life styles," or "matters of personal taste." From being morally wrong, they have become folkways overnight.

These sorts of drastic changes within a generation are simply not possible if the theory about early training accounts for why we think what is morally wrong is forbidden.

Finally, to pick up on a point I tabled a while ago, I do not want to give the impression that we don't *feel* guilty when we do things we were trained not to do. To this day, when I leave something uneaten, I feel guilty, because I was brought up during the Depression, and my father felt very strongly about wasting things—and made us feel strongly when we did it. But *in spite of* the guilt feeling, I am not going to eat and make myself fat and unhealthy just because I was served too much; and I am perfectly well aware that "the starving children in China" are not going to be helped by my turning myself into a garbage can.

Similarly, it is quite common for spouses on their wedding night to feel guilty about doing what they had been trained for so long to avoid. But they don't let the guilt feeling bother them (in fact, they rather enjoy it as added spice to what they are doing), because they *know* that what they are doing is not only all right, but that to *avoid* it would be morally wrong.

Conclusion 2: Adults generally distinguish *feeling guilty* from

knowing that what we are doing is morally wrong.

The wedding-night experience is very informative in this respect, not only because it is (or at least was) a very common one, but because it means that things which were known to be forbidden just hours ago are now not forbidden; the act of saying, "I do" transformed what was taboo into what is commanded. This is a very strange neurotic compulsion indeed, if you can get rid of it by pronouncing a phrase.

Let me give another example. As a young child, and even into my later life, I had had dinned into my head that it was a terrible thing to "rat" on someone: to report to authorities some act of someone else that I happened to know about. In the year I left the seminary, a middle-aged priest who was the Resident in the dormitory of the men's college I was visiting asked me into his room to chat; and when I was leaving, he kissed me with a French kiss. I at that time didn't know what such a thing was, and was too surprised to fend him off; but I left rather quickly. When I got back to my room, I was faced with a dilemma: I *knew* I had to report him to the Rector of the college, to get him out of the men's dormitory, both for his sake and for theirs; but I couldn't bring myself to do it. Finally, in great trepidation and self-disgust, I went to the Rector and told my story, and he said he would take care of the matter. Here was a case where I knew what I had to do, and all my training made me *feel* that I should do just the opposite.

And let's face it; this experience is not at all uncommon. Those surviving some great tragedy feel terribly guilty for years that they survived while others died, even though they know that there was nothing they could have done to save them, and it would have been wrong not to save themselves just for the sake of solidarity with the dying. And there are many many other instances of this sort of thing also, even the other way. We know, when things like committing

adultery "feel right" that they're still wrong. Feeling guilty or not feeling guilty has nothing in itself to do with knowing whether what you did was morally right or wrong. Knowing what you did was wrong comes from your *factual knowledge* that you did something inhuman; *feeling* that it is wrong comes from your training.

But the theory that the prohibition against immorality comes from early childhood training would make it impossible for us to make a distinction between the two.

Therefore, we can say

Conclusion 3: A person has a guilty conscience if he *knows* that what he has done is morally wrong; whether he also *feels* that it was wrong is irrelevant. Conscience is not a feeling.

Of course, if a person has been trained from childhood not to do what he later realizes is inhuman, he will both know and feel himself guilty if he does something morally wrong; but there are a lot of things we know to be wrong that we weren't trained against, because the issue just never came up in our childhood; and there were a lot of things (the folkways) that we were trained not to do that we don't think there's anything morally wrong with.

So this theory, as attractive as it sounded at first, *simply does not fit the facts* about the prohibition we find attached to morally wrong conduct. If it were true, our moral code would be very different from what it is.

Note, by the way, that it is easy to explain the *connection* between early experiences and a person's moral code. In the first place, people *are* trained to avoid doing what is regarded by their parents as morally wrong: they *are* punished for lying, for fighting, for stealing, and so on. What I was saying above is that this (a) doesn't by any means constitute *all* of their training, and (b) is not even necessarily

what is most persistently or severely punished. Secondly, *parental conduct* is, as everyone seems to admit, a far more potent force in developing a child's moral code than punishment; and the reason is that the parents are the child's prime examples of what human beings really are like. Thus, if the child's parents tell him not to lie and he hears them lying, he takes not lying to be one of the folkways, to be avoided only when it's "not proper," not something morally wrong. If a child is brought up by a mother who is a prostitute and a father who is a stud, it would not be surprising for him to think that sexual promiscuity is the human way to behave—and so on.

We have to get our notion of what it is to be human from somewhere, and most people only begin thinking about it in the abstract when they get to be teen-agers (at which time their parents seem to be terrible hypocrites, since these paragons of humanity are now recognized to be people who preach and don't practice); and even then not many take deep dips into philosophy. By and large, we get our notion of human and inhuman conduct from two sources: (a) hearing what apparently wise people think is human and inhuman; and (b) observing what people around us generally do—and the latter is far more persuasive than the former. Someone is said to have said to a preacher, "What you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you say."

So there's nothing mysterious about it, really, as far as the *contents* of our moral code is concerned; we don't have to resort to "similarities in punishment when young" to account for why people who live together tend to think that the same things are wrong, and why they need strong evidence to prove to them that some behavior they have observed "everybody" doing all the time is in fact inhuman conduct.

Well, then, where are we? The notion that what is wrong is forbidden can't be deliberately attached to the conduct; it can't be innate; and it can't come from fear carrying over from experiences in

early childhood. So it doesn't come from inside us. What about from outside?

Well, since it is a *fear* of some sort ("Don't do that, or else..."), then it can't be induced in us by something *inferior* to us, like "nature": the rocks, the plants, or the animals. Even those pagans who worshiped "nature," actually worshiped the *forces* behind it which they thought had molded them and were directing them just as they were directing the heavenly bodies and the streams and the other things in this world. These *invisible beings* were what had the power over our lives, not the inferior objects which they directed. So we don't have to think "nature worship" means that people ever thought that inferior beings controlled them.

Secondly, we can dismiss that the *moral* prohibition is induced in us by another *human individual* who threatens us without having any authority to do so (i.e. without his being a representative of society). It is universally recognized that if another individual threatens us, *he* is the one being morally wrong, and the fear he induces has nothing to do with our thinking that it would be *immoral* to disobey him.

But then what of people like police? Does the force behind morality come from the *law* and its threat of punishment? If so, of course, what is illegal would be recognized as immoral by the very fact that it is illegal.

But that would make *tyranny* impossible. The government would be like what Hobbes thought it was, incapable of commanding anything wrong, or incapable of "harming" the citizens, since they had no rights against it. But this was not in practice held either before Hobbes's time, during it, or certainly since.

People have always recognized that there are *immoral* laws that actually command people to do *wrong,* and which *must* by that fact be disobeyed (as the Blacks disobeyed the segregation laws, and the pacifists have always disobeyed the draft laws); and also *unjust* laws,

which command the avoidance of things that the people as a whole think are perfectly all right to do, such as in our country the law against drinking alcohol, which was even made part of the Constitution itself, until its universal flouting forced a second amendment repealing the prohibition. I suspect that the laws against what are now called "drugs" are going to share the same fate—though I hope we get some sense and when we repeal them we forbid the *advertising* of them and of alcohol and of tobacco and other dangerous substances. People simply do not think that there is anything morally wrong in smoking marijuana, for instance; and the fact that it has all the deleterious side-effects of the increase of crime and so on is recognized by people as as much due to the attempt to prohibit it as the danger of the drug itself.

At any rate, if the fear of *legal* punishment were what was the "enforcer" of the moral imperative, people would equate illegality with immorality, and they don't. So this theory doesn't work.

Let me add here, however, that it wouldn't be surprising for people to tend to think that what is *legal* is *morally right,* because (a) people tend to think that what is morally wrong ought to be illegal (simply because it's forbidden; and why would government allow what is forbidden?); (b) if the government allows it, they presumably know more about things than the ordinary person, and so it must be a permissible act; and (c) if somebody happens to think that it's morally wrong, he doesn't have to do it. For instance, in my time it's very difficult for people to believe that the Nine Wise Justices on our Supreme Court would actually permit abortions if they were in fact killing people, as the Right-to-Life groups contend (and as is actually the case). They thought the same thing about the Supreme Court in its pro-slavery decisions. No, basically, it's when the government *forbids* what people don't see anything wrong with that there's apt to be trouble.

Of course, for the sake of social order, we generally accept laws

that forbid things that are morally neutral. There's nothing *morally* wrong, most people think, with driving sixty-six miles an hour on an expressway; but it's against the law; and morality wasn't felt to have changed a few years ago when the speed limit was finally raised back up to nearly what the roads were built for. Laws prohibiting drinking or smoking in certain places don't mean that it's immoral to drink in those places; it's just for public order. It's recognized that there's a basic moral stance behind these things (that, for example, chaos is to be avoided); but the laws themselves deal with folkways, not mores.

Therefore, the prohibition connected with morally wrong conduct can't come from within us, from anything short of society outside us, nor from the sanctions on the laws of society *as formally organized*. Nor, by the way, can it come from any *combination* of all of these, because *even if* our training *and* the law forbid certain acts, such as driving on the left-hand side of the street, we don't think that such a thing is *morally wrong,* making all of the people in England sinners, as we would think if they thought that keeping slaves was all right.

There is only one thing left in this world, then, that could give us the notion that what is morally wrong is forbidden; and this is the other theory that is widely accepted today: *social pressure*.

Here, the threat connected with morally wrong conduct actually *does* come from "society" in a sense, at least from the people around us. But it comes from the *culture,* not society as formally organized; and it deals with the "unwritten" laws of the expectations of behavior that people have for other people—which may, of course, and generally do, spill over into the laws, but which extend far beyond them.

Social pressure is an invisible force, but it can be no less strong for all that. I remember one time when I was one of the first men in the Cincinnati area to grow a beard. I was checking out some milk at the supermarket on my way home from work, and the woman at the register looked at me with contempt and said, "And what are *you*

protesting?" I was taken aback for a moment, and then answered, "I'm protesting the fact that men aren't allowed to grow beards." But it made me feel odd afterwards, realizing that people were looking at me with disapproval. Shortly afterwards, as I was visiting my parents near Boston (actually nearer Harvard Square, where the hippies congregated), I saw a number of people actually turn around as I was coming out of church and look back at me over their shoulder as if they didn't know what to make of me. Here was a hippie, coming out of *church,* for God's sake, and wearing a *suit and a tie!* I *ask* you, Marge!

This is not so trivial as it seems. I see the uniforms my students wear, thinking that they are dressing as they please in their jeans and their jogging suits. But let one of the young men come to school every day in a suit, and he will after a while find himself alone. The others feel that he's a snob, trying to put them down by the way he dresses, and they'll have nothing to do with him—because he *does* dress as *he* pleases, not as they want him to. This loneliness can be hard to take.

In fact, the word "boycott" comes from man's name. Mr. Boycott was a representative to Ireland from England many years ago, during (I believe) the era of absentee-landlordism that Swift decried so eloquently. In any case, he was cordially hated by all the Irish, who couldn't do anything about his being there (there was evidently no Irish Republican Army doing its dastardly things at the time); and so it was decided simply to ignore his existence. He was passed on the street as if he wasn't there, he couldn't be waited on in the shops because no one acted as if they saw him, and so on. It actually drove him mad, and he had to be recalled.

So even if nothing is done to you, social pressure can be a very potent force. But of course, it doesn't follow that nothing will be done to you. There was no law against Blacks' using the public libraries in many areas of the country fifty years ago; but it was

known that Blacks had better not try. And some Black person who was ignorant enough or reckless enough actually to walk in and attempt to read a book would be very apt to be found in an alley the next day with his throat cut. The Ku Klux Klan was social pressure at its most frightening; and its enforcement was by no means confined to words. In fact, one of the functions of laws is to prevent the uglier manifestations of social pressure, like tarring and feathering or lynching in general.

So social pressure is an extremely powerful force on the individual, and one that is very often not recognized for what it is. But does it account for the *moral* prohibition? Let us test it against the facts we have so far observed.

First of all, since everyone lives in some sort of a culture, then everyone in fact is subject to social pressure; and so you would expect the attachment of an imperative to what the culture disapproves of.

But wouldn't that imply that *everyone* in the culture would feel the *same* moral obligation? Not necessarily. First of all, in cultures that are heterogeneous, you find various subcultures, each of which exerts its own social pressure. In the United States, for instance, a given person belongs not only to the larger society, but to the male or female subculture, to the subculture connected with his ethnic origins (there's a vast difference between Whites, Hispanics, Asians, and Blacks, for instance), to the subculture implied in his social position, his religion, the region of the country he lives in, etc., etc. Each person belongs to a different "mix" of these subcultures, and so he will have to reconcile what others expect of him differently. In cultures that are less complex, this reconciliation is much simpler, and in these the theory would predict that the moral code of the culture would be much more clearly defined—and this is what takes place. But even in simple cultures there would be *some* differences. There is also the fact that a given individual will not necessarily have any desire to do everything that the culture (or sub-culture) thinks

is taboo; and so he might not have any occasion to discover that a given act is forbidden, while someone else might be painfully aware of it.

I mentioned that the theory that the moral prohibition is due to childhood experiences cannot explain the fact that there is a distinction between folkways or things that are "not done" and mores or things that *must* not be done. Can the social pressure theory do so?

Not, I think, as Sumner and others stated it; but it would be easy to adjust it to make it explain the distinction very nicely. If we assume that there are some behaviors that the people in the culture *expect* for the sake of being able to predict how others will act (or basically for convenience and ease of social living), and there are others that the people in general feel *threatened* by for one reason or another (even for no objective reason), then the distinction falls into place.

Thus, people in my generation expected men to have short hair and women to have long hair. Women started wearing their hair short many years before my generation, but women have (in spite of what feminists nowadays allege) been allowed a great deal of leeway in behaving and looking like men, while men have been supposed to look like men. Hence, there was a tremendous furor when the young people, following the lead of the Beatles, began wearing their hair long; and some young men really suffered from the opprobrium that followed their "sissifying" themselves. But few except those who associated this with homosexuality thought that it was *immoral* to grow hair long. It was just that "you can't tell whether it's a boy or a *girl,* for heaven's sake!" And people in general want to know, because we are expected to behave differently towards men and women.

The point I am making is that the social pressure against violating folkways can be extremely severe; but if this theory is true, this is still

different from violating the culture's mores, because the culture does not feel threatened by it. Our culture obviously feels threatened by "doing drugs" nowadays and yet does not feel threatened by "doing alcohol," in spite of the fact that the damaging effects of alcohol to the society are far greater than those of drugs, especially if you discount the damage that is done by the mere fact that the drugs are illegal, making supplying them a crime and also immensely profitable for that reason. We think that getting drunk is *bad,* but we don't shun distilleries or stores that sell the stuff—while we think of drug-pushers as scum that must be wiped off the face of the earth.

Note that if this theory is true, there doesn't have to be any *rationality* to this social horror at a given act; *if* the people around you feel threatened for any reason or no reason by some act, and you start to do it, your friends will say, "My God, don't do *that!*" You ask them why, and they say, "Because it's terrible!" And it's clear that they are afraid, not only of *doing* the act, but of *having it be done*. Naturally, this fear will communicate itself to you; and so even though you don't know what will happen to you if you do it, you think that it must be really bad, if everybody looks on it with such terror and loathing. And of course, that fear you have picked up makes you another one of the group exerting social pressure on those who would contemplate doing the act.

So on this theory it is simply *the fact that* the people around you *feel threatened* by some act that creates the social pressure, *not* the *reason* why they have this dread. As Sumner pointed out, the actual reason may be some fact lost back in antiquity, like a farmer in one culture who, not following custom, planted during the new moon instead of the full moon, and a week later there was a devastating flood and consequent famine. The people would notice the sequence and put a cause-effect relation to it, making it taboo—and the taboo would persist long after they had forgotten why it was absolutely forbidden to plant during the new moon.

Once again, of course, the people will generally be able to give reasons for the fear; but it isn't the reasons that produce the prohibition, but the fear, because people will take steps to prevent what they are afraid of; and besides, the fear itself communicates itself throughout the group, reinforcing itself.

Now as to why the moral code is basically negative, the explanation on this theory would be because it is based on social fear of the acts that seem to threaten the social fabric. The folkways have their sanctions, but they aren't based on fear, but simply on the desire to find others' behavior predictable; and so beyond what is regarded as destructive behavior, a good deal of latitude is allowed. So this point is neatly taken care of.

As to why the prohibition would be regarded as the most serious of all, there are three explanations that would come from this theory. First, the individual doesn't know what will happen if he violates the code, and fear of the unknown is apt to be considerably stronger than fear of the known. Secondly, there is the fact that everybody around him is also afraid of the act, and so it must be really serious if everyone is scared to do it.

But thirdly, and this accounts for the association with a divinity, no one individual really knows what the whole code really is or where it came from; it has always been "just there" and "every-body knows it"; and so it seems to have come down from On High. Further, who or what will enforce it is also unknown, and so seems to be something invisible taking charge of our actions. Any actor can tell you that the audience appears to him like a single person, and any teacher will agree that each class has its own collective personality, which may or may not match that of the most vociferous members of the class. I have had classes, for instance, in which a small group of objectors were constantly raising their hands; but the others shifted in their chairs when this happened, and it was clear that the class as a class considered them disruptive rather than spokesmen for

it.

So a group of people seems to have a "personality" hovering over it somehow, a personality you can't put your finger on in any individual or even small set of individuals, but one that belongs to the group as a group, derived, actually, from their interaction with each other.

If this is the case, then the moral code would be to the *group's* horror *as* a group to the action in question, and so it would have a special "personal" dimension to it which would be somehow "above" that of any individual and more powerful than any individual or even than the totality of the individuals in the group. In short, the *group as a group would appear to any individual in it as if there were a god directing it.*

And everyone in the group realizes that he is subject to the god's orders, and so is everyone else; and so everyone will see to it that the god's will is done, even though the god is perfectly capable of seeing to it himself—but if the god takes matters into his own hands, who knows but what *everyone* in the group will be made to suffer for the sins of a few?

Once again, this sense that there is a god supervising everything cannot really be escaped even by someone who does not believe that there actually are gods. You may rationally *think* that there's no god; but when push comes to shove, and you are faced with doing something wrong, you will *feel* that there is one—simply because the attitudes of the people around you will convey itself to you in this form. In the same way, even if an actor knows that there's no such animal as "the audience," he plays to it, and listens to it. He can't help it. Thus we get the famous cry of the atheist *in extremis,* "Oh God, if there is a God, save my immortal soul, if I have a soul, and if it's immortal, and if it can be saved!"

So the theory fits all of the facts originally observed, plus the fact that the early-experience theory couldn't, that people recognize a

distinction on seriousness between folkways and mores.

But there was another fact that the early-experience theory couldn't handle: that moral codes could change drastically in a short time. Can this theory account for that?

It can in one sense at least. Sumner points out in *Folkways* that when life-conditions change, what was once deviant behavior now becomes more rational than the accepted behavior; and so the "bad" element in the community begins doing it and prospering, inducing more and more people to "sin," until the practice becomes accepted and finally sanctioned by a new moral order. This in theory could happen very quickly, if some new practice is introduced making people as a whole rethink what they were doing.

For instance, the introduction of The Pill would lead people to rethink the connection between sex and reproduction, which had up to that time been inescapable or difficult to avoid. Since, of course, sex is something people like to do, then the "sinners" would become numerous rather quickly, and would then rather quickly cease to be regarded as sinners at all.

But one of Sumner's examples illustrating this was rather unfortunate, I think. He claims that it was the fact that slavery became *impractical* in the United States of the first half of the nineteenth century that made people *then* begin to think that it was immoral, and particularly those in the North impose their new-found moral code on the South (because in the North it was cheaper to hire wage labor in the factories than to own the laborers and have to feed and house them). He mentions that after the Civil War, for many many years, the Southerners still thought that their way of life was "right" and were not following it only because they were forced not to.

The history, however, isn't by any means that clear. Something of what he says is true; but the evil of slavery was *widely* recognized in the *South* long before the War, and during the time that slaves were

becoming more and more *necessary* to the Southern economy, and consequently more and more expensive. The problem the people in the South faced was that it might be bad to own slaves, but if you freed them, particularly *en masse,* what would happen to them, and how could their owners be indemnified for the colossal financial loss of suddenly giving up this investment they had made in them? It would bring *practical* ruin on the South to free the slaves (in fact it did, of course, and the South is now beginning to recover, a century and a half afterwards). In fact, if I recall correctly, the constitution of the Confederate States of America contained a provision abolishing slave-trading overseas. No new slaves were to be imported. The idea obviously was to get rid of slavery by attrition, not in one fell swoop.

No, it was not really because slavery was impractical (though it was in the North), it was because of the inconsistencies Harriet Beecher Stowe portrayed so vividly in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that people began to believe that it was *wrong*. And it was *then* that—it can be argued—the movement against it began; the change in life-conditions *followed,* rather than led, the change in perception of what was right and wrong.

The civil-rights movement of my century is perhaps even clearer. It was not because it became more *practical* to desegregate; desegregation is impractical in many ways still as I write this—and even the Blacks in many universities are tending to segregate themselves now, having seen a number of disadvantages for them in integration on campus. No, the whole thing began when Rosa Parks was too tired to move to the back of the bus when the front seats filled and a White person asked her to give up the "White" seat. Then a preacher named King began asking everyone the question, "Why must a Black person be treated as if he were only half human? Why must we walk ten blocks to the public drinking-fountain when there is one right here, but it's White only? Why must we plan our day around our bodily functions, so that we'll be in the vicinity of a

Black toilet when we need to use one, or near a Black diner when we need to eat? Is this a human way to live?"

The Blacks, who had not collectively thought in these terms, but had simply accepted things as "the way it is," began listening to this, and could see that Blacks were not being treated as if they were really human. And the Whites who listened also saw that, however convenient this arrangement was for them, it was treating human beings as if they weren't human—and as soon as this was realized by the people as a whole, things had to change, no matter how hard the change was going to be, and how impractical.

There was no change in life conditions, certainly no drastic one, that preceded the most significant positive step our culture has made in morality since the abolition of slavery itself; it was a recognition that we as a people were giving lip-service to the concept that Blacks were just as much people as Whites were; and lip-service was not enough.

This is a difficulty with the theory serious enough to destroy it. Cultural reforms come, often with great pain, *not* because life conditions change, *but because inhuman practices are brought into the open*. The reformer convinces the people that what they are doing is inhuman, and the people, if he provides clear evidence, listen. The reformer is often vilified while he is in the process of presenting his evidence; but to the extent that the evidence *is* evidence, it speaks for itself, and doesn't need him; and the word spreads and changes the society.

What specifically, then, are the predictions connected with this that destroy the theory? First, since the prohibition is, according to the theory, simply the *actual fear and revulsion* that the people have against the act in question, it would predict that the moral code of any culture would simply be a haphazard collection of "thou shalt not's" without any rational basis to it; it would not be derivable from the culture's definition of what constitutes being human and

therefore what inhuman behavior is. But in fact, if you examine a culture's taboos, you find that they also invariably spell out that culture's notion of behavior inconsistent with human reality.[10]

Secondly, since the social pressure at a given time is supposed to *constitute* the moral code at that time, the present moral code would always be thought to be "right" (as Sumner himself says), and anyone who disagreed with it would automatically be regarded as at best a crank. But in fact, cultures have always had people decrying the immoral spirit of the times; and these people have been held in esteem generally by the people as a whole, even if they have not been followed by them.

Nor is this just the fact that the practice of the society falls short of its ideals. The people who form the "conscience" of the society, from Socrates in Greece and Cato in Rome down to the present day, usually are talking about the moral *attitudes* of the people as a whole, implying that the people as a whole have no problem in doing things that these leaders think is morally wrong.

Using Socrates as an example would seem to prove the point of the social-pressure theorists, because he was killed for "corrupting the young people" by allegedly teaching them atheism (implying that

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[10]In this connection, I remember a Presidential Address of the Kentucky Philosophical Association some years back in which that year's president (whose name, unfortunately, I forget) had the thesis that morality was just a game played by the culture, and if you were going to play, you had to abide by the rules the culture set for itself. He showed very nicely how this fit what was going on in the moral behavior of the culture—except, I realized, for one thing. What does the culture do with someone who says, "I refuse to play"? He is then not bound by the rules.

If the culture *makes* him play, then it's no game; if it's a game, then anyone who doesn't like the rules simply opts out and can go his merry way. Clearly, the first alternative is the one that is taken by the culture, which destroys the game-theory. Morality is, as I said, thought to be the most serious of all pursuits.

the people thought that their moral view was right and his was wrong). But actually, it reinforces what I am saying, because (a) he was almost acquitted in his trial, and would have been if he had not antagonized the audience (which was the jury) by his bluntness, (b) it was realized almost as soon as the verdict was in that the charges were specious and it was a miscarriage of justice, (c) the people were willing to look the other way and let him escape, and (d) just a few years after that Plato came back to Athens and began teaching the very things that Socrates taught, and was held in great respect by the people.

But if the social-pressure theory is true, *reformers would **always** be looked on as **immoral and evil people** by the society at the time,* not simply misguided, because (a) they are not only *doing* what is wrong (any deviation at all from what the culture *thinks* is the moral code is *ipso facto* wrong on this theory), but (b) trying to persuade others to sin—and in all cultures, tempting others to sin is regarded as the most heinous of acts.

But in fact, though reformers in the culture are often *hated,* they are just as often looked on as well-meaning troublemakers, not as evil tempters. People nowadays talk about Martin Luther King's sexual faults; but those were not known at the time, and even those who hated him did not think of what he was doing as *immoral,* but as something that disrupted the social order.

And thirdly, people *do* seem definitely to make a *distinction* between what disrupts our social order and what is morally wrong; certainly what is morally wrong tends to disrupt the social order, but it is *also* disrupted by technological advances and by social *reforms,* which are embraced in spite of the trouble they cause. Many people faced with how the abolition of slavery or the recognition of the Blacks' human status was going to wrench society out of shape had no problem with the *goal,* but fought what was going on because they thought that a way should be found to achieve it at less cost to

the social order.

If you look closely at social changes that are regarded as moral reforms, you will find that the people as a whole seem to be quite astute in distinguishing the immorality from the social effects it causes; but of course on the social pressure theory, it is precisely the socially deleterious effects that *make* the action in question morally wrong. In South Africa, for instance, the *apartheid* of the Blacks from the Whites is recognized as immoral and some kind of integration of the society as moral, in spite of the fact that there was at the time of transition a great fear (a) that there might be a civil war once the status quo was changed, and (b) from the experience of other African countries, "majority" rule might simply be tyranny by the Black group that happens to get power (which now seems to be the case there also). Still, the country as a whole recognizds that the system it had then was wrong and had to change, whatever the dangers; a kind of Europe in southern Africa with each tribe having its own nation has been tried and found unfeasible.

Fourth, the culture also makes a distinction between those who call themselves reformers and are only advocates for license, and those who really are reformers. For instance, Timothy Leary some forty years ago preached, "Tune in, turn on, and drop out," and extolled the virtues of LSD, which as a professor, he had been experimenting with. For those of you who don't remember, LSD is a psychedelic drug. He tried to show that doing drugs was harmless and a better life than "leading the straight life," but though he got a number of rebels following him, the *culture* never regarded him as a reformer, because the only "case" he made for his position was that it made you feel good; and anyone with any sense knows that there are a lot of inconsistent acts that make you feel good.

On the other hand, when Martin Luther King started his campaign for equal treatment of the Blacks, the culture perked up its ears; because what he said made sense to anyone who had any idea

what his reality was.

Hence, the culture rejects some "reformers" and accepts others; and it rejects, often, the reformers who show the easy way and accepts those whose reforms are bound to bring turmoil. But if you examine the basis of this rejection and acceptance, you find that it is what evidence the people present that their course of action is human and the alternative inhuman.

And so fifth, there is the point that introduced this critique: I think it can safely be said that through history those shifts in moral codes that have passed from one thing's being thought of as permitted to the same thing's being thought of as morally evil and forbidden have come about, not because the act became impractical, but because the act was recognized as inhuman. It may be that changes in the practical situation might cause the people to think that something which was before wrong is now permitted, (I am thinking, e.g., of The Pill and about the change in money lending once banking was invented), but it is rare that practical ease of doing wrong would make people think that it is right (it's always easy, as I said, to do wrong).

And how, on the social-pressure theory, did the handful of Christian missionaries effect such radical changes in the cultures they visited? These changes, by the way, are decried by the social-pressure theorists, because the previous set of mores "worked" so well. It is alleged that it was the "alien" mores of the Christians that destroyed the Aztecs and the Incas as much as the depredations of those looking for the city of gold. But actually, if the social pressure theory (on which the vilification of the missionaries is based) is true, *the missionaries couldn't have done it*. If the mores were thought to be "right" by the people and were in fact adapting them to their situation, how could they have believed that these foreigners were correct when they said that what they were doing was *wrong,* and that less practical actions were the only right ones? There was

precisely *no* change in life-conditions here preceding the moral shift, only the arguments of strangers pointing out that sacrificing people and so on were inhuman acts.[11]

No, let us face it; as soon as *anyone,* individual or culture, becomes convinced that a certain action *contradicts* what it is to be human, then that person or culture *automatically* recognizes that it is wrong and must not be done by any human being, however "adaptive" it might be. For instance, I have the conviction that our health-care cost problem is not going to be solved until the distinction I made in Chapter 3 of Section 7 of the fourth part between values and necessities is recognized, from which it follows that health-care providers simply have no right to become *rich* from providing necessities to others, though they have a right to a decent income. It is going to take a lot of convincing to show doctors that they just don't have a right to their BMW and their box at the opera, and to be moral will have to make do with a Buick and a seat in the orchestra; because they are supplying what people have a *right* to have and not what they *want*. I will spell this out a little more fully in the section on economics in the next part. The point I am making now is that there are such things as new moral discoveries as we understand more fully what it means to be human; and new inconsistencies are brought to light. But once they come to light, the moral code changes.

Therefore, the people themselves *judge* the mores of their culture and sometimes *reject* it as being perverse. But this cannot happen if social pressure is what accounts for the force that makes morally

[11]And it's not even as simple as that. The Mayans, for instance, rebelled against the "adaptive" practice of drowning the maidens, and slaughtered the elites who foisted it on the people, and thereby destroyed the advanced civilization. But the people after that could live in peace.

wrong acts forbidden; and this in turn means that the people think that there is a higher standard than what society or the culture happens to think is right and wrong at the moment, and this higher standard is this:

Conclusion 4: No human being may ever deliberately act as if he were not a human being, no matter what the culture in its ignorance allows.

That is, *hypocrisy,* or a deliberate pretense in action that you are what you are not, is the basic definition of immorality. And that is why the basic definition of moral conduct is *being honest*.

Ignorance of what is right and wrong is generally regarded as excusable and not hypocrisy or dishonesty; it only becomes hypocritical behavior when it is perceived as knowing and deliberate. For instance, most doctors now still think of themselves as benefactors of mankind, "deserving" of the wealth that society heaps on them, because it has simply not entered into their heads that their fees are not freely and gratefully offered by the patients who desired so much the great boon that the physician conferred upon them. In the same way the slave owners of old interpreted the gratitude of the slave for a new pair of shoes.

Chapter 4

The theory that works

But then if we eliminate social pressure as an explanation of why we think what is inhuman is forbidden, where are we? This prohibition attached to inhuman conduct can't be deliberately attached to it, it can't be innate, and it can't come from habits resulting from past experiences, so it can't be internally generated at all. It can't come from things inferior to ourselves or equal (other individuals); it can't come from people as formally organized (the laws); and now it can't come from people as informally organized. But that's all there is, isn't it? What else could give us this conviction?

Remember, we are not playing games here; we are talking about the obligation that is felt to be the most serious of all obligations. Just why *do* people think that inhuman behavior is to be avoided at all costs?

I think the answer was given some twenty-four hundred years ago in the early pages of Plato's *Republic,* when Cephalus, the old father of the boys Socrates is visiting, tells why it is comforting to have been virtuous when you get along in years:

> You know yourself, Socrates, that when you get near the time when you realize the end is coming, fears and worries you never had before come creeping into you. Your mind gets tortured now by stories you used to laugh at, about the Land of the Dead and how bad

> people get their punishment there, and you wonder if they might be true.
>
> Maybe it's weakness from age, or maybe it's because you're nearer now and can see better into what's on the other side; but whatever it is, you get full of doubts and anxiety, and start trying to figure out if you've cheated anyone. And if you find there's been a lot of dishonesty in your life, you start waking up all the time in the middle of the night, terrified like a child, and you spend your days anticipating disaster.
>
> But if you know you haven't done anything dishonest, then you have "bright hope always with you like a nurse for your old age," as Pindar says.

And we have the intellectual Hamlet saying the same thing in reference to suicide:

> To die, to sleep—
> No more, and by a "sleep" to say we end
> the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> that flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
> devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep—
> to sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub.
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
> when we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> must give us pause....
> Thus, conscience doth make cowards of us all,
> and thus the native hue of resolution
> is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> and enterprises of great pitch and moment
> with this regard their currents turn awry, and lose the name of action.

In short, if we make the assumption that we are different from animals and that we will not be annihilated at death, then what happens to us after death could very well be what makes sense out of

acting consistently even if it means disadvantages in this world.

My contention is that it is very difficult for anyone to escape this conviction that death will not be the end of his life, because he is conscious of his life and its insatiable drive to continue indefinitely. Hence, it would only be reasonable to expect that every human being would have at least a "gut feeling" that death is not going to be the end for him, even if rationally he thinks that it will be. And in fact, the notion that human life goes on after death is another of those "cross-cultural constants" that is there in every culture, even when the society as officially organized (as In Russia) is atheist and strictly this-worldly.

But if we have this inescapable feeling that we will not simply "sleep" at death, but might "dream," then "what dreams may come" must necessarily "give us pause." It is only by putting this out of our minds as silly and contrary to fact that we can avoid being bothered by the *possibility* of some kind of hell facing those who would act hypocritically.

And this is reinforced, as I mentioned in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of the third part, by the fact that it simply does not make sense to do what is consistent and suffer horribly for it, and to do what is inconsistent and prosper greatly—as is the universal experience of mankind. Only those who have their heads in the clouds think that moral conduct actually gets you where you want to be in this life; those who have their eyes open know that Leo Durocher was right when he said, "Nice guys finish last." But this, as I pointed out, makes it good to do what is obviously bad, and bad to do what is good; and so instead of being simply possible, it then becomes probable that (since the reality around me basically makes sense) that my life too will make sense in terms of what happens to me in the life after death.

What I am saying here is that, whether or not this reasoning is *true,* it is *perfectly natural,* given the fact that we can't avoid at least

a doubt that life ceases at death, and that the afterlife might well be what makes you better off not being dishonest. That is, if people actually *thought* they might live on after death, then, faced with the fact that inhuman conduct is very highly rewarded and human conduct often leads to horrible suffering, it would be practically impossible for people not to conclude that the afterlife would—or at least might—straighten matters out.[12]

My contention in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of the third part was that in fact this reasoning is valid; but the point here is not that, but that it is natural and therefore widespread, so that it would occur to every human being. If so, it would account for the universal conviction that morally wrong conduct is somehow punishable, even if you get away with it in this life.

The reason, on this view, for the first sub-point, why the imperative attaches itself to morally *wrong* conduct is that the existential problem comes from observing people who *directly contradict* what it means to be human leading better (more human) lives because of it, and people being dehumanized because they tried *not* to do what was inhuman. People don't necessarily have a problem with others being *better* off than they are, if they aren't positively suffering— especially people who are more enterprising than they; that simply gives rise to the notion that if you work hard, you get ahead; the problem comes with people who couldn't avoid hardship without acting inconsistently with themselves.

As to the second point, why every person thinks he is "really" right, a person would not tend to think that something was *forbidden*

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[12]In fact, if you read the Old Testament, you find that the Hebrew people progressed as time went on from a simplistic view that right conduct was rewarded in this life, to a recognition (in the book of Wisdom) that the "sheol" (life after death) was not simply a going on, which was the same for everyone (Ecclesiastes), but a place where virtue was rewarded and vice punished.

to him unless he thought he had pretty good reasons against it; we don't like to restrict our activity any more than we have to. But since he thinks it would be unjust for him to be punished for doing something he had no idea was wrong (because how could he have avoided it in that case?), he would tend to excuse others who deviated from his idea of what was wrong on the grounds that "they don't know any better" unless they can show him *evidence* that he was in fact mistaken—as does sometimes happen. But the evidence has to be pretty compelling, of course.

This is what you would predict from this theory, and it is pretty much what you find in the way people act.

We can approach the third point, the seriousness, by pointing out that, to the extent people believe that there's no hell facing us when we die, to that extent you would expect morals to deteriorate. Is it a coincidence that the moral decline in our country happened shortly after the irreligious teachers taught that we are simply the product of chance evolution and "spirituality" was "unscientific" and so false, and at the same time the religious teachers began to get sentimental and taught that even if there was a hell God was too "loving" ever to send anyone to it—and so we should "stress the positive" in religion rather than threatening hell-fire to transgressors?

That is, why should a young girl not get pregnant when this will put her on welfare and the government will hand her money—if realistically speaking, she'd be worse off if she tried to get a job? Why shouldn't a young kid push drugs if he can take in a thousand dollars a day doing it? He answers that he's not responsible for the others' misery, because if they didn't get it from him, they'd get it from someone else—and he's right. How do you answer the kid, when he says that if he goes straight and joins the Establishment, he's then in league with an organization that is putting all the people in his neighborhood into the condition you see them in—and you want him to do this to avoid causing misery to others! "Live in the

ghetto," he says, "and then talk to me about it."

For many many people, the only hope in this life is morally wrong conduct; it's not that what's morally wrong makes them *better* off than what they would otherwise be; it's that morally wrong conduct *saves* them from a life of abject misery. And if there's no life after death, or rather no hell after death, then there is simply no reason why any sensible person would act morally.

I mean, why should these people care about "the greatest good of the greatest number" if they're the ones that are going to have to suffer for it? Why should they care about the fact that Reason inside them issues a "categorical imperative" not to be immoral, if all that means is that they'll have to live with the thought that they're inconsistent as they lift themselves out of agony? What's society to them or they to society that they should weep for her? What do they care if they're violating their early training if keeping to their training keeps their faces in the muck? What profit is there in losing everything to save their immortal soul if that's just a pretty myth? Why should they bother being on the "cutting edge of history" and working for a just society for future generations if they have to sacrifice every shred of justice now for it and watch the leaders enjoy the fruits of their hardship? If this life is all there is, make the most of it; it's all you've got. "Better to be a live dog than a dead lion."

But then, as I pointed out in the chapter on immortality, life is absurd. And people's reason will not let them believe that life is absurd; therefore, they are bound to believe that there is an afterlife that makes life not absurd.

And, of course, what happens in this afterlife has to make you better off than any suffering you endure to avoid being immoral, and worse off than any gain you achieve by doing what is morally wrong—which makes the moral imperative the absolute one, overriding every other. Once you believe there is a hell, you believe that moral conduct is essential. This takes care of the third point, the

seriousness of the obligation that is felt.

And since morality is concerned with *deliberately* acting, where you know what is right and wrong, and since this cannot be known except by the person himself and any Being who could know what is in our inmost thoughts without our telling him, then it automatically follows that if there is a hell, there has to be a God running it who knows whether we have been immoral, or whether it has been an honest mistake on our part, so that we won't again suffer without its being our fault that we are suffering. And so the fact that no one wants to be punished for what he in fact couldn't help doing accounts for the fourth point, the universal belief that there is some kind of god who knows our thoughts and who takes care of the sanction on moral conduct. Differences in contents of the obligation, of course, are accounted for, as I have so often said, by different ideas of what it is to be human. The connection with early training is that we get our idea of what humans are by observing our parents first, and our idea of what behavior is consistent with this by seeing them and being taught by them. The consistency of moral codes within a culture is also due, not to social pressure, by to the fact that the people around us are our evidence for what people are like, and what they tend to think is consistent behavior would of course, absent any evidence to the contrary, be taken as consistent behavior.

In short, this theory can explain everything that the other theories can explain; it can explain it just as naturally as they can; and it can explain what they can't explain. It is therefore, unless further evidence comes forward, the one that is to be taken as the correct one.

If you add to this the fact that an analysis of reality and life, especially human life, leads to you predict an afterlife, as we saw in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of the third part, that would in fact be just what the doctor ordered as a sanction on moral conduct, then there

are two lines of evidence that converge on the same conclusion: that there is a life after death, and that it makes moral behavior rational.

I will therefore take it that I have proved not only that the reason people *think* that there is a punishment connected with immoral choices is their belief in an afterlife (or at least their fear that there might really be one), but that in fact there *is* an afterlife which makes it always advantageous not to be immoral, as we saw in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of the third part.

The view of life sketched there, then, which I am not going to repeat here, not only is a theory that accounts for why it is reasonable not to choose what is morally wrong, it is a theory which also accounts for why we *think* it is *necessary* not to choose what is morally wrong; and furthermore, it is the *only* theory which faces the facts of our actual experience and makes sense out of acting consistently when it is greatly to your disadvantage in this life to act inconsistently. The best all the other theories can do is show why we would be deluded into believing that it is better not to choose wrong in that situation; only this one can show not only why we believe it, but why our believing it is more rational than dismissing it as wishful thinking.

I rest my case.

Chapter 5

Morality and the choice

What I want to do now is first of all spell out some of the moral implications in the fact that it is the *choice* to do something that carries with it the eternal implications, rather than the act you actually do; and after this list and briefly discuss what has been called "personal ethics": those acts which can be inconsistent even if no one else is affected by them.

First, then, we will take it from Sections 3 and 4 of the third part that our overt acts cease at death with the decay of our bodies, but our consciousness goes on, containing in one act every act of consciousness we have ever had, including every choice we have ever made. Our choices imply goals that we intend to reach, meaning that we consider ourselves to be unstable and in a self-contradictory condition if we do not reach them: we are *frustrated* without them. If the choice is to do something inhuman (one that contradicts the genetic potential we were given, or one that contradicts what we have already made ourselves), then eternally we have set up a goal for ourselves which eternally cannot be achieved, and so we are eternally frustrated.

With that presupposed, let me begin by stating the general moral rule, which takes into account that morality deals with the choice:

Basic rule of morality: A person must never *be willing* to do

what is morally wrong.

It either never or almost never happens that a person does what is wrong *simply because* it is wrong, or that his goal is the precise wrongness of the act he does. Augustine, St. Thomas and others have said, in fact, that to choose evil for evil's sake is psychologically impossible, because the will is oriented automatically toward "the good." I argued in Chapter 6 of Section 3 of the third part that this is not the case, and so it is possible in principle to do something simply because it is wrong. But that doesn't alter the fact that this would be a very very rare sort of thing, and just about all morally wrong acts are chosen because the wrongness has some unavoidable connection with some good the person wants to achieve: either it is a means toward it, or a side-effect of it, or a consequence of it.

In this case, however, *if* you want the goal in question, you *also* can't avoid the wrong act: for instance, if you want the inheritance your father has left you in his will, and the only way to get it is to kill him, and you kill him to get the inheritance, then *one* of the things you chose was his death, and you can't get away with saying "All I wanted was the money." You may have *wanted* the money, but you were *willing* to kill your father.

And this is why the moral rule was stated as it was. It is not enough not to actively *desire* what is wrong, or be actively *seeking* it as even a secondary goal; your choice *must be directed* ***away*** *from the wrong,* or the wrongness will enter your choice as part of it, and you will suffer the eternal consequences. If you kill your father for his money, you will find after you die and your full consciousness reawakens that one of the things you will be striving for eternally is to have the power of life and death over those you don't have the power of life and death over—because this self-contradictory goal was entailed in your choice.

There are times when wrong side-effects of the act can be kept

out of the choice, and we will discuss them later under the Principle of the Double Effect; but in general, if there is something wrong connected with what you choose, you have to be willing that the wrongness be done in order to make the choice, and that means that the choice is immoral.

I also said in Chapter 6 of Section 3 that a choice depends on the *factual information* one has at the time about what he is choosing; and so the contradiction and its frustration would only be set up in a person's choice if he had some information that what he was doing was wrong (self-contradictory). Choices, I said, are *not* directly affected by emotions (it is the *fact* that I have a given emotion, not the emotion itself that forms a motive for the choice); and if morality deals with the choice, then this means the following:

Conclusion 5: Emotions, instincts, and drives are not directly relevant to morality. It does not matter morally how you feel about something.

I said that they are not *directly* relevant to morality; but they do have an *indirect* relevance, because indirectly they can *affect* a choice, even if as such they don't directly *enter* it. So in discussing morality and the choice, let us first speak of the relation of morality to emotions, to clear away the underbrush; and then we will deal with the relation of morality to the factual information you have at the time you make the choice (your conscience); and finally the relation of morality to the act in the situation you find it in.

How would an emotion or a drive, which is not in itself part of the choice, be morally relevant? Emotions and drives, as I said in Chapter 5 of Section 2 of the third part, are the operation of instinct, which has two functions: *attention* and *an automatic tendency toward a behavioral response to the stimulus.*

When instinct is operating, then, it tends to push some data below the threshold of perception, using the energy gained by this to make operation of the particular program more efficient, but by that same token (since consciousness is another "dimension" of that same act) making the consciousness *favorable* to the drive's operation that much more vivid.

It follows from this that, the stronger the drive in question is, *the less information is available in consciousness* that there is anything wrong with doing what the drive leads toward, and *the clearer it seems* that doing what the drive leads toward is the right thing. You can't think of a fact, as I said in Chapter 3 of Section 3 of the third part, if the proper sensation isn't raised above the threshold of consciousness; and it follows from this that the operation of instinct would naturally tend to *blind* you to facts you would otherwise know against what the drive is leading you towards.

And, of course, this is everyone's experience. If something seems attractive to you, there seems little reason for not doing it; and the more attractive it gets, the less reason you can think of against doing it, until in the limit, as I said, temporary or permanent insanity occurs (psychosis) and you see no reason at all for not doing the act, however heinous you might regard it when the drive is not operating.

Obviously, when that point is reached, the choice you make to do what would normally be understood by you as morally wrong is a *moral* choice, precisely because you can't, in this condition, understand that there is anything wrong about it. It is a moral choice, but an *ignorant* one, ignorant, not because you didn't have the information stored somewhere within you, but because you had no access to that information and were not aware of it.

Conclusion 6: To the extent that emotions or drives actually

block out **of consciousness information that would normally be accessible to us, to that extent choices to do what in fact is wrong based on this lack of information are *moral,* not immoral.**

If the drive has in fact totally blocked out the information from your consciousness, then it's the same as if you never had it, because there is no way at the moment you could be conscious of it, and so there is no way it can enter or affect the choice.

It's not quite that simple, however, because you're not always at that stage, and can sometimes prevent yourself from getting there. But let me table that for a moment, and take the other side of the coin.

A drive can also create, by using imagination, *hallucinatory sensations,* sensations that are images that we take to be perceptions, and by which we think we can understand facts. These need not be visions of unreal objects popping into our field of vision, though this can sometimes happen when the drive is strong enough. Some psychotics do see things and hear voices, and so on. A poor woman on trial in Cincinnati when I first wrote this now says she killed her six-year-old daughter because she heard voices from the radio telling her she had to do so to save the world. She had had a history of mental problems.

More often, however, the imagination simply *enhances* favorable aspects of things or even *attaches* imaginary characteristics to things that are real, creating "information" that these things are what they really aren't. I read in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* a mother's view of her son, who was a notorious rake, wounded in a duel with Pierre Bezukhov, his friend he had cuckolded:

> No one cares about virtue anymore, it's a reproach to everyone. Now, tell me, Count, was it right, was it honorable of Bezukhov? And Fedya, in his noblehearted way, loved him, and even now never says a

> word against him. All those pranks in Petersburg, and that trick they played on the policeman, they were in it together, weren't they? Yet Bezukhov got off scotfree, while Fedya took all the blame on his shoulders. And what he has had to go through! True, he has been reinstated—but how could they not reinstate him? I don't suppose there were many such brave sons of the fatherland out there. And now—? This duel! Have those people no feeling, no honor! Knowing him to be an only son, to challenge him to a duel and then shoot straight at him like that! We can be thankful that God had mercy on us! And what was it for? Why, who doesn't have intrigues nowadays? And if he was so jealous, well, as I see things, he ought to have shown it sooner...

and on and on. Everything is a virtue in her Fedya, even his intrigues. She would be startled indeed if you told her that she was distorting the facts out of all recognition. "Why," she would say, "who sees more clearly than a mother's heart? I *know* him!"

So the drive not only can block out information, it can create *misinformation,* and of course to the extent that a person thinks the misinformation is a fact, his choice is based on the facts as he thinks them objectively to be, not what they in fact are—and if his choice is to do something in fact morally wrong, but his emotion has made it *seem* objectively innocent, then his choice is *moral,* not immoral.

Conclusion 7: To the extent that emotions or drives create *misinformation* which the person takes to be factual, to that extent his choosing what he would otherwise know is morally wrong is a *moral choice.*

Of course, this sword cuts both ways. Some temporary or permanent psychosis can lead you to think that an act is *wrong* when in fact there is nothing morally wrong with it. In that case,

Conclusion 8: To the extent that instinct misinforms the person, making him think that something which is in fact innocent is morally wrong, his choice to do that act is *immoral.*

In that sense, the emotion is really not morally relevant in itself; because insofar as it affects the information, all that happens is that your choice is based on ignorance—on the information you possess—and you can't be held to what you can't in practice know or be bound to correct a mistake you don't know you're making.[13]

The other thing a drive can do, as I said in discussing drives and choices, is take over control of the act, so that it is made in spite of the choice. This, as I mentioned, when it becomes chronic, is what I called a *neurosis.*

Of course, in this case, the morality follows the choice, not the act you perform. The alcoholic, for instance, who chooses not to drink and finds himself drinking in spite of himself, has made a *moral* choice.

Conclusion 9: If a person chooses to perform an act and a drive prevents him from doing so, his moral status depends on the choice, not the act.

But.

Generally speaking when some drive attracts us to an act, it

[13]This is what has been known as "invincible ignorance," as opposed to "vincible ignorance," where you have reason to suspect the truth, and it is a question of looking for it. Some ethicians would interpret the ignorance I have described as vincible, on the grounds that the person *ought* to have known the facts, which were right in front of him. But if his emotions have blinded him, how could he even know there *were* facts to be known. These people confuse what an *ordinary* person would be aware of with what the actual person could in practice be aware of.

doesn't strike with its full force all at once; and for a good while we have a certain amount of control of our attention and can direct it *away* from the "program" that the instinct is trying to run at the moment. I mentioned in Chapter 5 of Section 2 of the third part that we can *concentrate* and control, to some extent, the energy-flow in our brains; and by concentrating we can wrest our consciousness out of the control of a drive—until it gets too strong for our powers of concentration to handle, which is part of the evidence for our "fallenness" that I discussed in Chapter 5 of Section 4 of that part.

The moral implication of this is the following:

Conclusion 10: If a person in control of himself finds an emotion leading him toward some act that he *now* recognizes is morally wrong, *he makes an immoral choice* if he *chooses to let* the drive grow stronger until it makes the act seem morally innocent or forces him to act in spite of his choice.

That is, to the extent to which a person *foresees* that in this situation, if he simply lets things take their natural course and doesn't use his concentration to get him out of the thought-pattern that the drive is leading him toward, he will eventually find nothing wrong with what the drive wants him to do—to that extent, *he is now (i.e. when he foresees the outcome) willing to do the act,* which he *now* understands is wrong, and is simply *using the instinct as an excuse* because when it gets strong enough its misinformation will *then* make him think the act is all right.

True, when he actually does perform the act later, under the control of the drive, his choice *then* is not immoral; it is the earlier choice to *get into* that situation when you can prevent it that is the immoral choice.

I spoke earlier of temptations, which were attractions to some-

thing we found undesirable, whether or not it was morally wrong. Let me make a definition here in a moral context:

A *moral temptation* is any reason or emotion that would make it seem a good thing to do what is known or suspected to be morally wrong.

"Giving in" to a temptation, strictly speaking, would involve making an *immoral choice,* because if you "give in" to it, you are still in a position to realize that what you are doing is wrong, but you decide to do the act anyway—in which case, you are *willing* to do what you know is wrong, and that is the essence of immorality, as I said.

But what I was discussing above means that there are instances of apparent giving in to a temptation that *in fact* you could not control, when the drive gets stronger and stronger in spite of your efforts to concentrate, and you find yourself with less and less reason for not doing the act, and eventually can't see any realistic reason why you shouldn't. In that case, since you haven't *deliberately* let this happen, your choice isn't a giving in at all, really, but something you *really* had no power over.

And this is a point that needs emphasizing.

Conclusion 11: A person who is under the grip of a drive toward some morally wrong act is only being immoral if *he is willing* to let the drive take over (or retain) control.

That is, it might not in practice be possible, by concentrating, to get out of the behavior-pattern that the drive is leading you towards; even from the beginning you are actually out of control, even if you see clearly what is happening, and even though theoretically (because

your will is free) you could prevent the act. This is particularly the case with neurotics, and is one of the causes of the distress that comes from neurosis.

An alcoholic, for instance, who sometimes can resist the temptation to drink, can argue from this that "if he put his mind to it" he always could resist the temptation to drink (certainly enough of the people around him tell him that). So he "gives in" to the temptation and drinks, hating himself all the while he is doing it, and thinking that he chose to drink, when even while he is raising the glass to his lips, he is wishing he wasn't doing this. "Motivating" him while he is doing this is totally useless, because he simply can't hear what you are telling him. You say, "If you don't care about yourself, think of your wife and children!" What will immediately pop into his mind as he does so is how they don't care about *him* or they would leave him alone and stop getting on his case, which would help him to quit.

This man is not *willing* to do what he is doing; he would gladly stop if he could. He hasn't "given in" to the temptation; there was no way he could, even at that stage, keep himself from taking the drink. You might think that, even if this is true when faced with the drink itself, he can at least control himself and not get out of the house and drive to the tavern. But very often not even this is possible for the alcoholic; the need for a drink has become so essential in his physical and mental life (because his brain has arranged itself so as to be able to cope with the poison he is introducing into it, and cannot now function without the poison, just as a teen-ager can't study any more without blocking out the rock music in the background) that it obsesses him; and while he is at home, it keeps intruding itself onto his consciousness, like a headache, no matter how often he tries to put it out of his mind. And in this process of coming back and coming back, he can figure out all sorts of ingenious ways of getting a secret drink *without being able to prevent himself from doing so.*

So those who aren't alcoholics can't use their own minds to assess what is going on in the alcoholic's mind, and suppose him to be in control because they would be in control if they were in his situation.

There are severe dangers in "motivating" an alcoholic and trying to convince him that he is in control of himself and can stop if he "really wants to badly enough." The first is a practical one, connected to his behavior: He knows—or rather suspects strongly—that he's not in control; but if you're right and he *is* in control, then he is loathsome, evil, and depraved, not helpless; and so, to escape this horrible evaluation of himself (which in his heart of hearts he doesn't believe), he will be *that much more motivated to drink to prove to himself that he* ***is*** *helpless.* You don't realize what he thinks you are calling him when you tell him the harm he is actually doing to himself and everyone around him and supposedly "encouraging" him to stop doing it. He hears you telling him, "Because you are doing this when you could stop if you wanted to, you are the vilest of the vile."

But the second danger is even worse. To the extent that the alcoholic believes you and thinks that he *can* control himself and that he *doesn't* because he freely chooses not to (i.e. he freely chooses not to put forth the effort—both of you realize that it would be "hard" to stop), then this notion that he is *in fact* being immoral can lead him to say, "Well, what the hell, if I'm damned anyway, no matter what I do, why fight it? What good does fighting it do? This is the way I am, and from now on *I accept it.*" What has he done? He has now *become willing* to be a drunk; and this is immoral.

Yes, by your wrong-headed attempt to "save" him, you have been instrumental in *damning* him. Up until the time you convinced him that he could stop if he really put his mind to it, he was *resisting* his unconquerable drive to drink; now, he has *made the choice* ***not*** *to put his mind to it,* and has become willing to do what he can't help doing anyway.

The "tough love," that I mentioned in Chapter 6 of Section 3 of the third part *only* works in forcing on a person's attention *information* that he couldn't see because of the distortion that instinct causes; but if the person knows what he is doing and can't control himself anyway, keeping after him to "get hold of himself" and not treating him as handicapped is just as apt to lead to his damnation as it is to his "solving his problem."

But how can a person *know* whether he is out of control, or whether he still has enough control so that he can pull himself back if he really wants to? He must look at the rest of his life: is he a person who doesn't care about himself and what happens to him in other areas of his life? Is he a person who does harm to others and doesn't care about doing it? If in other areas of his life, he tries to be decent and to avoid doing harm, and if what he is doing now distresses him except when he is faced with the prospect of drinking (when he seems not to care about anything except the drink), then he can assure himself that he is not *willingly* a drunk.

Conclusion 12: If a person under the grip of a neurosis is in other respects a moral person and if he is *dissatisfied* with himself as tending toward this wrong conduct, *he has a psychological, not a moral disorder*. If he "accepts himself" and does not care that the tendency is toward what is wrong, *his disorder is still psychological, but his willingness to be this way is immoral.*

That is, even though immorality and psychological disorders are not the same thing, they are not necessarily *separated* in a person. There are all kinds of combinations of how a person can be. Let me use the homosexual as an example now, instead of the alcoholic, since the different combinations can show up more clearly. I will discuss in the next section why homosexual sexual intercourse is

morally wrong; but let us here take for the sake of argument that such activity is objectively inconsistent with what sexuality is, and simply see what different sorts of ways homosexuals can be related to their acts:

First, a person might *not be aware* that there is anything wrong with homosexual intercourse; he might be able to prevent having sex homosexually if he wants to, but sees no reason for not having sex in this way. This person has no psychological disorder (he can do what he chooses), and *is not being immoral,* because as far as he knows, what he is doing is perfectly all right. He is simply *ignorant* of what the facts really are. He is *doing* what is wrong, but there is no immorality in his choice.

Second, a person may know that homosexual intercourse is wrong (or even merely suspect that it is in fact wrong) and be able to prevent himself from performing the act whenever he chooses; but he likes the act and chooses to do it. This person *has no psychological disorder,* but *is being immoral,* because he is in control of himself and deliberately chooses to do what he knows is wrong (or is willing to do what he suspects is wrong, which amounts to the same thing).

Note that in this sense, homosexuality is not *of itself* a psychological disorder; it only *becomes* so in the following cases:

Third, a person may be unaware that there is anything wrong with homosexual intercourse, but may have found that when he didn't want to have sex with someone (for reasons other than moral ones), he couldn't help himself and had sex with the person. This person *has a psychological disorder with no moral overtones,* because he *is* out of control of himself, but doesn't see any reason why morally he must prevent this act's from happening if he can.

Fourth, a person may know or suspect that homosexual intercourse is wrong, and try to prevent himself from having sex; but he finds that the urge is too strong for him, and he performs the act in spite of himself. This person *has a psychological disorder* because he

chooses not to do something that he does, and therefore cannot control himself. But *he is not being immoral,* precisely because he does choose not to do the acts.

Finally, a person may know or suspect that homosexual intercourse is wrong, and realize that he can't prevent himself from having sex this way and is out of control. But he has decided to "accept himself" as a homosexual anyway and live out his life consistently with his homosexual nature. This person *both has a psychological disorder and is being immoral.* He has a psychological disorder because he is in fact out of control; he is immoral because he doesn't care that he is out of control; morally speaking he is the same as the person in the second case, because *even if* he were in control and could prevent the acts, he wouldn't; hence, he is willing to do the acts he knows are wrong.

In this last case, the psychological disorder is a "disorder" only in an abstract sense: in the sense that the person could not prevent the acts *if* he wanted to. But in point of fact, he doesn't want to, and so there is no sense in which he could be "cured." All that a "cure" of a psychological disorder does is put the person back into control of himself; but in this case, putting him back into control *wouldn't change his behavior,* because then it would simply be the same because of his choice and not because both of his choice and his neurosis. Further, he would not *seek* "treatment," precisely because the "cure" would make no practical difference to him; and in fact, he would actively *resist* "treatment" insofar as he suspected that the "cure" would change his behavior, which he wants.

Hence, a person who *is willing* to do what he can't help doing can't hide behind his "neurosis" on the grounds that neurotics have psychological problems, not moral ones. He has no psychological *problem,* any more than a person has a psychological problem in the fact that he can't prevent himself from breathing. He might have a psychological *disorder* in the sense that his act objectively is

inconsistent with some aspect of his nature and he can't help performing the act; but it isn't a psychological *problem or handicap* unless he wants not to perform it.

I suppose here is the place to point out that the way for a person with a psychological disorder to look on himself—and the way for others to look on him—is that he has a *handicap* rather than a *problem*. The reason why looking at it as a "problem" can be counterproductive is that problems imply that there is a solution and that something is *to be corrected*.

But it may not be *possible* to correct some psychological disorders. For instance, alcoholism can't really be *corrected,* so that the person can become a rational drinker the way many normal people are; he can *never* "take it or let it alone" the way normal people can. Similarly, there is a good deal of evidence that homosexuals can't become heterosexuals, even when they can learn to have heterosexual intercourse to orgasm, and when they can avoid having homosexual sex; but this is not to change their orientation, any more than a heterosexual who *can* be brought to orgasm by one of his own sex is thereby homosexual (or even bisexual, for that matter). So even if homosexuality is a tendency to do something which in fact is inconsistent with the agent, it in itself is probably not a "problem" which can be corrected. And the same goes for many other psychological disorders.

But a *handicap* is something that can be either lived with or "overcome." An alcoholic who stops drinking is an alcoholic who still has his handicap, but has overcome it; a homosexual who has no homosexual sex has overcome his handicap. But it may be that the alcoholic can't in fact stop drinking (they say that only 25% of alcoholics permanently stop), and it may be that the homosexual never can stop his sexual activity.

In this case, the person *must maintain his unwillingness to do the acts he knows are wrong,* but certainly can accept the *objective fact* that

he can't prevent them, and need not hate himself because of this. He is no more "hateful" because of this than a man with paralyzed legs is "hateful" because he can't walk, or a man with St. Vitus' Dance or Parkinson's disease is "hateful" because he can't stop shaking his head. The latter sort of people have *physical* handicaps; the former, *psychological* handicaps. But the principle is the same: the person cannot do what he chooses to do, because of some malfunction inside him. In the case of the psychological handicaps, it is something wrong with the circuitry in the brain, not with his "will." His *will* is oriented properly; it is just that his *brain* won't let him fulfill his choices.[14]

Hence, the alcoholic or homosexual or neurotic who can't help himself *has* got a difficulty: he *must never be willing* to do what he can't help doing anyway; but he doesn't have to fret about it or keep beating his head against the wall, trying this and that and the other to get "cured." He can "learn to live with it" in the sense that he can know that, barring a miracle, he'll be this way until he dies and there's nothing he can do to get out of being this way; and can accept *that fact* without "accepting himself" in the sense of *acquiescing* in the acts he can't prevent.

I remember one time I persuaded my father (who was blind) to go back and have his eyes examined, because I told him that medical science had made many advances in the thirty years or so since he was last tested, and it might be that they could do something for him. He went back, and after several tests, they started fitting him for

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[14]This is the kind of thing St. Paul was referring to in *Romans* (7): "This [the fact that I am material while the Law is spiritual] is shown by the fact that I don't even recognize the acts I do; what I do is not what I choose to do; I do what I hate doing. And if what I do is what I don't want to do, then I am in agreement with the Law as a good thing; and so in fact, I am not the one who is acting; it is the sin that has its home in me that acts."

glasses, at which point he said, "Don't bother; the improvement isn't enough to make any difference." When the nurse was filling out a questionnaire about the testing afterwards, she asked, "Does it bother you that we couldn't improve your vision?" and he answered, "No. I've lived with this all my life, and I can go on living with it." She said, "Then I'll put down, 'Is satisfied with his condition,'" and he shot back "Don't say that! I'm not *satisfied* with it! I just said I can *live* with it because there's nothing I can do about it!" It is this sort of "acceptance" that the person with the psychological handicap with moral overtones *must* have. He can never morally be *satisfied* with himself; but he doesn't have to keep trying to be different in order to be moral.

Obviously, this situation is anything but a desirable one to be in; and if a person *can* overcome his handicap, it would be beneficial for him to do so. The point is that he doesn't morally have to be wearing himself out trying to overcome something he can't in practice overcome.

Just a word about virtues and vices before we go on to talk about the moral implications of the choice and the information it is based on.

Some definitions:

A *habit* is an automatic stimulus-response pattern that is not innate, but acquired through repetition of the same act on being presented with the same stimulus.

I mentioned habits briefly in Chapter 5 of Section 2 of the third part, where I was discussing instinct and drives. They function like drives, except for the fact that in themselves they have no emotional overtone connected with them.

A *virtue* is a good habit.

A *vice* is a bad habit.

A *moral virtue or vice* is the habit of doing something morally right or wrong.[15]

For moral purposes, a habit functions the same way a drive does; it makes the act happen more or less independently of the choice—and can take sometimes take control even against a choice to the contrary. In fact, many if not all psychological disorders are complicated by the fact that they also involve habits, because the person who is initially somewhat out of control tends to perform the act in the situation in question, and so a habit begins to be formed, making him that much less in control as time goes on.

It is probably the fact that psychological disorders are as much if not more habits than drives that means that when we have them, we eventually find the act in question necessary rather than pleasurable. People, for instance, who have smoked or been drinking for years don't feel much pleasure from it; it is just that it becomes less possible not to do the act, and the agony from not doing it is very great.

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[15]To these definitions we could add that the ***Theological virtues*** are the **faith, hope, and charity which initially are given us in the new life that is received in becoming Christian; from this point on, they can be developed like any habit by repetition of the appropriate acts.** There is nothing a person can do to *acquire* these virtues; they are given as a free gift by God when he bestows his own life upon us in our incorporation (literally) into the Body of his Son. But we can by our choices put up more or fewer obstacles in the way of their operating, and so they can grow stronger or remain weak.

But if virtues are good habits and vices are bad habits, and habits function independently of the choice, why are virtues regarded as *very* good morally and vices regarded as worse than actual immoral choices?

The answer is that a habit is a *virtue* rather than a disorder if (a) we recognize that there is nothing wrong with the act it automatically produces, and (b) we *are willing* to have it happen. If the acts are *totally unconscious,* then what you have strictly speaking isn't a virtue, but just automatic behavior, analogous to sleepwalking, however noble the act might be in itself. In this case, it has no connection whatever with your will. For a person to have a virtue, he has to realize what he is doing and give no resistance to it. Thus, when I brush my teeth in the morning (to take a virtue that isn't a moral one), I'm not in much of a position yet to be making choices and deliberating "Should I brush? Should I not brush?" It just happens; but at the same time, I'm not *so* unconscious that I don't know that it's going on. I just *approve* of it and don't try to stop it. I have the virtue of tooth-brushing.

In this sense, a virtue is *better* than a single moral choice, because (a) it is a willingness, because the act is conscious and approved; and (b) the person has a *permanent orientation toward* this good behavior, and so it is "more" "his" in a sense than the single act that he chooses as his. He is, if you will, more like what he will be eternally, because he has not only chosen this act, he has *fixed* it into himself as a permanent part of himself. All choices will be like habits after we die, because they will all be consciously permanent parts of ourselves; but we imitate this here by creating habits.[16]

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[16]A sign, by the way, that you have acquired a virtue is what you do in your dreams. If in your dreams you "overcome temptations," then, since dreams do not involve full consciousness, as we saw in Chapter 5 of Section 2 of the third part, and so don't

Similarly, a vice is worse than a single immoral choice, because the person is willing to do the act, and is willing to *keep* doing it whenever the situation presents itself; he has a permanent orientation toward what he recognizes is self-contradictory.

Note that a vice turns into a psychological disorder if the person *stops being willing* to do the act he has got into the habit of doing. It is then, as I said above, not a vice but a handicap.

There is this we can say about virtues and vices and their acquisition:

Conclusion 13: It is immoral to allow oneself to acquire a vice if (a) one realizes that the acts are wrong and leading to a habit of doing wrong acts, and (b) one makes no effort to prevent the habit from forming.

That is, it is one thing to choose something wrong; but there is an *added* dimension to the immorality if you realize that this choice is *also* getting you into the *habit* of doing this wrong act. Then the choice is to do something both wrong in itself and wrong in its effect; and it has the added overtone of being willing to be

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involve actual choices, your dream-self's acting morally is the result of a habitual resistance to the temptation rather than deliberate concentration; one thing you definitely can't do in dreams is concentrate. I hasten to add here that if you "give in" to the temptation in the dream, (a) this is not an immoral choice, because your consciousness in a dream is more or less like watching a movie of yourself, and does not involve control, and (b) is no sign that you *don't* have the virtue in question, because you may have the habit in your waking life given the assist your full consciousness gives to the proper behavior-pattern. Since dreams have nothing to do with choices *dreams have no moral significance at all.* When they tell you (as above) that you have a virtue, all they are indicating is that the habit in question is deeply ingrained.

permanently oriented toward this wrong act.

This, of course, supposes that you are in control at the time. It might be that an alcoholic from the earliest stages is one who can't prevent himself from falling into the habit. This is even more apt to be the case, they tell me, with certain other drugs like "crack." I am told that sometimes just one experience is enough to get a person out of control; and from then on he is "hooked."

To the extent that one realizes that this might happen to him, it would be immoral to choose to have the first experience, even if in itself it was not morally wrong (we will see what is wrong with drugging yourself later), because one would be deciding to perform an act whose effect is permanent dependence on something which, if habitual, is destructive. But of course, if one has no *reason* to believe this might happen, then one would not be choosing this effect along with the act. So, since many many people can drink and control it, it does not follow that when you take your first drink you have any reason to believe that this will make you an alcoholic. You would *suspect* that you were becoming an alcoholic if you felt you *needed* a drink. *The day you say to yourself, "I need a drink" must be the day* ***after*** *you have had your last drink,* or you are in serious danger of alcoholism. This is no pleasantry; the difference between the alcoholic and the controlled drinker is that the latter never needs a drink.

Many authors spend a great deal of time listing and categorizing the various types of virtues. Since it should be obvious that I am not terribly fond of lists nor of pigeonholing things, I am not going to bother with that. Nevertheless, I think it useful to say a couple of words on what are called the four "cardinal" virtues, traditionally called "prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance." I will give them names closer to their modern significance shortly; but first why are they called "cardinal"? The word comes, not from the bird or the Princes of the Catholic Church, after the color of whose robes the

bird was named, but from the meaning of the word which also is behind why these people are called "cardinals." The Latin word *cardo (cardin-)* means "hinge"; and these virtues, or these people, are the ones on which other things "hinge." They are what we would call the *pivotal* virtues; if you don't have all of them, no other act can be virtuous, nor can you acquire any other (moral) virtue.

What are these virtues habits of doing? First, *discretion* ("prudence") is the habit of adjusting the act to agree with all the *physical circumstances* of the act; it might also be called "common sense." Without this virtue, your act is *reckless,* and is apt to be at cross-purposes with itself because it did not pay attention to something about the situation which modified it significantly.

Secondly, *honesty* ("justice") is the habit of adjusting the act to be consistent with the *persons involved* in the act. It is, as Aristotle mentioned, synonymous with morality itself if you take it in the general sense of "being true to that person which is yourself, including all your relations with everything and everyone." It includes within it the virtue of *justice* in the strict sense when it adjusts the act so that it fits *other people* who are affected by it. Obviously, without this virtue, your acts would be *dishonest and/or unjust* and could violate your own or someone else's reality.

Thirdly, *courage* ("fortitude") is the habit of preventing *negative emotions* from taking control and forcing you to avoid an act reason tells you is desirable. All negative emotions can be classified under "fear" of some sort; and so the person who does not have this virtue is a *coward,* who won't do what he knows he must do because fear prevents him from doing it.

Finally *self-control* ("temperance") is the habit of preventing *attractive emotions* from taking control and forcing you to do an act your reason tells you is undesirable. Obviously, the person who lacks self control is *intemperate* and cannot prevent himself from doing what is wrong if he is attracted toward it. Clearly, a person may be

intemperate with respect to only one type of activity and have self-control in the rest; lust, for instance, is sexual intemperance, gluttony intemperance with respect to food, and so on.

You can see why you have to have all four of these virtues working together to be able actually to *do* what is morally right; it you don't pay attention to the physical or personal circumstances, then your act can violate one of them; if you can't control your emotions, then your act won't follow your choice.

But let that be enough about virtues. Since my view of morality is that you must not choose (or be willing) to do what is wrong, it is not a virtue-ethics, and not even an anti-vice ethics. I have nothing against virtues, by any means; but what virtues you acquire are part of your self-definition of yourself, and morality as I see it simply deals with how to keep *contradictions* out of this self-definition.

But there is one last point dealing with the choice's control of the acts that needs clear statement, since it has moral implications:

***Responsibility* is the fact that the act and its consequences "belong to" the person insofar as his choice could have made them different.**

That is, responsibility is "answerability," not "duty." When one talks about the "responsibilities" of the Senior Vice President of the company in the company's manual, one is talking about the *duties* of the Senior Vice President. They are "responsibilities" in the sense that if they don't get done, *he* is the one (then) responsible. So these are "responsibilities" in an analogous sense, presupposing the sense above.

In other words, responsibilities in the strict sense are *after* the fact; they imply that (a) you had control over the fact, and consequently (b) it happened as it happened because you *chose* what you

chose. Responsibility implies that you were free and could have chosen that the act not happen this way, in which case, it wouldn't have happened this way. But one of the implications of responsibility is this:

Conclusion 14: A person cannot be responsible for what did not happen (even if he intended it to happen).

Responsibility *supposes a concrete event,* and "attributes" it to the person it "belongs to," in the sense of the person who could have prevented or altered it by his choice. If the event didn't happen, then there's no "it" that he could have altered, and so he can't be responsible for "it." To talk about a person as if he were responsible for a non-event which he intended is to confuse guilt (which I'll mention shortly) with responsibility. The two are not the same.

There are various levels of responsibility, not all of which are recognized as distinct, and whose confusion can lead to false judgments:

At the lowest level is ***physical responsibility*** **which is the responsibility a person has for an event because it was in principle possible for him to prevent it by choosing differently,** irrespective of whether (a) he had any idea that he could do so, (b) he was in control of himself, or even (c) the choice would have been immoral.

I was told by a friend who had just come back from Saudi Arabia never to get a driver's license and try to drive there; because the law (at that time, anyway), according to him, was such that, if you were in an intersection and the light was in your favor, and a Saudi ran the red light and crashed into your car, killing himself, you would be prosecuted for murder, on the grounds that if you hadn't decided to come to Saudi Arabia, you wouldn't have been in the intersection for

him to smash into you. This is physical responsibility. You *could* have prevented the accident by choosing not to come to the country; but your choice to come to the country certainly did not *include* placing yourself in the path of a reckless driver, let alone his death.

The point of merely physical responsibility is that, while you *could* have made a different choice, *there is no reason why you* ***would*** *have made a different choice,* and there might be all sorts of reasons why you would *not* have made a different choice—or even, morally speaking, *could* not have made a different choice. For instance, you might choose to have an arm amputated because it is gangrenous and you would die otherwise. Obviously, you now can no longer pick up things with the hand that is gone; but you could not *morally* choose to keep your body intact and kill yourself; hence, you are *only physically* responsible for the mutilation. In the "true" sense, you are not responsible for it, because you didn't intend it in any meaningful sense.

The *highest* level of responsibility is ***moral*** **responsibility. This implies that the act and its effects were *known* when you made the choice and you were *willing* to have them happen.** Obviously, this choice may be either moral or immoral, depending on whether the act and its known consequences were consistent or inconsistent with yourself. In this sense, the act was (as known) part of the choice, in which case it obviously "belongs" to you.[17]

But in order to be morally responsible for an act or one of its consequences, *you must be actively conscious at the time you make the choice* about the particular aspect of the act or its consequences; if

[17]I.e. it belongs to you as a "moral agent" or as a person. This is what Pope John Paul II calls in *The Acting Person* an act that one "does" as opposed to an act that the person is only physically responsible for, which he calls an act that "happens to" a person. It belongs to the body, so to speak, but not to the person, since the person is essentially the spirit.

you didn't *in fact* realize that the gun might be loaded and you chose to point it at someone and pull the trigger, *you would not be **morally** responsible for the death you caused*.

"Well, but wait just a minute!" you say, "You certainly *ought* to have suspected that the gun might be loaded!" That's *legal* responsibility, which I'll get to in a minute.

If you take what I said before about how emotions can block out information, it is clear that sometimes you simply are not conscious of information that you might normally be aware of; and, as I said, in that case morally speaking it is the same as if you never knew the information, since there is no way in can affect your choice at the moment. The same can be said of temporary lapses of memory or attention that don't have any particular emotion or drive behind them. If you *aren't* aware of the relevant information, you *aren't,* and therefore, it isn't part of your choice; and therefore, morally speaking, that aspect of the act isn't *yours,* because there was *no reason you knew of* to keep from choosing it.

Conclusion 15: A person is not morally responsible for aspects of an act that he did not in fact foresee at the time he made the choice.

Secondly, there are aspects of an act that you foresee will happen but which you cannot *morally* prevent, because to do so would be to make an immoral choice. No matter what the harm done, *no* immoral choice can be made to prevent it, because the trade-off is eternal frustration in comparison to the avoidance of temporal harm, and the scales always tip against the eternal frustration, no matter how slight. I mentioned this in Chapter 4 of Section 4 of the third part, where I showed how it was always better to avoid being immoral, no matter what harm you avoided by being immoral.

Therefore, if the harm that comes cannot be avoided except by making an immoral choice, you are not *morally* responsible for the harm—though of course you would be *physically* responsible for it, since in principle you *could* have avoided it by being immoral. But obviously you can't be *morally* responsible for what you couldn't *morally* avoid. Morally speaking, such things are out of your control. Hence,

Conclusion 16: A person is not morally responsible for any aspect of an event that could not be avoided except by making an immoral choice.

If you can't avoid some harm to another person without being immoral, you aren't morally responsible for the harm. But since your choice *did* bring on the harm, you are, as I said, *physically* responsible for it; and so there is a sense in which the harm is "yours." Because of this, you have an *obligation* to *correct or mitigate the damage* insofar as this is reasonably possible without harm to yourself.

Thus, for instance, a doctor whose knife accidentally slips during an operation (even though he was exercising care) and paralyzes a patient permanently is not *morally* responsible for the patient's paralysis, but is *physically* responsible for it. He then must do what he can to correct the situation or to make his life as comfortable and as close to what it would otherwise have been as he can; though he need not impoverish or actually harm himself in the process.

In this sense, physical responsibility sometimes has moral overtones.

But since other people cannot know, unless you tell them, what you actually knew at the time you made the choice, or whether even you actually chose the act in question or were out of control for some reason and did what you chose not to do, or finally whether

you chose the act to avoid being immoral, then a level of responsibility *between* physical and moral responsibility exists, because other people, and particularly those who have to enforce laws, have to have some way of assessing your act and its relation to you.

It would obviously be unjust to punish acts on the basis of physical responsibility, as the example of the person in Saudi Arabia makes clear. Then you would be punished for what you could not in practice prevent, and which no one in your situation would have been able to have prevented. On the other hand, if a person can get away with *claiming* that he was not morally responsible ("I didn't know the gun was loaded, your honor") then obviously no criminal would ever be punished, because all he would have to do to go free would be to lie—and a lie which no one could disprove, since it would deal with his own consciousness, which only he is privy to.

To get between the horns of this dilemma, a mental fiction is created: that of the "ordinary person." If the "ordinary person" would have been aware of the facts involved, or if the "ordinary person" would have been in control of himself, then *you are* ***held*** *responsible for the act,* whether you were *in fact* morally responsible or not. The idea is that if the "ordinary person" would have been morally responsible for the act, you *ought* to have known what he would have known or had the control that he would have had, and it is your negligence and culpable carelessness that prevented it.

Hence, the following definition:

A person is ***legally responsible*** **for what the "ordinary person" would be morally responsible for in the same circumstances.**

The reason this is called "legal responsibility" is that it is the kind of responsibility that generally applies in courts of law; but it is actually the kind of responsibility we *ordinarily* assign to people

because of the fact that we can't know what is going on in their minds. The "ordinary person" is a person who has average intelligence, average access to information, and average control over himself; if he would be expected to know the facts in question, then if you claim not to have known them, *the presumption is in favor of the fact that you are lying, unless you can present evidence showing why you couldn't have been expected to know them in your case.* "I just forgot" will get you off morally in God's courtroom, because he can tell whether you're lying or not; but if you make that claim in a court of law, then it is *more* probable that you are lying just to get yourself acquitted than that you actually did forget. You would have a strong reason for lying, and there is no real reason why you would forget what "the ordinary person" would have remembered.

However, if you *can* show why it is reasonable to assume that you were not aware of the facts in question (why, for instance, you would have been preoccupied with seeing to it that the tub of scalding water didn't tip on you), then you are not held legally responsible; because if the situation is peculiar, "the ordinary person" would also have not noticed the fact in question. Similarly, if the situation was so provocative that the "ordinary person" would have lost control, you can get away with a defense of "temporary insanity." If you shot someone because you saw him in the act of raping your wife, the jury would probably recognize that when you said, "I just couldn't help myself" they would have been unable to help themselves either in that situation, and so they won't hold you responsible for what you did.[18]

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[18]Of course, what you say still could be a lie. I had a policeman in class one time, and after the class where I discussed this, he came to my office and told me that he had killed his wife, who was about to take custody of his daughter; he pleaded temporary insanity and got acquitted, but he said to me. "I knew what I was doing; I just wasn't about to let that bitch get her hands on my daughter."

Now then, I said that responsibility is not necessarily the same as guilt. What is guilt? It's not "feeling guilty." Guilt *feelings* are actually *a fear of punishment,* and they can occur, as I have so often said, without your *being* guilty of anything at all. What are you when you *are* guilty of something?

A person is *guilty* when he has chosen to do what is morally wrong or illegal.

A person is *morally guilty* when he has chosen to do what he knows or suspects is a morally wrong act, whether or not it happens.

A person is *legally guilty* when he is legally responsible for an act violating a law.

Note first of all that for *legal* guilt you must actually have *done* something that violates the law; the event you are guilty of must actually have occurred. Hence, you can't be legally guilty without being also legally responsible for what you are guilty of. "They can't arrest you for thinking" is legally true. Nor can you be legally guilty of *choosing* an act if for some reason not under your control you couldn't carry out your choice.

Thus, for instance, John Hinckley, who tried and failed to assassinate President Reagan, is not *legally guilty* of killing him, because in fact he *didn't* kill him. He is legally guilty of "shooting with intent to kill," because he actually *did* that (it is presumed that if you point a gun and pull the trigger that legally you had the "intent" to kill—whatever your actual intention, unless it was in self-defense), and there's a law against it.

But assuming that Mr. Hinckley knew what he was doing and

knew that it was wrong, *he is morally guilty of killing President Reagan,* because he *chose* precisely *to do that,* even though, through no fault of his own, he couldn't carry his choice to its chosen goal. Hence, his choice on this assumption carried with it the eternal frustration connected with killing the President of his country—and, presumably, the added frustration of knowing that he didn't actually do it.

Nevertheless, Mr. Hinckley was *not* morally responsible for killing Mr. Reagan, because in point of fact that didn't happen, and so how could he be responsible for it? So in moral matters, you can be *guilty* of something you are not *responsible* for, in the case where your goal didn't actually get achieved in spite of your intention.

The other distinction between responsibility and guilt is that *you can't be guilty of choosing something good, but you can be responsible for what is good*. That is, good effects as well as bad ones "belong to" you if they are the results of acts you chose; and so you are the one responsible for them. But guilt always deals with what is wrong or illegal.

In fact, you can be morally guilty of something bad and legally responsible for something good at the same time and by the same choice. Suppose you went into your father's sickroom with the intention of frightening him to death in his weakened condition, so that you could inherit his millions (I'm not sure I want to have much to do with a person like you, come to think of it). You go in and shout at him, startling him so that he stops the hiccups that were bound to kill him in his debilitated condition—and he recovers. You are then *responsible* for his recovery, because it was the act you chose that caused it; and you are *legally* responsible for it, because the "ordinary person" knows that shock stops hiccups. But you are *morally guilty* of killing him, because that was your goal in startling him. Far-fetched, perhaps, but it shows the distinction.

Chapter 6

Conscience

Let us now, then, look at the moral implications of the relation of the choice to the factual information it bases itself on. First a definition:

***Conscience* is the factual information a person has at the time he makes a choice about the moral rightness or wrongness of the act he is about to choose.**

The Scholastics also talked about what they called "subsequent conscience" meaning a person's knowledge *after the fact* about whether his choice at the time was moral or immoral. It is this latter sense of "conscience" that a person finds "bothering him," or "examines" later to find out whether and to what extent he sinned. But that, strictly speaking, isn't conscience, but merely a *memory* of what the conscious *was* in regard to any past act, and because it's the same as any recollection of a past act of consciousness, in itself has no moral status at all; it can't make a moral choice immoral or vice versa. Only what the Scholastics call "prior conscience," which is what I defined above, is morally relevant; and so it is what conscience really is.

So conscience is not, as I said, a feeling, as Freud and so many moderns have held; nor is it a little cricket inside your head or a voice

that tells you things; nor is it a faculty you have; nor is it necessarily, as Aristotle would have it, the result of a reasoning process starting from a general moral premise and applying it to a special case. Aristotle, as the inventor of the syllogism, can perhaps be forgiven for thinking this; but when a person is tempted to lift something from the store's counter and sneak out with it, he doesn't, I think, really say to himself, "Thou shalt not steal; this is stealing; therefore, thou shalt not do it."

There's nothing mysterious about conscience, really. All it is is the *facts you know* at the moment, however you happen to have arrived at them; but it is the facts you know *bearing on the moral rightness or wrongness of this particular act,* and so isn't just facts in general, even facts in general about moral rightness or wrongness. A course in ethics can be a *source* for forming your conscience, but your general ethical knowledge is not your conscience, because it doesn't as such deal with the act you are now about to choose. Further, conscience, as a kind of consciousness (the consciousness of whether this act is morally right or wrong), is not in some book somewhere; it is the facts *you concretely know at the moment*. And, of course, conscience is not facts about this act (such as that it's taking place in Ohio) that have no relevance to its moral status; all it is is a name for the information you have that enters into the morality of the choice you are about to make, since choices are based on the facts you are aware of at the time you make them. *Conscience is* ***your evidence*** *about the moral status of this act.*

Note, by the way, that conscience is not your *opinion* of the moral status of the act in question; in fact, as we will see shortly, if you have *facts* indicating that the act might be morally wrong, it is immoral to choose the act, even if your *opinion* is that the weight of the evidence is on the side of saying that the act is legitimate. Hence, a person can have an opinion that abortions are probably morally legitimate, and still not be able to choose an abortion, because she knows some

evidence indicating that she might in fact be killing her child.

But before exploring this, let me point out that, since conscience is the facts you are aware of about the act you are to perform, and since it will only be these facts that enter your choice, it follows that

Conclusion 17: A person's own conscience is always the "Supreme Court" in moral matters; the morality or immorality of a choice always and only depends on the conscience of the person who makes it.

This has been held for centuries, and is not something new; but it is why it must be stressed that conscience is *evidence* and *facts,* not opinion or feeling. The point is that you can't be punished for doing something you had no idea was wrong, or you would be being punished for something you couldn't have helped; and this would be gratuitous cruelty (not to mention the fact that the "punishment" is the deliberate setting up of a self-contradictory goal within the choice itself, which is impossible if the contradiction is not known).

But many have interpreted this conclusion as if morality were up for grabs, because it makes conscience "subjective." Conscience is *objective knowledge,* the kind of objective knowledge of facts that we discussed in Chapter 7 of Section 5 of the first part. In that sense, there is nothing subjective about it at all; you can't make a fact not be a fact by wanting it not to be what it is. If you know the fetus is in fact a human being, then you *know* that the abortion is homicide, however much you might want it not to be or "feel" it isn't; and it is this knowledge that is your conscience, not your feelings on the matter.

Note that conscience is not *evaluative deliberation,* nor the results of evaluative deliberation, when you consider which course of action would be *best* for you at the moment. When you are deliberating

about the *best* course of action, you are in the realm of values and *goals,* which, as I said, are subjective. It may very well be (and often is, as I have said) that a wrong act is the most efficient way for you to achieve some particular goal that you have set; in that sense, the wrong act is what is "best" for that goal. But that kind of *evaluative* deliberation concerned with what would be *best* for you to do *is not conscience,* because conscience deals simply with *rightness and wrongness* (which are objective facts about the act's consistency with yourself or not), and *not* with goodness and badness (which are subjectively set goals), as I said in Chapter 1 of Section 7 of the fourth part. It is this mistake that has caused most of the confusion we have nowadays about morality and the supposed "subjectivity" of conscience.

This is important enough to state it as a formal conclusion:

Conclusion 18: Conscience has nothing to do with values.

But, of course, conscience is "subjective" in the sense that it deals with the (objective) information *you* happen to possess at the moment—or rather the information *concretely available* to you, because you might deliberately put information out of your mind because you don't want it to affect a choice you are making. Unfortunately if you deliberately suppress what might be relevant information, you guarantee that your choice will be immoral, whatever the facts actually are, as we will see. So conscience is still the objective facts; but it takes into account that you might not know all of them.

Now then, to account for why deliberately refusing to know some fact you could find out makes the choice immoral, let me begin by saying that conscience can be in one of two states: clear or unclear.

A *clear conscience* has no information that the act in question might be morally wrong.

An *unclear conscience* has some evidence that the act in question might in fact be wrong, even if that evidence is weak.

Conclusion 19: It is *always moral* to choose to do what your conscience is clear about, irrespective of the actual moral rightness or wrongness of the act.

Why? Because you have precisely *no **reason** to believe* that there is anything wrong with the act. Again, you might *feel* terribly guilty about doing it, as the modest woman feels on her wedding-night; but you know that this feeling is due to something like the way you were brought up, and there is no *fact* you know of indicating that there is or even might be anything wrong with what you are doing.

Note that the only certainty you have to have in order to have a clear conscience is *moral* certainty. To review the levels of certainty (the opposite of doubt) that I spoke of in Chapter 5 of Section 1 of the first part of this book, you first need not be concerned with avoiding "subjective doubt," which is a *worry* that you might be mistaken, a worry with no facts to back it up. That would be due to something like a guilt feeling, and is irrelevant. You are objectively certain, even when you are subjectively doubtful in this sense.

In fact, a psychological disorder that the medievals called "scrupulosity" comes from a confusion of subjective certainty (emotional conviction that you are correct) and objective certainty. The scrupulous person is worried that he might be sinning even when he has no reason to be concerned; and it can incapacitate a person. I remember once when I was in the seminary, I served Mass for a scrupulous priest, who had to keep checking that his hands were

in the right position, that he was actually thinking of every word he said, and that he did all that the "rubrics" directed (the directions for the priest printed in the Missal in red type, which bind under sin). It took him an hour and a half, as I recall, to say a twenty-minute Mass, and all the while he was in agony doing something which was supposed to be the most joyous and glorious thing anyone ever had the privilege of doing. And since one of the rubrics was to say the Mass straight through without pausing or repeating, in his concern not to violate any of them, he was violating them.

This kind of attitude supposes that God is a spider waiting until you touch the web, whereupon he will pounce; when in fact, you only suffer eternal frustration if you *deliberately* bring it on yourself. This again is important enough to highlight it by a conclusion:

Conclusion 20: You cannot be immoral by accident; you must deliberately be *willing* to be immoral.

This is obviously true, because the moral rule says that you must not be willing to do what is wrong. If you do something wrong by mistake, you aren't *willing* to do it, simply because you didn't know that you *were* doing something wrong. To be immoral, your will must be oriented *toward* the wrong act.

But to continue with the levels of certainty, clearly you don't have to be *absolutely* certain that the act is not wrong, in the sense that you can prove that it is *impossible* for it to be so; almost any act can be morally wrong in some circumstances. Further, you don't even need to be *physically* certain, or able to give *positive evidence* to prove that the act is in fact morally legitimate. So, for example, you probably can't *prove* that there's nothing wrong with reading what you are now reading, and that I'm not a moral subversive who is trying by plausible arguments to lead you into a trap. I hope you

have found no evidence indicating this (which is just what I would say if I were one, isn't it? See how insidious subjective doubt can be?); but I'm inclined to think that you don't have a great deal of *clear* evidence to the contrary.

No, the only certainty you have to have in order to make a moral choice is *moral* certainty, which, as I pointed out in Chapter 5 of Section 1 of the first part, is negative: you just have *no* actual facts indicating the contrary. For instance, if this book were (God forbid!) condemned as subversive by the Catholic Church, you would now have *indirect* evidence indicating that it was morally dangerous for you to read it, even if you might not know *why* the Church condemned it (i.e. what facts about it formed the basis for their condemnation). In *that* case, you would have a *reason* to believe it was subversive, and your conscience would not be clear in reading it.

If we take what is, I hope, a less far-fetched issue, let us say a woman doesn't see any reason why she should consider her fetus a human being, and thinks that those who hold that abortion is murder do so because of holdovers from superstitions from outmoded religious beliefs (and if she hasn't listened to them for that reason), she would have a clear conscience in considering whether or not to have an abortion. It would be moral for her to choose to have one, in spite of the fact that she is—without realizing it—actually killing her child.

But as soon as she realizes that there are intelligent people who don't seem to be fanatics on the other side, she then has evidence that they might have facts to back up their position, and at that point her conscience is unclear.

Then what is the rule about acting when your conscience is unclear?

Conclusion 21: A choice to do something your conscience is

unclear about is *always immoral,* irrespective of what the facts actually are.

Why is this? Because an unclear conscience means that there is *evidence* that the act *might in fact* be morally wrong, even if the evidence on the side that it is legitimate seems far stronger. If you have any real evidence that the act is wrong and you decide to do it under these conditions, *then you have to accept the possibility that you are doing wrong,* and this is the same thing as saying *you are **willing** to do it **even if it is** in fact wrong,* which, of course means the same thing as being willing to do what is wrong.

Remember, to be willing to do wrong (which is what the general moral rule is) doesn't mean "to want" to do wrong, but to *accept* the wrongness in what you are doing, even if your goal is something very good.

But if your conscience is unclear, you can't choose the act *without* accepting its wrongness, because you are willing to do it even if the evidence indicating its wrongness turns out to be correct, and it is in fact wrong. Thus, the woman who chooses to have an abortion with an unclear conscience has to be saying to herself, "Well, it seems more likely that I'm not killing my child by this; but there's reason to believe I might be. Well, if I am, so be it." There is no way, with this objective doubt, that she could escape being willing to kill her child if it turned out that this is what her abortion really entails.

Note that this also works if in fact the act is not morally wrong. Suppose a citizen of the United States doesn't want to go to the polls and vote, but wonders whether he morally has to. In point of fact, we have a right to vote, but it is not morally wrong not to exercise this right. But suppose he reasons, "But if nobody voted, then the country would collapse, and so if I didn't vote, I would be contributing to the collapse of the country, and that would be the

equivalent of treason." He thinks there is something wrong with this argument, but also thinks that it might really be valid. In this case, if he *refuses* to vote, he has made an immoral choice, in spite of the fact that his reasoning *is* invalid and he has not done anything morally wrong in not voting. (You can see the invalidity in the argument if you say that the country would also collapse if no one ran for office; but that clearly doesn't imply that every citizen has to run for office or he's a traitor. The point is that he suspects a fallacy, but doesn't see it; so as far as he knows, the argument might be sound.)

So you would only have a clear conscience in "I didn't know the gun was loaded" *if you had no reason to believe that it might be loaded.* For instance, if it were a theatrical gun to be fired in a play, and you had checked it an hour ago and left it in the prop box, you would have no reason to suspect that the Phantom of the Playhouse had substituted a real bullet for the blank, and so you could fire the gun with a clear conscience. But if you don't know anything about it one way or another *and you* ***refuse*** *to check,* then, knowing that guns sometimes *can* be loaded, your notion that probably it isn't doesn't make your conscience clear.

Obviously, then, you have to clear your conscience before you can choose a doubtful act. How do you do this?

First, of course, it is *always moral to choose some other act (including inaction) that your conscience is clear about.*

That is, if you don't want to be bothered straightening out the situation and clearing up the doubt about this act, simply don't do it (provided "not doing it" doesn't also involve something that might in fact be wrong), and you have no problem of conscience. So, for example, the person who doesn't know whether the gun is loaded doesn't have to check it if he chooses not to pull the trigger; or the woman who wants to have an abortion but has reason to believe she might be killing her child can choose not to have it and have the

baby (which might be inconvenient, but is not morally wrong). That should be obvious.

But if you want to do the act, or the alternative of choosing not to do it also involves something which is or might be wrong, what do you do?

Secondly, *if you want to do the act, you must, if possible, find out what the facts are in the case in question.*

The person who wants to fire the gun needs to look in it before he pulls the trigger, assuring himself that there is no live ammunition in it. The woman who wants to have the abortion has got to find out somehow that she's not in fact killing her child before she can choose the abortion.

But how does she do this? If she had enough skill in ethics and philosophy, she could examine the arguments and see if the evidence that the fetus is a human being was specious or not. This would also involve looking at refutations of one side's position by the other and assessing how much was rhetoric and how much was clear sifting of the evidence.

This is obviously a tricky procedure *and in general is not to be undertaken by an amateur,* for the same reason that you don't diagnose yourself if you think you might have cancer or whether that pain in your chest was a heart attack or not. You're no expert, and there are all kinds of things that could be misleading that you wouldn't be aware of. But if you won't trust yourself when your bodily life or health is in danger, why would you trust yourself if eternal frustration is hanging over you? Anyone who would just "examine the facts for himself" would also eat wild mushrooms he collected because "he read a book about them once."

Now of course that doesn't mean that you have to go running to an expert with every little moral problem you have, on the grounds that there *might* be some huge subtlety here that you're not aware of, any more than you have to go running to your doctor with every

sniffle on the grounds that it *might* be some new kind of nasal cancer you've never heard of. There *are* moral problems that any sensible person can resolve for himself, *and if you have* ***no reason to believe*** *that there's anything subtle about the one facing you,* then you don't need to be bothering a moralist about it. That is, if your conscience is clear about its not needing consultation, you don't need to consult. The rule of thumb is that you should use no less care in moral problems than you would in medical problems. Obviously, some people, because of the way they are made, are going to consult experts more often than others, just as some think they should see a doctor when others would dismiss the symptoms.

But in general, if you don't have a clear conscience, and it isn't obvious (like looking into the gun) how to find out whether the act in fact is morally right or wrong, then you consult an expert.

But who is an expert? Again, the information available to you is your guide. If a person is *known* to be an expert in moral matters (he's a clergyman, for instance, or a teacher of philosophy), and if there is *no evidence* that he doesn't know his subject or that he's *biased,* then your conscience is clear if you consult him. You don't necessarily have to "shop around" to find the person *best* qualified, as long as you have reason to believe that this person is qualified. Again, the analogy with the medical expert is in order. You don't immediately take the pain in your chest to the heart specialist; it is perfectly all right to go to your family physician, who has enough expertise that he can tell if there is something tricky enough so that he has to send you to the specialist. So in the moral realm, you can presume that if your local ethician is honest, then he'll recognize whether the case is complicated enough that he should refer you to someone more qualified in that area of ethics and will send you to the other expert. So as far as you're concerned, you can follow his advice.

There *are* a couple of cautions about "shopping around,"

however; one which would make you tend to do *some* shopping, and the other which acts as a restraint on it. *There are all kinds of moral quacks,* particularly in our own day, who set themselves up as "experts" because they read a book on the subject once, and who make confident pronouncements that Solomon would tremble to utter.

If you've read this far in this book (I *hope* you're not just dipping into it as if it were just a philosophical candy counter), then you've presumably got some idea that morality is based on facts, and is more than deadly serious; and so you should be extremely dubious of those "moralists" who advocate moral relativism or "feel-good" morality under the mask of "compassion." If they're right, why consult them—because if they're right, the morality depends on how *you* feel about things, not on some "expertise" *they* might have.

Hence, certainly in the present day, you would have to do *some* shopping, because you would have to have some reason to believe that the expert you consult actually has some grasp on the facts, and isn't just one of those people who tell people what they want to hear. For instance, I would think that any Catholic who would consult Rev. Charles Curran on moral matters, now that he's been forbidden to teach morality in the Catholic University of America, would not really be interested in finding out what the *facts* were, any more than a person would be interested in finding out the state of his health by consulting someone who's been thrown out of the American Medical Association—*unless* you had very good reasons for saying why he was objectively right in whatever dispute led to his ouster.

The second caution is that *it would be immoral to shop around even among recognized experts until you found someone who told you what you wanted to hear*. In this case, it would be the *motive* for consulting one after another that would make doing it immoral. If you think of it a bit, you can see why. If, for instance, you want to have an abortion and the expert you consult says, "Sorry, but you can't," and

then you go to another and he says the same thing, and you go to another and another until finally someone says, "Well, I guess it's all right in your case," *why are you rejecting the first people's advice?* Because you want to perform the act, *whether it is moral or not*, and you just want to *use* the fact that people disagree as an *excuse* for doing it, knowing that if you look hard enough, you'll probably find someone who will allow it.

Why did you consult an expert in the first place, if you were going to sit in judgment on his advice? You in your ignorance would then be saying "You're mistaken," which implies that you know more about it than he does—which contradicts why you went to him for advice.

Conclusion 22: In seeking moral advice, the advice of the expert must be followed, unless there is *reason* to believe that he misunderstood the situation or was biased.

It *is* possible, in other words, to reject someone's advice; but you have to have a *reason* for doing so; and the reason can't be that you disagree with his conclusion. But it's possible that he didn't listen to the whole situation as you were presenting it and interrupted you with a hasty pronouncement; or it's possible that you got the idea from the way he spoke to you that he had some bias on the issue that very well might be clouding his judgment (if, for example, you were consulting him about some homosexual problem and he reacted with disgust at you as soon as he realized you were homosexual). In these cases, you have *evidence* that his conclusion was ill-formed, and could (and should) consult someone else. *Your knowledge* that what the expert tells you is true is not based on your being able to follow his reasoning, but on your knowledge of these two facts: (a) that he knows his subject, and (b) that he's not lying to you.

So even if he doesn't give you his reasons for his conclusion, you still have to follow his advice, absent evidence of ignorance or bias or lying. And the reason for that is that it is sometimes apt not to be wise for moral experts to give their reasoning, because it might sound implausible to a non-expert despite its validity, and this only creates the possibility of the client's beginning to second-guess the expert. For the same reason, physicians often make confident pronouncements without giving their reasons for them, which are, they know, rather "iffy"; but which could cause unreasonable doubts in the patients if known.

But when a person is going on the testimony of experts, and he *knows* that expert views are divided on the issue in question, there is an ethical principle that comes into play: what used to be called the doctrine of "Probabilism."

Conclusion 23: If it is known that generally recognized experts are divided, some thinking that the act is wrong and some thinking that it is right, then a person may morally take *the more lenient view.*

Why is this? Let me say first of all, that there are some presuppositions here: First, you have to be basing your following one side *purely on testimony*. That is, if you happen to know for some reason that the argument on one side is specious (for instance, experts on the abortion question who hold that it is legitimate and say that the fetus is like an acorn—and you have seen from Chapter 8 of Section 1 of the third part that this is a fallacy), then you can't take their view just because there happen to be a number of experts who don't see the fallacy in it. Secondly, you couldn't use the rule above if you were aware that one "school" of experts, say, belonged to some religious sect that you happen to think is false, in which case,

the fact that large numbers of people in that sect consider them experts could be as much due to collective bias as to grasp of the facts. So the second presupposition is that you have reason to believe that no one group lacks any particular access to the facts that the other group possesses.

With those two caveats, what is the situation? It is obvious that the evidence about the moral rightness or wrongness is *so unclear that even experts can't figure it out*. But it is incumbent upon any lawgiver (God, in this case) to make it *possible* for his subjects to know what he wants done; but if even experts can't fathom what he wants in this case, then either (a) God has failed to "promulgate" his wishes clearly enough that it is humanly possible to know them, or (b) there was no obligation there in the first place.

Clearly, if God (or if you prefer "nature") is the author of the command, then he's clever enough to let us know what he wants. And so the second alternative is the only reasonable one. The stricter side has clearly picked up on something that it considers "evidence," but it can't really be evidence or there wouldn't be this dispute among people who really want to know what the facts are. Hence, *reason* says that *the more lenient side is the correct one*.

And based on this reasoning process, *if you take the more lenient side, your conscience is clear*. It is *positively unreasonable* to say that there is an obligation that significant numbers of sincere, competent, and unbiased experts deny; and therefore, the "reasoning" on the part of the stricter side must be fallacious—even if *you* don't happen to know where the fallacy is.

Following this, of course, *can* lead you to be mistaken. There were plenty of moral experts two hundred years ago who held that slavery was perfectly all right, even though there were others who held that it was wrong. And the ones on the side of allowing it had experts like Aristotle (who held that some people were born slaves by nature) and the Bible on their side. So at that time, a non-expert

could have used the doctrine of Probabilism and *with a clear conscience* owned slaves—unless he listened to the arguments of the abolitionists and was convinced by them.

But if he did own slaves, he would have been mistaken. But whether you are objectively mistaken or not is not morally relevant; it is whether you are *willing* to do what is wrong; and in the case above, the slave-owner would *have no reason* to believe that owning slaves was wrong. Similarly many a person who has an abortion today is actually following this view and has a clear conscience, but is doing what is in fact wrong, and is mistaken. I hope that by the time you read this, the issue will have been cleared up and the killing stopped, and you will look back on our age with as much wonder at our blindness as we look back on the antebellum South.

But to continue, **thirdly,** it is not always possible to straighten out the moral matter for yourself, and sometimes for one reason or another you can't consult an expert before you must make your choice, and no matter what you do, it seems to you you might be doing what is wrong. What do you do at this point?

Conclusion 24: If there is no alternative that your conscience is clear about, and if you can't find out what the facts are about the moral status of the act in question, then you *must* choose *away from* the alternative that seems *worse*.

This is called the "indirect method" of clearing your conscience. The idea here is that you don't know whether the act in question is moral or not, and there's no way you can find out about the *act*. But in this situation, what you know you are doing is *trying to avoid what is wrong* by choosing what seems either *least likely* to be wrong or likely to be *least seriously* wrong or both.

Now you can't be *in favor* of what you are explicitly trying to

avoid; so in this case, where you can't know about the act, what you know is *the orientation of your will.* You are precisely choosing *away from* this course of action *because* it is probably bad; the alternative might also be bad, but there's nothing you can do about that; *every* alternative, including doing nothing at all, might be bad, as far as you know. In this case, you are *morally certain* that what you are *trying to do* is avoid wrongness; and you can't be in favor of what you are against.

That is, you are sure that you're not using the fact that the alternative you avoid is worse to *excuse* your doing something that might be wrong. In that sense, you're not *choosing* "the lesser of the two evils;" you're choosing to *avoid* the greater one.

For instance, you know that it's wrong to mutilate yourself; but if you don't cut off your hand, you'll die from the gangrene in it. Have you *chosen* to mutilate yourself? Clearly not; but your alternatives are (a) do nothing—don't cut off the hand—and die, or (b) cut it off, and live without a hand. You don't *want* in any meaningful sense to be handless; you just *want not* to die.

Hence, in a moral dilemma, when you can't find out what is *in fact* the right thing to do, you can *in practice* always *make a moral choice* with a clear conscience, because you can always choose away from what *seems* worse.

I want to stress that *you can only take this choosing away from what seems worse if all other courses of action have failed.* That is, you can take this course *if and only if* there is no course of action or inaction that your conscience is *clear* about already *and* you can't straighten the factual situation out for yourself *and* you can't get an answer from an expert *and* the rule above about legitimate disputes doesn't show you that there's really no moral issue here at all. Only then can you make a choice involving what might be wrong on the grounds that you are really choosing away from wrongness. If any of the other roads are open, then you would be able to do what you know in fact

is not wrong at all, and therefore in not choosing this course, you are willing to do wrong.

Well, but there's one possibility left: Suppose both alternatives seem equally bad. Suppose the surgeon tells you you have an 80% chance of dying if you don't have the brain operation, but only a 20% chance of surviving the operation itself. What do you do now?

Clearly, in this case, you either *choose not to have the operation to avoid being killed by the knife,* or you *choose to have the operation to avoid being killed by the tumor.* You can go either way here, because avoiding one is going to bring you just as much likelihood of wrong as avoiding the other; and so it is a question of your motive only. You can't *want* to die, using the operation as, for instance, the most painless way to end it all; you must choose *away* from death, even though the choice away from it in fact involves just as much risk of it.

In practice, of course, these "equal-seeming" alternatives are like the proverbial equally attractive bales of hay that made the donkey starve; they never exist. Faced with the surgeon's alternatives, *one* of them would be bound to seem worse to you (as more expensive, more painful, more prolonged, or whatever); in which case, if you were trying to avoid what was worse, you would choose away from that side.[19]

Note, by the way, that this rule is the *exact opposite in practice* of the rule above that if experts disagree, you can take the more lenient course. But the reasoning in the two is different. With the case of the dubious obligation, *you have found evidence that there is no real moral problem here, but only a pseudo-problem,* and so you know what *the facts are about the act* you want to perform. In the case of not being

[19]Remember here, I'm talking about what is (probably) *morally* worse, not what is more expensive, or more painful, or whatever.

able to find the facts about the act, you have to choose the "stricter" course (the one less likely to be wrong) to assure yourself that *your will* is oriented in the right direction, precisely because you *don't* know what course in fact is legitimate.

In any case, *it is always possible to have a clear conscience*. Either there will be some alternative your conscience is clear about, or you can straighten out the factual issue for yourself, or you can consult some expert and follow his advice, or you can take the more lenient view of a dispute among experts, or if all of these fail you can choose away from what seems worse.

Chapter 7

The situation

We have so far discussed the choice in relation to what is not relevant to it (the emotions), and what it bases itself on (the factual information). There remains only the moral implications in what it is one chooses to do: the act in the situation one finds it in. A choice is always a choice to do some concrete act in a concrete situation; you can't choose "in general" any more than you can get on a horse and ride off in all directions.

The moral relevance of this is the following:

Conclusion 25: The actual act chosen is always in itself morally neutral; it is always either some aspect of it in the situation or some other aspect of the situation itself that makes it either consistent or inconsistent with the reality of the agent.

What! After all this time, and after all these "conservative" pronouncements so far, I am hopping on Joseph Fletcher's bandwagon and following "situation ethics"?

No, though I *am* using his term rather than the traditional "act, motive, and circumstances." Fletcher just took what was a perfectly good and valid idea and ran it into the ground. He's one of those "compassionate" ethicians who says that what you should do is "the loving thing" in the situation, meaning that if the situation shows

you that fornication would be the "loving thing to do" here, it's okay. Unfortunately, if you have your head on straight, fornication (sex without marriage) is *not* the "loving thing to do," because you are either (a) violating the reality of the sexual faculty of yourself and your partner—which is hardly "loving" of you toward her, or (b) leaving her with the possibility of a child which you have not tied yourself to also—which is hardly "loving" toward either her or the child if he comes. But note that *the act of sexual intercourse* is not in itself wrong, if it's with your spouse and you can take care of any children which may result from it.

But let me explore a bit why I say that *no* act you choose is in itself either right or wrong, and it's always the situation which relates it to your humanity in such a way that it's one or the other. For thousands of years people have held that there are certain acts like murder, abortion, rape, and so on, that are *always* wrong, no matter what the situation.

But note that these "acts" are defined *in a moral way,* and aren't simply physical acts. That is, murder is not just *killing* someone, still less the act of pulling the trigger on the gun; it is defined as killing someone *unjustly,* leaving out the circumstance of killing someone, for instance, in self-defense. Abortion is not removing a fetus, or Caesarean sections would be abortions, not childbirth; it is removing a fetus in such a way that the fetus dies. Rape is not sexual intercourse, but sexual intercourse with someone who does not want to have it—and so on. The way the "act" is defined, some *aspect of the situation which makes it inhuman* is introduced; and so of course in *that* case it would always be wrong.

But in fact *no* act a human being can actually perform could ever be wrong *in all possible situations,* because that would mean that it contradicts itself as an act of a human being in all possible situations a human being could be in; but this in turn means that (since what is in fact a contradiction can't occur) the act *couldn't in fact happen*

in any circumstance a human being could be in, and therefore, it would be *physically impossible* for him to do it. I suppose you could say that for a human being to turn into a rhinoceros would be wrong in all situations, because there's no situation in which (a) it could be done without contradicting his nature as human; but therefore (b) there's no situation in which it could be done at all. But then what does it mean to say that to *do* it would be wrong?

Well, but aren't there acts which contradict some aspect of our nature no matter what situation we are in? No. Take one which would seem the most likely candidate: In all situations, we are in fact creatures of God, as I showed in Chapter 7 of Section 4 of the first part, because we are finite and directly depend for every act we perform on the Infinite Act. Therefore, the act of blasphemy, or expressing *contempt* for God, would be wrong in all situations: I am referring to some such statement as "God, you are a shithead and I spit on you!" Obviously, that would be morally wrong no matter in what situation it was uttered or written.

Would it? I just wrote it *as an example* of a blasphemous statement. I had no intention of expressing, nor did I express, any contempt for God in writing it; I was clearly writing it to indicate that this is the kind of statement you can't make *when you mean to express what it says*. But I didn't mean to express what it *said*, any more than to say, "Hero is a four-letter word" means to express *what is meant by* "hero," or to refer to any heroes.

Hence, there is at least one situation in which a person can deliberately utter a blasphemous statement without being immoral: as an example of what a blasphemous statement would be. Such a statement would be morally wrong only when what the words express is what he had in mind to express.

Do I need to belabor this? I am perfectly willing to accept things like murder, blasphemy, rape, and so on as "always wrong" as long as it is recognized that it isn't the actual *act* in its nakedness that's

being talked about, but the act *plus* some aspect of the situation that *relates* the act in an inconsistent way to the humanity of the person who is performing it.

But situation ethics differs from what I am saying in another way also. Usually, it is the result of an existentialist turn of mind, in which, à la Sartre, it is assumed that the agent *has* no reality until he makes the choice; that he is (in Sartre's words) "nothingness," in himself, with nothing "given." In this case, of course, he *could* turn himself into a rhinoceros if he chose to do so, because there would be nothing preventing this any more than there would be anything preventing him from turning himself into a philosopher. I even saw a man turn into a building once—but that's a different story (the ground floor, actually). Sorry.

But the fact is that the *reality* of the agent and the *reality* of the objects around him is *given*; they are not *constituted* by the choice he makes. Certainly you would have quit reading this by this time if you believed that. Furthermore, the *choice itself* does not constitute the *relation* of the act chosen to the person's humanity; this is a fact *to be known,* not something to be created. For instance, if you feed that candy bar to that diabetic child, you'll kill him. You *choose* to do it *and not* kill him. He dies anyway. The very *point* of immorality is that you make a choice like that; you choose to take this wallet *and make its contents belong to you*. But the act of taking can't do that, and so after you take it, its contents still don't belong to you. Immorality is a *refusal* to accept what the facts *are* and a pretense that our choice *makes* them what we want them to be.

In this sense, situation ethics, insofar as it says that the choice creates the moral status of the act you choose, is actually a set of rules on how to be *immoral.* Of course, if the choice itself makes the moral status, then there is clearly *no* immorality in *any* choice, even in Sartre's "bad faith" choice not to choose. If I want to let someone else make the decision for me, who is Sartre to tell me that I must

not? And of course why would *not* "doing the loving thing" be wrong if my choice *created* the moral rightness and wrongness of what I choose? Who is Fletcher to tell me that self-fulfillment is *bad*?

So the situation "constitutes" the moral status of the act in that situation *only because the aspects of the situation* ***objectively*** *relate the act to the humanity you have in that situation,* and this is something you have no control over (except to change either the act or the situation so that this objective relation is no longer there). So even admitting that the act *as an act* is morally neutral, this does not mean by any means that the morality of *choosing* the act in this objective situation is subjective.

Note, by the way, that the reason Sartre condemns "bad faith" and Fletcher says not to do the "loving thing" is wrong are based, not on anyone's choice, but on *their definition of what it means to be human*. In Sartre's case, "to be human" means to be in oneself nothing, and self-constituted by one's choices, and so it is *objectively inconsistent* to refuse to constitute yourself by choosing to let someone else choose for you. In Fletcher's case, human beings are the beings who can love, and therefore their *objective reality* is constituted by love, which, of course, lies in the choice. Hence, the choice not to love is (for him objectively) immoral, and any other choice is moral if in the situation it's consistent with love. So the morality or immorality of a choice is not determined by the *choice* in either of these cases, but by the *relation* of what you choose to your objective humanity.

With that out of the way, we can say the following:

Conclusion 26: *Any* aspect of the situation *can* make the act inconsistent with the agent's reality, and therefore make it immoral for him to choose the act in that situation. A choice is moral *only if all* aspects of the situation are morally right.

That is, there aren't some aspects of the situation that are privileged "moral" aspects of it, and some that are exempt from moral implications. Anything about the act *can* in some circumstances make what would otherwise be a legitimate act morally wrong, or vice versa. I mentioned how using a blasphemous statement as an example lifts what is generally a wrong act into something that is all right to choose to do.

It doesn't sound fair that only one aspect of the situation of an act can make the choice of the whole act immoral, if everything else about the act is morally good, even morally very noble. But think what this one aspect means: it means that the act *as related to the agent is inconsistent with him*. Thus, for instance, if you lie to save your country from nuclear destruction, what is this "tiny evil" in relation to the good you accomplish? It is the fact that you *chose* to do wrong: you chose the *one thing* that is forbidden by the moral command. Well, but aren't we commanded to do good also? No. We are free with respect to good; we can choose whatever goals we want for ourselves; what we are *commanded* to do is avoid choosing what is wrong.

This is no Blairian innovation; it is the old Scholastic rule *Bonum ex integra causa, malum e quacunque defectu* ("Good from an intact cause; bad from any defect whatever.") This is one of the reasons why I think that Scholastic ethics, for all its supposed basis in "the good," is actually the same as the "avoid wrongness" ethics that I have been proposing. Scholastics have always said that it simply doesn't matter how good the act is in every respect but one, and how tiny the evil is in this one respect; the act must be avoided because of this small evil.

Some modern moral Theologians have seized upon the "orientation toward the good" to advocate "proportionalism," and have overturned this rule. The idea is supposed to be that if the act, looked at as a whole, has more good about it than bad, then it's okay

to choose it.

This really needs a bit of discussion, since it is so widespread. It is part of the cause of controversy nowadays between the official stance of the Catholic Church on such matters as contraception and "progressive" moralists like Charles Curran, who think their view is more "nuanced" and less "rigid" than Rome's.

This claim of being "nuanced" is, of course, propaganda. God knows that Scholastics (especially the Jesuit casuists) have up to now had the reputation of "splitting hairs"—and now apparently, they're too simplistic in their views. We will see shortly that there is one place where "proprtionalism" fits; but if you catch the correct nuances, it doesn't fit all over the place, or moral conduct is a shambles.

The moral theory of proportionalism actually has three things wrong with it: two theoretical and one practical. First, it supposes that "good" and "bad" are objective qualities that things have, so that you can actually calculate the "amount" of objective good connected with the act and weigh it against the "amount" of bad. If you can't do this *objectively,* then obviously *anybody's* assessment of what's "more good than bad" is as good as anybody else's—and so, for example, Hitler's notion that a world without Jews outweighed little things like Auschwitz has to be accepted.

But if you want to say that an objective calculation of how much good outweighs how much evil can be made, you run into the fact that philosophers ever since Bentham and his "utilitarian calculus" have been trying to to do this and failing miserably. And they were (and still are) good and intelligent people, trying to straighten out the mess the world is in.

The second theoretical error is that, even if goodness were objective, and badness too, it doesn't follow that these are on a continuous scale with each other, so that a certain amount of goodness "compensates" for an equal amount of badness, and vice

versa. The denial of this is precisely what forms Dmitri Karamazov's argument in the "Grand Inquisitor" episode of *The Brothers Karamazov*. His argument is that not all the goodness in the world can balance the terror of a little girl locked in the closet and screaming to get out.[20] It might very well be that good and evil, even if objective, are *incommensurate,* the way strength and beauty are incommensurate, in that a certain amount of strength does not offset a lack of a certain amount of beauty.

But it is possible that you can make a calculus by considering that good lost involves a damage, and therefore, the damage from the good lost is now compared with the damage done. We will see, in fact, that the last rule of the Double Effect has to be done in this way. But in that case, you have to weigh the *whole* damage, as I discussed in discussing immortality in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of the third part. If you do, you find that a slight *eternal* frustration always outweighs *any temporal damage whatever*, so that in the long run you and the sum of all beings will be worse off for your immorality.[21]

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[20]I mentioned this introducing the problem of evil in Chapter 12 of Section 5 of the first part (and you might want to refresh your memory by going over again the chapters in that section dealing with ideals, goodness, and badness). The incommensurability of goodness and badness, of course, destroys Augustine's argument that "God allows evil so that greater good can come of it."

[21]This is certainly true if goodness and badness are objective. If they are subjective, then of course, when you make an immoral choice, you are either ignoring the eternal suffering (even though you know the choice is wrong, and therefore "bad for you" in the abstract—or the choice would be mistaken, not immoral), or you have the idea that you can escape it, or you think that the eternal suffering is "worth it."

It seems to me that, no matter what your standards, you are, in this case, making an unrealistic assessment. In the first case, you simply *choose* not to consider one of the consequences which, if you thought about it, you would see as undesirable no matter what your goals are (frustration is precisely failure to be able to achieve a goal, no

And the practical thing wrong with this view is that in the last analysis it means that *no choice in practice would ever be immoral.* Even if it is in principle possible for a person to choose something wrong for the sole reason that it is wrong (which I hold but practically every other philosopher denies), why would a person in practice choose to do anything if he didn't see more good in it than bad? Even a person who takes drugs (assuming he's not an addict, and is freely choosing) obviously does so because as far as he's concerned at the moment, the benefit of the high outweighs the risks of addiction and so on.

Of course, you could say that he's objectively mistaken in this (if you hold that goodness and badness are objective and commensurate); but obviously *he thinks* that the high is "worth it," or he'd choose not to take the drug. But all that this means is that he's *mistaken,* not that he's made an immoral choice. He is no more immoral than a surgeon is when he performs an operation to save a

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matter what it is). In the second case, you are acting as if the frustration were a consequence separable from the choice itself, and not exactly what the immoral choice is (to set up a goal that can't be achieved); and so to want the immoral choice without its consequences is a contradiction in terms.

But the reality of some condition that can be called "hell" is precisely because of the third case. It can be said that those who are in hell *would rather* be in that condition than give up what they would have to have given up not to be there. It isn't that they're *happy* being eternally frustrated; but that they consider that this frustration is more bearable than the frustration in giving up what put them there. For instance, alcoholics are apt to consider that it's worse not ever to be able to drink than to put up with the misery they are going through because of drinking; because to give up drinking is to give up their very reality and become a different person. True, there is the physical dependence and the psychological blindness that goes on together with this; but this does not mean that the assessment is not a very powerful motivator keeping alcoholics drinking. Something like that would be the condition of a person after death, if he made immoral choices in life.

person's life, and it happens that the operation, for no discernible reason, was too much for the person's system to bear, and he dies.

Therefore, if "being moral" means "choosing what is proportionately more good than evil," it also means that a person is being moral when he chooses what he *thinks* is more good than evil. But in that case, he is *always* making a moral choice, even if he is "objectively" mistaken, as the Palestinians are when they blow up a busload of innocent people to draw attention to their plight, and to induce the world to save their people from homelessness and oppression.

No, let's face it; "proportionalism," like "situation ethics," is another attempt to absolve people from moral responsibility—in the name, of course, of responsible morality. Obviously, I don't buy it; and neither do these people, when they condemn others for not following their view and seeing *their* idea of what the "proportion" should be.

Having, then, disposed of whole schools of ethics, I will go briefly through the "topics of invention" and give an example of how the particular aspect of the situation can change the act's moral status:

First, *who* performs the act. It might not be immoral for an ordinary person to be seen driving around in a Mercedes; but I remember that a certain monsignor who taught in our College had one, and created a lot of gossip by it. Here was a man who was supposedly dedicated to the overriding love of God beyond material possessions, who was giving the impression that he was doing very well for himself, thank you, by counseling the virtue of poverty to others. (His argument was that he got it cheap on a trip to Germany, and it was more economical to run than an ordinary car. Sure, sure.)

Secondly, *whom* you act on. Giving candy to a baby is fine; giving candy to this diabetic baby is to harm his health, possibly kill him.

Thirdly, *where* you do the act. Playing rock music on your boom-box is all right in the privacy of your room. Playing it in

church during the service is disrespectful to the congregation and probably sacrilegious.

Fourthly, *when* you do the act. Playing your stereo in your room at noon is fine. Playing it at three in the morning when your roommate is trying to sleep is not.

Fifthly, *how* (i.e. in what manner) you do the act. Playing your stereo at three in the morning is not fine, if you let the sound come out of the speakers. Playing it at three in the morning through the headphones is fine.

Sixthly, *with what intention* you do the act. It is fine to volunteer to work overtime on your company's computer. It is not fine if you volunteer in order to break into their payroll program and embezzle money.

A couple of words should be said on this point. Scholastics sometimes call the "intention" the whole choice, including all aspects of it; so that, for instance, if you choose to get money by means of stealing it, they would say that the theft entered "the intention" of the choice as a means to the end you chose.

Nowadays, "the intention" of a choice *means* the *goal* you want to accomplish by the act you choose, and doesn't necessarily include every other aspect of the act. It is in this sense that we can say, *"Good intentions are not enough."* A person can have the best intentions in the world in choosing, say, to free the Palestinians from their oppression by the Jews; but if he achieves this goal by capturing, torturing, and killing hostages, he has *also* chosen the deaths of the hostages—and this is immoral.

Note that the words *intention, purpose, goal, end,* and *reason* all mean the same thing in reference to a choice of an act: they are all *the effect for which the act was chosen*.

We can state the morality of goals as the following conclusion:

Conclusion 27: a morally wrong goal will make the choice

immoral, but a morally good goal is not sufficient for a good choice.

Good intentions are necessary, but not sufficient.

Seventhly, *by what means* you do the act. Taking money from another by working for him and being paid is fine. Taking money from him by stealing it is not.

Again, a bit more should be said here, obvious as this is. What it says, of course is the proverb "The end doesn't justify the means." *If* you choose to achieve the purpose, you *also* choose the means to get there, as is obvious if there are several possible ways of getting at your goal. For instance, you can be handed money by another person not only by working for him, but by begging it and persuading him to give it to you, by stealing it without his knowing you are taking it, by threatening him with harm if he doesn't give it to you, by cheating him out of it, by doing him a favor which he then rewards with the money, and so on and so on. If you want the money from him, you have to pick out some way of getting it; and so the means will necessarily enter the choice; and, of course, if the means are morally wrong, you have chosen what is wrong, and so your choice is immoral.

Actually, if the intention or goal made it moral to choose morally wrong means, then this is another route like proportionalism which would imply that no one would ever make an immoral choice in practice; because in practice, as I said, we never do anything morally wrong for its own sake, but always because some benefit to ourselves or others is going to come out of it—and in general, until we have become steeped in vice, the worse the act we choose to do, the greater the good we expect from it. One can only sympathize, in one sense, with the Palestinian terrorists, who think that terrorism is the only way the world will wake up to their plight and do something to

correct it. They want to end the misery of their people which has gone on for so many, many years; their purpose is extremely noble. But they have *still* chosen to kill and torture people, irrespective of the reason why they did it; and if this theory is correct, then (unless they are so blinded by their situation that they have no idea of what they are doing), they are bringing on themselves and their assistants, as I showed in Chapter 5 of Section 4 of the third part, a suffering far worse than anything they are trying to save others from. This deserves to be made another conclusion:

Conclusion 28: even if the goal is to avoid terrible wrong, it is *immoral* to choose a *means* toward this goal *that involves the smallest moral wrongness.* You may *never* choose *anything* wrong.

Actually, this is just another way of stating Conclusion 27. But it is significant enough that it can stand being stated in these two forms.

The eighth and final "topic" is very "nuanced," and needs all of the previous discussion to make it clear. It is *what effect* the act has—other, of course, than the effect intended, which is the goal. All the effects of the act that are not parts of the goal are called, of course, "side-effects."

The rule here is the following, though it needs some qualification.

Conclusion 29: In general, if you choose an act, you are also choosing all of the effects you *foresee* will (or might reasonably be expected to) come from it. Hence, if any one of these is wrong, the choice to cause it is wrong.

That is, as I said earlier, if you know that an act *will result in* some effect, then to choose the act is *to choose a cause* of this effect, and the

"cause" is meaningless except in relation to its effect, and so you have *also* chosen the effect. Thus, if you choose to drink and drive, knowing that it impairs your control of a car and will therefore put you in danger of killing someone, *you have, in making this choice, also been willing to kill someone* if it should happen. You have *reason* to believe it might happen; and therefore, you have to be willing to have it happen if you choose what will produce it. You can't get away with saying, "But I didn't *want* to kill anyone," any more than that is an excuse if the death is a means to some good purpose. So in general, all known side-effects enter the choice along with the act, the means to the end, and the goal itself.

This, by this time, should be clear. But I said *in general,* because *with respect to this aspect of the situation, there is a way* ***sometimes*** *to keep wrong side-effects out of the choice.* The way to do this is called the **"Principle of the Double Effect,"** and it is one of the most important principles in moral philosophy.

Actually, though this Principle is usually given here under the effect of an act, it is very similar in many ways to the indirect method of clearing an unclear conscience I spoke of above, where you clear your conscience by knowing the orientation of your will rather than the facts about the moral status of the act. This Principle is somewhat more sophisticated, but it amounts to the same thing: making sure that the wrong effect of the act is kept out of the choice; and in fact, the fifth rule, as we will see, is for practical purposes the rule for removing a doubt from conscience.

For instance, a woman who is attacked by a rapist who is holding a knife at her throat is told, "Lie still and let me do this, or I'll slit your throat." If she struggles, she dies; if she doesn't struggle, she has sex with this man. Since there *are* alternatives, and she knows there are, she cannot avoid choosing; but no matter what she chooses, something bad is going to happen to her.

We saw this choosing away from what is worse earlier, as I said.

But this isn't exactly a case of an *unclear conscience*. With an unclear conscience, you don't know whether the act is wrong or not; but the woman in this situation would *know* that it is wrong to have sex with this man, and also that it is wrong to kill herself by proxy, by doing something that will induce someone to kill her. So there isn't any doubt as to the wrongness. But still, everyone, including the woman herself, would immediately say that if she chooses not to struggle, she is still being raped *against her will,* which means that she didn't choose it, but simply couldn't avoid the actual act. She no more chose the act of sex, really, we would intuitively say, than if she were tied up and gagged so that she couldn't struggle.

That's fine, and our intuitive view is correct. But why? Because, first of all, the *act she chooses* is to lie still; this is not *in itself* the act of sex, and so the sex is not contained in the act she chose, and therefore presumably can be divorced from it in her mind and her choice. She *can* be willing to lie still and simultaneously be positively *unwilling* to suffer the consequences of this, but simply can't avoid them without choosing something worse. The example makes clear that the rape victim, even though she actually *chose* something that *resulted* in sex, is *not* simply "not willing" to have sex (in the sense that she doesn't positively want it, which would include indifference to whether it happens or not) but actively *does not want* to have sex, and would prevent it if she could. In other words, as in the case of the unclear conscience, the *orientation of her will is* ***away*** *from the wrong act*. And this, of course, makes the choice moral and keeps it from containing a self-frustrating goal.

Note that it is *only* in this sort of situation that this can be done; because if the rapist were not threatening her with something worse if she didn't lie still, then her choice to let him rape her would be an *acquiescence* in his act, using the fact that he was forcing her as an *excuse* to have sex with him, because she *could* prevent it by struggling, for instance. Hence, if she lies still knowing that she could

prevent the whole thing by struggling (supposing that this is real knowledge and she is not frightened into immobility and so on), then she *has* chosen the consequences of her act, just as the rapist has also chosen the possible pregnancy by choosing to perform an act which can make someone pregnant. I am not saying a woman ever does such a thing, and the last thing I want to do by this example is "blame the victim." What I am saying is that in order to be unwilling to have sex, you have to have *reason to believe* that *something at least equally bad* is going to happen if you try to avoid it. It would be the very rare woman, I would think, who would not have a reason like that in the situation of a rape.

The example of rape is really being used because it is intuitively obvious to almost everyone that it makes sense to say that a person can sometimes choose something and *actively reject* in that very choice some side-effect of the act; and this means that, as far as the morality and the eternal consequences of the choice are concerned, the side-effect is not there.

But there is another difference from the indirect method of clearing your conscience. Since the wrongs are *known,* the Double Effect must be somewhat more sophisticated than just choosing away from the greater wrong. What if the lesser wrong is a *means* toward avoiding the greater one? The end doesn't justify the means. To give an example of this, suppose Darth Vader told you to shoot Luke Skywalker or he would kill your wife and children. Can you actually kill someone as a means of saving someone else's life? In that case, the end justifies the means; and if the end ever justifies the means, then morality, as I said, goes right out the window.[22]

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[22]Actually, "proportionalism" probably arose from thinking that there wasn't any real difference between the Double Effect and what is traditionally called "resolving a doubtful conscience by taking the morally safer course." The difference is subtle, but

And this is what the Principle of the Double Effect is about. It is five rules by which a person can assure himself that the choice he is about to make *will in fact exclude* the wrong that he knows is indirectly involved in the action he is choosing; and so if these rules are fulfilled, the choice to perform the action will be moral.

I hasten to say that a person in an emergency situation need not say, "Wait a minute, Mr. Rapist, I have to check. Let's see, Rule One..." Obviously, if you are being attacked, you choose what you think is right, and that will suffice. Furthermore, in emergency situations, you are very apt to be under the grip of an emotion which wouldn't let you think straight anyhow. All of what I said above about emotions and conscience apply here.

So we are assuming that you are in a situation where you have time to figure out what the moral thing to do is; and all the rules are is a spelling out of when the choice is *in fact* away from the moral wrongness involved, and doesn't necessarily imply that you have to apply them explicitly every time you make a choice.

Here, then, are the rules:

First, the wrongness has to be *separable in principle* from the act itself, and not be some intrinsic aspect of it. That is, it must be in *some effect* of the act rather than *in* the act. For instance, a lie may deprive a person of the truth (and that's an effect); but a lie *also* is a use of one's act of conveying factual information *in such a way that what is conveyed as a fact is not a fact,* and so the act as chosen *also*

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profound. And it is in this sense that I think that the traditional view is far more "nuanced" than proportionalism ever was.

directly contradicts its own reality.[23] Since that contradiction is within the act itself, if you choose the act of telling a lie, you cannot avoid choosing the violation of your nature as a factual communicator. Here's the first instance of its not being legitimate simply to avoid a greater wrong; you can't choose something as insignificant as telling a lie even to save your life, because the lie in itself contradicts itself.[24]

On the other hand, if the woman chooses to stay still, there is nothing *in that act itself* which is inconsistent with her; obviously, if the rapist weren't there, there'd be no moral problem. What's wrong with lying still is that the *effect* of it is going to be sex with someone not her husband.

Second, there must be *more than one known effect* of the act, and *at least one* of the other effects *must be good*. This "goodness" may simply be "the avoidance of the greater harm."

The idea here is that the act, innocent in itself by the first rule, is known to be *the cause* of at least one effect. If that's *all* you know about it, then in choosing it as cause, you would also be choosing its effect. Since, then, you know you are choosing the cause of an effect, you must choose it as the cause of *some other* effect it has (using "cause," of course, in the loose, ordinary sense, not the technical

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[23]That is, you can make the *statement* that is contrary to fact, but you can't do so *intending to convey "information"* that is contrary to fact. The statement in itself (as a string of words) is morally neutral; but a statement *to* somebody which would tend to mislead that person as to what the fact is is wrong. It is the misinformation, not the words that is significant here.

[24]As we will see later, there are ways of not telling the truth (including, especially, keeping silent) that are not lies. You don't have to *do* what is good; you have to *avoid* what directly contradicts your humanity.

sense in Sectionn 2 of the first part, where a cause has one and only one effect).

For instance, the woman chooses the act of lying still *as the cause of staying alive,* and not as the cause of having sex. She has now chosen the act, which is innocent; and she has chosen it knowing that it is the cause of effects; but she recognizes that because it has *many* effects she need not choose it as the cause of the harmful one.

This, by the way, is why the Principle is called the Principle of the *Double* effect. All of the wrong effects are lumped together as "the (complex) wrong effect," and the good effects are lumped together as "the (complex) good effect."

Third, the wrong effect must not *bring about* the good effect. That is, it must not in practice be a means toward the good effect as its end.

The reason for this is that you are choosing the act for its good effect, which means that the good effect is the end you intend to accomplish. But if the wrong effect is *necessary in order for this to happen,* then you can't avoid intending it along with the good effect you want. For instance, you may want your inheritance, and this is perfectly good; but if you put arsenic in your father's soup to get it, then you want the inheritance *by means of his murder,* and you can't hide behind, "Well, but what I *wanted* was just the money."

So this Principle, as I said, does *not* allow the end to justify the means. The two effects (the good one and the wrong one) must be *independent of each other,* even though both of them, obviously, depend on the same act. At least they must be independent of each other in the sense that the wrong one isn't indispensable for the good one to occur; it might be that the good one results in the wrong one (as, for example, the surviving the rape might result in insanity, and you might even know that you were going to lose control once it was over. But this can still be kept out of the choice.).

How in practice would you know if the good effect didn't depend on the wrongness of the wrong effect? You make a mental supposition that the wrong effect doesn't happen. Will the good one still occur? If so, then obviously the wrong effect was not indispensable for it, and you're home free.

Note that this supposition doesn't have to be realistic. The woman has no reason to believe that the rapist won't carry out his threat (either of them); but, supposing that someone came by and frightened him before the actual sex act took place, would the woman still be alive? Obviously yes. So it wasn't *by having sex* that she saved her life, but by lying still.

Let me give another example. Someone drops a hand grenade into the room, and you leap on it, shielding the others with your body. Of course, you die. Can you do this? First, the act of lying on a hand grenade is perfectly all right in itself; if it is not set to explode, there is obviously no problem. So the damage lies in the effect. There is also a good effect; the others do not die. Now is it your *death* that produces the good effect? No, because if the grenade doesn't go off, the others still live, and even if it does and you survive, the others still live.

On the other hand, if Darth Vader tells you to shoot Luke Skywalker or he will kill your family, and you pull the trigger and the gun misfires and Luke is still alive, cruel Mr. Vader will say, "Try again, or they die." Here, it is obvious that *unless Luke dies,* the good effect of the saving of the other lives will not occur, and so it is precisely the *death* that brings about the good effect. Hence, in this case, you would have to *choose* Luke's *death,* which is immoral; which means that you could not morally prevent the deaths of your family. But you would not be *morally responsible* for their deaths, for that very reason; there was no *moral* way you could have prevented them.

Obviously, this is a hard saying; but no one said that being moral was easy. In any case, this is the third rule for assuring yourself that

you have not chosen what is wrong.

Fourth, the wrong effect *must not be a motive,* even a secondary motive. You must actively *be unwilling* for the wrong effect to occur, and are not permitted to use the dilemma as an excuse for doing something that would in ordinary circumstances be wrong.

For instance, if the woman *wanted* to have sex with the rapist, even though her *primary* motive was to save her life, she would be morally guilty of fornication or adultery. Note that this is not the same thing as saying that if she (unwillingly) finds sexual *pleasure* in the act that she has "wanted" it. This could happen, for instance, in what is called "date rape," where the rapist is (or rather was) a friend. We don't have control of our emotions, still less of our physical feelings. Similarly, if you shoot an attacker, you may get satisfaction from seeing someone who wanted to kill you die. You can distinguish this from willing his death by asking, "If I escape and I find him later helpless, would I kill him in vengeance?" If the answer is yes, you are also willing his death during the attack; if no, then the satisfaction you get is merely an emotion with no will behind it.

Also, if the man who jumped on the hand grenade wanted to end it all, then even if he mainly wanted to save the others, he would be morally guilty of committing suicide, because he *did* intend his own death, even if it was not the main intention. You have to be *actively unwilling* to have the wrong occur.

Note, by the way, that if you shot Luke Skywalker, there is a sense that you didn't *want* to do it (it wasn't a goal of yours); but it *can't* be said, as here, that you were *actively unwilling* for it it to happen. One who wills the end, also wills the means necessary to the end.

And **fifth** and finally, *the damage done by choosing the act must be no greater than the damage done by avoiding it.* That is, you choose

the act because not to do so is *at least as bad*. Here is where the "proportionalism" comes in.

I say, "at least as bad," because, as in the case of clearing an unclear conscience, if the two are equal, you can choose either alternative *with the motive of avoiding what is bad in the other one*. But if the damage to *not* choosing the act is greater, then morally speaking you *must* choose the act with its damaging effect.

For instance, if the woman believed it was worse to die than be raped, she would have to choose to lie still; if she believed the other way (as some have), she would have to choose to struggle. If both seemed equally horrible to her, she could choose either with the intention of avoiding the other.

Here is where subjectivity enters, because there is no objective "bad," and when the damage is to *yourself,* then what *seems* worse *is* worse, and no one may contradict you on that.

However, when the damage is to someone *else,* then that criterion of "community established damage" I spoke of under Conclusions 7 and 8 of Chapter 3 of Section 7 of the fourth part comes into play. For instance, if I were to think that having my wallet stolen was a fate worse than death, and I were to kill the robber because, according to my standards, I am inflicting the lesser evil on him, I could not impose *my own personal standards of damage* on someone *else,* but would have to go by the community's standards and let him rob me, if the only way I could avoid it involved his death.

The reason for this last rule, of course, is that if you choose the alternative with the *greater* damage, then you have chosen something which is more wrong than right, and you can't argue that the orientation of your choice is *away* from the wrong, since you could at least have lessened it by choosing the other alternative.

But what about jumping on the hand grenade to save the others? It would certainly seem worse that eight should die rather than one; and so the reasoning above would seem to indicate that you would

have to jump on the grenade.

But that actually isn't the case. By staying where you are, you are not *actively doing anything to cause* the death of the other people, even though you *could* do something to *prevent* it if you jumped on the grenade. In the case where the effect of your action of preventing it would involve *no* damage to yourself, you would have to choose the act, because in that case, you would be willing to do harm to the other people. For instance, if you could have saved them by yelling "Everybody run!" and you refused to do so, you might just as well have thrown the grenade yourself.

But in the situation as I outlined it, the others have no right *against you* to be saved from the blast; you have no special duty toward them. Saving them, therefore, is not fulfilling a moral *obligation* you have, but merely doing something that is morally *good* (i.e. that is consistent with yourself). But you *have* an obligation not to do yourself damage. Hence, we can draw the following conclusion:

Conclusion 30: No one has a moral *obligation* to do damage to himself to avoid greater damage to others, even if the Double Effect would permit it.

That is, even if the damage is in the effect of the act, and even if the two effects are independent and the damage to oneself is not intended, it is *not* the case that the fifth rule means that saving others from worse harm means that one *must* choose the course of action involving harm to oneself. And the reason is, as I said, that one has a positive obligation not to harm oneself, but no positive obligation to prevent harm to others.

Now this is not to say either that it is *forbidden* to choose the action which involves harm to oneself when the Double Effect

applies; because the point of the Double Effect is that the harm is kept out of the choice. So you *may* jump on the hand grenade and die and save the other people; and you would be considered a hero if you did—which you might enjoy in heaven, though obviously it's going to do you no good in this life. But the point here is that you *need not,* because you are, after all, the agent of your actions, and you need not sacrifice yourself by your own actions for the sake of others.

On the other hand, if an attacker is robbing me and the only way I can avert the harm is by shooting to kill, then even though I might justify the shooting (as we will see when discussing rights in the next Part) in defense of my *life,* the fifth rule about greater damage *does* apply in this case, since *I would be actively doing something which caused damage to the other—and greater damage than he was doing to me.*

Hence, there is morally speaking a difference between *refraining* from doing something which, if done, would prevent damage and *doing* something which would *inflict* damage, even if the damage inflicted is an effect of the act. The reason is that the moral obligation is, as I said, negative; you must not choose to do what is wrong. I am only obliged to choose to *do* something when not doing it is the equivalent of actively doing something wrong.

Traditionally, this fifth rule is stated in such a way that there is supposed to be "a proportion between the good that is accomplished and the evil that is caused"; but you can't compare gains with damage, as we saw in Chapter 3 of Section 7 of the fourth part.

And, in fact, ethicians recognize this. Suppose you were offered a million dollars to play Russian Roulette just once. You put one bullet in the chamber of the six-shooter, spin the barrel, point the gun at your head and pull the trigger. If the gun doesn't go off, you win a million dollars; if it does, you die.

You could argue that you have five chances out of six of winning the million, and only one of dying; and those are very good odds. So,

taking the likelihood of survival (83 per cent) and the million dollar reward for surviving, you could argue that the benefits would outweigh the slight chance of dying. After all, you don't take your umbrella when there's only a 17 per cent chance of rain.

But this is looking at it the wrong way. If you don't play the game at all, you will be *no worse off* from the way you are now (though if you do play, you will probably be a million dollars *better* off), while if you do play, there's a 17 per cent chance that you'll be a lot worse off. Hence, the *damage* from not playing is nil, and the damage from playing is considerable; and therefore, *you may not morally run this risk for the sake of the benefit*. You may not choose to harm yourself; and since the only way you can keep the harm out of the choice is to avoid greater (or at least equal) harm, this is not fulfilled by the fact that there will be a great benefit from risking the harm, and you would have to be *willing* to die if luck had it so—and this is the moral equivalent of choosing your death.

Conclusion 31: No one may morally choose an act whose effect is damage to himself if not choosing it simply means losing a *benefit,* however great the benefit might be.

Ethical theory is obviously a minefield; and so we must cross it very carefully. Things which at first sight seem perfectly reasonable turn out to involve inconsistencies.

But we finally have got through a sketch of the general principles of morality. The next task before us is to look at the individual human being (i.e. exclusive of his relations with others) and, based on what we said in the first, second, and third parts about his reality, what acts would be inconsistent with this and so morally wrong; and when the wrongness can be avoided using the Double Effect.

Section 2
Personal Morality

Chapter 1

Some preliminary things to clear up

Before beginning this sketch of the characteristics we have as human and the implications of these characteristics for our actions, I want to stress several things:

First, I am going to be talking about *morally wrong acts,* not immoral *choices,* except when I explicitly presuppose the person knows or suspects that the act is wrong and chooses it anyway. I want it very clearly understood that when I condemn certain acts as wrong, I am simply stating a *fact* about how the act is related to the person's humanity: that it is inconsistent. I am not accusing anyone who does these acts of being immoral. That is between that person and God, and depends on all that was said in the preceding chapter about emotions and conscience.

In that sense, this chapter and the ethical sections of those that follow are nothing but academic exercises. They do, however, give the grounds a person would use in judging whether the act he is about to perform is morally wrong, which would make his choice to perform it immoral (supposing the wrongness cannot be kept out of the choice, by some such thing as the Double Effect).

Second, I am going to be talking about morally wrong acts in general, and am fully aware that the individual's situation can *modify* his common humanity in such a way that the rightness or wrongness

of what he does is also altered. For instance, in general, it is wrong to put your life at risk; but using the Double Effect, this can sometimes be done. Or if you are dying anyway, the positive obligation we generally have to take care of our health does not apply to you in significant ways. A person's conscience recognizes the *actual* state of his humanity at the moment, and can know what is inconsistent with it; so these general principles of morality are not really as "rigid" as the proportionalists would have us believe.

Third, it might be asked why I bother doing an analysis of our humanity and the implications for our action if morality depends on the choice anyway, and the choice depends on the actual knowledge of the person who makes it rather than some philosopher's analysis of his reality.

The answer is twofold. First of all, if you *refuse* to try to find out what the facts really are about your humanity so that your freedom won't be restricted by knowing things you weren't aware of before, then that *refusal is itself immoral,* because it is the equivalent of saying, "Don't tell me because I want to do this act regardless of its wrongness, and I'll feel better doing it if I don't know."

Let me call this "President Nixon's ignorance." It is said that when he was approached with the plan to break into the Democratic headquarters, he said, "Don't tell me what you're going to do! I'm telling you to help me get elected, and how you do that is up to you; I don't want to know it." In this case, his "ignorance" made him *morally responsible for* ***everything*** *that the man did* afterwards, because he could have kept control by being informed and vetoing anything that was illegal, but *deliberately relinquished this control*; and this was the equivalent of saying, "I concur with everything you do."

The second part of the answer is that a morally wrong act is by definition at cross-purposes with the agent. True, the eternal consequences of this are avoided if you don't suspect that it is, but the *temporal* consequences of doing something that contradicts what

you are trying to do can be quite severe also (though they do not always happen). Many a woman who has had an abortion comes to realize after the fact (sometimes because of it) that she has killed her child; and killed her child by the most barbaric of methods, like dismemberment. What of the rest of her life after she realizes this? And what of the child in any case? Those who try to keep kids from getting pregnant by handing them condoms (so they can have irresponsible sex responsibly) wonder why more kids get pregnant. Those who advocate "freedom of expression" (amoral license) in the arts wonder why our kids are into drugs after a generation of listening to music telling how nice it is and scoffing at those who are against it.

So going through these aspects of what it is to be human is by no means a waste of time; and so let us get started.

Chapter 2

Finiteness and bodiliness

In Chapters 6 and 7 of Section 4 of the first part, I showed that every being of our experience, which of course includes every human being, and every act of every human being, is finite and therefore in itself self-contradictory as being less than its own intelligibility; and I concluded from this that every finite act (and therefore every human being and every act of a human being) depends on God or it can't exist. Without him we can do nothing whatever.

Therefore,

Conclusion 1: It is morally wrong for any human being to act as if he did not absolutely depend on God, not only for his existence, but for every aspect of himself and every act he performs.

If you spell this out, there are several types of acts which are forbidden, and some which must be done so that in practice one does not act as if God made no difference in his life:

Conclusion 1a: Conduct insubordinate to God or an insubordinate attitude is morally wrong.

That sort of thing is called "*blasphemy*," or manifesting contempt for God; it is obviously is something that could only be done by an equal or superior to God; but we are absolutely and totally subordinated to him; we are complete slaves and he is the absolute Master. Any act or attitude which is insulting to God is inconsistent with this relationship.

A subclass of this would be *sacrilege,* which is treating objects, acts, or places used for worship of God as if they were like any other kind of objects, whether you happen to agree with the religion in question or not. These sacred objects are used to express the human relation to God, by which we humans acknowledge our relation to him. But every human being does this haltingly, imperfectly, and to a large extent ignorantly; and so it is inconsistent with a human being to say by his actions, "I worship God perfectly, and you must respect my manner of worship; but you do not, and I can treat with scorn the instruments of your worship." Even supposing you had divine revelation to guide you, who are you to say that you understand it perfectly? Hence, we must respect others' religious practices and objects, even if we think that the religion is basically mistaken.

In connection with this, let me note that there is a view current that conviction (especially religious conviction) is incompatible with tolerance. Any person who says, "My religion is factually true" will of course think that any religious view that contradicts it is false; and for this reason the general attitude toward such a person is that he is a bigot who does not respect others' views.

But this is not the case at all. Even in science there are people who hold one view of something (such as the Big Bang theory of the origin of the material universe) and others who hold an opposite view (such as the Steady State theory); and they can respect each others' positions, recognizing that the evidence is not absolutely conclusive, but with each still thinking that his reasons are more cogent than those on the opposite side.

That is, even if you are convinced that you are right, you can still *understand* how someone can be convinced of the opposite. I can, for instance, see how it is that many people think that fetuses are not human—in fact, I can make out a better case for their position than practically any one of them can, though I recognize where the fallacy is. It is not easy to think things through and spot subtle fallacies, especially when it is a matter that touches our lives.

And so it is in the case of religion. If Catholicism is, as I believe, factually based, the facts about Jesus' actually coming back to life and so on are two thousand years old; and by no means everyone is capable, as I happen to be, of going back to the Greek of the documents and looking at them in their historical context apart from the relativistic nonsense that has crept into everything we examine nowadays; and so it is perfectly understandable to me why very intelligent people would think it is all a myth. I happen to believe, in fact, as part of my faith, that a person needs special help from God to be free enough of bias that he can look at the evidence and see what it's actually saying. So even though I think that those who don't believe, for instance, that the Communion wafer is in fact Jesus' body are wrong, I have no problem understanding and respecting their view.

But as I say, there are those who consider my position bigoted and intolerant, because I am not willing to "respect the view" of a person who declares that what I ate this morning was really just bread, however much it might have symbolized Jesus or "meant" Jesus. No, I don't "respect the view" in the sense that I think it is on an equal footing with mine; what I respect is (a) the *person* who holds the view and even (b) the *reasons* why he holds it.

And those who hold that this is not enough contradict themselves. Obviously, they are saying that people who *have* convictions *must not* hold that those who disagree with them are wrong—which *itself* is a conviction that either (a) will not tolerate its opposite, or

(b) at the very least thinks that its opposite is *false*. That is, if you say that in order to "respect" someone else's view, you have to hold that it is on an equal footing with yours, then clearly it follows that the view that respect does *not* entail this is on an equal footing with this definition of respect—and consequently those who hold that respecting others' view *means* giving them equal weight with their own *simultaneously hold* that respecting others' views does *not* mean giving them equal weight.

And that those who advocate "tolerance" in religious matters are really intolerant of those who hold convictions about truth is clearly demonstrated by an article in the July, 1990 issue of *Faith and Philosophy* by E. Stump and N. Kretzmann, answering the Theologian Gordon Kaufman, who thinks that philosophers are not "with it" as far as contemporary Theology is concerned in trying to dig out the "truth values" in religious statements. The authors say this:

> But when he does make a positive point, Kaufman is, not doubt inadvertently, entering into the evidentialist discussions he deplores; for in such cases we can and should ask him for his evidence. For a theological example of this sort, consider (4), the claim that we sin against God when we try to make ourselves the ultimate disposers of our lives and destiny, and consider it in the light of (2), "God is beyond our understanding and knowledge." How can Kaufman know that it is not God's will that we should strive for ultimate independence? Not on the basis of any revelation, as (3)["we dare not claim" that any of the ways in which we conceive of God "have been directly revealed by God"] indicates; and certainly not on the basis of any philosophical inquiry, regarding which it is a sin—this very sin—to think it yields any understanding or knowledge of God.

The reason I bring this up is not only to show once again, as I did

in Chapter 6 of Section 1 of the first part, how relativism absolutizes itself and so contradicts itself without realizing it, but to point up how *intolerant* those who advocate "tolerance" are. Who is Kaufman to say I *sin against God* if I hold some conviction about him? How does *he* know so much about God that such a thing is a sin?

But to return to the point, we must *respect* others' religious views and practices, even though we do not have to admit that they are correct.

Conclusion 1b: It is morally wrong to worship anything but the non-finite Activity.

***Worship* is the act of acknowledging absolute dependence on another.**

But God as discovered through the investigation in Chapter 7 of Section 4 of the first part is the being on whom we absolutely depend, and the *only* being on whom we absolutely depend. Hence, it is inconsistent for any creature to apply this relationship to any other being. Of course, if a person *thinks* he depends on some other being or beings in this way, and has no reason to believe he is mistaken, then his conscience is clear.

But one of the reasons I have been at some pains throughout this book to show that the God the Christians believe in is not incompatible with the God known by reason is precisely that if Christianity wanted people to worship a God who *contradicts* what reason says God is, then Christianity, by this corollary of the moral obligation, would be a morally wrong religion, and would have to be abandoned by any person who understood what the facts are. And since, as I said, I happen to believe that Christianity is factually true, I would be doing a disservice to my readers, if any, in leaving the

impression that it is false.

I might point out that Judaism or Islam has much less of a difficulty with this tenet of the moral obligation than Christianity, because they believe in a God whose characteristics match pretty well the ones you can deduce from what the cause of finite activity would have to be. But Christianity, with its notion of a Trinity, as if God were a committee, and an Incarnation, in which the Infinite becomes finite, is, to put it mildly, on a superficial level something that contradicts what is known about God; and so it is necessary, I think, to point up the fact that these facts do not necessarily contradict what God is known to be—though, of course, this showing that you can't prove that the two are incompatible does not of itself prove that the two *are* compatible; it only makes it *not unreasonable* for a person to admit the other evidence which indicates the factuality of what is said in Christianity.

But to return to acknowledging our dependence on God, note that acknowledging *some* dependence, even profound dependence, on others is not forbidden by this, but only acknowledging *absolute* dependence on others—as if their act entered into the very activity of our act. We *do* depend on other beings besides God, because we and our aspects and acts are also *effects* of various other causes besides God, as I said in Conclusion 17 of Section 4 of the first part. My features, for instance, as well as my beginning to exist, are due to my parents and their sexual interaction as well as to God; and so I depend for my existence on them—but in a different sense from the way my existence depends on God. My existence depends on my parents, because without them I would never have begun to exist (and so would not exist now); it depends on God in that as finite it could not now exist if God were not actively causing it to exist now.

But we can even depend on people who have died. As I mentioned in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of the third part, a person who dies does not go out of existence, and in that same section in

Chapter 4, dealing with what life is all about, I said that, if he loves another, the other's fulfillment is part of his goal in life, and therefore even after death, he is "with" and concerned about the other. And, though he can no longer *be affected,* he can still *act*; and it is quite possible that he can do something to affect those he loves in the world. But he can only do so (because they are free) if they ask for his help.

Thus, it is perfectly legitimate morally to *pray* for help with our problems to people who have died and who can "intercede" for us with God, in the sense that God, who is fulfilling them, is bound by this to fulfill their goals for the others they love. As I write this, I see so many of those I care about suffering, and I am powerless to do anything for them; and I long to see them happy. My life is not only meaningless but a positive horror if they cannot achieve their goals; and so I can't wait to die, so that I will (a) be able to see how they have achieved these goals, and (b) be able to assist them because of my ambition that they achieve their ambitions.

And so if you, reader, want my help (since I am undoubtedly dead by the time you read this), then ask, and I will do what I can for you—and it will be much. Not that I am God; I am simply someone who wants you to be happy, and who, being dead, cannot be myself unless you *are* happy; and therefore, God, who has wiped every tear from my eyes, will do it. Even in my present state I am nothing, and he is everything—so you are not worshiping me if you ask for my help; you are simply doing what you would do if you ask for any person's help: establishing a solidarity *among creatures,* since we *do* depend on each other in many ways in addition to the absolute

dependence each of us has upon God.[25]

Conclusion 1c: It is morally wrong to try to manipulate God or bargain with him.

This is traditionally called "tempting" God. The idea here is that you are treating God as a partner in a transaction, where you will do something "for him" if he does what you want; or where you put down conditions for him to act.

God is absolutely free and independent of us, as I said in Conclusion 12 of Section 4 of the first part; he neither needs nor wants anything from us, nor can he be affected in any way by what we do. Therefore, you have nothing to offer God in return for some favor. Hence, if you say, "God, I'll give a thousand dollars to my church if you'll cure me," you are supposing that God would be "motivated" by the money to cure you; and this puts you on an equal plane with God. Similarly, if you say, as Uzziah did, "I'll give you five days to save the city, and then I'll hand it over," you deserve

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[25]Jesus is the "sole mediator" between God and human beings, as *First Timothy* says, in that he is (as I translated the word) the "link and liaison" between the two. That is, being one Person who is both divine and human, he is a "union" or a "middle" or a "bridge" between the creature and God in a unique, absolute sense. And, in fact, what I was talking of in the ability of the dead to "intercede" with God (because of their ambitions which God fulfills) comes about because they are literally *in* Jesus, as cells of his body, living his (God's) life, while still living their natural lives, as we saw in some of the notes to Section 4 of the third part.

So their "intercession" on our behalf (helping us to get what we ask for) is in itself something different from Jesus' "mediation," which actually *makes* us God by incorporating us into the Being who is (also) God; and further, this intercession only takes place within the mediation of Jesus, who is one body, where if one part hurts, the whole thing hurts, as *First Corinthians* says.

Judith's reply, "Who are you to put conditions on God, and put yourself in God's place over human affairs?"

Hence, *magic, séances,* and so on, as an attempt to manipulate "occult forces," violates not only this aspect of our relation with God, but the one stated in Conclusion 1b also. You attempt to get control over what has control over you; and you also do so without acknowledging that it is God who has this control, not "the spirits of the air."

In spite of all this, I hasten to say that (a) there is nothing wrong with *praying for favors* from God, since by asking his help you are acknowledging that he enters into your getting what you want, and that you can't get it by yourself; and this is the truth. It may even be that the particular thing you want would be counter-productive for you if you *didn't* recognize that God was involved in it, and you thought that you got it totally on your own. You then share the farmer's attitude when the preacher passed his field and said, "I see you and God have done a fine job here," and he answered, "Yeah? Well, you should have seen it when God had it all by himself."

It is also true that (b) there is nothing wrong with *expressing gratitude* to God for the favors he has bestowed on you. In that sense, giving money to the parish as a thank-offering is morally noble; it is simply a recognition that God had a hand in your achieving your goal, and that he didn't need to act to bring it about. It is when the offering is promised beforehand as a kind of bribe that it becomes inconsistent with your creaturehood.

Conclusion 1d: It is morally wrong to refuse to worship God, even if you never actively declare your independence of him.

This is the first of the "affirmative" obligations we have. The idea behind it is that, even if you don't actually *say* you are independent

of God, if you *never* say that you *do* depend on him absolutely, then for practical purposes you are acting as if God had no part in your life, when in fact without his causal activity on you, you could not exist or act at all. Hence, you must worship God at least sometimes.

And the criterion for how often is, of course, that you *never* act in practice as if God had nothing to do with what you are doing. This does not mean that you must explicitly acknowledge the dependence upon God of each act you perform; it is enough that you *virtually* acknowledge it. That is, if someone were to say to you, "Does God have anything to do with what you're doing now?" you would spontaneously reply, "Of course he does," rather than "Of course not."

But this doesn't help much, you say. How often does that mean? Every hour? Every day? Every week? Once a year? It will vary from person to person. It may be that a person who undergoes something like a "conversion" experience could be so filled with that consciousness that once in his life would be enough so that he always from then on realized his dependence on God in the virtual sense above. For most, it would be much more often than that. The Catholic Church, following the Hebrew tradition, has obviously thought that the normal person needs to worship God explicitly at least once a week to keep this attitude of dependence minimally alive; and this is why it has made this a rule.

The Scholastics rightly held that the negative tenets of the moral obligation were unlimited, and the affirmative ones all had limits to their obligatoriness; but it wasn't clear in Scholasticism (at least as far as I could discover) why this was so. And the answer is, of course, that we are free with respect to what is *consistent* with our reality to do anything we please; the obligation is simply that we must not choose to act *inconsistently* with it. And the affirmative duties are things that must be done in order to *avoid* doing the practical equivalent of some inconsistent act. Hence their limit is reached

when the act's omission is no longer the same as actively doing something inconsistent. Hence, I am not saying here that it is not a good thing to worship God more often than you have to in order to avoid thinking of yourself as independent of him. The point is that you don't *have* to do it any more than you have to—obviously. In fact, worshiping too often can be a disvalue. I mentioned in Chapter 6 of Section 3 of the third part, dealing with choice how St. Ignatius had to break himself of ecstatic contemplation when he heard the word "God," or "Three," because it kept him from hearing his math lectures. There are even cases where it could be morally wrong to worship God; if, for instance, you worshiped God so constantly that you harmed your health or neglected your children or failed in some moral obligation you had.

Note that it is morally wrong to *keep some area of your life apart from worship,* as if this aspect of your life had nothing to do with God. There are those who worship God internally, but externally act as if they had no dependence on him at all; there are those who worship God as individuals, but engage in no *social* worship, as if their selves as interrelated to others had no dependence on God. To refuse to reveal to others that you depend on God is to say that God governs *only* your mental or personal life and has nothing to do with the way you relate to others.

We in the United States are apt to fall into this trap, because of the stupid way the Supreme Court has interpreted the "separation of church and state" (which in itself is the proper relation between civil society and religion, as we will see in the next part). Our attitude is that religion is a "purely personal matter" and not only does not have any social significance, but *should* not be brought to bear on our relation with others and especially our relation with civil society.

But the point of the "separation" is that government is not to try to dictate *how* worship is to be performed, but leave each person free to follow his conscience in this matter; it is not supposed to *suppress*

the free expression of religion in its desire not to force people to adopt some religion. The fact that people of one faith or no faith see symbols of some other faith, or see people practicing some other faith, imposes no restrictions on their activity; and at the same time, it permits people to manifest their faith and to acknowledge the social dimension of their dependence on God. The separation is supposed to respect religions equally, not shove them into a corner.[26]

There is something further in this business of worshiping God, however. The end of Saul's reign came on the occasion of his not slaughtering the animals of a city he had taken, when God had told him to do so. He answered, when the prophet Samuel reproached him, "I was saving them to offer them in sacrifice." Samuel answered, "The Master says, 'I want obedience, not sacrifices.'"

That is, if you have reason to believe that God expects worship to take a certain form, and "you don't get anything out of doing it this way," and you choose to worship him in *your* way instead, then you are saying to God, "I will acknowledge my absolute dependence on you but independently of the way you want me to do it." This is no "absolute dependence."

Hence, if you think that there is evidence that God might have in fact revealed himself to human beings, and that this revelation might have included ways in which humans are to worship him, then you are now in the case of a person with an unclear conscience.

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[26]Of course, technically, a "religion" is a code of conduct "religiously" (that is, tenaciously) held to and practiced. Of itself, it does not suppose there is a God—and in fact, Confucianism and Buddhism do not demand that one believe in any god. Hence, when the "strict separationists" try to remove religious expression from the public domain, they are attempting to impose the *religion* of secularism on everyone. Just because they don't *call* themselves a church or even think they have an organization, it does not change the fact that they are practicing a religion and trying to impose its restriction on others who do not share their views.

Obviously, if he *has* revealed himself and expects people to follow some religion dealing with this revelation, then your refusal to join this religion would be an attempt to be independent of him. But if you think that in fact he *might* have done so and you refuse to investigate to find out whether he has or not, then you are *willing* not to worship him in his way, but only in your own.

Now in order for this to be the case, you must think (a) that there *are* facts which would indicate that he might in fact have given some kind of revelation of this nature, and (b) that there is some way to ascertain whether these suggestive facts actually indicate that he *did* reveal himself. That is, if you have no reason to believe that the whole religion issue is anything but superstition, you have no obligation to investigate; and if you have no reason to believe that there is any hope of settling the matter by looking into various claims, then you have no obligation either.

The point is that you can't stick with a form of worship you "feel comfortable with" if you think that there might be a form of worship that is mandated by God, however distasteful it might be to you. In that state of mind, you must find the facts, as far as is reasonably possible, or you are willing to do what is wrong.

Sorry about that, but it's an obvious conclusion from the very concept of worship. This does not mean, of course, that those of you who are convinced by the faith you hold have any obligation to investigate rival claims; your conviction is the very opposite of a doubt. But if you *have* a doubt, then you must find the facts, or if you can't, choose the morally safest course of action. I am not trying to "sell" Catholicism by this book; I am just laying out the facts as objectively as I can based on the evidence I have available to me—and I am quite aware that this evidence is distorted by my biases, though I don't know where the distortion lies, or I would try to correct for it.

But there's a lot to say, morally, isn't there? What I've said so far

is just the implications in the fact that we are finite.

Now as to the particular type of finiteness we have, as is clear from Section 2 of the second part and Chapter 1 of Section 4 of the third part, we are bodies (integrated clusters of forms of energy with multiple properties) integrated by an act that is spiritual, but in that same act "reduplicates" itself as a form of energy. We are, in short, embodied spirits.

Conclusion 2: It is morally wrong for a human being to act as if he were a spirit that "had" a body "attached" to it or as if he were just a body, even a body with certain spiritual "adjuncts."

The first sort of violation of this tenet has been called "angelism," and it is actually an attitude that is quite widespread among those who consider themselves devout. It is the attitude of *despising* the body and wishing to be "free" of it and of "mortifying" it, not to get our urges under control, but because they are "physical" and so are to be suppressed as "beneath our notice" as spiritual beings. Plato, of course, held this because of his theoretical mistake of considering the soul a "something" which got trapped into a body presumably because of some sin in its disembodied condition, and which was "in" the body as a pilot is in a ship. And philosophers since his time who have followed the Platonic way of thinking have also held, to one degree or another, his contempt of the body as an alien kind of prison. Platonic dualism is very strong in Descartes, for instance, the founder of modern philosophy.

Conclusion 2a: The more limited (more material) acts of the body are not to be regarded as "objectively worse" than the spiritual acts.

This corollary says that the energy-acts of the body, which are properties produced by the unifying activity which is *both* spiritual and material in one act, are *just as much* acts of ourselves as any other act we perform; and it is inconsistent with the fact that goodness and badness depend on *subjectively created* ideals, as I said in Chapter 10 of Section 5 of the first part, to pretend that just because these acts are infinitely more limited than the spiritual ones (which have no quantity at all), they are thereby not as "good" as the spiritual ones, or are to be despised. Objective limitation has nothing to do with goodness and badness, as I was at pains to point out.

And not even the people who "despise the flesh" believe this, since most of them think of music as something exalted, when in fact it is objectively one of the most limited of realities (nothing but the vibration of the air), and its effect is that the consequent vibrations of the tympanum in our ear give us emotions which we can *then* (spiritually) understand relations among, as I said in Chapter 1 of Section 5 of the fourth part.

But these same people would shrink in horror from the art of dining, because that is just "feeding the flesh," in spite of the fact that the external object is or used to be alive, and isn't just air vibrations, and that there are also emotional overtones connected with the tastes, odors, and appearances of foods, as opposed to just sounds, and that these impressions and their emotional overtones also can go together into very interesting interrelationships. But it's so—so "fleshy." It is precisely this attitude which is a morally wrong one.

But even though that is the case, it is also true that the activities of our instinct are by nature subordinate to the activity of understanding and choosing, as I said in the discussion of Conclusions 12 and 13 of Section 2 of the third part. And the point of choice in Section 3 of that part is that it is to be the basic controlling aspect of our nature insofar as it is conscious, and the function of

instinct in humans is to supply information to understanding for our spirit to make an informed choice. Hence, we can draw the following conclusion:

Conclusion 2b: It is morally wrong to follow instincts or emotions as if they indicated the direction our "true nature" is to take.

Each human drive, as I mentioned in the chapters cited above, seeks its own fulfillment, not, as with other animals, the benefit of the individual or the species; and if followed unchecked, will only become stronger and stronger until it destroys the person. Further, once a person *does* make choices and plan his life rationally, and especially once this becomes complex and interactive, as in culture or civilization, then the automatically programmed responses to stimuli which drives (with their emotions) are are no longer necessarily appropriate, and very often will be positively inappropriate. Hence it is *contrary* to our nature to act as if the way we felt toward things is our "true" attitude toward them. This is as much as saying that reason is a kind of "false" epiphenomenon of our nature, and that the situation we have got ourselves into by using our minds is "unnatural." Certainly there are people who think this way. But this is to equate "natural" with "animal," and say that human nature has no spiritual dimension.

Conclusion 2c: We must see to it that, as far as possible, our drives do not become strong enough to take over control from our choice.

Deliberately to allow this would be to be immoral, since this is the equivalent of violating Conclusion 2b. Therefore, what this

conclusion says is that some *active steps must be taken* to see to it that it is not likely to happen; and therefore, a certain amount of "mortification" of the emotions is *morally required*.

First of all, what is this "mortification"? It consists in *deliberately doing the **opposite** of what an emotion inclines one towards*—in situations, of course, where there is nothing morally wrong with this—in order to establish the subordination of the emotion to the choice. It would be done, obviously, in cases where the drive was weak enough so that one clearly had control, and should progress to times when the drive is stronger, until one had reasonable assurance that in all rationally foreseeable instances, the drive would not take over and force an act against what is known to be moral (or blind one to the facts, as I said in the preceding section). This clearly would have to be done with *all* the major drives: hunger, sex, fear, and so on; or one would be leaving an area of his life as potentially uncontrollable.

How much do you have to do of this? As in the case of worship, the answer is enough so that in practice you can see that, barring cataclysmic circumstances, you will be in control of your drives—and this will vary from person to person, and is never perfectly achieved by anyone, due to the "fallenness" I talked about in Chapter 5 of Section 4 of the third part. If a person thinks he *is* in perfect control of his emotions, he is deluding himself (and in fact is probably in the grip of some drive that is blocking out information from his consciousness).

Thus, *dances* and so on which allow both sexes to be in a situation in which the sex drive tends to be aroused and the circumstances make control fairly easy are probably morally *necessary* for most people; and a total avoidance of occasions of sexual arousal is generally far more dangerous than this sort of thing, because it leaves the person without any practice in coping with the urge, and so he is much less likely to be able to handle minor sexual temptations than

a person who has realized that except in really extreme instances, the drive is controllable. The Puritanical (and to be fair, monkish) attitude that anything sexual is to be avoided is arguably more conducive to sexual license than these innocent sexual enjoyments.

This is precisely not to say that one should expose himself to situations in which the drive is apt to be strongly aroused: to look at pornography, for instance, in order to "steel oneself" against the sexual temptation. You would have to be pretty far advanced in sexual control to be able to do this; in which case, the pornography would not have any interest for you. The point is that drives *can* take over control and the rash idea that you can keep control under every circumstance denies the fallenness of our nature, which is the basis of getting control of instinct in the first place.

Hence, this exposure to controllable temptations and the deliberate going against what the emotions indicate is not to be taken as an excuse for what we used to call "seeking out the occasions of sin." It was a commendable attempt to recognize this fact that led to the Puritanical excess of avoidance of *all* temptations involving the major drives.

Further, one must not lose sight of Conclusion 2a, and think that because these acts can get out of control they are therefore somehow "evil." Every act of a human being is good; and the fact that the sex drive, for instance, can take over control is not an indication that it is not to be rejoiced in and followed when it leads us to do what we recognize as rational.

That is, the attitude sometimes attributed to Augustine, that it's okay to have sex in order to have children, but "you shouldn't take pleasure in it" is obviously stupid. The act is one of the most beautiful acts a human can perform, and the pleasure is a part of its beauty; the only problem is that because the drive is so strong and the pleasure is so intense, it is easy to do it when it is irrational to do so; and so it is dangerous. But this should not mean that when it is

rational to have sex, it is somehow ignoble or *infra dignitatem* to enjoy the pleasure to the full. That error is a variation of angelism. Poor angels! They get no pleasure out of anything at all, because they have no emotions. Aren't you glad you're human and not one of them?

A third implication of our bodiliness is that we are units consisting of multiple parts, as I said in Chapter 2 of Section 2 of the second part; and these parts in the human being are often *faculties,* or parts that *enable the person to perform or not perform a definite set of acts,* as I discussed in Chapter 9 of Section 1 of the third part.

Conclusion 3: It is morally wrong for a person to deprive himself, by removal of a part, or suppression of the act of a part, of an *ability* he has by his nature as human.

Since these parts are faculties, and allow you *either* to act or not as you choose, there is nothing wrong with *not exercising* the power you have. But if you "don't exercise" the power by removing the organ so that you *can't* do the act you don't want to do any more, you put yourself in the self-contradictory position of being "a being who can do X who cannot do X."

That is, it is one thing to close your eyes, and another to remove them. In the latter case, even if you don't want to see ever again (which I suppose, absent any reason you would morally have to see, you could choose), you can't consistently do this by making yourself *unable* to see; because the person who is blind *still is able to see,* or blindness would never be curable, any more than you can cure the blindness of the book you are reading. It is always in principle possible to cure any such defect by replacing the defective part with a natural or artificial one which is not defective, because the unifying energy after all built the part in the first place because it was "the

kind of thing that can do the act in question," and so it is the *unifying energy* that *really* has the ability, not the part itself, as we saw in Chapter 9 of Section 1 of the third part. Every part is in principle regenerable, for the simple reason that it was built in the first place by the unifying energy; it is just that, in very complex organisms, the ability to regenerate certain parts had to be given up for efficiency's sake in using the limited available energy.

But since this is so, it follows that it is self-contradictory to remove or damage the organ in question in such a way that the unifying energy can no longer use it to do what it can do.

***Mutilation* is the removal or damaging of a part of the body in such a way that the person becomes unable to do what he could do with the intact part.**

There are some things, therefore, that are called "mutilation" that aren't mutilations at all. I happen to have a tattoo on my right arm (of a snake, if you're curious), which many people consider to be a mutilation. If I had known when I got it done what I know now, it would have been immoral for me to choose to get it, not because I was mutilating myself, but because it seems reasonable to say that various horrible diseases like hepatitis, AIDS, syphilis, and God knows what else, could be transmitted by the needle's use in decorating one body after another, since there is a certain amount of bleeding in the process.

But the danger aside, there is nothing morally wrong with decorating the body this way, because no ability the body has to act is impaired. Similarly, there is no mutilation in what to me is the barbaric practice of piercing ears for earrings—or noses for nose rings, or even teeth for the insertion of little diamonds, I suppose. For the same reason, hair and fingernails may morally be cut short

(or even off, in the case of hair, or even pulled out), because the hair itself has no real function except decoration—or at least no function that can't be duplicated with a cap or turban. Not even cosmetic plastic surgery (e.g. changing the shape of the nose for reasons of appearance only) is morally wrong or a mutilation, as long as the function of the organs involved are not impaired.

And since beauty is basically subjective, as I said in Chapter 4 of Section 5 of the fourth part, what is one person's ugliness may very well be another person's beauty, and therefore mutilation has nothing to do with the "uglification" of the body. No way of changing the body's appearance is of itself morally wrong; it would only be wrong if it involved a violation of some other aspect of our reality, such as the Chinese binding of girls' feet making them unable to walk as adults or the Ubangi women's enlarging of their lips to such an extent that they can't eat. Judging by what I have seen of women's feet in our culture, the extreme fashions involving high heels at least border on being morally wrong, because they cause bunions and various actual impairments in the function of the feet.

But of course, the following should be said also:

Conclusion 3a: Parts of the body may be removed, depriving a person of the ability to perform their acts, when the Double Effect applies.

For instance, a hand may be removed if it is gangrenous and the person will die if it is left on the body. This is pretty obvious; you don't *want* to be deprived of the ability to pick up things, but you have to put up with it if you want to stay alive—and morally speaking, you cannot want to die.

But all of the five rules must be fulfilled. The act of removing the organ must have nothing wrong about it but the effect of the

deprivation of the ability to act. This in general will always be fulfilled, because, as I said, there is nothing wrong with removing parts of the body *as such,* as with hair and fingernails that have no function (I am supposing that we are talking about the part of the fingernail beyond the "quick").

Secondly, the removal must also have a good effect, and cannot be done capriciously, because it is going to deprive you of the ability to act.

Thirdly, the *inability to act* must not be what brings about the good effect. This needs discussion, but let me table it for the moment.

Fourthly, you must not *want to be unable to do the act* you are depriving yourself of the ability to perform. It is one thing not particularly to want to do the *act* in question; it is another thing to *want to be unable* to do it. If you want not to be able to do what you are able to do as human, you want a contradiction. This will form part of the discussion we are tabling.

Finally, the act that deprives you of the organ can be done *only if not doing it is at least as damaging* as the damage done by the inability to act. In the case of removing the gangrenous hand, this rule is obviously fulfilled. In the case of removing tonsils that seem to become infected rather often, it isn't necessarily obvious that the damage prevented is greater than the damage incurred. I am inclined to think that the purely routine removal of the male foreskin (which does have a function, albeit not much of a one) is not morally justifiable. To do it on the grounds that the person might not keep himself clean is invidious; who are you to predict his future habits of hygiene? You might just as well remove the external ears for the same reason.

Note that the organ in question *can be a perfectly healthy organ* at the moment, but one which *might* go bad later in circumstances where it couldn't be taken care of and would kill you—such as

removing a healthy appendix from an astronaut who was going to be spending several months on a trip to Mars, on the grounds that it might become infected and kill him while on the trip.

Traditional moralists would be apt to say that it would be immoral to choose to do this, because the removal of any healthy part of the body is of itself immoral; you can only remove a part of the body which is diseased or malfunctioning. But this is not the case, or we couldn't shave our faces or pull out unwanted hairs. No, it isn't the act of removing a part of the body that is the problem, but the effect of it.

If you can do this for your own sake, you can also do it for someone else's:

Conclusion 3b: Parts of the body may be removed and donated to others when the Double Effect applies.

If you have two healthy kidneys, you can have one of them removed and transplanted in another person whose kidneys are malfunctioning, either to save him from death or to keep him off dialysis machines for the rest of his life and restore him to health. We only need one kidney to live a normal life; the other is a backup; and so the damage done to yourself is (apart from the operation) not great, and can easily, in general, be balanced against the damage to the other person if the organ transfer is not made.

But I hasten to reiterate here an application of Conclusion 30 of the preceding section:

Conclusion 3c: No one ever has a moral obligation to donate an organ to another person, even if the other person will die without it.

The reason, as I said in the preceding chapter, is that you have an obligation not to harm yourself, and you don't have an obligation in these circumstances to take positive steps to alleviate the damage to someone else. That is, you don't have to *inflict* damage on yourself (even if slight) in order to *prevent* (something else from inflicting) damage to someone else (even if great).

But now let us return to the discussion I tabled above, because it has serious repercussions dealing with things like *sterilization*. Let us say you want remove or damage the sex organ (by "tying the tubes") so that the ovum cannot get into a position to be fertilized, or that the sperm cannot get out of the testes to fertilize any ovum, because if the woman in question gets pregnant, her condition is such that she will die from it. Can you do this?

First, the act is in itself all right, as I said. Second, there is a good effect; her life is preserved. But third, *how* is the life preserved? By her *not getting pregnant*. That is, it is *precisely because she is sterile* that her life is out of danger; and you can see this, because if the operation was not successful, or if an ovum that happened to be in the fallopian tube was left there and it was fertilized by the next act of sex, she would get pregnant and die. So unless she is *unable* to conceive a child, she will not achieve the good effect to be achieved by this act.

And as far as the fourth rule is concerned, she would have to *want* to be sterile, or in other words want to be a person-who-can-conceive-a-child-who-cannot-conceive-a-child. She can't avoid the fact that she is a person who can conceive a child (because of the unifying energy she has); hence she cannot morally want to be something other than this.

Of course, the same applies if it is her husband who is sterilized for this reason. It is the fact that he is now a person-who-can-impregnate-who-cannot-impregnate that allows him to have sex with her without in effect killing her. But no man can

morally choose to be such a person.

What! Are you condemning the poor woman to *death?* What *are* you, Blair, some kind of monster? No. I'm saying that sterilization is not morally any different from blinding yourself; the fact that you have a good and noble *purpose* for it does not mean that the end justifies the means.

Conclusion 3d: Sterilization, in which the inability to become pregnant (or the inability to impregnate) is the means toward the desired goal, is immoral no matter what the goal is.

This would apply, also to any analogous function, such as removing part of the intestine so that only some of the food taken in could be digested so that the person could keep from being dangerously overweight. In that case it is precisely the impairment of the ability to digest which achieves the good effect. The case of inserting a balloon into the stomach to give a full feeling so that the person *eats* less is different; there, the *ability* is not impaired; it is just that less food now gets into the system to be digested.

In actual practice, of course, sterilization is not the only means of avoiding getting pregnant. There is one infallible means, that is a hundred per cent sure and doesn't even involve the remote possibility that there might be sperm left in the duct or an ovum somewhere to be fertilized: refrain from sex.

But that's impossible! It's inhuman! Nonsense. You refrain from sex ninety-nine per cent of the time anyway; you certainly refrain from it in public. (I hope. Who knows what things have got to by the time you read this? As I write it, women reporters are indignant when coaches don't let them in to the locker room after a football game so that they can interview the naked players.) There is no law of your nature that says you *have* to have sex.

Further, since women have such a thing as menopause, this refraining from sex is not for a couple's whole life; and if it is a matter of life or death, then *this* would allow the Double Effect to apply in this case: First, the act of not having sex at any given moment is obviously not wrong. Second, it has a good effect: the woman's life is out of danger. Third, it isn't the deprivation of the pleasure that produces the good effect, because sometimes that pleasure isn't there even when you perform the act, or if you knew that at the moment it was not possible for the woman to get pregnant (it was the wrong time of the month), then the pleasure could still occur and the good effect also occur. Fourth, you don't want to deprive yourself or your spouse of the pleasure; and fifth, the damage of deprivation of this pleasure is not greater than dying. It's hard; but don't say that "there's no alternative to sterilization." There is; it's just that you don't want to consider it.

Now of course, it is possible, if the organ in question is diseased, to remove it to get rid of the disease; and if this results in sterility, one need not mourn over the fact that undesirable side-effects from pregnancy now cannot occur. That is, one would still *like* to be able to be sexually potent, other things being equal; but since they aren't equal, the good *effects* of this can be rejoiced in without rejoicing in the impotence itself. You just can't do this when you *bring about* the impotence in order to achieve those good effects.

I will talk about contraception later, in the section that follows.

Chapter 3

Life

But the human body is not simply a body; it is a *living* body, which (a) is not dominated by its quantity, and (b) controls itself, as we saw in Chapter 1 of Section 1 of the third part. We also saw in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of that part that life of itself that, as equilibrium, its tendency is to continue indefinitely, and in human beings survives death. Let us discuss the implications of this point first.

The metaphysical implication is that, though we can die, we cannot go out of existence, and also that the existence we have as disembodied spirits after death is not natural to us. It follows from this that

Conclusion 4: It is immoral for any person ever to choose his own death.

Death is, as I said in Chapter 7 of Section 4 of the first part, contrary to the nature of an embodied spirit, because the spirit and its energy-"dimension" are one and the same act, and for the spirit to go on existing without its own energy-"dimension" is for it to exist without an essential aspect of itself; it is possible, but unnatural—and of course this is why our instinct resists death.

Hence, our control over our lives does not extend to ending

them. Obviously, if we commit suicide with the idea that we are going to stop existing, we don't know what the facts are, and we are in for a surprise. Also, if we commit suicide with the idea that this embodied life is intolerable and without bodies we will be in a better or more fulfilled state, we are also in error, because death is a loss of ability to act, not a gain—not to mention that the frustration connected with choosing loss to gain by it will be with us forever. Suicide could be a rational option if this life were all there is; but in the real world, it never works.

But since this is so, if we add Conclusion 29 of the preceding section to this, we can say the following:

Conclusion 4a: It is immoral in general to choose an act which reason says might result in your death.

When you choose an act which might bring about a given effect, then in general you choose the effect along with it. Note here, however, that you have to have some *evidence* that it *might in fact happen to you*, not simply the knowledge that it *can* happen, or the *fear* that it might happen.

What is the difference between evidence that it might happen and evidence that it can happen? People who play the lottery have evidence (because they have the ticket) that they *can* win; but the chances are millions to one *against* the fact that they *will* win; and so if anything, the evidence is that they won't.

But if you're going to *do* something that can cause your death, it isn't enough that the odds are better than fifty-fifty that you won't die. I gave the example in the last section of the fact that it would be immoral to play Russian roulette, even though there are five chances out of six that you will survive; because a one-in-six chance makes it reasonable to say that it *might* happen as well as that it *can* happen.

It probably won't happen, but it might actually happen.

It is, of course, the person's own conscience which determines when the odds against death's occurring are so great that the fact that death can happen becomes only a theoretical possibility, not something which might in practice occur. Nevertheless, since there are people who can't make reasonable distinctions here because they worry too much (just as those who play the lottery and shell out their hard-earned cash for a ticket can't be said to be reasonable in their belief that they just might win), we can say that, just as I said in Chapter 3 of Section 7 of the fourth part, there are "community standards" for damage, so we can adopt here a kind of "community standard" for danger.

Conclusion 4b: If the community at large, or unbiased experts in the field, regard a certain act as dangerous to your life, then absent evidence that your case is special, this is evidence that doing the act might in fact result in your death.

For instance, not everyone who goes over Niagara Falls in a barrel has died from it; but "everyone" regards this sort of thing as risky to the point of foolhardiness. But more important are these: (1) Experts in the health-care field have determined that *smoking* more than a pack of cigarettes a day poses a significant risk of dying from one of various diseases; and therefore, *it is immoral to choose to smoke* if you know this. (2) Experts have also determined that the equivalent of two drinks impairs your ability to drive, and that half of the traffic fatalities last year involved someone who had been drinking; and therefore driving after drinking this quantity is a significant risk of killing yourself and others; and from this it follows that *it is immoral to choose to drink knowing that you will be driving afterwards.* (3) Using other types of drugs poses risks similar to those of smoking

and alcohol; and therefore *it is immoral to choose to use these dangerous drugs.*

Yes, these are *moral* issues, not just "health care" or "social" ones. There is *reason to believe* that if you do these things (to the degree indicated by the official warnings) it is not simply the case that death *can* happen to you, but it *might in fact* happen; and so it is immoral to choose them.

This, of course, supposes that you are not already addicted to them in such a way that you can't stop; in cases like that, the Double Effect applies. And so let us now add this to what has been said so far.

Conclusion 4c: A person can choose an act which reason says might or even will cause his death when the Double Effect applies.

Once again all five rules have to be fulfilled: the act itself must not have anything wrong with it except the danger of the death as its effect; there has to be a good effect that you also foresee; the actual harm or death cannot be what *brings about* the good effect; you must not want to die; and the damage avoided by choosing the act must be at least as great as the damage incurred.

Obviously, in the case where reason says that, barring some miracle, you *will* die, the fifth rule is fulfilled only if, (a) in your own case, what you avoid by dying is something you consider at least as bad as death, but (b) in the case where the good effect is avoidance of harm to someone else, only if one or more lives are *saved* because of it. We saw this in the discussion of this rule in the preceding section, where we gave the example of a person's falling on a hand grenade to block the blast from his companions.

But a person in the kind of prison camp Alexsandr Solzhenitsyn

talks about in *The Gulag Archipelago* would not be being immoral if, as Solzhenitsyn says somewhere, he tried to run away knowing that he would be shot and would die. It would be reasonable to say that a given person could regard the kind of life in those camps as something worse than death, and therefore could choose to get out of it, even if the act of getting out involved the certainty of his death. The *act* of running in itself is all right; there is a good effect: the life in prison is escaped; the *death* is not really the means to the escape from life in prison (because if the guards missed, the good effect would be achieved); you don't want to die, but to escape this kind of life, and, as I said, the alternative of staying is worse than death. You can't *shoot yourself* to escape the life worse than death; you can only run the risk if the death is independent of the effect you want to achieve.

In cases where you *might* die, since there are chances that you might in fact survive, then the damage of the *risk* is to be balanced against the damage incurred in not taking the risk. For instance, it would in general not be immoral to choose to treat sick people even if the disease were infectious and could be fatal; the greater the hope of cure of the sick person, the greater the risk that can be run. Even if there is no cure, running a significant risk to avoid having the patient spend his last days in isolated agony can, depending on a person's conscience, be moral.

However, the risk cannot be undertaken if the *death* that might result is the *means* toward the alleviation of suffering or even death. I am thinking of examples like that of those who discovered the cause of malaria by injecting various components of the secretion of mosquitoes into them, on the grounds that the one who caught the disease would indicate which component caused it, and then a cure could be developed. But in this case it is the *actual catching of the disease* with its risk of death that brought about the good effect. For instance, if none of them had caught it, then they would be no wiser

and the cure could not have been found; hence the good effect depended on the wrong one. Sorry, but that sort of thing is morally wrong.

This is not to say that a person can't test drugs so that the community can find out their effects, even if the testing is risky. In that case, the *damage* is not what brings about the knowledge; if the drug turns out not to be damaging at all, the good effect has been achieved: you know what it does. Hence, even though there is a danger of damage, the damage itself is not a means to the good effect, as it was in the case just above.

Conclusion 4d: It is immoral for a person, except when Conclusion 4c applies, to refuse what sustains life.

This should be obvious. To refuse to do what everyone needs to do in order to stay live (breathe, eat, drink, etc.) is in effect to choose your death.

How much must you do these things? Enough so that you don't run a significant risk of death.

But there is a variation of this which needs discussion:

Conclusion 4e: If a person is dying, he may refuse to take steps to postpone the death, though he cannot in general refuse what sustains life.

Obviously, there's a distinction here that must be made clear between what "postpones death" and what "sustains life."

What *sustains life* is what everyone always needs in order to stay alive, such as air, food, and water.

What *postpones death* is what is needed to keep a person alive only if he is in the process of dying.

This whole issue has been confused by moralists up to the present, when they talk of "ordinary means" and "extraordinary means" of keeping a person alive, because it sounds as if technological complexity is the issue, when this is not the case at all. Death-postponement may be as simple as taking a pill, while life-sustenance may be technologically complicated, as in feeding a person directly into his stomach if he can't swallow.

First of all, since, as I said, to refuse life-sustaining means is to choose your death, then even if you are dying, you cannot refuse life-sustaining measures like food and water to accelerate the process unless what was said in Conclusion 4c above applies.

Secondly, what does it mean to say that you "are dying"? Aren't we always dying by degrees? No. As I said in Chapter 2 of Section 1 of the third part, the living body tends toward and then tends to maintain its biological equilibrium, and the tendency downwards toward ground-state equilibrium that happens all through life is due to the physico-chemical nature of the body which is *counteracted* by the unifying energy. A person is dying when something happens to the body that the unifying energy can't cope with, and the maintenance of the super-high biological equilibrium can't be sustained any longer, and there is an *actual process toward death*. The losing of energy which is replaced (which happens even in one's prime) is not a *process*.

In this case, the application of the Double Effect is a little different from what was said in Conclusion 4c. The reason is that the death-postponing measures *give no reasonable hope for a* ***cure***, but simply put off—even indefinitely—the moment when death will occur. Hence, the death is inevitable, no matter what you do; so

your action does not have the effect of *avoiding death,* but merely postponing it.

Therefore, the good effect is *what kind of life you will be living between now and the time you will die*. It is foregoing *this* that you are now comparing with not foregoing it. Note that *it is only in this case that the "quality of life" can be taken into consideration*. In the case, for instance, of refusing food, you would be in effect *killing* yourself, and therefore, in that case, it is the *death* that has to be kept out of the choice according to what was said in Conclusion 4c. But in the case of simply postponing inevitable death, the actual death is not the issue; it is going to occur in any case, and is not "brought about" by not using the death-postponing means, but merely brought *closer*. There is a subtle distinction here, but it is very significant.

Hence, let us look at the rules. First, the act of not using the machine (or taking the pill, or whatever) is all right in itself; if you were healthy, there would be no problem. Second, there is a good effect: the pain and the trouble and expense of others is lessened by not lengthening the time until you die. Third, the damage involved in not living longer is not the means toward the good effect; if you suddenly got cured, the good effect of not taking the death-postponing means would have been achieved without any bad effect at all. Fourth, you don't want to shorten your *life,* you want to avoid the agony connected with living longer *in this way*. And finally, giving up the kind of life you would be living in the interim can be, depending on what that life is, much less than what is given up by dying later. If all you've got to look forward to is three more weeks of pain, why bother, if you save yourself pain and your loved ones from pain and expense? The point is that this is legitimate in this case, because you're not killing yourself to avoid the extra three weeks.

A variation of this occurs with the elderly who, if not dying, are near the time when they could be expected to die. An elderly person

may continue doing things like smoking which put his life at risk, balancing off the discomfort of trying to kick the habit against the fewer number of years he might have if he continued smoking and actually got lung cancer from it. The closer he is to the time when he would normally be expected to die, the fewer steps he has to take to avoid risks of death. This is not, of course, to say that he *shouldn't* try to preserve his life as long as possible; obviously, this would be consistent with the nature of life. It merely says that he doesn't *have* to, and since he is near death anyway, he is not really in effect choosing *death* if he continues to smoke heavily, for the same reason that a dying person is not choosing death if he foregoes death-postponing treatment.

Note here that this *only deals with what you can do with your own life*. If you are making the decision for someone *else* who is, say, unconscious, then the question of *rights* comes into play, and we will discuss that in the first section of the next part.

But not only does a living body tend to stay alive, it tends to maintain its biological equilibrium, which amounts to saying that it tends to preserve itself at a level where it can do all that is in its genetic potential to do. I discussed the human genetic potential when I dealt with essential acts and necessities in Chapter 3 of Section 7 of the fourth part. Let me here make another definition:

A living being is *healthy* if it can do all that is in its genetic potential to do.

A living being is *unhealthy* if something within it prevents it from doing what it is genetically capable of doing.

Because of the activity of maintaining biological equilibrium on the part of the unifying energy, the natural condition of a living

being is that of being healthy. "Being healthy" is not, as I said also dealing with kinds of values in Chapter 4 of Section 7 of the fourth part, the same as "being fit," where you can do these acts *with ease*. Health as opposed to being unhealthy simply means that there is no significant difficulty in doing the acts.

It follows from this that

Conclusion 5: It is immoral to choose to harm your health.

Hence, putting your health in danger is analogous to putting your life in danger, except that it is less serious, and, depending on what acts are made difficult and the degree of difficulty, the harm you are avoiding by doing what puts your health at risk need not be as serious as the harm you have to avoid in order to run the risk of dying.

Conclusion 5a: A person can do what has or might have the effect of harming his health if the Double Effect applies.

For instance, a person with respiratory problems could probably alleviate them if he lived in Arizona, and is certainly doing harm to his health by living in Cincinnati. But moving from Cincinnati to Arizona means giving up his home, his friends, and his job; and this disadvantage can outweigh the disadvantage to his breathing if he doesn't move.

There are practices like certain types of sexual activity that also have serious health hazards associated with them. By practicing what is called "safe sex" you can reduce the hazards, just as you can reduce the danger to your health from smoking by smoking filtered cigarettes. But I hear plenty of people saying that smoking filtered cigarettes is a delusion; what you have to do is quit if you care about

your life or health. I do not hear voices saying that same thing about these sexual acts, which, by the way, are morally wrong on other grounds as well, as we will see shortly.

It is also obvious that, analogously to starving yourself to death by not eating, refraining from certain acts can also harm your health; hence, there are certain things you must positively do to avoid harming your health.

Conclusion 5b: A person must morally do what is necessary to maintain his health.

Again, by "maintaining your health" here, I do not mean "being in the best shape you can be in," but merely that you must do enough exercise, eat enough of a balanced diet, and so on that you don't *impair* your body's ability to do what it is genetically capable of doing. If you happen to be overweight, for instance, but not so overweight that it is a great effort to do what you need or want to do, then you can use the Double Effect and balance off the inconvenience of dieting against the inconvenience of not being able to do your acts as easily as you could if you were at your ideal weight.[27] The same goes for exercise. If you're not going to be doing any running or pitching of bales of hay, then there isn't any moral obligation to do aerobics or weight lifting; but if you get to be so much of a couch potato that your heart is in danger, you have to have a good reason for not starting some kind of exercise program.

[27]One should beware of delusions about this. Many is the seriously obese person who thinks he is "just a little overweight" and does nothing about a lifestyle that is dangerously damaging to him.

Chapter 4

Faculties and acts

One of the definitions of life in Chapter 7 of Section 1 of the third part is that it is existence as in control of itself; and in that part I also said that the living body exercises this control over itself by means of *faculties:* parts organized in such a way that they have special instabilities when energy from within or without is introduced into them, and perform special acts as they recover equilibrium. The fact that internal energy can set up the instability is what lets the body turn its acts on and off, by distributing the available energy present because of its super-high equilibrium.

Since the faculty allows the whole body either to act or not act, it follows that

Conclusion 6: It is not morally wrong *not* to exercise a given faculty, even *never* to exercise it, unless the *effect* of refraining is some damage to the person.

That is, it is perfectly consistent with the nature of a faculty never to perform the acts it allows you to perform, because its function is precisely to give the person *control* over whether he acts or not. True, you are not being all that you can be; but there is no moral obligation to develop ourselves to the full, or our "freedom" would be freedom in name only. In that case, we would be determined by

our talents, really (because we would have to develop all that we were genetically given), and would be "free" only to rebel and suffer eternally from it; and so we would have no room to morally exercise our freedom at all. To be free to do something and to be forbidden under pain of eternal frustration to do is is not to be free in practice.

Thus, the Parable of the Talents Jesus gave cannot, as I said in Chapter 4 of Section 4 of the third part, be taken to mean what we mean nowadays by "talents." As I said there, it has to mean the gift of the Good News that we were given, not our innate abilities. If that were not so, his advice to "make yourself a eunuch" for the Kingdom (i.e. remain celibate—clearly, he could not be counseling mutilation) would contradict his advice in this Parable.

So even though you have a sexual faculty, there is no moral necessity ever to exercise it if you don't want to; and you are *not* being "unnatural" if you refuse to do so, because your *nature* is precisely the *power to have sex or not as you see fit*. You don't even need to apply the Double Effect here, since there is no wrong to keep out of the choice; the incompleteness of your reality in relation to what it could be is no more wrong than never taking a course in economics or—horror of horrors!—philosophy.

This is not to say that it is objectively better to be celibate. Not even St. Paul says that when he says in *First Corinthians* that if you don't marry you "do a better thing" than the "good thing" you do if you marry; because he's talking about its being better *in the context* of not being distracted in the work of the Kingdom; and he is quite clear that he leaves everything up to the person's own conscience. Besides, there is, as I have said so often, no objective "good" and "better": these depend on your goals; and if your goal doesn't involve sex, that's fine.

I am stressing this because our age, not believing in God any more, has done what every age that doesn't believe in God has done: made sex God. The idea of foregoing sex entirely has, for a person

with this mentality, something blasphemous about it—or even is unthinkable, the way desecration of the Host (the Communion wafer) would have been for a medieval monk. *Any* restriction on "sexual freedom" is now what is regarded as the "perversion," not the bizarre forms of sexual expression that are now "alternative life styles." The great tragedy of life nowadays is loss of interest in sex; it is regarded as one of our most serious "mental health problems," and "caring" people wring their hands at how widespread it is—and, of course want the government to spend money doing something about it. Even the nurse who was administering the anti-depressant medicine I once tested was very concerned with the level of my interest in sex, and was quite disturbed by the fact that it declined evidently due to the medicine.

So if your culture when you read this has the same attitude, don't be misled. There is nothing wrong with exercising the faculty; but there is nothing wrong with not exercising it either. It just depends on what your goals are. If you find that you just can't swallow this, then sit back and *think* it out in terms of the logic of what a faculty does, and try to "raise your consciousness" above the prejudice that has been dinned into you from the time you were old enough to reach the knob on the TV.

I am saying this, because I am going to be talking about the morality of sex shortly, based on what the faculty evidently does; and I want to warn you so that you won't be blinded by the religion of the age, and turn a deaf ear because "obviously Blair is inhibited and has a sexual hangup." Whether or not that is true is irrelevant; the issue is what evidence I present and whether there is any flaw in my logic.

But before getting into sexuality, let me draw two other conclusions from the nature of a faculty:

Conclusion 6a: It is not morally wrong to use some device to

enable the faculty to perform its act better.

Nobody really has any problem with this. I am thinking about things like spectacles or contact lenses (or even lens implants) or hearing aids, or even such things as artificial hearts and so on. However "unnatural" these might be in the sense that they are technological, what they do in fact is *enable* the faculty to do its job better than it can in the condition it is in; and what the faculty is all about is the act that it can perform. Hence, even if it is perfectly healthy, it can be aided beyond even its natural powers by such things as microscopes, telescopes, or sound sensing devices, or even microphones and loudspeakers to allow the voice to carry.

The fact that what I am dealing with is basically "natural law ethics" shouldn't lead to the really silly objection a Jesuit of my acquaintance made to it that "Natural law ethics would forbid you to use an umbrella; it's unnatural to go out in the rain and not get wet."

To apply this to sexuality, there is nothing morally wrong in a man's using a syringe after sexual intercourse to move weak sperm farther up his wife's vagina to help her get pregnant, however much it seems as if this is "interfering in the natural course of things." It is "interfering" *consistently with what the act is trying to do,* and hence is morally right. The same, of course, applies to delivering a baby by Caesarean section instead of through the birth canal (using the Double Effect here, since the operation poses dangers); but of course this raises no eyebrows, because it's fairly common and has been accepted for centuries.

The following is also true:

Conclusion 6b: It is not morally wrong to suppress the functioning of a faculty when this is the same as not exercising it at

all.

That is, if you don't want to see, you can cover your eyes to make sure that you don't inadvertently open them; you can cover your ears in order not to hear.

This is not the same as removing or damaging the organ itself, since you still have the *ability* to do the act at will, in the meaningful sense of the term. You can take your hands from in front of your eyes (or remove the tape) if you want to, and take your fingers or ear plugs out of your ears. Hence, you still have the *ability* to perform the act. So just as you can *aid* the functioning of a faculty by technological means, you can *suppress* its function by technological means when you don't want to perform the act.

For instance, there is nothing morally wrong in itself in taking aspirin to kill a headache, just because you don't want to feel the pain. The only thing that might be morally relevant here is that the pain normally tells you that something is wrong with the way your body is functioning at the moment, and it might be wrong to ignore this, because you might by ignoring it be harming your health. But if you know why you have a headache, then the pain isn't doing anything useful to you, and so it's perfectly moral to get rid of it. In fact, if you deliberately chose to keep feeling it when you could suppress it, it is possible that you could be training yourself to enjoy something that warns you of danger, which could cause a good deal of trouble. Don't laugh; what else is "cultivating a taste for alcohol" except this very thing? The same goes for suppressing by medication things like depression (as I was doing when I wrote the first version of this). Even if the depression is realistic, if there's nothing you can do about the facts that are causing you sorrow, then still to feel the sorrow when you don't have to is counterproductive.

I don't want to be misunderstood; I am not saying that it is morally necessarily to suppress pain or negative emotions when they

serve no particular purpose, because after all they are the functioning of our nature, and so how could their doing their thing be contrary to nature? But on the other hand, there is nothing wrong with suppressing them either, natural though they be.

Because we do a lot of this sort of thing with pills, those who don't think things through believe that the contraceptive pill fits into this category; but it doesn't, precisely because you are *exercising* the faculty whose function you are suppressing. But how can you do that? Because the faculty has more than one function. Let me give the general rule, and take some other instances than sex to make the principle clearer in its illustration; and then I will apply it to sex. But first, I should say this:

Conclusion 6c: It is not morally wrong to use a part of the body for some other function than the act of the faculty it contains, provided the faculty is not damaged and its proper function is not suppressed.

What I am thinking of here is using your ears and nose to hold up your glasses, or walking on your hands. Obviously the former use of the two organs has nothing to do with hearing or smelling, and in the latter case, the hands were not really built for walking on, but for holding things and so on.

But you aren't damaging the ability of your ears to hear or the ability of your nose to smell, or the ability of your hands to hold things; and so there's no problem on that score. In the former case, in fact, you can use your nose and ears for their functions as sense organs at the same time you are using them for their ability to hold up your glasses. In the latter case, your hands can't be holding things while you are walking on them, but you are not using your hands at the moment *as a faculty of grasping,* and so you are simply *not*

exercising the *faculty* at all, not suppressing its function in the use of the organ.

Why do I split hairs this way? Because of the following conclusion:

Conclusion 6d: It is morally wrong to suppress *one* of the functions of a *multi-function* faculty so that it can be *exercised* for one of its other functions.

In this case, the *faculty* allows you to act or not act in certain ways; but if the faculty *does several things simultaneously* when it regains equilibrium from its instability, then this is what it does; and to suppress one of them is to pretend that it only does *part* of what it does when it acts.

This is different from what was said in Conclusion 6c, because there, as in walking on your hands, you are using the *organ which* is a faculty but not *as* that faculty; you are not interested in having the power to grasp do what it does and simultaneously do only part of what it does, as if it did less than what it does as a faculty. You are simply not exercising the *power to grasp* in using the organ in this way.

So it is one thing not to exercise the faculty at all; and this is what the nature of a faculty is: to allow you to turn its act on and off. And, as I said in Conclusion 6c, there is nothing wrong therefore with forcibly shutting it off, as long as you don't damage the faculty itself. But when you *make it act* and then forcibly shut off *part* of what it does *in the very exercise of the faculty,* you are forcing it to be *different* from what its nature is—or you are pretending that it is a faculty to do only some of what it is in fact a faculty to do; and this is fundamentally a dishonest practice, and by definition is morally wrong.

The act of what is now called the "eating disorder" of *bulimia*

and used to be called the vice of gluttony is a case in point. The bulimic person eats and then throws up so that the food won't be digested and he can remain thin. It is considered nowadays a psychological disorder, because it is assumed that no rational person would do it, because it is "obviously" a perverted way of eating (though of course psychologists don't put it in those terms). And of course, since it clearly *is* a perversion of eating, and everyone knows it, it's not surprising to find that those who do it are pretty much out of control—and so they do have psychological disorders.

But it's instructive that the *reason* why everyone thinks it's "sick" to eat and then throw up is that doing this implies that eating is *just* for the taste, when it's obvious that taking food into your stomach involves nutrition as well; and the fact that there's a damaging *effect* from eating more than your body needs to maintain biological equilibrium doesn't justify taking a *means* that pretends that the act of eating doesn't have anything to do with nourishing the body.

There is, however, this other side to the coin:

Conclusion 6e: It is not morally wrong to exercise a faculty in circumstances when not all of its functions are operative, as long as the non-operating function is not *actively suppressed*.

In the case of eating, there is nothing morally wrong in eating something that tastes good and has no food value at all, and simply passes through your body. The nutritive faculty then *by its own nature* can't provide energy or parts to the body, because there isn't any to provide.

Essentially, eating non-nourishing "food" is the same as running on a treadmill or running around a track just for the exercise. Clearly if you run on a track or come back to where you started again and again, you are not fulfilling *one* of the functions of running, which is

to get you from Point A to Point B. But what you are doing (a) does not suppress part of the act of running (the way throwing up suppresses part of the act of ingestion of food), and (b) is not *contradictory* to what your legs do when they run.

There is an added aspect to this in the case of eating, which I suppose can be made a sub-conclusion here.

Conclusion 6e1: It is not morally wrong to *remove* from otherwise nourishing food the food-value and then eat it for the taste.

The reason why this is not morally wrong is that the food (or what is ingested) is clearly not a faculty of the body which exists for a certain function. The food is, or was, a living body in its own right (or in the case of salt, an inanimate one), and was not "made for" our nourishment. Even the fundamentalists would have to admit that God *gave* the other creatures to the man for his use, which indicates that he didn't make them specifically *for* his use. But let's face it; living things are in equilibrium, and even if they *can be used* by human beings, they are ends in themselves; otherwise mosquitoes who do not sting humans have failed to achieve the purpose of their existence.

But since the food is just something that *can* be eaten, then if you eat something non-nourishing that can be eaten without doing *harm* to your body, this is *not inconsistent* with eating, even though it doesn't fulfill the nutritive function of eating, as I said above. But the point here is that there is nothing wrong, say, with cooking things which were alive and altering their chemical composition and then eating them. If doing something like this takes the nutritional value out of them, then they simply get transformed into something that can be eaten without harm, that tastes good, and doesn't have any

food value. So there's no problem with eating them now that they're in that state, any more than there's any problem with eating what was in that state to begin with. You haven't "suppressed the foodness of the food" because it wasn't by nature "food" in the first place; it was just something which happened to be edible.

There is also this conclusion which we can make before we get into the application to sexuality:

Conclusion 6f: One need not morally have as a goal *any* of the functions of the faculty in exercising the faculty.

For instance, there is nothing morally wrong with eating something that doesn't taste good to you (even that tastes bad), and that isn't nourishing, just to please your daughter who was making her first venture into cooking. You don't have as a goal the enjoyment of the sensations of eating, nor do you have as a goal getting any nourishment from it; your *sole* purpose in this act of eating is to see your daughter happy. No problem. You haven't done anything *in*consistent with the act of eating, and the act *can* be used to give pleasure to another who is watching you eat; and so you use it for some purpose it doesn't by nature have, but which it can have by accident of circumstance. This is consistent.

But why is eating something that tastes *bad* not contrary to the sensation of taste? Because "good" and "bad" are not objective properties; from which, as I said in Chapter 7 of Section 5 of the first part and repeated in Chapter 4 of Section 2 of the third part, what is a "pleasure" or a pleasant sensation, and what is a "pain," depend on our assessment of whether it is or is not consistent with our subjectively established view of the way things "ought" to be. A sensation like a taste is simply a sensation; the label "pleasant" or "unpleasant" is added to it by our evaluative judgment.

Of course, sensations that are spontaneously regarded as unpleasant are our built-in warning that what is perceived is dangerous to the organism (or would be, if it was in its primitive condition), and we have to take into account whether the sensation reports anything *in fact* damaging to the organism before we can choose to experience it, running the risk of damage. But when this is not the case, as in eating caviar or fried ants, then there is nothing wrong with eating the food and experiencing the taste simply as a taste.

Similarly, you can eat just to keep someone else who is eating company, whether or not the food is in fact nourishing, and/or tastes good. But in this case, you wouldn't be eating it because you're hungry (and so you don't need it), or are particularly interested in experiencing the taste. Your purpose has nothing to do with the function of the act as such; but as long as it's not going to make you sick or is going to add to a weight problem you have, this is perfectly moral.

One of the reasons this has not been brought into ethics books until recently is that what I call the "function" of the faculty (the act it produces when it is put into instability) has traditionally been called the "purpose" of the faculty. But calling the acts of multiple-function faculties "purposes" would naturally lead the Scholastics, who were so fond of classifying and arranging things, into thinking of hierarchies of purposes, so that one purpose was the main or "real" purpose, and the others were subordinate to it. For instance, the taste of food, as obviously a natural *incentive* to eat, was looked on as the "secondary purpose" of eating, and nutrition was the "primary" or "real" purpose, with the taste being a kind of means toward it, or subordinate to it.

Hence, as I said in discussing the kinds of values in Chapter 4 of Section 7 of the fourth part, it would on this showing appear as a kind of perversion of the purposes of eating if you ate *for the sake of*

the taste rather than for the nourishment. But as I pointed out there, since an "incentive" is precisely something *which is intended to be a motivator* for what it is an incentive for, then the taste is *by nature intended as a motive* for eating—or is *the purpose we would naturally have* in eating, as far as our consciousness went; while the nutrition was the thing that nature slipped in unbeknownst to us. Hence, if taste is an incentive to eat, it is perfectly consistent with the nature of the faculty to make the taste your primary motive rather than the nutrition. In fact, since the sensation of taste is immaterial (and therefore basically spiritual) and the nutritive act has no spiritual "dimension" to it at all, then you could argue just as cogently that it would be a "perversion of the natural order of things" if you subordinated the immaterial act to the material one. Hoist with their own petard!

The medievals were a little too ready, I think, to read God's mind—understandably, since for them morality was supposed to be something basically positive, doing "the good" which was seeking God's will. So you had to figure out what God wanted you to do. And I must say, they did a darn good job of analyzing nature and its moral demands accurately, because they were consistent with the way things are, not with the logic of their initial premise.

At any rate, the fact is that eating has the *two functions* of producing a pleasant or unpleasant sensation *and* running the nutritive activity of maintaining or achieving biological equilibrium; and which of these is "primary" and which is "secondary" is morally irrelevant. You can't *directly contradict* ***either*** of them in the exercise of the act of eating; but you don't have to have as a goal either of them. As long as you don't suppress one so that you pretend that the act doesn't have this other function *in the circumstances when by its nature it does,* you can eat or drink or do anything at all for the glory of God or for any other purpose you want to name.

Now then, with all of that under our belts, we are ready to discuss

sex rationally.

Logically speaking, this should be a set of sub-conclusions under Conclusion 6; but it's going a little far, I think, to start talking about Conclusion 6g1, 6g1a, and so on; so let me label the basic conclusion about sexuality in this way:

Conclusion 7: It is morally wrong to exercise the sexual faculty in such a way that one of its functions is suppressed or contradicted in the exercise.

Sex has, in itself, three functions: (1) it produces a complex and strong sensation; (2) it involves another person; and (3) it is the kind of thing that produces a child. I hasten to point out that these are not listed in any kind of hierarchical order, because which of them is the primary function and which is secondary is (a) unanswerable,[28] and (b) makes no difference, because choosing the act for its supposed "primary" function still doesn't allow you to contradict any of the others.

But let us draw a first conclusion immediately:

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[28]I delivered a paper once on contraception, and a philosopher or Theologian from Australia wrote me a letter objecting to it on the grounds that "love" was what the act was really all about, and so considerations of love overrode the "biological effect." I wrote back saying asking where he got his *evidence* that love was even in the act at all, since the urge clearly sought *its own* gratification and in itself didn't give a hang about whether the partner felt good about the act or not; and it would be hard to argue that the ejaculation of sperm had nothing to do with reproduction. But if love means "unselfish caring about the other person as a person," it was certainly hard to find how the act *automatically* has this aspect to it. So his "obvious" primary "purpose" of sex was the one there was least empirical justification for, while the others shouted out at you.

Conclusion 7a: It is not morally wrong to have sex for some purpose which has nothing to do with any of its natural functions, as long as none of them are contradicted in the exercise of the faculty.

That is, it is perfectly moral to have sex because it's the night of your fiftieth wedding anniversary, and you think that having sex is an appropriate way to commemorate it, even though neither you nor your partner feel particularly sexy (though neither is *un*willing to do the act) and even though it's obviously impossible to conceive a child at this age.

When, years and years ago, I was doing my "pre-Cana" studies my church required as a preparation for marriage, I was told that it was morally wrong not to have sex for the purpose of "procreation," at least as a secondary motive. Even way back then, I remember, I knew there was something wrong with this, or how could elderly people marry? Perhaps, like Abraham, they shouldn't laugh when told that their act might result in a child.

But of course to say that you have to *want* children or *want* "love" in the act is to miss making the distinction that not having something as a goal is not the same as contradicting the function of the act. Hence, if you have some arrangement with your spouse that you have sex on Tuesdays no matter what, there's no moral problem in having sex just to keep to the schedule.

Secondly:

Conclusion 7b: There is nothing morally wrong in technologically suppressing the functions of sex if the intention is to make it easy not to exercise the act.

That is, if there is such a thing as an "anaphrodisiac," or

something that takes away sexual desire or even makes you temporarily incapable of sexual activity, then there's nothing morally wrong with taking it if exams are coming up and you don't want to be bothered with sexual urges. To be, as St. Paul says, "on fire" is a nuisance; and like a headache, it can be suppressed.[29]

There is a variation on this. A woman who was going into a place where she had reason to believe she might be raped could, in spite of what I am going to say about contraceptives below, take a contraceptive in order to avoid getting pregnant as a result of the rape; because the act would be performed (if it is performed) *against* her will, and so she has no intention of exercising the act without one of its functions—she has no intention of exercising it at all. Taking the pill (or using some other device) is in itself not wrong; it has a good effect (she doesn't get pregnant if she is raped); the suppression of the function of the act is not the means to the good effect (because if she isn't raped, she obviously doesn't get pregnant anyway); she doesn't want to have sex with any rapist; and the harm she would be doing to herself is minimal compared to the harm in being raped and then having to cope with the pregnancy.[30]

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[29]Paul, in that passage of *First Corinthians,* offers marriage as an antidote—which couldn't, I would think, morally be the sole motive for marrying, since marriage involves an intimate partnership with another person, who must be taken into account. By the way, "It is better to marry than to 'burn'" is sometimes taken to mean, "It is better to marry than (to sin and) go to hell"; but that isn't the sense of the Greek at all. Note that the wording also indicates that Paul is not saying that the sole reason for marrying can be not "burning."

[30]I owe this to Rev. William O'Donnell, a very traditional and orthodox expert on medical ethics, who told it to me in a private conversation as something he was tentatively exploring, concerning nuns sent into missionary fields where rape was possible. I think he is perfectly right; and have taken his ball and run with it. If I'm

By the same token, I think that a woman whose husband demands sex out of all reason, getting her pregnant when it would be irrational to have children, and who shows no consideration for either her feelings or the results of his act, but "demands his rights," is actually being raped by him. In this case, I think she is justified in taking contraceptives, supposing she remonstrates with her husband and tries and fails to make him see reason; because she is not really willing to have sex in this case, but is coerced into it—and therefore can, using the Double Effect, now take steps to prevent an undesirable side-effect of what she is forced into. That is, in these cases, I don't see how you can simultaneously be unwilling to perform the act and be choosing to perform it as if it were not what it really is.

But now what are the implications in choosing to perform the act?

Conclusion 7c: Masturbation is morally wrong.

Masturbation, doesn't *suppress* the functions of involving another person and reproduction, in the sense that it doesn't do anything to prevent them (because there's no one else there, and so reproduction also can't occur) but is an exercise of the sex faculty in which *it makes no sense to claim that the faculty has anything to do with these other functions*. In this sense, performing the act in a way in which the other two functions *cannot* be fulfilled is in practice the same thing as suppressing the functions.

That is, the act *as performed* involves *only* the satisfaction (or release of tension) and *cannot* perform its other functions when

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being rash, then he can repudiate my too-hasty acceptance of what he was exploring; if we're both right, then he's the one who deserves the credit.

exercised in this way. Even masturbating to acquire sperm which will then be inseminated into a woman so that she can have a baby, or masturbating to acquire sperm for testing and so on, is not morally legitimate. In this case *your* goal is reproduction, say; but this is not to say that the act *as you perform it* is a reproductive sort of act. The fact, for instance, that you urinate into a bottle for testing to find out whether you are diabetic does not make the *act* of urinating an act of medical discovery; it is simply what it is: the act of eliminating waste, and what you *can* do with it afterwards doesn't give it that function. (Of course, doing this is perfectly moral. What I am saying is that this shows that the fact that you want to use the sperm to make a baby with doesn't make the act of masturbating reproductive.)

And you can see that the ejaculation of semen when men masturbate makes no sense in the context of masturbation, except as the release of built-up body fluids. But semen is not just "body fluids"; it contains gametes, or sex cells, which fertilize ova in a woman. Hence, the ejaculation of semen is *not*, in this respect, analogous to urination, which is *simply* the elimination of material the body can't use. Masturbation is a pretense that there isn't any significant difference between them, which is fundamentally dishonest.

Furthermore, it is difficult to masturbate without fantasizing about performing the sex act with another person. Sexual arousal almost always involves images of another person, and, for instance, with men, manipulating one's penis and *not* even imagining having sex with someone else would be apt not lead to arousal; and if it did, then the imagery would spontaneously appear, and could only be put out of one's mind with great difficulty; and doing so would probably destroy the arousal before orgasm.

What I am saying here is that it is next to impossible to masturbate *without imagining that you are doing something else with*

the act, and involving another person in it. This is an indication that the act is *more* than simply the sensation and the release of body fluids; and so to use it *as if* it were nothing more is to contradict what the faculty is in the very exercise of the faculty.

That is, you are simply not being honest with yourself if you think that masturbation is consistent with sex, if in the very act of masturbating you are fantasizing that the act is involving someone else.

Now of course, the sex act *does*, among other things in men at least, release body fluids, which need releasing from time to time; so that there is nothing to worry about if ejaculations occur spontaneously. The point is that you can't *choose* to perform the act in such a way that *only this can happen and nothing else*. But if it happens, you can rejoice in the relief, and you need not take steps to prevent it.

Conclusion 7c1: Mutual masturbation is morally wrong.

The reason for this is that, first of all, there isn't any essential difference between two (or more, I suppose) people's masturbating themselves in the presence of others because they enjoy the act more in others' company and in their actually masturbating each other. In the former case, the act is what it would be if you were alone and simply imagined someone watching you; and so it is contrary to both of the other functions of the faculty. That kind of thing "involves" another person only by the wildest stretch of terms (considering that the "involvement" really means the union of the two sex organs in this context).

The latter case is discussed here because it is masturbation; but it really belongs under Conclusion 7e, because the other person is involved, in a sense, and may well be deriving sexual gratification from the act; but it is obvious that this kind of sexual activity can't

have anything to do with reproduction; and so it is an exercise of the sexual faculty as if reproduction had nothing to do with it.

What is called "onanism" is a variation on this. It is having sex by the union of the two organs but removing the penis just before orgasm *precisely so that reproduction will not occur*. In this case it is even clearer that the use of the sex faculty (a) *recognizes* that the act is reproductive and (b) *prevents* it from being what it is recognized to be. Essentially, this is a case of mutual masturbation, and though more "natural" than using the hands to accomplish the task, it is no more moral.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with manipulating the sex organs and causing sexual pleasure as foreplay to the act of reproductive-type sexual intercourse. In that case, the faculty is being exercised for all of its functions; it is just that at various times in the course of the exercise one or the other is stressed; but in the whole act, none of them are excluded, as in the case of mutual masturbation.

Conclusion 7d: It is morally wrong to have sex with inanimate objects or living beings of a different species from human beings.

Sex with inanimate objects in general is the same as masturbating with a technological assist. When the inanimate object is a human corpse, of course, there is the added dimension that it is sex with an inanimate object as if it were still a human being, not to mention the implied rape of the person it used to be; because the presumption is that the living person would not have wanted his body to be sexually assaulted.

But note that the corpse *is* in itself just an inanimate object; so those who think, "What's wrong with using inanimate objects for

sexual pleasure, if you feel like it?" have no logical case against necrophilia; because the corpse clearly doesn't in fact mind.

And this is what I was talking about when I mentioned that our age has made a religion of sex. There are still some things that we shrink from, like necrophilia, and consider "sick." But our acceptance of "free sexual expression" will not allow us to say that there is anything really wrong with these things, because if we say they are wrong, logically speaking we have to say other things we have accepted are wrong. And if someone likes sex with corpses, who are you to say that it shouldn't be done just because it disgusts you? Diff'rent strokes for diff'rent folks.

Sex with inanimate objects makes, of course, a mockery both of the involvement of another person and the reproductive aspect of sex; there is no way either of them can occur in this type of sexual exercise.

Sex with other animals is analogous to rape if the animal reacts unfavorably to the act; but of course it isn't really rape, because the animal can't be *unwilling* to do the act, since it can't will at all. Similarly, if the animal seems to like it, this doesn't make the act consistent with "involving another person," because the animal isn't a person, and can't be willing to do the act. Nevertheless, I suppose it would be closer to fulfilling this function of the faculty than masturbation or sex with an animate object, even though animals by nature do not actively *tend* to have sex with anything but their own species, and in some sense would have to be trained to do the act, resisting (I would presume) at least at first.

But the real reason why sex with animals is morally wrong, of course, is that there is no way this could be construed as reproductive. The human ovum cannot be fertilized with anything but human sperm, and human sperm cannot fertilize anything but a human ovum; and so this kind of use of the sexual faculties is inconsistent with its reproductive function.

But if you hold that sex doesn't "really" have a "reproductive function" at all, then that means that training an animal to have sex with you is all right (because, sex not being reproductive, you wouldn't be going against its nature), and so, as one college student once remarked at a question on a sex survey, "What's wrong with a little bestiality?" Her answer was at least logical, based on the premise she held.

Conclusion 7e: It is morally wrong to have sex to orgasm in a human being other than in the corresponding sexual organ of the other person.

The meaning of "sex to orgasm" here means that oral sex, for instance, is legitimate as foreplay (providing one of the partners is not disgusted by it, in which case it is a form of rape) leading up to the union of the two sexual organs, where the sexual act can be reproductive.

Sexual activity in other parts of the body than the sexual organs, when this is all there is to the sexual activity (i.e., it "completes" itself outside the sexual organ of the partner), cannot be construed to be the *type* of sexual activity that is reproductive; and hence the ejaculation of semen makes no sense, because that is a reproductive act. Semen is *not* food, nor is it an enema, nor is it body lotion; and to pretend it is is dishonest. A person who has this type of sexual activity has to say that as far as his use of his sexual organs is concerned, sex has nothing to do with reproduction; but in fact it does. It doesn't always *produce* a child; but it is always *the kind of thing* that is child-productive. Sex outside the corresponding organ is not this kind of thing at all; there is no way it *could* be reproductive in this type of sexual activity.

I am perhaps beginning to hit a nerve here. It means that people

might have to give up some very pleasurable sexual activity, because it's not reproductive. But beware of the reaction, "But sex isn't *just* for having children, Blair! You have to look at the whole picture!" Look at Conclusion 7a; this is no Augustine talking. In fact, as other conclusions will say, it is perfectly all right to have sex after menopause, for instance, when you know no children can result, and it is morally wrong to rape a woman in order to have a child by her, or to inseminate a woman artificially in order to have a child. You have to look at the *whole* picture. Sex is not just reproductive; and the reproductive *type* of sexual activity (i.e. that involving the two sexual organs) isn't always *in fact* reproductive either; but sex is a reproductive *type* of activity; and what I am saying is that to use something which (among other things) is a reproductive type of activity *as if it weren't a reproductive type of activity at all* is to pretend that it isn't what it is. It isn't I who am not looking at the whole picture. Those who want to engage in oral sex or anal sex or some other type of what we still today call "kinky" sex are the ones who are shutting out part of the whole picture and pretending that the part remaining is the whole.

Note that this type of sexual expression *is* pleasurable (and so that function is fulfilled—I can't imagine why you would do it unless you liked it; but then humans, especially in sex, can do some pretty unimaginable things); and it also can be, in a sense, an expression of love, if the other person wants the act and it gives the other person pleasure.

It can't be a *true* expression of love, however, because love doesn't want just the *pleasure* of the beloved, but the beloved's *fulfillment,* and so love would be *against* doing to the beloved something that *contradicted* the beloved's reality, even if the beloved wanted it. If your beloved wanted you to chop her hand off, would you do it? And if you did, would this be an act of love just because she wanted it? How could it be wanting her fulfillment if she wanted

what was damaging to herself and you cooperated in it? Hence, if this kind of sexual expression is contradictory to what the use of the sexual organs is, it is so on both sides; and so you not only are violating yourself, sexually, you are violating your beloved—and how can this be love?

It is for reasons like this that I don't like Joseph Fletcher's "do the loving thing" type of situation ethics that I discussed in the preceding section. Acts like this are apt to be justified on the grounds that they are "loving" when all they "fulfill" is *feelings,* not the *reality* of the other person. And anyone who says that the way you feel is the way you are obviously has rotten teeth, since his "true reality" tells him to avoid the dentist at all costs.

Note that this applies to sex with the same sex *and* non-reproductive types of sex with sex with the opposite sex. But since there is no reproductive type of use of the sexual faculty with another person of the same sex, we can draw the following sub-conclusion:

Conclusion 7e1: All homosexual uses of the sexual organs are morally wrong.

The objection might be raised that a homosexual's *nature* is that he is attracted to someone of the same sex and can only receive sexual satisfaction with someone of the same sex; and so homosexual intercourse is fulfilling of his nature.

There have been attempts to show that such "natures" are actually only "second nature" and are acquired and not innate, on the grounds that God couldn't have given a person a nature that could only fulfill itself by contradicting itself. But this is both not true and irrelevant. In the first place, it is not true, because God has caused all kinds of deformed humans to exist (following the laws of the genes,

which also caused them—see Sections 4 and 5 of the first part); and certainly having two heads is not something that is "acquired" by evil acts, nor is intolerance to mother's milk so that you die if you nurse at your own mother's breast. Given the horrors one sees in the obstetric and neonatal wards of hospitals, it would be hard to establish that God "couldn't" have allowed the homosexual aberration in people from the very beginning.

In the second place, I find it very difficult to imagine a person's *deliberately choosing* to become homosexual, whatever his moral attitude toward the acts themselves, because of the enormous social pressure against it. Even in our age which values "tolerance"—especially sexual tolerance—above everything else, there are still huge numbers of people who not only despise homosexuals, but actively want them eradicated from the face of the earth. The same goes for sadists, child molesters, rapists, and others. You don't set as your goal to become a child molester or a rapist; if you become one, it is in spite of yourself, and so is as much an "act of God" as getting polio or diphtheria.

In any case, whether the person was homosexual from the beginning or got to be homosexual because of circumstances of his past life, the fact now is that *as his reality is now constituted,* he cannot (and in all probability irrevocably cannot) have meaningful sexual gratification with the opposite sex (even when he is capable of performing the act of heterosexual intercourse), and can only fulfill the emotional and sensual aspect of the faculty with a member of the same sex.

But his act of *fulfilling* this aspect of the faculty, and (we can add) the act of giving sexual satisfaction to another (a version of sexual love) *denies* the reproductive function of sex. And so one of the aspects of the sexual faculty cannot be fulfilled without denying the other. But what the moral obligation says is that you can't fulfill one aspect of yourself *at the expense* of contradicting some other aspect.

And there is no moral imperative that says that (a) the faculty must ever be exercised, or (b) that all aspects of it *must be fulfilled* in the exercise. It is only that none of them must be *contradicted* in the exercise of the faculty.

Before you react too harshly to my cruelty, consider whether you think a child-molester should ever be allowed sexual gratification, even if he had nothing to do with getting himself into the condition where he can receive sexual satisfaction only by having sex with six-year-old girls. Consider whether you think a person who can only gratify himself sexually if he rapes another should ever be allowed to fulfill himself. Consider whether a person whose nature—acquired or innate—means that, like a black widow spider, he must kill whatever he mates with to receive any gratification should ever be allowed to fulfill himself.

One may sympathize with such people, but it would be the rare normal person who (a) does not recognize this sort of thing as an *aberration* rather than a "different life style," and (b) would not say that the person involved must forego (or even, in the cases where others' rights are involved, be forced to forego) any sexual gratification or any fulfillment of the emotional side of his sexuality for his whole life long. He must not even perform *one* act of killing his sexual partner, however satisfied he might be by it, and even if no other sexual gratification is possible for him.

Now the homosexual is not quite in the same position (unless he's "into" sado-masochism), because he isn't damaging the other person in the sense of doing anything that the other is unwilling to have done, or inflicting physical harm on him. The only damage involved is that the other person also is exercising his sexual faculty in such a way that it cannot be construed to be reproductive. But still, the homosexual cannot have homosexual intercourse without having both himself and his partner exercise their sexual faculty inconsistently with one of its functions.

Conclusion 7e2: There is nothing morally wrong with a homosexual's (a) *being* a homosexual, (b) remaining celibate, (c) having heterosexual intercourse if he is capable of it, and/or (d) expressing his love for others of the same sex by other means than use of the sexual organs.

What the first alternative above says is that the *orientation itself* is not morally wrong, any more than blindness or being crippled or being paranoid is morally wrong; it is the *act* of sexual intercourse with another of the same sex that is morally wrong, because it is inconsistent with the faculty that is being exercised. Homosexual intercourse by a "straight" is of course also morally wrong; and so the wrongness is in the act, not the nature of the person. The nature is abnormal; but this has no moral overtones, any more than left-handedness, which is abnormal, has moral overtones.[31] Homosexuality is a *vice* only if the person *willingly* is in this state, in the sense that he is satisfied with his orientation and chooses to act consistently with the way he feels.

The second alternative, given the fact that the person who would consider it is in the state he is in against his will, may in practice be impossible; and then he is in the condition I described in the preceding chapter in discussing psychological disorders. But he has nothing morally to worry about if he has lapses into homosexual sex in spite of himself.

Considering the third alternative, it is not morally wrong for a homosexual to marry a person of the opposite sex, always supposing

[31]This abnormality, with its tendency to urge one to an act inconsistent with itself, is what the Catholic Church is getting at when it calls the homosexual orientation an "objective disorder." It is not in itself morally wrong, but if followed, fulfills itself in a morally wrong act.

that the other person knows of his condition and doesn't have delusions that marriage will "cure" him; and that therefore she (or of course he) is marrying someone who will never be able to relate to her sexually the way a heterosexual would, and so will not be able to give her full satisfaction either.

But it is not, as I said in Conclusion 7a, immoral to have sex when there isn't much gratification in the act, as long as it is in itself the *type* of act which is calculated to perform all of the functions of the sex faculty. It would be analogous to having sex after menopause, when no children can occur because of the sterility of one of the partners. The *type of act* is a reproductive one; it is just that no children will result from it. Similarly, for a homosexual to have heterosexual intercourse is the type of act that is consistent with all of the functions of sex, in spite of the fact that he feels the way a heterosexual feels when having homosexual intercourse. The fact that he might feel "disgusted" and "dirty" in performing the act, while he feels that homosexual intercourse is "beautiful" and "uplifting" and so on is no contradiction of the act, because these evaluative labels are tacked onto the act by the person, not inherent in it as such, as I have said so often.

As to the fourth alternative, kissing, hugging, and doing such things with a member of the same sex, this is morally legitimate to the extent that it is not likely to lead one to lose control and go on to homosexual use of the sex organs. When touching and so on become sexual foreplay is, of course, up to the conscience of both parties. But it must be remarked here that one cannot simply take into account *one's own* control, but must be aware of the degree of self-control one's partner has in drawing the limits of what can morally be done in a given case.

The point here is that just as heterosexuals can engage in a certain amount of fondling of each other without its becoming a "proximate occasion of sin," homosexuals are not barred from doing the same

thing just because they are of the same sex. There is, of course, nothing wrong with *loving* another person of the same sex; heterosexuals do this all the time, and call it "friendship," because it has no sexual overtones. Heterosexuals also fondle each other, pat each other on the back, even (in some cultures) kiss each other, without any thought of its being morally wrong. What would be wrong with homosexuals doing this is that it is likely to lead to homosexual intercourse, and so has a possible effect that it wouldn't have with heterosexuals. But of course if a person loves another, he intends the other's fulfillment; and far from being "dirty," this is the most noble attitude a person can have toward another; and there is certainly nothing wrong with expressing it.

Conclusion 7f: Rape is morally wrong.

Rape is, of course, sex with someone who is not willing to have sex, or is not willing to have sex in the way in which the person forces him to have sex.

In addition to violating the rights of the other person, this is also against the function of sex as involving another person; because, since it involves another *person,* the other's *personhood* or self determination (as described in Chapter 6 of Section 4 of the third part) must be taken into account and respected.

Legally, there is a form of rape that can occur even if the other person is willing. If the other person is a child, then even if he wants sex, the act on the part of the adult is one of "statutory rape," and is considered as rape for legal purposes, on the grounds that the child is not capable of making *informed* consent. Morally speaking, this is analogous to why homosexual sex is wrong with respect to the reproductive aspect of sex. Here, the act doesn't exactly *contradict* the willingness of the other person; but the other person is not in a condition to realize the full implications of what he is doing, and so

can't really be said to be "willing" to perform an act which can have serious repercussions he can't be expected to foresee. Just as sex with other organs than the sexual one is sex in a context in which the reproductive aspect cannot have anything to do with the act, so sex with a child is sex in a context in which the willing consent of the other person can't be said to have anything to do with the act, since it can't really occur.

There are other ways also in which rape can occur, even though they haven't until recently been recognized legally as rape. A man can rape his wife if he forces her to have sex when she actively does not want to have sex, or demands that she engage in some kind of foreplay that she finds disgusting and does not want to do.

Note, by the way, that rape is wrong *even to have a child by the woman*. I can't imagine anyone thinking that it was all right to rape someone because you wanted her to have your baby; I am just mentioning it to show that the reproductive aspect of sex does not override the other aspects of the act. And in fact even the most traditional Scholastic who holds that reproduction is the "primary purpose" of sex has never held that rape is legitimate in order to fulfill this "primary purpose." So actually my position has been in the background of Scholasticism for many centuries.

As to doing something that is felt to be disgusting, while it is wrong to force someone else to do this, there is nothing wrong with being willing to do something one finds disgusting (as long as it isn't morally wrong, of course) in order to gratify the other person. In fact, the act is that much more of an act of love in this case, since one foregoes one's own gratification for the sake of the other's greater enjoyment. A person can even be willing to make a habit of it and to try to make it enjoyable to oneself. This is, as I said, not contrary to the function of gratification, because it is attaching an evaluative label to the act.

Finally on this topic, it is not an act of rape if the other person is

not particularly eager to have sex, but is not positively unwilling to have it. There is nothing morally wrong with having sex with your partner because you want it, even if she isn't receptive at the moment, as long as she is willing to do it with you. Again, this function of the faculty need not be *fulfilled;* it is just that it must not be *contradicted*.

Conclusion 7g: Contraception is morally wrong.

I imagine you could have seen this coming from quite a while back. In fact, contraception is more obviously wrong than homosexual sex or sex with animals, because when you use a contraceptive you are doing so because you *know* that (a) the act *as you perform it is reproductive,* and so might result in a child, and (b) you want it *not to be able* to result in a child; you are precisely *suppressing* the function of reproductivity. It is the sexual analogate of eating and throwing up.

Some have argued that sex is not always reproductive, and so when you are using a contraceptive, you aren't really suppressing this aspect of it, because (a) you don't necessarily use contraceptives all the time (i.e. you want to have *some* children), and (b) you are really just lessening the chances that a child will result this time.

Now it is certainly true that the act of sex is not always reproductive, even during the fertile years of the couple. Even during the woman's fertile time of the month during these years, it is still not inevitable that a given act of sex will actually result in a child; and during infertile times of the woman's menstrual cycle, the chances are much less even to nil that a child will result from the act. Let me, before going further, draw the following conclusion:

Conclusion 7g1: It is not morally wrong to have sex when

one (or even both) of the partners is infertile.

In this case, the reproductive aspect of the use of the faculty is not *fulfilled*, but as long as the act is a reproductive *type* of act (i.e. one uniting the sexual organs of the male and female), then it is perfectly consistent with the nature of the act that no child in fact result from the act. So you don't have to be bothered trying to figure out whether your partner is fertile before deciding whether to have sex or not.

Now as to point (a) above, that you do intend to have a child or two, but just not from this act. You have, in this, recognized that your sexuality involves children; and this is something that must be recognized; and so let us draw another conclusion:

Conclusion 7g2: It is immoral to choose to have sex with a partner with the intention that no child *ever* result from the whole series of acts.

That is, it is inconsistent with the reproductive function of sexuality if you intend to have sex but want to see to it that there never is a child from your sexual activity. Here, it doesn't matter what means you use to avoid there being a child—i.e. whether you use contraceptives and suppress the reproductive function of the act in its very exercise, or whether you only have sex during infertile periods so that no children can "by nature" come about. In this latter case, each *individual* act is morally legitimate, as we just saw; but the *effect* of the whole series of acts is to deny that your sexual activity has anything to do with children. In other words, it is just accidental that your sexual activity happens to unite the male and female sex organs, because you are doing so in such a way that it might just as well be oral sex, because you are precisely seeing to it

that your sexual activity will not be reproductive.

Nevertheless, there is a variation on this: Let me lead up to it by drawing the following conclusion first:

Conclusion 7g3: A couple has a moral obligation not to have any more children than they can rear decently.

It is certainly true that, since children are human beings, they have a right to a decent chance for development toward adulthood; and this means that their parents must (a) be together, and (b) have the physical, financial, and emotional resources to be able to bring up their children in a decent way. These resources are in most cases limited; and so the children resulting from exceeding these limits would be deprived of their rights, and that is morally wrong. Hence, you can't have sex and "let God take care of the consequences." You have to have *reason to believe* that you can support the child (in all the ways children need support) before you can be willing to do something which will produce a child.

Given that, then it can be morally necessary for a couple not to have any more children; or it can be morally necessary for them to space out their children (e.g. because otherwise, they are not emotionally capable of coping with them).

But this does not mean, except in extreme cases (e.g. those in which the woman's infertile times cannot in practice be known), that the couple must forego sex until well into menopause.

Conclusion 7g4: It is morally legitimate to have sex during infertile periods to limit the *number* of children one is going to have, using the Principle of the Double Effect.

This is, of course, the famous "rhythm" or "natural family

planning," or "sympto-thermal" method of family planning. The assumption is that the couple is not choosing to have sex and have no children at all, but is simply limiting the number of children to what they can afford to bring up decently. It may be, for instance, that they already have as many children as they can afford, and morally cannot have any more.

In this case, if they have sex only during the infertile times of the woman, no further children will result, and the effect of that is that the *rest* of their sexual lives will not result in any children. But since they *have* had children (or if they intend to have some children in the future), then obviously this is not the same as saying that their sexual intercourse as a whole has nothing to do with children, because they have had or will have children. Secondly, each act they perform is in itself morally legitimate, because they are not suppressing any function of the sex faculty, because at this time the faculty does not have the function. Finally, since the problem is in the *effect* of the *series* of acts they perform, then the Double Effect can be used: The act is not wrong in itself; there is a good effect (not having a child you can't support); the bad effect is not a means to the good one (obviously, because the bad effect only occurs after all the acts are over); there is no intention of denying the reproductive nature of sexual intercourse (i.e. if they could afford a child, they would not be unwilling to have another); and the wrong avoided of having a child they couldn't bring up is greater than the wrong of having a series of sexual acts that are not completely what sex is capable of being.

Hence, it is not true that traditional morality forbids family planning; in fact, it demands it. It just forbids *contraception* as a *means* of limiting the number of children.

To return, then, to the attempt to justify contraception, point (b) under Conclusion 7g, that you are just "lessening the chances of a child's resulting," this is obviously a sophism. If the contraceptive is used and a child results anyway, the couple doesn't say, "Well, those

are the breaks," they consider the contraceptive to have *failed*. That is, the contraceptive is used to "lessen the chances" down to zero by *changing the nature of the act and making it non-reproductive while it is reproductive*.

This is not quite the same as having sex during infertile periods and having a child "by accident." Since the act *was* a reproductive type activity, the "failure" is only in the effect you hoped for, not in something's "not working properly," as in the case of the contraceptive. The distinction is quite subtle here, but it is significant. In the one case, what you did to the act didn't work, and you had a child; and so what you did to it made no sense. In the other case, the act did what it did, and resulted in something that you knew *could* happen from it, but which is going to cause you difficulties now that it did happen; but it is *consistent* with the act as you used it. But it is *not* consistent with the act as used with a contraceptive, obviously, that there be a child from it.

No, let's face it; the couple that uses contraceptives *of any form,* whether pills or diaphragms, or acupuncture, or electronic devices, or any other means that human ingenuity can devise, wants to use a reproductive act *which they know is reproductive as they use it* (because otherwise why try to suppress that function?) and so they want to use a *reproductive act unreproductively,* and that is simply dishonest. They want to *pretend,* because they can alter the outcome of the act, that it isn't what it is while it is what it is; and that sort of pretense is the essence of immorality.

I'm sorry; but this hypocrisy has been with us for quite a number of years now, and it has spawned all kinds of offspring, such as children having children, not to mention acceptance of homosexual sex, bestiality, "swinging" and partner-swapping, and a host of other social and moral ills. It has pretty effectively destroyed the family (in the name, of all things, of "family planning") by making the family irrelevant. Families are necessary for the well-being of children; but

if sex has nothing to do with children, why bother with marriage; and then the children are regarded as "mistakes" or "failures"—and woe to them if they are!

I will say more of this when I treat marriage and the family in the next part; all I am saying at the moment is in the context of the act itself and its self-consistency.

I don't want these comments about the social consequences to be construed as implying that the immorality lies in them. What I mean is that, *since* contraception represents a fundamentally unrealistic way of looking at sex in its reproductive dimension, it isn't at all surprising to find that (a) an act performed with such blindness as to what one is doing would have other consequences not taken into account, and (b) that these consequences would be blamed on anything but the attitude that caused them.

Let me give just one more example. The divorce of sex from children has been touted as beneficial for the children, because "every child should be a wanted child." The idea is supposed to be that unwanted children tend to be battered children. But then why are there so many *more* battered children now than there used to be? Precisely because people have a child because they *want* one. In the old days, when people recognized that if they had sex, they had to take the consequences, they were *willing to accept* the responsibility of a child, and were prepared to make sacrifices if necessary for him. Nowadays, since people can control whether they have a child or not, they "want" a child in the sense that they want one *for their own fulfillment*. But a child is not something you go to the showroom and pick out (though it's getting that way, isn't it) and that you can send back if it's still under warranty. Children cry and defecate and demand attention, and give no quarter; they're cute only at intervals. If you "want" a child in that sense of desiring one, you very soon discover that this one is not what you bargained for; and you either grow up very fast, or you take it out on the kid. In olden days, you

were grown up before the child arrived; at present we have cultivated the attitude that technology is going to leave us as perpetual children, never having to take the consequences of our acts.

The final topic I want to treat on this non-social aspect of sexuality also has overtones of this childishness. It is the following:

Conclusion 7h: Artificial insemination is morally wrong.

Why is this? It is a use, to be sure, of the woman's sexual organs for the sake of reproduction; but it is done in such a way that the other two functions of the faculty cannot be fulfilled. If the inseminating is done by a doctor, for instance, he certainly doesn't want to arouse the woman; it must be a purely mechanical procedure for the two of them. Hence, it is intended *not* to give sexual gratification *nor* to involve the other person who is the "partner" in this case, but *only* to reproduce, as if the woman were a test tube and an incubator, not a human being.

Even if the inseminator is the husband, he is acting as a disinterested party in this act; and it is certainly not the union of the two sexual organs. The act is "open to life," as the Papal encyclicals say; but in this case, it is not "open to love."

Even if the couple want to have each other's child because they love each other, *this act* is not a act of sexual love, in spite of the fact that it uses the sexual organ of the woman, and used the sexual organ of the man at another time to get the sperm. The *intention* is good; but the end does not justify the means.

There is also the problem in the effect of such activity that, if the sperm is not that of the husband of the woman, or he is not the inseminator, the child has two (or more) "fathers." There is the sperm donor (the biological father), the one who got the woman pregnant (the "active father," who might be the doctor), and the husband of the mother. Which one is the "real" father? There is no

answer to this question.

I don't really need to say any more on this topic, I think. If anyone has read through the rest of what I said and been reasonably convinced that it might be true, then it should be easy for him to realize that technological possibility does not automatically translate into moral rightness.

Let me just mention what I said earlier, however; technological means of *assisting* the sperm of an act of sexual intercourse to fertilize the woman's ovum is morally legitimate.

Why artificial insemination, "test-tube babies," surrogate motherhood, and all the rest of it has come to the fore just after the contraceptive mentality was established is that it is just another manifestation of the same childish attitude of wanting something without taking the nature of the act or the consequences into account.

There are women who cannot have a child by their husbands; but they "want a baby," and think that because they want one, they have a right to one. To fulfill this longing, they then get themselves inseminated *without ever considering the rights of the child they are causing to exist*. As we will see later, a child has the right to be brought up by both of his biological parents; and only by using the Double Effect can he be brought up by someone else. But that use of the Double Effect supposes he is already born; it is morally wrong to bring a child into the world in such a way that he can't be brought up by his biological parents—as when the sperm comes from a donor not the husband, or even the mother is a "surrogate," who agrees to give up her own child as if she weren't his mother at all. But this deals with rights, and I will leave further discussion of it till later. The point I am making now is that the contraceptive mentality could be *predicted* to result in the ignoring and consequent trampling upon the rights of the child; and our country now is full of children who have been thrown out with the trash, and we are wringing our hands

and wanting the government to do something about it, and reaching for any "solution" to the problem that doesn't involve giving up "reproductive freedom," which is its cause.

But since further exploration of this involves rights, marriage, and the family let us leave it till later, and let this be all about the use of the sexual faculty.

There is one final topic dealing with control over your actions:

Conclusion 8: It is morally wrong to get yourself into a situation in which you can act without being able to control your actions.

There are two variations on this, the first of which we already discussed in the preceding section dealing with emotions. Since emotions can take over control, it is immoral to choose to get into a situation in which you foresee they might in fact take over control and lead you into doing something morally wrong. I will take it that this needs nothing further said.

But it is this aspect of our nature which is violated in *getting drunk,* because if you get drunk, you either are in—or pass through—a condition in which you can act, but in which your inhibitions are lowered enough so that you cannot in practice control yourself. You are, in getting to this state, *using* your self-control to act in an uncontrolled way, which is clearly a contradiction. This also applies, of course, to *getting high* on drugs which have the same effect.

Let me say, however, that there is nothing wrong with *losing* control of yourself, as long as you can't act when in this situation; if not, it would be morally wrong to go to sleep. For the same reason there is nothing immoral about deliberately taking a sleeping pill or an anesthetic that knocked you out. In these cases, you are out of

control but inactive. Similarly, if you happen to need to be operated on when there is no medical anesthetic available, there would be nothing morally wrong with getting so drunk that you pass out and cant't feel the operation. In this context, the time you would be out of control and capable of acting would be minimal, the context in which you would be out of control and capable of acting could probably guarantee that you wouldn't do anything foolish, and certainly avoiding facing the pain would balance of whatever bad effects there would be of drinking so much.

Secondly, there is nothing wrong with drinking (or using marijuana or some other relaxant) to *lessen* your control over yourself for the sake of relaxation or conviviality or to overcome stress, as long as (a) you don't see any reason to believe that you will pass beyond this stage into the drunken stage where you can't control yourself and might do something you would normally be ashamed of doing, and (b) you aren't in any danger of becoming addicted to the stuff.

Marijuana, since (at the time I write this, at least) it is illegal, however, has the moral problem of your being a "scofflaw" if you use it. That is, using marijuana even though there is a law against it, just because it is not immoral *in itself* to use it in moderation is the equivalent of saying that the government can't morally tell you what you can't do unless the act is morally wrong—and that's simply not true, as we will see in the next part when we deal with what society is all about. Government, for the sake of the "common good," can tell people not to things that are in themselves perfectly moral, like drive on the left-hand side of the road. There's nothing morally preferable about one side of the road rather than the other; but no one really thinks that because of this, government doesn't have any right to pick one side as the legal side and the other as illegal. Hence, it is morally wrong to use marijuana in our country at the moment because it is illegal. What I was saying above is that in itself,

supposing it can be used without losing control of yourself, the only moral problem is the dangers it poses to health.

As to addictive substances, there is nothing in itself wrong with becoming habituated to something and dependent on it. We are "addicted" to food and water by our very nature; and many of us are psychologically addicted to things like brushing our teeth and taking showers and so on; we would feel really strange working out in a gym and then just dressing over our sweaty body—even though there's nothing morally wrong in doing so. Such things are what we call "habits," not "addictions"; but there isn't a really significant distinction between them, morally.

Some addictions, however, are to things that *do* do harm to a person's health, especially his mental health; and moreover are such that the person needs more and more of the drug in order to be able to function at all; and they are apt to become the be-all and end-all of one's whole existence. This is true addiction. Obviously, this situation where a single act is going to become so vital that one's whole life revolves around it, and which is harmful to one's health to boot, is something that a person must morally avoid getting into if he realizes that he is in danger of doing so.

I do not want what I am saying to be construed as an endorsement for these drugs, especially since I might be thought to be saying that marijuana in itself is harmless. As far as I can tell from the objective data (which is hard to come by, since there is propaganda on both sides), it probably is dangerous, but no more dangerous, possibly less so, than alcohol. But *alcohol is an extremely dangerous drug,* and the fact that it has been accepted for centuries doesn't make it less so.

I am simply saying that it is not *immoral* to choose to drink in moderation, or (in itself) to choose to use other drugs in moderation *as long as* you realize that the harmful effects are going to be avoided. But even here, it is very easy to delude yourself that you are

using the drugs in moderation when you aren't; and so, since the only benefit you get, really, is a feeling, by far the wiser course of action is to stay away from alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine and all the rest of them altogether; you have a tremendous amount to lose by taking them, and very little, really, to gain; and with some of them it is Russian roulette.[32]

[32]I think coffee, which contains the drug caffeine, of course (as do tea and cola drinks), deserves only a footnote, because it has very few damaging effects, and is not all that addictive. The program for the medicine I once tested advised cutting down on caffeine, and before starting it I cut out my morning double cup of strong coffee altogether. I had a headache in the morning for two days, as I remember, but nothing much else; hardly significant withdrawal symptoms.

Chapter 5

The act itself

You would think at this point that I have said all that could be said about morality without talking about our relations with others. I have mentioned the metaphysical aspect of ourselves as finite, the physical aspect of ourselves as bodies, the biological aspect of ourselves as living, and the fact that we have faculties and the control over our acts. The only thing left would be the act in itself; and how could an act contradict *itself* in its very activity? Wouldn't this always be a contradiction between the act and its faculty?

Not always, because some acts we perform don't have a faculty to perform them, precisely; there isn't some part of the body that was built by nature to perform the act, even though obviously a part of the body which *can* perform the act is used to do it.

The only example I know of of this is that of *linguistic communication*. We don't have a "faculty of speech" as such, as I implied in what I said under Conclusion 6 of Section 3 of the third part, where I was discussing why most languages consisted of sounds. We do have the ability to make complicated noises, and since adopting this as our linguistic "organ" allows us to be able to use our hands and eyes for other functions while we are talking, it is most convenient to use our vocal cords for communicating rather than our hands or some other organ. But clearly the vocal cords were not *constructed*

for this function, as the sex organ was constructed for reproduction or the eye for seeing, or animals that can't think (and so can't communicate linguistically) wouldn't have vocal cords; and they do.

So in the first place we haven't got a "faculty of speech" as such. In the second place, since this is so, I think it useful to make the following distinction:

Linguistic expression **is the representation in sensible ways of mental acts.**

Linguistic communication **is the representation to others in sensible ways of one's mental acts.**

Factual communication **is the representation to others in sensible ways of what one thinks the facts are.**

Conclusion 8a: It is not morally wrong to talk to yourself or to animals which cannot understand what you are saying.

If we had a *faculty of communication* (i.e. one built to enable transmitting to others mental acts *as* understood, as discussed in Chapter 5 of Section 3 of the third part), then talking to yourself would be analogous to masturbating, since you would be "communicating" something that obviously you already understood, and so would be communicating without communicating. Similarly, if we had a faculty of communicating, talking to your dog would be the equivalent of homosexual sex, because, though your dog can *react to* the sounds and (especially) the tone of your voice, he can't *understand the meaning* of what you are saying; and so you are using understandable symbols in a context where you know they can't be understood. If your "faculty of speech" produced understandable

symbols *as such,* then it would be contrary to its nature to use it in such a way that understanding could not occur.

This is another subtle distinction, and the fact that everyone recognizes that there's nothing morally wrong in talking to yourself or to your dog has led those who don't think clearly to assume that therefore masturbation and homosexual sex (and bestiality and all non-reproductive forms of sex) are all right. But the analogy unfortunately does not hold *in the relevant respect,* and so is worthless as an argument. Sex would be analogous to (and is, in a certain sense) a "faculty of communication," since it is reproductive and goes beyond itself into another and results in a child.

But precisely because we have no *faculty* of speech as such, there isn't anything that automatically has any function with respect to expressing or communicating mental acts linguistically. Therefore, the part of the body in question (the vocal cords, or, as is the case with me now, the fingers tapping on a keyboard) *can morally be used either for expression or communication* or, of course, simply for roaring inarticulately or drumming on the table.

And this, of course, is why it is all right to talk to yourself. You are simply *expressing* your ideas and clarifying them, without any intention of communicating them to anyone. And if you talk to your dog, you are "communicating" in the sense that the sounds of the words make the dog's instinct react in various ways by training and empathy; but you know that he can't understand, and you aren't trying to make him understand in that sense. The meaning of the words is for *your own* sake, not his, and you realize it; it's easier to command a dog to lie down by saying "Lie down!" rather than by saying "Horp!"

But this does not mean that there are no moral implications involved in linguistic expression.

Conclusion 8b: If you are expressing yourself linguistically to

someone who can understand you, it is morally wrong to *communicate* as a fact what you think is not a fact.

This, of course, is what a *lie* is, as we saw in Chapter 5 of Section 3 of the third part.

The first thing to note is that *if you are speaking in the presence of someone, the presumption is that you are* ***communicating*** *linguistically with him,* not just "talking at" him. I say "the presumption is," because it is quite possible that he might be in the vicinity and not be listening to you. This often happens at parties, where you might actually be closer to the person whose back is to you than to the one you are talking to; but you are only communicating with the one you are talking to.

The second point here is that *if* you are communicating what is going on in your mind to someone else, *it directly contradicts the* ***act*** *as communicating* to communicate something which is *not* the case as if it were the case. The hearer is going to understand what you say as if it expressed your judgment of the facts or your attitude toward something or some other mental state you have; and so your act contradicts itself if what you say communicates the opposite of that mental state.

The third point is significant enough so that it deserves being made a definition:

A linguistic expression *communicates* what could reasonably be expected to be understood from it.

The reason I say this is that we very often communicate something quite different from what the words say, depending on the tone of voice or the context. A great deal of casuistry has gone on unnecessarily in this, agonizing over the secretary's "lie" when she

says to the client, "Mr. Jones is in conference at the moment," when she knows perfectly well that he's taking a nap.

But look at the situation. When the client says, "Is Mr. Jones in?" he's obviously not interested in the physical position of Mr. Jones; it's a way of asking "May I speak to Mr. Jones now?" And this is what he communicates, because everyone understands that if the secretary said, "Yes," he would answer, "Oh, good!" and walk to the door, at which she would have to add, "But you can't talk to him," which would be an insult, and if she added "Because he's taking a nap," this would be derogatory to Mr. Jones, and isn't any of the client's business anyway.

So the client *says,* "Is Mr. Jones in," *communicating,* "I would like to speak to Mr. Jones now, if possible," and the secretary answers, "I'm sorry, he's in conference at the moment," *communicating* what everyone understands by this conventional expression, "Unfortunately, you can't," but in a way that doesn't give the impression that the client is unworthy to talk to Mr. Jones. This expression *communicates* no more than this, because everyone understands that this is all it means, not that there's a real conference going on.

Similarly, when a person goes out in the rain and says, "What a beautiful day!" and his tone of voice makes it clear that he thinks it is a perfectly rotten day, he communicates exactly the opposite of what the words say. Or when a person says, "How are you?" he isn't really asking for a list of woes, but *stating,* "You are more than just somebody I pass by; I am interested in you." You can see what an insult it would be for the other person to reply, "What do you care?" That would be the same as saying, "I want nothing to do with you!" And if he takes the statement of interest as a factual question and then tells of his symptoms as he got up, he is presuming *more* of an interest than the question warrants. You have to be pretty intimate with another person for him to be anything but bored when you

recite all your aches and pains.

One final example that bothers people. You go into a hospital room to visit your friend, and he looks ghastly. You say, "You look fine," to cheer him up, and have qualms of conscience about lying to him.[33] But you can't go into his room and say, "I sympathize with you," or he'd throw the bedpan at you, coming in healthy and happy and condescendingly pitying him like that. But he *wants* your sympathy and encouragement; it's just that it can't be expressed baldly, or it is condescending. So what is *communicated* by "you look fine" and such expressions is, "I sympathize with you" without its invidious overtones. And that it's really what the words could be expected to mean in the context is clear from the fact that it often happens that after a while your friend may ask you, "Tell me now; how do I *really* look?"

At this point, he's asking you the question as to your actual evaluation of his appearance, and you now cannot use the statement as a way of establishing your relationship with him. But what he is asking is for an *evaluation,* and evaluations, as I said, are *subjective,* and depend on the standards you adopt. So if you say, "Actually, you look pretty good," this can be true according to your standards of the way you would expect him to appear given the condition he is in. There's no law that says you can't adjust your standards to meet the situation, and if he looks ghastly by the standard of how he looks when he's healthy, then by the standard of the way a person looks when he's in his death-agony, he looks wonderful. It's possible, but very difficult, to lie when you're evaluating, precisely because

[33]Mark Twain had a short story on something like this, as I recall, where his esthetic point was that lying is a virtue. He couldn't make the distinction I am making, that's all.

standards are so flexible.

I should remark that, unless you are a teacher who has to grade someone's performance in relation to others', adjusting your standards so that what you say is encouraging is much kinder and more helpful to progress than using the highest standards and saying something that shows how far the person has to go to meet them. For some reason we are very concerned about others' growing too conceited and thinking too highly of themselves, and want to be sure we poke their balloon so that they don't commit the sin of pride—while at the same time, we ourselves recognize that our own shows of self-confidence are brave fronts that we put on over our quivering hearts, and what we need more than anything is someone else thinking that what we have done is acceptable. All too often this world of ours is the place where never is heard an encouraging word. You aren't lying if you encourage someone. Do it.

The upshot of all of this is that what is communicated is subtle and depends on the context and the tone in which something is said as well as on the words; and a lie is an attempt to *communicate* the opposite of what is the case, not the act of making a statement that, taken literally, is not the case.

I think a counter-example is in order. A fairly common medical practice is that of giving a placebo (which is the Latin word for "I will please [you]."), something that looks like a pill, but is actually something harmless and medically inert like sugar. The doctor prescribes the pills, saying, "You take these four times a day, and you'll feel better within a week." Since the human body tends to heal itself, what is called the "placebo effect" very often brings it about that *because* the person believes that he will be cured, he actually gets cured, and the doctor's statement comes true.

Sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but the patient was lied to. Not by the statement itself; but *the act of giving the pills as if they were medicine when they are not* ***communicates*** that they are medicine and

will do the curing, when in fact it isn't the pills that do it, but the *belief* that the pills will do it, that effects the cure.

It is well known that if the patient suspects what is going on or doubts whether the "medicine" will work, there's no cure. It is therefore *by means of his deception* that the cure occurs. If the physician were to say, "You take these pills, which are neutral, but if you believe that they'll cure you, you'll get cured," there would be no cure, because the patient wouldn't believe he could believe fervently enough.

Hence, the physician's *statement* is true; but the physician *also* is communicating, by giving the pills, that the "medicine" will do the curing when in fact it won't and he knows it. What he does could reasonably be expected to be understood falsely by the patient, who then is cured by the deception. The physician is lying, and that's morally wrong, even if it works, and even if it's the only thing that will actually cure the patient. The end never justifies the means.

Note, by the way, that what are called "faith healers" are not lying. They make no secret about the fact that it's the faith of the person that cures him; all they claim to do is bolster that faith so that it can do its job. The fact that they "drag God into the picture" isn't false either, because in fact God has to enter into any causality that happens, and certainly can cure anyone if he wants to.

On the other hand, there is nothing wrong with the use of placebos in procedures like testing drugs, where there is a control group, as long as the person knows he *might* be getting a placebo and not the medicine and is willing to enter the test on those conditions. No deception is involved here. In fact, the idea of this is precisely to eliminate the "placebo effect" by having everyone suspect that he might not actually be getting the medicine, and so eliminate the cures that are due to expectation of being cured rather than the physical effect of the medicine.

A third point that can be made is that it is possible to tell an

esthetic lie. Some people think you can't lie in fiction; but if you go back to Chapter 3 of Section 5 of the fourth part, you will recall that fiction, like all art, expresses a *fact* understood through the emotional overtones of something. I waxed eloquent about Robert Mapplethorpe's depiction of sado-masochistic acts as "the perfect moment," when in fact they violate the humanity of the people. He may not have understood this (though how someone could think that forcing the handle of a bullwhip into your body doesn't involve *some* kind of violation of yourself is a little hard to see), and so may have been mistaken; but the presentation of the result as something desirable or neutral because of the way it was photographed is an esthetic falsehood; and if deliberate, is an esthetic lie.[34] Hence, if your fiction is such that people understand esthetically what is not in fact the case, then it is a lie. This is what artists in general object to when they talk about "prostitution" of art by saying in their art what someone wants to hear rather than what is true.

The fourth point to make is that you can lie by communicating that you have a certain *attitude* when in fact you don't have it. Lies don't deal just with deliberately misstating *judgments*. If you answer the phone and say, "Roy! How *are* you?" you are communicating how pleased you are to hear from him; and if you are not pleased to hear from him, then of course you are lying, even though as far as the words are concerned, you have asked a question and not made a statement at all.

A. J. Ayer misses the point of this when in his discussion of ethical statements like, "You did wrong to steal" he says that the only fact

[34]Shortly after the time I wrote the chapter I am referring to, the museum was acquitted of charges of pandering obscenity, on the grounds that Art is protected by the First Amendment, and what's shown in a museum is by definition Art. Art it may be; but false it is nonetheless; and even the jurors admitted that it was obscene.

involved is "you stole," and the "wrongness" only expresses an attitude, and so is like, "You stole!" spoken in a tone of horror, and therefore can't be a lie. As I said in the preceding section, he is simply mistaken in thinking that there is no factual content in "you did wrong," because what "you did wrong" actually means is that "the act in question is objectively inconsistent with you as its agent." But even if it were true that it was just an expression of an attitude, it would be understood by others that you in fact *had* that attitude; and if you didn't have it, you would be lying.[35]

This is basically the difference between communication and "talking." Now,
do we *have* to communicate what we know?

Conclusion 8c: A person has no moral obligation to communicate anything to another person, unless the other has a specific right to know it.

That is, if some *damage* would come to another if he were left ignorant of something you know, or if he *could not fulfill some obligation* he had without this information, then obviously he has a right to know it. He doesn't necessarily always have a right *against you* to be informed of it, even if you happen to know what he needs to know. For instance, if you are just anybody who happens to know

[35]My own theory, by the way, would allow saying that "It was wrong of you to steal" and simultaneously feeling approval of the action; because it's quite possible that the person making the statement could recognize that it was *beneficial* to the thief to have stolen, and yet the theft was still *inconsistent* with him as human. Not everyone straightens out this conundrum. In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,* when the daughter confesses to her mother that she wanted to have sex with her fiancé before he left for the war, the mother says words to the effect, "You were right not to do it, but it would have been beautiful."

some fact that, let us say, the President needs to know to make some decision, and if you happen to know that his advisors also know this fact, then he has no particular right to have *you* inform him of what you know—unless the Double Effect applies, of course, and damage could come from his advisors' concealment of the information.

Beware, by the way, of this business of someone's having a "right to know" some fact. A woman's husband is cheating on her. Does she have a right to know this? You could establish the right if you could show that her not knowing involves some damage to her; but it is quite possible that her knowing could prove even more damaging. Suppose you talk to the husband and persuade him to reform. If the wife had an absolute "right to know" beforehand, she still has it; and yet if you tell her, this might ruin the marriage, which might otherwise be stronger and more loving because of her husband's realizing what he had done and trying to make up for it. Marriage, as we will see, does not confer upon the partners the right to know everything about the other partner.

Another example. Once, as I mentioned in passing, there was a to-do in Cincinnati over the fact that the Bengals' coach excluded a woman reporter from the locker room, because a number of his players didn't want to be interviewed naked by a woman. An understandable reaction, to my mind. But why should *any* reporter be allowed in the locker room? Because the "public has a right to know" their immediate reactions as they come off the field. Really? What damage is done to the likes of you and me if we miss out on what Boomer Esiason feels about the game as he takes off his cleats and gets under the hot water? Baloney! The public (excluding me, I guess) *wants* to know these things, and it sells papers; but the public still has absolutely no *right* to know these things. And it strikes me that if, as I think Solzhenitsyn says, one of the forms of degradation in the *Gulag* was to be interrogated when you were naked and the interrogator was clothed, the football players have the right not to

have to submit to this sort of thing. "Well, let them wrap themselves in a towel," someone said. It's the *reporters* who are invading the *players'* privacy; why should the players have to accommodate themselves to the reporters?

The point is that the claim of a right to know doesn't really mean that a person has one; the desire to know does not establish a right to know. And if a person has no real right to know some fact, then you don't have to inform him of it—even if it might be a good thing if he knew it.

Conclusion 8d: A person may have an obligation to *conceal* some information from the person he is communicating with.

If, for instance, you happen to know something that would be damaging to another person's reputation, or if you have been told something having given the promise of keeping it secret, or if you as a member of your firm have information which, if revealed, could give competitors an advantage, then you have a moral obligation not to reveal this information.

Always supposing that the person you are communicating with does not have a right to know which invalidates the secret (as, for example, a detective investigating a crime has a right to know information which might be damaging to the party he is investigating), then you have to keep the information concealed from your hearer. How can you morally do this?

Conclusion 8e: It is morally wrong to conceal information from another by lying to him.

That is, if the *means* by which you conceal information is by *communicating* the opposite of what is the case, then the very first

rule of the Double Effect is violated (the act contradicts itself as a communication that opposes what communication is), and so the good purpose doesn't matter.

But note that the act has to be an actual communication of something *as* the case when that something *is not* the case. You have to say something that *would reasonably be expected to be understood* in a sense opposite to what is the case.

In any case, you can't lie to conceal the information. But suppose you are asked about it. What can you do?

Obviously, the first way to conceal the information is to keep your mouth shut. That is, if simple silence on the matter or saying something like "No comment" or "I'm not going to talk about that" actually *communicates* no information, then this is what must be done.

But it's not always that straightforward. Very often silence or the equivalent of "No comment" or changing the subject in response to a question *tends to communicate the worst possible answer* to the question. Let us say that Mary came to your house in the middle of the night last night to discuss a serious problem. Everything was perfectly innocent, but if it were known that Mary was visiting you at three in the morning, it would look as if there was something untoward going on between you. If you are asked, "Didn't I see Mary coming out of your house last night at three in the morning?" and you answer, "Let's change the subject," you have as much as told the person, "Yes, she did, but I don't want to talk about it," and the fact that you don't want to talk about it seems to imply that you were in fact engaged in amorous dalliance with her. So in this case the refusal to answer or evasion of the question is the equivalent, not only of communicating something, but of communicating something *false,* because it is what *could be reasonably expected to be understood* from the refusal to answer.

So in that case, by not *saying* anything, you *communicate* what

you had to conceal. Then how do you conceal it under these conditions?

Here is where the Jesuits with their "equivocation" or "mental reservation" have historically come in—and come in for some rather hard knocks, too. Their idea is that you can conceal the fact you need to conceal by saying something that *has two meanings, one of which is true,* but the hearer doesn't know which one, and takes the wrong one to be true.

One of the early saints was, as I remember the story, being chased by "pursuivants," as they called them in those days. He ran around the corner and saw some clothes hanging on a rack. He quickly picked up a cloak and hat and put it on and walked back in the direction he came, and when the "pursuivants" came up to him, they asked, "Have you seen Athanasius?" (or whoever it was), and he answered, "He isn't far from you," and they ran on.

In an ordinary context, this statement does not imply, "He's right here talking to you." The question really was, "Is Athanasius far behind you?" because the people were trying to catch him; and so the reply would normally be taken to communicate, "No, not far behind."

On the other hand, in the context in which someone is trying to escape capture, those asking the question might be expected to be suspicious of people trying to help Athanasius. In this case, if the statement can *also* mean "He's right here," then an astute hearer could have picked this up and realized that the speaker didn't really tell him where Athanasius was. Hence, he didn't really communicate what was false; he communicated no more than that Athanasius was in the vicinity, which was true.

This is legitimate, using the Double Effect. The statement itself is amoral, because if no one understands it it is simply a linguistic expression, not communication at all. It has a good effect: the information is concealed. The false interpretation (the deception) is

not the means of achieving the good effect, because the good effect can be achieved if the hearer is simply puzzled or left in the dark as to what was meant. The intention is not to *deceive* the other person, but simply to conceal the information that (a) he has no right to have, and (b) needs to be concealed; and finally, the damage done by revealing it has to be at least as great as the damage done by concealing it.

So equivocation's intention can't be to *mislead* the hearer; it is to *leave him uninformed*. In a context where you need to conceal information, you can take it that the hearer is clever and will realize that you communicated something ambiguous, and therefore didn't tell him anything. If he takes the wrong interpretation, this is an unfortunate side-effect of his not being clever enough to see the ambiguity, and is not necessary to achieve the concealment, and not intended.

I should point out here that equivocation is not moral in a court of law, where you have sworn to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." That oath precisely commits you *not* to equivocate; though it doesn't say that you have to volunteer information that you are not specifically asked for (though it might sound as if it does; but the legal interpretation of the oath is not that, and so the legal interpretation is what it is to be taken to mean). The intent of the oath is to make it not morally possible for you to deceive by equivocation, or even convey no information by equivocation; if you are asked about the facts, then you must tell them as you know them.

Of course, if the secret you know is serious enough (such as if you are a priest and heard something in confession, or a doctor who heard something from a client), then morally you must refuse to answer the question, even if you go to jail for it (or in the case of the priest, even if you are killed for it). Of course, as our laws are constituted, you can't be forced to give evidence in a case like this;

but if the laws should change, you still can't morally give the testimony, because the damage done by such a revelation would be worse than the damage done by the concealment in this case.

The idea here is that doctors need to know intimate details of the patient's lives to make proper diagnoses; and these details can be exceedingly damaging to the patient if they are revealed. If patients have the least suspicion that what they are telling their doctor (or lawyer or priest) will be revealed, then they will not tell him when the damage from revelation would be extremely great, and the doctors and so on will not be able to do their jobs. As soon as it is known that *any* doctor has revealed some damaging fact about a patient, this is apt to happen; and so *it must never be done under any circumstances, even to save an innocent life from a gross miscarriage of justice*. The wrong effect of doing it would be the deaths of thousands who wouldn't tell the truth to their physicians.

The case of the priest is even more serious, because, as Catholics believe, *unless* the penitent reveals each and every serious sin to the priest (or at least has the intention of doing so), he can't get forgiven by the priest, and so that aid toward erasure of his sins by God and his change of heart that I spoke of in footnotes in the fourth part is unavailable to him, and he is in grave danger of damnation. Clearly, to tempt people not to confess their sins by putting the obstacle before them that the sin might be told outside the confessional is to put them in far more serious jeopardy than death. A priest must not *by any act whatever* give the slightest hint that he knows *anything* a penitent has said to him in confession. Even if the penitent confesses that he intends to kill the priest as he walks in his garden that night (as he is in the habit of doing), the priest cannot avoid walking in the garden or take any precaution that he would not have habitually

taken.[36]

As long as I have brought up law courts, let me say that the *plea* a person makes *does not mean what the words say.* If a person pleads not guilty, for instance, he is not saying (as a fact), "I didn't do it," but "You must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that I did it." If he pleads guilty, he is saying, "I am willing to accept the penalty for the crime I am charged with." This is why a person who makes a "plea bargain" can plead guilty to a lesser charge than the one originally made, even though he did not do what he was finally charged with. Finally, if a person pleads "no contest" (*nolo contendere*), he is actually saying, "I am not going to fight this, but for one reason or another I don't agree with the charge as stated." His legal position is that the bill of particulars against him stands, but he is asking to be treated in the same way as a person who did the crime but did not realize that it was a crime.

But to return to equivocation, some have objected to it as requiring too much intelligence to be usable by anybody but the most sophisticated. But I had an interesting experience dealing with it when I was in graduate school, and teaching the very topic. It was

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[36]By the way, the case of the Catholic who out of fear cannot bring himself to confess some sin of his is not as bleak as I have made it out to be. The act of confessing the sin is a *help* toward his change of attitude, which is brought about by God, not himself. A deliberate *refusal* to confess the sin would be to say to God, "I wish I hadn't done that, and I'm going to change heart and admit that I'm your slave again—but only on my own terms." That's obviously not being willing to change heart. But a person can be emotionally *incapable* of actually carrying out his intention of confessing his sin; in which case, of course, his will is in the right direction, and he has a psychological disorder; and I am certain that God is astute enough to figure this out and take it into account. There is never anything to worry about as far as your relationship with God is concerned; confession is to assure *yourself* that you are serious; God already knows.

a restaurant I frequented, and on the day in question, the waitress had a terrible cold. I told her, "You should be home in bed." "You're as bad as John" (her husband), she answered. "He told me to be sure and not come to work today. So after he left I did the dishes and the wash and vacuumed the house; and so when he comes home, he's going to ask me did I go to work, and I'll say, 'Listen! I did the dishes and here's the laundry and I vacuumed the whole house! What d'ya think?'" In some, the talent for equivocation seems to be innate, the way Mozart had the talent for music.

But of course, not all of us are that ingenious; and the fact is that the information must be concealed, and to refuse to answer communicates it. What do we do?

Most of the time *a false statement* ***communicates*** *no information* in such a context. I am sure that the waitress's husband would have had enough experience of her so that when he asked her if she went to work, then he wouldn't believe her if she said "No."[37] If she could reasonably have expected that he wouldn't believe her, then obviously her "no" would have communicated nothing; because if she said it, he would realize that it would *either* mean that she hadn't gone to work *or* that she was trying to make him think that she hadn't when she actually had—and he would have no idea which it was.

And this sort of thing can happen in more serious contexts. If, for example, the Prime Minister of Israel had been having secret talks

[37]Actually, the vacuuming and so on was in all probability her way of providing evidence that the denial was factually the case (in which case, it was a lie, of course) rather than, as I interpreted it at the time, a case of equivocation to avoid saying what was false. The point I am making is not her moral position, but that she knew well enough how to say what was literally true without divulging some information she wanted to conceal.

with the Palestinians (who at the moment are mortal enemies) then it would not only destroy his reputation with the Israelis but probably annihilate any chance of peace if it were known; and if he was asked by a reporter, "Is it true that you have been in communication with Palestinian leaders?" the reporter would know that he couldn't say he was; and if he said, "No comment," he would be admitting it; and in fact the only thing he *could* say in answer to the question would be to deny it. So when the Prime Minister says, "There's no truth to that at all," he is saying what everybody realizes is the only thing he could say. That is, if he weren't in communication with them, he would say it; and if he was in communication with them, he would have to deny it or destroy any purpose to the communication. Hence, the reporter is just as uninformed as he was before he asked the question; and the Prime Minister has *communicated nothing* by making the false statement.

So he didn't lie, because he had reason to think that his answer would not be believed; he simply concealed information. That sounds like Jesuitism raised to the nth power; but it's either valid, or you have to say that the literal meaning of what you say is what in fact you communicate, in which case ironic speech (in which you say the opposite of what you mean in order more forcefully to communicate it) is a lie. And I'm sure you're going to agree that it is (he said ironically).

Well, then, finally we have sketched out a good many of the ways you can do what is morally wrong just by yourself; so it obviously isn't true that immorality always involves some injustice to someone else. But we will leave these other moral implications to the next part. Right now, what I want to do is say a few words about religion.

Section 3
Relgion

Chapter 1

Laying my cards on the table

This is not going to be a chapter on philosophy of religion in most of the usual senses of the term. First, I am not going to do what used to be called "Natural Theology," or "Theodicy," and give arguments for the existence of God, and so on (I already did that in the first part), nor am I going to do a kind of comparative religion, picking out the common elements in religions throughout the world, nor do I want to attempt (God forbid!) what Kant did and develop a "religion within the limits of reason alone," as if what religion had to offer could be encompassed within the meager knowledge philosophy has. Nor am I really interested in showing à la William James that there is a psychological need for religion, as if that need somehow made it true. Finally, or perhaps in summary, I would find it distasteful to make some kind of Husserlian *epoché* from what I believe and talk in a disinterested and detached way about this matter; I am not disinterested and detached, and to pretend that I am is, for me, not only stupid but dishonest.

I want to touch on a good deal of this; but I guess what you could say is that what I want to do here is give a kind of *apologia pro fide mea,* not with any real idea of justifying myself, or to "make converts," but to show why I think religion—and to some extent, the religion I believe—is something a reasonable person might have.

It is something you would expect to find in human beings, it isn't simply wishful thinking but has a factual basis, and philosophy points beyond itself in hope to something it can't know. I also want to show why, though I think that all religions have a common core, one of them isn't reporting myths but facts that actually happened about God's intervention in this world. I have made no secret in the pages that preceded this that I am a committed Catholic, and so it should be obvious that I think that this religion is Christianity (and the Judaism that preceded it); and that the Catholic version of Christianity is its most complete expression. Perhaps one of the things I am trying to do in this chapter is bolster my own faith by writing this down.

At any rate, I want, as the title says, to lay my cards on the table at the outset, so that when I say what I think is the case, you can take it with however many grains of salt you wish.

You're not going to miss some key step in the logic of this book if you skip this chapter. I didn't put this discussion at the end because the subject belongs here in a treatment of conduct, and I didn't think I could just leave out the philosophy of religion, and yet this is the only way I could bring myself to treat it. So if you aren't interested in my *pensées* (I've referred to a lot of people, so I might as well drag Pascal in), then I'll see you in the next part.

Chapter 2

Why religion?

As long as I alluded to Pascal, I think that the reason religions exist all over the world (they are a "cross-cultural constant," found everywhere humans are found) has got something to do with Pascal's bet: you have to bet that there's a God of some sort (and a life after death making sense out of the mess that's in our lives) or that there isn't. You can't as Pascal mentions, refuse the bet, because that's betting that this life is the only one.

I don't go along with Pascal, however, that if you bet that there's a life after death and so on as Christianity holds, you've got everything to gain and nothing to lose; because if you happen to be wrong and you try to be virtuous, you're going to get trampled on for your pains and miss out on a life that could have been quite fulfilling, and wind up with nothing. Besides, there might be an afterlife and no forgiveness, as my philosophical view would seem to conclude; in which case, all your future striving after virtue is going to find you still damned eternally. If you bet that there isn't a life after death and you're wrong, then you're in trouble; but if you're right, then you've got a better chance than the fool who tries to be consistent with himself. And even if you're wrong, who knows but what at the last instant you might see the light and repent, or maybe the modern Theologians' "loving God" will forgive you afterwards, and then you've had the best of both worlds. It's by no means as

simple as Pascal makes it out to be.

Nevertheless, I think that what gives rise to religion has got to be something observable and in fact almost inescapable, or we would only find religion among the very learned—whereas it seems that it's the unsophisticated that have it more than the people who can make fine distinctions. That, it seems to me, needs explaining.

My view of what accounts for the universality of religion is a person's recognition, first of all, of his own finiteness, based on the fact that he can't do everything he would wish to be able to do, or even that some of the lowly creatures around him can do, such as fly or swim like a fish. Our desires can easily outstrip our limitations, in which case our finiteness is forced into our consciousness, together with its implied contradiction. We say, "I am, therefore I will be," and we find that we are, but we cannot be all that we will be. And finiteness, of course, is the effect that leads on to conclude to an infinite being, as I said in Chapters 6 and 7 of Section 4 of the first part. I am not by any means supposing that people go through what I did there; but seeing one's own limitations as an effect certainly would hint, to say the least, at the fact that its cause is something much more powerful than our finite parents.

Let me make a distinction here between the thoughtful and the sophisticated. Unsophisticated people are not necessarily unintelligent; they are people who haven't had much practice in explaining away the difficulties that confront them. Sophisticated people have discovered the art of making distinctions, and therefore "know" that you can prove anything you want, and have concluded that nobody really knows anything. There is a level of knowledge above sophistication, however, which recognizes that sophistication really is a way of closing your eyes and avoiding the problem by adopting a supercilious attitude toward those who see more clearly than you do, and calling them naive.

The second thing that gives rise to religion, of course, is death,

which a person's very essence as living cannot accept, as I said in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of the third part. We *know* from the very core of our being that death is unnatural and that it *can't* be the end, that it *mustn't* be the end or life doesn't make any sense and is a chase after wind. The sophisticated "thinkers" talk about its being "a fact of life," trying to make us reconciled to it; but there is no being reconciled to it. All of that "acceptance" of death makes no sense, when in fact our own unifying energy is irreconcilably opposed to it, and we can be reconciled only by stifling the drive that constitutes our very existence.

Thirdly, there is the manifest unfairness of this life, where we strive for goals that others have achieved and through no fault of our own cannot achieve them; where we see innocent people undergoing such horrible torment that it makes the agony and absurdity of death not the curse we know it is but a blessed relief. In short, for the vast majority of people—the overwhelming majority—life is upside down, and the only way you can get through it is to do what Camus did: turn your back on the horror and concentrate on the few moments that seem to be worth the trouble, or rebel and think that you are doing something noble by admitting the absurdity and raging against the fading of the light.

And finally, and I think this is the main impetus for religion as I understand it, rather than for just the philosophical recognition of the immortality of the soul and the existence of the infinite being, there is the need for forgiveness. When we see the mess we have made of our lives, sometimes deliberately, sometimes inadvertently, and especially the mess we have made, sometimes deliberately, sometimes thoughtlessly, occasionally accidentally, of the lives of others, even others we dearly and deeply love, we long and ache to be forgiven.

I personally find it easier to reconcile myself to the damage I have done to myself than to the damage I have done to others. I think of

those I sinned with, and wonder what my acts have done to them. But in one sense, they cooperated in the damage; and I find it far more troubling to think of people like Rev. Francis Sweeney, my Freshman English teacher, whom I had kept up a friendship with all these years, until a few years ago when he was showing me the photographs of his being awarded an honorary doctorate—and I made some joking reference to it as not a "real" one. It was weeks later that I realized something that hadn't occurred to me until that moment, that he doubtless did not have an academic doctorate, and my remarks must have hurt him profoundly, a man I always looked up to and respected—and there is now no way I can apologize, because even to allude to what I did would reopen the hurt. True, I am not morally responsible for what I did, but what difference does that make? I did it, and I am no Superman, who can spin the earth backwards and redo the ghastly moment.[38]

I guess what I am saying is not that we need to be forgiven; I am sure that if I apologized and explained to him, he would forgive me (or would he? Would I, in the same situation?); but that is not what I want. What I need is either (a) never to have done such a thing in the first place, or (b) redemption.

By "needing redemption" here, what I mean is the need to understand that what we have done is *better* in the circumstances than the alternative; something like what St. Paul tells the Corinthians in his second letter: "If I did hurt you by my letter, I don't regret doing it; and if I did feel sorry about it—since I see that that letter did hurt you, if only for a while—I am happy now, not because you were hurt, but because your pain made you change heart; you

[38]In case you care, I did get another person to explain the situation and we were reconciled before he died. We never alluded to this event, so I don't know whether it really bothered him or not.

were hurt in God's way, where no damage was done by what we did." That is what we need. That is redemption. To put it in other words of Paul's, we need to know that "everything works out to good for those who love God."

Let me give another example. I mentioned earlier that I had been reading *War and Peace* during the time I originally wrote this. I had read it before, and when I got to the part where Natasha, engaged to Prince Andrei who has been staying away from her, is about to be seduced by Anatol and break off the engagement, I found I couldn't go on; it was too painful to read, even though I knew there would a reconciliation with Prince Andrei as he was dying. But then I thought of how he had treated his pretty and superficial first wife, and it occurred to me to look at this aborted marriage, not through his eyes or Natasha's, as the novelist had been doing, but to speculate about what their marriage would have been had it taken place; and it was possible for me to see that their marriage could have been far more bitter than what happened—and then I could resume reading. That is redemption.

The sophisticated, of course, will simply scoff at this longing as building castles in the air. "It's just not the way things are," they will say; "you have to dismiss such things from your mind and get on with your life. You have to be realistic."

But *why* do we have to "dismiss things from our minds"? Why are we being *realistic* if we dismiss from our minds what actually happened? "Because no one can live that way, brooding on the irrevocable past," will be the answer. Precisely. No one can live being *truly* realistic; life is too much of a horror to face; you must "dismiss it from your mind" if you want to get on with life.

What is this longing? It is a manifestation of what I talked about in Chapter 5 of Section 4 of the third part in which I discussed our "fallenness." Just as we can't accept death, because in fact our souls are immortal, and were obviously by the logic of being an immortal

incarnate spirit intended not to die; and just as we can't accept the unfairness of life in which we can't achieve our goals because we don't get "the breaks" while others do, because in point of fact our control over our lives *means* that we can control them, not that "the breaks" do, or self-control is a contradiction; for this same reason we can't accept that our lives and especially those of the people dear to us turn out to be horrors because of what we do—because in fact, the logic of our existence says that our control means that, just as we shouldn't be able to be harmed without choosing it, we shouldn't be able to *do* harm to anyone without his willing it also.

What I am saying here is that this longing to undo what we have done, or at least to undo the harm in what we have done, is not really what some people would think: an extension of an idea we had as a child that we were omnipotent. I doubt if any child thinks of himself as omnipotent, still less as in control of his life. It is *as* we *get* control of more and more of our life and can actually *do* damage to others that the people who see what they are doing also see the blatant contradiction this is; it is the *mature* who need redemption, and the childish who "dismiss all this from their minds" so that they can get on with life as if it had never occurred.

Why else is one of the "cross-cultural constants" the notion of a Golden Age, in which people could achieve their goals, and were (or will be) at peace, but that we *recognize* that our very natures are twisted as they exist, making the world, if faced fully, and our own personalities, if faced fully, something unbearable? Why else is one of the goals of psychology, in the name, of all things, of being realistic, the goal of "giving you a good opinion of yourself," and why are so many, many people desperately seeking that goal? Because they hate themselves and their lives; and *they* are the ones who have reason, not the psychologists who delude them into thinking that they're "really" pretty wonderful people.

Only a saint can face squarely the facts about himself and his

world; because only a saint knows with what Cardinal Newman called "real" knowledge as opposed to "notional" knowledge that he and his world are redeemed; and so he can do what I did with *War and Peace:* he can read the book, knowing that, though it may not be the best of all possible worlds, since we are free and can willingly wreck our lives, it is better than the alternatives if we don't *want* to wreck our lives.

Thus, it is not the unthinking from whom religions arise; religion comes about because of the basic impulse from which science itself comes about: the refusal to accept things as positively self-contradictory. The unthinking person, watching a rock fall, says, "It fell; what's the problem?" It took a Newton to see that it didn't make sense and *how* it didn't make sense, and to have the conviction that something unseen (gravity) made sense out of it. Similarly, the unthinking person says, "Yeah, but on balance I'm a lot nicer guy than Joe"; and it's the realist who says, "What I am in relation to Joe doesn't matter; neither Joe nor I should have been allowed to do the harm we have done," and who sees that it doesn't make sense and how it doesn't make sense, and who has the conviction that there is something unseen by which it can make sense.

What I am saying is that a *reasonable* person who tries to face the facts of the horrors of this world is driven, by the same impulse that moves the scientist, to religion. Reason can't resolve the conundrum. If reason tries as hard as I have in this book, the best it can do is say that there is a God and a life after death, and the mess we have made of ourselves will remain forever. It makes sense, because the mess that remains was deliberate when we produced it; but it doesn't make sense because we had very little idea of the extent of the mess at that fateful moment. Reason cannot argue to redemption; all it can do is show that redemption is not impossible, that God *could,* if he wished, erase our sins and somehow straighten out our world—but that this would be a gratuitous act on his part, and philosophy can give no

reason why he would bother.[39] But at the same time, reason can argue to a *need* for redemption, because if we can ruin our lives, it is positively unreasonable for us to be able to do it in even partial ignorance of what we are doing to ourselves and others.

People tend to accept science as "realistic" and "down to earth" when science refuses to accept the data that is in front of the scientist and explains it in terms of unseen forces. "But those are *real,*" we say, "electricity, magnetism, gamma rays, and all that." But then when a person looks at life and says, "This absolutely makes no sense; there has to be a God who redeems it and makes it better not to cut my throat before I do any more damage," we say he's not being realistic because he doesn't accept life on the superficial level of "that's the breaks" on which it presents itself. I submit that this way of looking at things is just as realistic as the scientific one. There is not only no conflict between science and religion; the very same attitude of mind gives rise to both, depending on which facts you are looking at.

"But science can prove that what it says is true; religion can't." Nonsense. Newton's Theory of Universal Gravitation, one of the best-established of all scientific theories, has been proved *false*. And as I said in Chapter 4 of Section 4 of the fourth part, *no* scientific theory can ever be proved true, just because of the logic of science.

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[39]Of course, reason can take some comfort in the knowledge that he created the universe, and there's no reason why he would bother to do that either. But it is brought up short with the realization that he made me free, and aware (at least to some extent) of the consequences of my actions; and I for the most part deliberately chose the damage I have done—and therefore, there's a reason why he *wouldn't* save me from it. But reason also answers, "But I didn't *fully* realize all the implications in what I was doing, and I wasn't *totally* in control of myself" and so that *might* provide a reason for God to save me if I later change heart—which again is countered by the fact that I realize that I don't fully see all the ramifications of what I do, and therefore I ought to think carefully before I act. So reason remains stuck in a conundrum.

"But science works." And religion doesn't? Henry James pointed out that religion works in allowing people to face reality and still lead happy lives; what could have a greater "cash value" than this? To be able to know that you don't have to kill yourself to avoid doing greater harm, because it is redeemed and somehow every tear, not only those you shed, but those you caused to be shed, will be wiped away.

Camus, by the way, missed half of the story in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* when after considering that the absurdity of the world demanded that we seriously consider killing ourselves to get out of it, he concluded that you might just as well not commit suicide, because life did have its beautiful moments, even if it was absurd. I counter with Dmitri Karamazov's answer: If my life in the future involves a million beautiful moments and one moment of my being somehow—deliberately or inadvertently—responsible for one little girl's being shut up in a closet and screaming for an hour to be let out, then these million beautiful moments are not worth the price, and let me kill myself now to avoid her pain. It isn't the harm I *face* in the future that horrifies me; it is the harm I *do* that makes an unredeemed life unbearable.

So again, Camus is not being wise in accepting the world as absurd and living nonetheless. The religion he tossed aside because he couldn't believe in a God who would allow the suffering he had seen would demand, by that logic, that he destroy himself to prevent his causing the slightest iota of that suffering to others. Living as a rebel doesn't redeem him, because his rebellion only stirs up others who will misunderstand his honest protest and twist it to their own ends and make the ideology of "existentialism" out of it and use his very book as an excuse to do harm—because people think primarily of themselves and the harm that is done *to* them and theirs, not the harm they do to others. They are not as thoughtful as he and don't make the distinctions he makes; and so his thoughtful work, his so

painfully honest work, could be expected, if he had had his eyes open, to do the harm he sought to lessen by counseling being a rebel.

But in fact he is redeemed, and his honesty has not done all the harm it could be expected to have done as people twist what he said to their own ends. And he knows this now, I am sure, because he was honest and tried to face the facts (though their light blinded even him), and it simply cannot be that everything is absurd and a horror beyond Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

If you want to be able to accept religion, however, you have to expand the openness of your mind much farther than the sophisticates have; because essentially this need we have for redemption implies, as George Mavrodes said in a paper I heard at a philosophy meeting, that the present can alter the past; and the sophisticated simply dismiss this as balderdash.

But it isn't. In the discussion on time in Chapter 6 of Section 3 of the second part, I pointed out that time as such is not real, but is simply the comparison of the quantities of processes; and that what is the present from one observer's point of view can be the future from another's and the past from that of a third, as when we watch New Year's Day celebrations from Japan while it is still the old year where we are. I also said that in the sense in which the past exists and is irrevocable, the future also exists and is irrevocable; what will happen is what will in fact happen; just as what happened is what in fact happened. True, what will happen *need* not happen, since we have control over it; but even though it *depends* on our choices, what will be will be. And it is also true that what happened need not have happened, because it too depended on free choices and so on. The fact that we don't know what the future will in fact be doesn't make what will in fact be less of a fact than the fact that we don't remember what actually happened ten years ago today makes that fact less of a fact.

Further, and this is the key here, God is not in time, as I said. God eternally (timelessly, not "always") causes the *whole* of creation, including what is from our point of view past, present, and future, to exist as it actually exists (i.e. as dependent on himself and all the finite causes in it).

But if this is so, it is perfectly possible for God to redeem the past, if we wish it. If I do wrong and repent and pray to undo the damage I have done, God, when he eternally exerts his creative causality over the event two years ago I now repent of *also* eternally causes my act of repentance and prayer to have that event redeemed. For him, the two events are eternally present (i.e. "before him," not "now"); and if he is loving rather than indifferent, then it is perfectly possible for him to answer the prayer, *not by making the* ***event*** *not what it in fact was, but by making it different from what it* ***would have been*** *without the subsequent prayer for redemption*.

Just as my choice, with God's creative causality, doesn't make the future different from what it *will* be, but from what it *would have been* were I to make a different choice (and so the future is what it is, and part of what it is is dependent on my choice); so in the case of redemption, my plea to have the past redeemed redeems it in the sense that it makes what happened no different from what *actually* happened, but different from what it *would have been* if I had not afterwards begged for its redemption. I can't change the past; but in that same sense I can't change the future.[40]

All this does, of course, is show that redemption of the past is not impossible; it does not say that it happens, because, like the erasure

[40]If the future cannot affect the past, then obviously prophesy is not possible. David did not *make* Jesus' hands and feet be cut open by writing "They have cut open my hands and my feet," but insofar as this is prophesy, it is the future event that caused him to write his poem in these words.

of my sins from my eternal consciousness, there is no reason why God must or even should do such a thing. The fact that the past or the present or the future needs redeeming is due to our fallenness; in the state we could as incarnate spirits be expected to be in, we would not be able to be harmed against our wills, nor would anyone else, we would be in complete control of ourselves and could not be misled or blinded by insistent desires, and we would have access to all the relevant information about any choice we made, so that we could not inadvertently bring on ourselves or our world anything we did not foresee. But the fallenness itself makes no sense, as I said in Chapter 5 of Section 4 of the third part, unless it was the result of a deliberate act on the part of the one who had the power to determine the human genetic potential; and since it was deliberate, he presumably had all the relevant information he needed and so on; and there is no reason why God should save him and us (especially since it would make no eternal difference to our consciousness, at least) from the consequences he chose along with his sin.

And so one again philosophy points in hope to something that is beyond itself: to something that it knows *could* happen, but something which it cannot know *does* happen; and this is why Hegel and those like him who subsume religion under philosophy are dead wrong. Religion is not a naive, imaginative picturing of the truths that are understood in philosophy; in its essence it is a trust that "the heart has reasons the mind knows not of," and in faith it hopes that the love of God which extended to the creation of the world when there was no benefit for him whatsoever in the act extends to the redemption of that very world in cooperation with the very creatures who have wrecked it often by their own deliberate choices and now are sorry for what they have done.

Chapter 3

The common elements in religion

Let us now look on this from a different point of view. Let us suppose that there was such a thing as a fall (which, as I said, there is pretty good philosophical evidence for); and let us suppose that God, eternally knowing of the fall and the lack of control that it produces in all of Adam's race, chose, in his love, to redeem us.

First of all, I would think that it would contradict our freedom (which we still have, but cannot exercise as well as could be expected without the fall) that this redemption should occur whether we want it or not. That is, the only thing that would seem consistent with both the freedom and the fallenness of human beings would be that redemption is *offered* them, in such a way that every human being would somehow know that it was possible and could be his if he really wanted it, but that it was merely offered and not forced upon him, and could be rejected.

On the hypothesis, then, that redemption is a fact, we can predict that it is offered in such a way that it can be rejected; and that it is offered to *everyone,* in such a way that everyone would know that such a thing is a real possibility. To offer it only to a select few would seem to me to contradict the grounds for its being offered in the first place. That is, presumably the offer was made because, not being in complete control of ourselves, we can ruin our lives indeliberately,

and even ruin our eternity only semi-deliberately. But this is true of every fallen human being, not just of a few; and so the reason why it would be given at all would predict that it be given to all.

Hence, everyone would have some sign that redemption is possible. And is it mere happenstance that the earth's axis is tilted with respect to the plane of its orbit, so that the sun shines now more directly on the northern half and now more directly on the southern? As I look out in the morning now in October, I see the sun rise later and later each day and set earlier and earlier; and I see at noon long shadows across the lawn as the sun sinks lower in the southern sky; and the lawn is peppered with yellow leaves from the trees which are becoming more and more naked and apparently dying. But I know that when all is dead and cold, and when the sun seems about to disappear altogether below the horizon (as in some places it actually does), the whole process will reverse itself, the sun will begin its climb from the winter solstice, the air will warm and freshen, the snowdrops and crocuses will bloom out of the still frozen ground, sometimes even though the snow, and the daffodils and tulips and the blessed green on the trees are not far behind. And the tulips will be more numerous than last year, and the trees larger and stronger for their temporary death. Redemption.

And is it an accident that the earth rotates as it revolves around the sun, so that darkness follows light, and I become tired and give up my conscious life every day, only to find the next morning that my physical self has been redeemed by its apparent non-existence, and the ravages of yesterday have not destroyed but added to my being of today—not to mention that my mental self has completely vanished an then been resurrected?

Now there is no particular reason why the earth's axis of rotation should be tilted and we should have seasons. In fact, precisely *because* of the enormous gravitational attraction of the sun, you would expect the axis to be at right angles to the plane of the orbit, since the

rotation of the earth makes the equator bulge, and therefore gives the equator that much more mass to be attracted by the sun. Nor is there any reason why the earth should rotate on its axis. In fact, what you would expect would be that, like Mercury and our own moon, there would be one rotation for one revolution, so that the same side of the earth would always be facing the sun; and so on one side, as on Mercury, there would be perpetual day and on the other perpetual night, making the "day" and the "year" both meaningless terms in practice.

And if life were to evolve under these conditions, then you would predict that we wouldn't have seasons, nor would there be regular periods of sleep and waking. Dormant stages are as much an adaptation to the adverse conditions of winter (or the dry seasons in the tropics) and night (or day, in the case of nocturnal animals) as they are to something about life that makes it want to shut down periodically. Granted, each organ needs rest, but this need not be achieved by sleep, any more than the rest the heart gets is achieved by shutting down for eight hours; it rests between beats.

If we are to understand reality accurately, we must rid ourselves of the tendency to put God in time, reacting to unexpected events. The fall is known by God eternally, and so is its redemption; and if redemption is offered to human beings, who learn from the evidence of their senses, and if redemption is one of the most necessary pieces of information for them, then it makes sense that the world they live in should be created so that the structure of what they see, of the very universe which began to exist millions of years before they did, would shout at them that redemption is a fact, and there is no reason why they should deny it in their own lives.

Even the pruning of plants—their injury— is what is needed to make them healthy; and the exercise and pain I inflict on my muscles is what is necessary for them to become strong and vigorous. Damage is not necessarily destructive; much of the damage we do to

ourselves and our world is precisely redemptive.

Thus, when a human being finds in himself a loathing for the damage he has done to himself and to those around him, he has plenty of hints that there is hope that this damage can be, if not undone, redeemed. And so it is not surprising that most of the religions in the world stress the turning of the seasons as the sign that the deity is going to do the same with us, and that all is not lost.

Stonehenge was built with such superhuman toil so many centuries ago obviously as something religious; and what it is, as most paleontologists think, is an astronomical observatory, where the day of the solstice can be accurately known. Many many temples throughout the world are built in this way, so that the sun shines on a definite spot at the point of its farthest decline, at which the believers know that it will begin to climb up in the sky again and all will once again be well.

The oldest religions are not those of ancestor worship as Freud, who believed that religion sprang from the need for punishment in violation of parents' commands, thought. The guilt is, to be sure, fear of punishment; but more than this, it longs for redemption; and so it is not at all surprising that the very oldest religions would be astronomical and tied to the seasons rather than legislative and looking to punishment. Religion stems from hope and is joyous, not from guilt, which leads to despair.

And, of course, since reproduction is the sign of redemption, and since it involves the seeking of another to produce the miracle of new birth, it is also not surprising to find that religion, responding to the hint of redemption here, would generally have sexual overtones.

I am not simply saying here that it is the need of redemption for the mess we have made of our lives coupled with the hints that all nature is redemptive (and we should be no different) that *motivates* human beings to engage in religious worship. That is true, I think. But my point is somewhat different from that. My point is that,

supposing God *offers* redemption to us, he could be expected to make everyone capable of knowing that it is reasonable to expect it from him, if we but ask. As St. Paul put it in *Romans,* "The evidence for God's existence is there before their eyes; God himself has made it obvious. His invisible presence from the creation of the world can be seen from what he has made by anyone who puts his mind to it."[41]

Is such paganism acceptable to God? Of course it is. Why would he have put those hints there, if he didn't expect them to be taken?

But there is another thing that you would predict that God would have to let people know: that redemption is *not* inevitable, as it is with the seasons, but that it can be rejected and that the consequences of either not asking for it or rejecting it are eternal.

There is on the one hand fully as much a need in the human being to wake up from death as there is that the past be redeemed. True, we need to escape to a world in which there is no possibility of being harmed or doing harm; but we need just as much not to die, except as we "die" every day, returning the next morning all the better for it. But on the other hand, as the Corinthians said scoffingly to Paul, it is all too obvious that "corpses do not come back to life." What falls asleep comes back to wakefulness, but what dies does not return. Even in death, of course, there is the redemption of reproduction, so that the form of life goes on; but this is small consolation to the one who is about to die. He wants *his* life to go on; he wants *his* body to reawaken.

Certain it is that from the most ancient signs of religion, there are

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[41]Interestingly, Paul is saying this in the process of castigating the sophisticated who, having this evidence, reject it as "unscientific." "And this means that they get nowhere with all their scientific investigations, and their empty minds are filled with darkness. They claim to be wise, but make fools of themselves."

signs (from burying food, for instance, with the dead) that the people believed that those who died did continue somehow as individuals (and as bodily) after death, in spite of the evidence to the contrary. Undoubtedly this hope would be bolstered by the fact that there have always been cases of people who to all appearances die and yet revive—and I am sure that some of them have told the wonderful experiences they had that are now cataloged as "near-death experiences."

Nevertheless, there is a note of finality to death. Whatever is beginning, it is not, even if somehow cyclic, like sleeping and waking. Those who, like Plato, held the transmigration of souls, also held that something happened in the underworld that made the soul forget its past and emerge as if it were a completely new being.

But beyond this, there is the injustice of what happens in this world, where the evil prosper and the good suffer, that must be explained, and can only, as I showed in the preceding two chapters and in Chapter 3 of Section 4 of the third part, be explained by an afterlife and God.

Death, then, and the necessity that wrongs be somehow righted and that the stubborn wrongdoer not escape punishment, are the counter-tendencies that would temper the hope of redemption with the necessity to conform to one's nature, under pain of losing the redemption.

And this, of course, is why all religions involve taboos and punishments in an afterlife, but which offer the hope of redemption in the form of forgiveness of sins. Religion is by no means all sweetness and light, looking forward to a better time in which every tear will be wiped away. Every religion says that this better time is not available to those who flout the law and do not repent and beg forgiveness.

And that people would come naturally to this realization is again just what you would predict if in fact we live forever and our eternal

lives depend on our choices which cannot be erased by our own efforts, but if in addition God has offered us the chance, not only to redeem the damage we have done, but actually to have the choice removed as an operative act, saving us from its eternal frustration. If redemption is offered at all, at least this would have to be known by everyone; and therefore, it would have to be an element of for practical purposes every religion.

So we can explain on the one side the common elements in religion such as the punishing but loving deity and the notion of an afterlife in which some sort of punishment or reward occurs, as well as the myths of the Golden Age and of the rebirth as a hope that the deep longings within us to make sense out of an otherwise senseless life will be fulfilled. This is what you find in most treatises on comparative religion.

But there is the other side, which is what I have been stressing here. If God has punished mankind for its original sin with death and partial loss of control of one's mind, and if the afterlife is a country "from whose bourn no traveler returns," then he would be being gratuitously cruel if he did not make it easy for us by means of the very absurdity of life to infer that there is an afterlife and that it provides the sanction which gives force to acting consistently with our nature. And if he offers us redemption, then he would, it would seem, have to make life absurd for us without it, so that we would be able to realize that it is possible and to ask for it.

Chapter 4

Why a revealed religion?

Given the philosophical analysis in this book, then, it does seem reasonable for religions to exist in every culture, but more than that that the myths and legends of religion have a core of fact and are not simply "responding to a need" in the people. That is, the need of itself doesn't establish that what you need is a fact. Men, for example, have a "need" for promiscuous sex, but it doesn't follow from this that their lives are a contradiction without it, because in fact promiscuous sex contradicts itself in various ways, as we have seen and will see more clearly in the section on marriage in the next part. But it does seem that the "needs" religion responds to are cases in which human life positively contradicts itself unless there is at least the possibility of their fulfillment. That, coupled with what you could predict from God as this philosophical analysis knows him, makes a pretty good case that religion and redemption might well be true.

But honest people of some degree of sophistication would be bound to be skeptical, partly on the grounds that it seems too good to be true. What I have said so far in this section is only the positive side of the evidence in favor of religion. In addition to the quasi-redemptive regularity of the seasons, there are destructive acts like earthquakes, volcano eruptions, tornadoes, and so on (not to mention exploding stars in the heavens); and the "balance of nature"

ecologists are fond of didn't help the dinosaurs much, did it? Things like this seem to have no redemptive aspect to them at all; which would hint at the fact that the hope of redemption for us is just wishful thinking. And though you can, by an analysis like mine in Chapter 10 of Section 5 of the first part, show that evil is not something absolute and therefore does not prove that an infinite God is impossible, still there *is* evil (even though it is relative to us, just as there is coldness), and you can wonder why a God who would redeem it would create in the first place a universe that needed to be redeemed.

It is no real argument, by the way, that he "couldn't" have created the universe in such a way that people in it would only make rational choices, because then they wouldn't be free. Unless you want to say that it is in principle impossible for a free being (one who *can* make a self-contradictory choice) to go through his life without at least once choosing to contradict his reality, then there is nothing impossible in God's creating those who are free and who can choose wrong but who in fact always exercise their freedom in rational ways. There's plenty of room to exercise your freedom without being stupid and at cross-purposes with yourself; freedom demands only the abstract possibility of immorality, not that it would ever occur.

If I have given the impression in this book that there's an answer to everything, I have given the wrong impression. There is no rational argument that I know of that makes a convincing case why evil *should* exist. Even if every tear of mine will be wiped away, I would far rather not have shed the tears in the first place—even if my state in the future turns out to be *better* than it would have been if what caused the tears had been avoided. That is, I don't repine at not having a hundred million dollars, though it is possible that I could have acted differently and acquired it, because I am not really *worse* off from lacking some *benefit* I could have but didn't work for. So a future *good* does not really compensate for a past *evil*. This is the

truth that Ivan Karamazov enunciates in the "Grand Inquisitor" section of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Further, while I might be able to *accept* the damage I have done and the damage that has been done to me if it is redeemed and I know that had it not happened, my life and the lives of others would have been worse, this is no reason why I should rejoice in the fact that my life was less bad than it might otherwise have been. Because that, in the last analysis, is what you are saying when you say that God brings a "greater good" out of evil.

No, those gnostics who "know the secret" and who have "plumbed the depths" of God's mind and understand why things are the way they are, and especially how they couldn't be otherwise, know what they know because they have closed their eyes to the other side of the argument. Like the sophisticates who explain away religion as wishful thinking with no basis in the "real world," these people explain away what is against their own position as "illusion."

That, I think, is not what I have done in this book; at least, it is not what I tried to do. What I have done with positions contrary to mine is show that the argument they give is flawed, and that the arguments do not prove what those who propose them think they prove. But all that this shows, really, is that these arguments are not *certainly* correct, not that their conclusion *might not* be correct. The analysis I gave of the problem of evil, for instance, shows that you can't use it to prove that there *can't* be the kind of God I argued to, not that it isn't *strongly suggestive* that there *isn't* that kind of God.

The really thoughtful person, then, is up against a mystery wherever he turns. The very fact that there are finite beings, whose reality is less than its own intelligibility, is a mystery. True, you can treat it as an effect and argue to a God who is equal to "what it means to exist"; but why such a being would bother to create these all-but-completely-contradictory beings is still left as much in the dark as ever. So if I can prove there is a God, I can by that conclusion

rescue the world from being complete nonsense; but I can't make it make sense by doing so. If I were God, perfectly happy by myself and incapable of being affected by anything I would create, I would stay by myself; and I can't picture myself creating a world in which there is agony and despair.

Denying that there's a God, of course, doesn't make more sense. There's nothing we can construct that makes sense out of the universe if we honestly observe it as it is; it is just that you can't *prove* that it makes *non*sense; and for a rational person it is more reasonable to accept a view of the universe that doesn't make positive nonsense (even if it doesn't really make complete sense) rather than one where you have to accept unresolvable contradictions. But the fact that it's more reasonable by no means proves it's true. Perhaps we are the products of chance and our brains are just built to reject contradictions, while the world "out there" is irrational and absurd. It doesn't make sense to hold this position, and in fact it makes a lot less sense to hold it than to hold that the world really isn't contradictory; but that doesn't *prove* that it *couldn't* be true.

The Book of Job is perhaps the most honest examination of this difficulty that there is; more honest, even, than Camus, who chose to accept absurdity and rebel. Job had senseless horrors befall him, and his friends gave all the rational arguments for why this happened, and Job showed that none of them were valid. Job even says in the middle of the book that he knows that there's no rational justification for the things that happened to him, and that he is aware that if he were to argue with God Himself, God would be able to out-talk him, but he would still be right. And at the end, God does answer him, but does *not* explain why all this happened to Job; he simply out-talks him by saying, in effect, "Can you do the marvelous things I can do? Then don't question why I did all this to you." Job is redeemed at the end; but there is in the book no sensible answer to why he went through what he went through. (The conversation

between God and Satan, using Job as a test case, is obviously a dramatic gimmick; because it certainly makes no sense for an omnipotent God to pick out somebody he knows is going to pass the test just to see if his "prediction" will be verified.) Essentially, *Job* says that we can't expect to know what's going on in this world and to make sense of it so that our minds are satisfied; but this is no reason to "curse God and die"; it is more reasonable to hang on and bow before the mystery than to repudiate it like Camus and accept absurdity as the truth.

Therefore, it is certainly reasonable to say that the honest searcher after the truth in what is most important in his life is in a quandary. There is reason to hope; but there is also reason, if probably not as much, to despair. And oddly, because the hope is so strong, and we know that it is so easy to blind ourselves when our desires make us want something desperately, the very fact that we need to have what religion offers us is a very strong argument that it is a delusion. It's too good to be true; that somehow all of this can make sense, and ultimately we will know about it fully and accept it as making sense. One of my own strongest doubts comes from this very fact; if my philosophical and Theological position is correct, then my world, which I at present find bearable only by putting from my mind huge chunks of it, is absolutely beautiful; and the fact that tears come to my eyes as I write this warns me that I shouldn't trust my reasoning. "It's too good to be true," the other half of my mind says. "You know how the world really is."

So the evidence is inconclusive; and it is really, I suppose, a matter of temperament which way you go, as James indicated in *The Will to Believe*. Those whose life has been basically favorable to them and their goals will find no particular need to face the mystery of their existence, because on balance life is definitely worth living; those whose life has been worse than death will tend to react like Hamlet, and might very well seek solace in religion. It was not for nothing

that Jesus said, "It is good for people to be poor, to suffer, to be oppressed," and so on, "because they are ruled from heaven."

But given this, given that the most sincere will realize that the evidence is inconclusive and resist the truth about God and his promise of redemption because it is so alluring, then the very people for whom the hints at redemption were to give hope to are cut off from its consolation by the very fact that the hope makes them wish so strongly that it be true.

And this, I think, is the reason for revealed religion. The evidence for natural religion is there, but it is too ambiguous, and so too easy to dismiss and to misinterpret; mankind can rightly ask of God, "Show me." It makes sense for God to do just that—not that he would have to, because the indications he gave in nature are enough to indicate the fall and the hope; but it still makes sense, given what we are.

To Abraham and his descendants, to whom God revealed himself as a "core group" from which to spread his good news, it must have been easy to believe, because they saw for themselves the wonderful things that God did for them, things that had no explanation except the fact that he in fact was the one in power over everything; but for us, and even for the generations that followed them, it was by no means easy to see what was factual and what was legend just like any other religion. In fact, the Hebrews kept thinking of YHWH as a god, and perhaps the greatest of all the gods; but they hedged their bets and didn't want to run the risk of getting Baal and Astarte mad at them by repudiating them utterly.

Interestingly, the Hebrew people themselves died and came back to life, several times: in the bondage in Egypt and then the exodus to the Promised Land; but more importantly in the exile into Babylon, where they ceased to be a people, and then in the return to Jerusalem and the rediscovery of the Law.

It seems that this last return to life cured them of polytheism; but

now the Law itself became a fetish, and the Hebrew religion was in danger of the perversion that is common to all religions: that of bargaining with God and trying to manipulate God. They had, after all, made a treaty with God, and they had seen what had happened to them when they violated it; and they had found again the terms of the treaty which had been given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and they were determined to live up to it, meaning that God would have to live up to his part of the bargain. But treaties with God don't work that way.

In any case, this kind of relationship of a partner making a deal with someone else is not the kind of relationship that the potter would, one would think, want with his clay. He created human beings free; and his promise of hope and redemption by means of his treaty with his chosen people was calculated to produce slavish obedience to the Law, and scrupulous concern about tithes of mint and anise and cumin—while expressions of human love and generosity, since the Law covers only the minimum necessary and leaves us free, would be ignored.

This sounds very much, I realize, as if I am second-guessing God, as if what I were trying to do was to show why God would "have" to pick out a people to reveal himself to, and how, having done that, he would "have" to go beyond that into Christianity. This is not really what I am after. What I am indicating by what I have so far said is that *if* you start from the premise that what the Gospels say about Jesus actually happened, then it would not be unreasonable that it be so.

But isn't that quite a leap? Granted, if the events of Jesus' life were as they are reported, the original followers would have had no trouble in believing that he was God, still, we in our present age are as much in the dark as ever. So much, so very much, of what is reported in the Old Testament seems clearly to be legend (the end of the Torah, supposedly written by Moses, tells of his death) or

fiction with a moral (such as *Job*) that it makes it all but indistinguishable from myth; and if there were miraculous events in Egypt, it's hard to say what they were. And the same goes for the New Testament. How can we, two thousand years after the fact, separate out the fact from the legend? And if it's not factual, then Judaism and Christianity are just like any other religion; myths that reveal the basic underlying core of any religion, and hold out to us the hope of redemption—just like any other religion.

And it was for this reason more than anything else that I undertook to translate the New Testament and put the documents in the order in which they were written—as far as I could discover it—to see if the documents as we have them are explainable in terms of legend, or whether the only sensible interpretation that they were basically factual reporting of what actually happened.

For a couple of centuries, at least, Biblical scholars have been infected with the "comparative religion" school of thought, and have interpreted the writings as legendary accretions on a religious innovator, the "Jesus of history." As his wise sayings became known and accepted, the saying goes, the "Christ of faith" grew up around him, and the fantastic stories about the resurrection (a theme common to all religions), the miraculous cures (also something very common) and so on began to be believed and taken to be fact. His doctrine, the believing element in this trend said, expressed the profound truth of our union with God and our redemption and so on; but the events of his life that illustrated it came from the teachings and the doctrine *as* illustrations of what he was saying, rather than being something that actually happened.

This is an extremely plausible scenario, one which, absent very cogent evidence to the contrary, is the one which should be accepted. But of course, it makes Christianity a religion just like all the others (which of course is also plausible on the face of it), and Jesus is no more to be listened to or "believed in" than Moses or

Gautama or Muhammad or Confucius—or George Blair. All are gropers after the meaning of life, and some did some more convincing groping than others.

Having had some experience with what classics scholars can do with Greek texts because of my work on Aristotle for my Doctoral dissertation, however, I was not intimidated by the fact that eminent Theologians were saying that if Jesus' grave were found with his corpse in it, it would make no difference to them; because the "Christ of faith" would still be there in what Jesus stood for and what he represents, even if the "Jesus of history" didn't do the things he was supposed to have done.

I realized that if Jesus *hadn't* done basically what he was reported to have done, he was a fool, and his teachings were nonsense, not profound wisdom. If someone slaps you, turn the other cheek for him to slap; if someone steals your coat, give him your shirt; make yourself a eunuch for my sake; go sell what you have and give the money to the poor; when people oppress you, be glad of it; if you don't take up your cross and reject yourself, you can't be a student of mine; if your eye is an obstacle to you, pluck it out and throw it away. If he isn't God but someone like me who is telling the world the right way to live, then Voltaire and Nietzsche were right: don't try to "interpret" this stuff in such a way that it is consistent with what we know is right, crush the infamous thing!

The Theologians could play with his being a wise guru, because of the difference between philosophers and Theologians: Philosophers think they believe, and Theologians believe they think. I know better than to accept uncritically what he said, if he's a human being; if I submit Aristotle and Kant to the microscope, the carpenter from Nazareth is going to be put on a slide too. And in fact, Jesus was no Socrates; as a philosopher, he is lousy. Far better follow Confucius or the Buddha; and far better still, follow your own reason, and make the bet as you see it.

Not to mention the fact that these Theologians were after the Pope to "change his position" on things that I knew he couldn't change his position on and be honest with the facts; and one of the things that gave me a hint that they might not know what they were talking about Biblically was that the Church's position on moral issues was very unpopular and not "with it," and very close to what I knew it had to be if it was locked into the facts, as it claimed to be. If there is any church that is the right one, it is almost bound to be the Catholic Church, if the reasoning I have given, especially in the last two sections, is at all on the right track.

So I decided to see for myself. What is the context in which these texts were written, when were they written, and what do they say? I found rather to my surprise that the letters of Paul were the earliest documents in the New Testament, which even those who think the whole thing is legend admit date from the time he was on his second missionary journey; and so at least most of them were written between the year 50 or so and Paul's death somewhere around 67. Now this was in the early days of the Roman Empire. Augustus, the first emperor to be called a god, died in 14, to be succeeded by the god-emperors Tiberius (d. 37), Caligula (d. 42), Claudius (d. 54), and Nero (d. 68). Cicero had held Rome spellbound by his oratory a hundred years previously; the poets Virgil and Horace died about fifty years before, Lucretius wrote his Epicurean *De Rerum Natura* in 60 B. C., Plutarch born as Paul started his work. In short, the Augustan age was upon the world, full of art, literature, learning—and emperors who claimed to be gods, to knit the empire together using religion as a tool for emotional solidarity.

Secondly, what would you predict if the stories about Jesus were legend, and the historical Jesus was the wise Galilean who made such an impression with his sayings that he was divinized by his hearers? You would predict that what would first be preached would be the teachings of this great sage; and then after the doctrine had spread

beyond the bounds of Judea and the non-Christians began to be converts, you would find the divinizing tendency begun in Augustus gradually rub off on Jesus, until eventually, when the complex documents got to be written down, there would be no way to separate out the fact from the legend, they would be so interwoven. And, in fact, the Theologians postulated a manuscript that they called "Q," for *Quelle,* or "source," to account for the similarities in Mark and Luke and Mark and Matthew and Luke and Matthew; the idea being that there was a document that contained the sayings of Jesus, probably written down by those who heard him; and the people who were the sources of the Gospels began preaching, they used this collection as a kind of guide that gradually got embellished—until years later, when the documents were written down by those who had heard second-, third-, or fourth-hand from Luke in the "Lukan community," or Mark in the "Markan community," the legendary accretions got written down too, and this gave us the Gospels as we now know them.

That's the hypothesis, basically.

Now what do we find when we look at the text itself? The very first document ever written was the *First Letter to the Thessalonians,* almost certainly written in 50 while Paul was in Corinth. And what does it say? Not Word One about the sayings of Jesus the Guru. "[You told the people] how you turned to God from worshiping idols, how you became slaves of the real God who is alive, and how you are waiting for his son Jesus to come from heaven and raise the dead and save us from the punishment that is coming." "We believe that Jesus died and came back to life; and God will do the same for those who have fallen asleep with Jesus; he will bring them back with him."

But that's the "Christ of faith," not the "Jesus of history." The only moral teaching Paul gives is not really something you find in the Gospels; none of the enigmas like turning the other cheek; it is basic

natural-law morality: "You know what the orders were that we gave you from Master Jesus. This is God's will for you, and your holiness: for you to keep away from sexual wrongs, for each of you to know how to keep possession of his organism in holiness and honor, and not let desire rule him as the pagans and those who do not know God do, and to know how not to be in competition with or take advantage of his brother or sister in what he does; the Master will make you pay for all of this, as we told you before and made very clear." Aristotle could have written that, except for the last sentence, and Moses could have written all of it.

So in fact, it is clear that what Paul had been preaching was that Jesus (a) was the son of YHWH, who is not like the pagan gods, (b) that he died and came back to life, and (c) that this was proof that we were saved from our sins.

We learn from his third letter, written to the people of Galatia between then and the year 57, that Paul was a Jew and a Pharisee of the most fanatical sort, going far beyond his fellow Pharisees in commitment to God as the Jews understood him and to observance of the Law. So Paul knew very very well the difference between YHWH, the Absolute, Almighty, Creator of Everything, invisible, unimaginable, and the pagan gods with their all-too-human foibles.

And yet here he is, preaching to the people of what is now northern Greece and central Turkey, pagans who have listened to him, that Jesus is the son of God, that he died and came back to life, and that this means that those who believe that he is the Prince who was prophesied and are "bathed in him" put on his livery and live with his life and become parts of him; and so when we die, we will come back to bodily life again; and this new life and union with the Prince who inherited Abraham's promise set us free from the Jewish Law.

True, a pagan wouldn't find all this so unusual: the death of the god and his restoration; the god having a human son; the union of

the true believer with the god. But how could the preacher himself, a *Jew,* swallow all of that? How could any Jew? They had resisted just this sort of thing for hundreds of years; and he himself had tried to destroy this very belief. And yet it was the Jews who were the first believers.

I have a Theologian friend who told me once that the way he looked on the early Christians was that they were like little children, fond of stories and ready to believe anything you told them. Yet the stories aren't there in Paul's letters; he was giving them things that Theologians still wrestle with today; there's a lot of the meat and potatoes of dogma and morals in Paul, but very little dessert. And he had from the very beginning antagonized the Jews, and even a good many of the early Jewish Christians; he tells in this third letter how he even "stood up to [Peter] to his face and told him he should be ashamed of himself." (Incidentally, note that Peter from this early time was regarded as at least one of the most influential in the community, if not as *the* most important.)

Nor were the pagans any more eager to lap up everything that Paul said. The first letter to the Thessalonians was written from Corinth just after Paul had left Athens, where, if Luke is to be believed in *Acts,* he had quite an audience, until he started talking about bodily resurrection. "We'll talk about this some other time," they said.

And in that same year 57, in which he wrote the letter to Galatia, Paul was in Ephesus, writing back to Corinth, to the pagan converts. And what does he say? First of all, that there were all kinds of factions forming of disciples of various preachers arguing with one another; secondly, "precisely because the Judeans want proof of the Prince's authenticity and the Greeks are looking for scientific evidence, our proclamation deals with the Prince hanging on a cross, which is shocking to the Judeans and stupidity to the Greeks."

After all, the one who was claiming to be a god didn't set himself

up as a sage like Gamaliel (who was Paul's teacher, by the way); he claimed to be the Prince who was prophesied; the successor to David who was to take over the throne and conquer the world. And he was killed for it as an impostor, and in the most disgraceful way a person could be killed: hanging naked, spread-eagled for everyone to see and jeer at.

Now these people were not fools; they knew that Tiberius and Claudius weren't really gods. Why should they pick this crook to worship? Nor was this something that the pagans outside the Christian community felt. Paul says in Chapter 15, "But if the proclamation says that the Prince came back from being dead, how is it that some of you claim that corpses don't come back to life?" That is, evidently, these early Christians were modern Theologians: the resurrection was symbolic, and shouldn't be taken literally.

And what Paul says here, in the year 57, some 25 years or so after Jesus died, is very instructive:

> If corpses don't come back to life, then the Prince didn't come back to life; and if the Prince didn't come back to life, then what you believe is a waste of time, and we turn out to be perjurers before God, because we have given testimony sworn before God that he brought the Prince back to life, which he didn't do if there is no bringing dead people to life again; and if the Prince didn't come back to life, your belief is useless; you still have your sins. Not to mention that those who have fallen asleep in the Prince no longer exist. If we are people who have hope in the Prince only in this life, we are the sorriest human beings there are. But the fact is that the Prince did come back to life, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

You have to stand on your head to interpret this as anything but an answer to the sophisticated, who see the "meaning" in all the legendary tales and view the whole thing as an allegory. Paul is clearly saying that this is precisely what it *isn't*. In fact, shortly before this

passage, he says this, as a summary of what he preached:

> In the first place, I reported to you what I had reported to me: that the Prince died because of our sins, as Scripture predicted; that he was buried, that he came back to life on the third day after his death, and that he was seen by Cephas [Peter] and afterwards by the Twelve. Later, he was seen by more than five hundred brothers at the same time, a great many of whom are still alive, though some have died; and after that he was seen by James, and then by all the Prince's Emissaries—and last of all, as if I had been born at the wrong time, he was seen by me.

This is no allegory, in other words. People you can talk to actually *saw* this, and are swearing before God that they actually saw it. Paul isn't stressing the wisdom of Jesus the sage; his preaching doesn't really have anything to do with that. What Jesus said, and what he "stood for" in the sense of the *values* that he preached, is almost irrelevant; it's what *happened* to him and the implications of that for our lives (that our sins are removed, and that we will come back to life some day) that is what is being hammered at again and again, with the clear recognition that what actually happened is shocking if you're a Jew, and ridiculous if you're a pagan. But it's a fact nonetheless, is what Paul says, and needs no persuasive rhetoric to dress it up.

People talk today as I write this about Elvis Presley still being alive; but no one dares to say he got up from his grave. It's almost thirty years since John Kennedy was shot, and there's a kind of aura that's arisen around him; in fact, during the 1992 election, I think it was, when Vice President Quayle mentioned that he wasn't any younger than Kennedy, Lloyd Benson, his opponent in the debate, looked at him and said, "I knew John Kennedy, Mr. Quayle; and let me tell you, you are no John Kennedy," and all but wrecked Quayle's career for *daring* to compare himself with John Kennedy.

But even with that, it's inconceivable that anyone would start a rumor that Kennedy got up out of the grave and started walking around again. Too many of us were there and saw what happened; anyone who tried this would find himself escorted to a padded cell. If we think that this is ridiculous, were the Romans that much more naive? Judging by what Paul wrote in the letter to Corinth, they precisely weren't. It was as hard to believe then as it would be today. And the man they're talking about was no John Kennedy; he was (a) a nobody, the son of a carpenter, (b) from a little part of the world of no fame except as a hotbed of fanaticism, and (c) a crook, hanged in the most degrading, disgraceful way the Roman Empire possessed. The only thing it had going for it was the conviction of the people who were saying, "Look, I saw this happen; I'm just reporting what I saw."

Maybe after seventy or a hundred years, people might begin to take legend as fact; but not within the lifetimes of the people who actually saw what was happening. And anyway, if Paul is any indication, he certainly isn't confusing the two. He is well aware of the allegorical sense in which these things can be taken, and is fighting it every step of the way—against those in his own community who insist on applying it.

And, in fact, in that same year he wrote the letter to Corinth, he went there to preach again, and was bitterly attacked as a fraud, and as one who didn't know what he was talking about, and was only doing this for his own aggrandizement. He left Corinth in disgrace and shot back a letter from Asia Minor (which I think has come down to us as the last part of the second letter to Corinth, beginning with Chapter 10) defending himself against the charge, in which he says several things that are instructive for our purposes. First of all, he says this: "Then what is wrong with me? That I degraded myself—to dignify you—when I delivered the report of God's good news to you without charging you for it?" So he wasn't doing it for financial gain.

He was a tent-maker and in the earlier days supported himself with this work.

Well then, was it for prestige?

> Are they [his accusers] the Prince's servants? This is the crazy man talking; I am more of one. I work a lot harder than they do, I've been in prison a lot more, I've been whipped many more times, and many times faced death. I got the "forty lashes minus one" from the Judeans five times, I've been beaten with rods [from the Roman lictors] three times, I was stoned once, I've been shipwrecked three times, and once spent a whole day and night in the water; most of the time, I'm traveling from one place to another, in danger from fording rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from foreigners, facing the dangers you find in the city, the dangers you find in the country, the dangers in the ocean, the dangers from pseudo-brothers; most of the time I'm working hard, worn out and don't have enough sleep; I'm hungry and thirsty, and I've often gone without eating at all; and I've been cold and not had enough to wear; and besides these external troubles, there is the responsibility I carry every day, and my concern for all the communities.

There were, however, people that were making quite a good thing of "delivering the report." Shortly before the passage I quoted, he says,

> I'm going to say crazy things and lay out my claims like a braggart. There are a lot of people who brag a lot in this world; well, I can brag too. Anyway, you should have no trouble listening to a crazy man, since you are in your right minds. You put up with people who are enslaving you, eating you out of house and home, catching you in traps, putting themselves on a higher plane than you are, and slapping you in the face. But to my shame, I have to admit that we have been weak.

Later on, he says this:

> All right, maybe I haven't imposed on you financially myself; but from the beginning I've been a faker who swindled you out of your money. Did I manage this swindle by someone I sent as my representative? I sent Titus and the other brother; was it Titus who swindled you? Don't we behave with the same spirit? Don't we walk on the same path?
>
> Do you think I'm saying all this because I need to defend my conduct? I'm speaking in the presence of God and the Prince; and everything I say, friends, is supposed to be constructive for you.

In the early part of the Second Letter, which definitely was written after he had word from Titus that they were sorry for what they had done to him, he says:

> Of course, we have never "interpreted" God's word to fit our own ideas; we have said what we said in the Prince out of sincere hearts, as if it came from God and was said in God's presence. What, are we going to start all over again defending our conduct? Of course not."

Later, he says again,

> This is why we aren't really discouraged, because we have this service [of delivering the Report], which is, so to speak, our comfort; and so we have given up hiding things as if we were ashamed of them, and don't engage in devious behavior or "interpret" God's word to fit our own ideas. No, we stand right up in the light of the truth and let any person see everything before God.

And later on, he adds, "Stay on our side. We haven't wronged anyone or ruined anyone, or taken advantage of anyone."

What makes Paul's letters so convincing is that they aren't "composed" at all (except for the first two), but dictated just as fast as he could speak (shorthand had been invented by a former slave of Cicero's in 63 B. C., which must have been a blessing for Paul's

scribe), obviously just pouring out his whole heart and soul, without trying in the least to "make an impression."

But for our purposes, the point is that he had absolutely nothing to gain from what he was doing: no money, no fame, nothing that would induce a person to lie. Not even any of it, obviously, from the communities he founded, except possibly those in Macedonia. In fact, in the very last letter he wrote, the second letter to Timothy, where he was in prison awaiting his death, he says, "The first time I appeared in court, no one helped in my defense; they all deserted me; but I hope that this won't be held against them." Two short paragraphs later, he is silent forever, facing certain execution on a cross, than which nothing is more horrible to contemplate. His own Master was said to have sweated blood over it.

So (a) there is no reason to think that Paul was doing anything but telling what he thought were the facts. Further, (b) he knew full well what the attitudes of the Jews and the pagans both were to the message he was giving them, and that it wasn't what they wanted to hear. Again, (c) he had seen Jesus himself, though "at the wrong time," and had talked at length to those who had been present at the events he was talking about, and he was no dupe. He precisely went to see them, "in case the path I was following led nowhere."

Where are we, then? If you're going to hold that Christianity with its fantastic stories about Jesus was legend, then how do you get around Paul's letters? There's no hope in placing the most telling of them anywhere but at the time I mentioned; there's too much testimony about them, not only from writers in the very earliest part of the second century, but from other documents in the Bible itself, like Peter's second letter. There's no way they could have been written by someone later and "backdated" so that they would sound as if they came from Paul.

And he gives ample testimony that what was "controversial" about Christianity wasn't what Jesus taught, but the idea that he was

actually killed and actually came back to life; and that everyone knew that this was the issue, right from the beginning. Nobody was imprisoned or beaten for taking part in the Eleusinian "mysteries," which essentially said something like this, or for believing that Orpheus or Odysseus or Horus or whoever went into the underworld and came out again; nor was anyone in pagan Rome condemned for calling someone a god—it was as innocent a thing as our calling someone a superstar. But these people were claiming that it was a *fact!* They were claiming that what *they* meant by this was totally and utterly different from anything these other religions were claiming; they said it actually happened, that they saw it happen, and you had better listen to them. And they died for it.

And this wasn't just Paul. Peter's second letter says explicitly,

> You see, we were not retelling "meaningful" legends when we informed you about the power and presence of our Master Prince Jesus; we saw his magnificence with out own eyes. When, for instance, he had taken on himself from God the Father honor and glory, and the voice reverberated down to him from the glory of the Grandiloquent, "this is my Son, the one I love, in whom I am pleased," we heard this voice resound out of the sky while we were there with him on the holy mountain.

If Peter actually wrote that letter, it had to have been before he was killed in 67, during Nero's persecution. Many have put it late, on grounds that I find utterly unconvincing, but which I am not going to go into here, except to say that one of the main reasons is precisely this passage above. It would *have* to be late, the critics think, because the Transfiguration was one of those things that couldn't really have happened; and if he wrote it (a) he would know that he was lying, and (b) there wouldn't have been time for the legend to have become that entrenched. Precisely.

But if a later author wrote it, then *he's* a liar. This isn't like the

Letter of James, which could have been written "as from" James, in the sense that it says things that James could have (and possibly did) say, and so was "in the spirit" of James. But since this passage of Peter's letter claims precisely that he is *not* recounting a legend but something that he saw with his own eyes and heard with his own ears, then any later author who wrote this is perpetrating fraud.

Well, I don't want to go through a whole exegesis of the New Testament; but let me make just a couple more points.

First of all, the Reports of the Good News, beginning with Mark and then Luke and then Matthew, seem to date from about this time [42] (65-70. John's Report apparently was not circulating until toward the end of the century). But there are other manuscripts extant, some which may have originated this early, such as the *Gospel of Thomas,* the *Gospel of Philip,* and so on (called the "Gnostic Gospels") but which were always regarded by the official community as spurious.

You would expect such things. Thirty to forty years after Jesus died, especially since from the beginning fantastic things were said about him, it would be inevitable that the facts would get embellished with legends, because those who had been hearing the Good News wouldn't be content with the bare essentials; they would be burning with curiosity about what Jesus did during his life and what he said. So the "legendary accretion" hypothesis isn't by any means far-fetched.

But it's not as simple as that. Supposing there actually to have been fantastic events in Jesus' life, and that these were crucial to

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[42]All this the point of the subsequent book I wrote, *The Synoptic Gospels Compared*, which showed (I think conclusively) that the "Jesus of history/Christ of faith" dichotomy was inconsistent with the very Gospel texts (of Mark, Luke, and Matthew) that it was supposed to be illuminating; that these were *not* things that were written down many decades after the event, but by the people whose names are attached to the writings, at least two of whom were Jesus's Emissaries (Apostles).

people's belief in what Jesus' life meant to them, there would be a counter-tendency to want to weed out what was imaginative embellishment from what actually happened. And so, just as was the case with Muhammad, there would be strong pressure to get what actually happened written down while the original eye-witnesses were still alive. And given that once Nero got into the act, these witnesses were dying like flies, it would have to be done fast.

Furthermore, you would expect a kind of committee to arise, whose function precisely would be to make sure that distortions, however nobly motivated, didn't creep into the original facts. We see this natural tendency as early as Paul's letters to Timothy:

> And if anyone teaches something else and doesn't follow God-fearing teaching and a healthy way of thinking—the way of thinking of our Master Jesus—then he is a pompous fool who doesn't know anything; he is sick for puzzles and riddles that only lead to jealousy, bickering, sarcastic remarks, suspicions, and arguments. This is what happens to people who have destroyed their minds and turned away from the truth; they think religion ought to be "useful."
>
> And now, in the presence of God and jesus the Prince, who is going to judge the living and the dead, I command you by his appearing and his kingship, deliver the proclamation; harp on it, at the right time and at the wrong times; answer objections, correct errors, and lead people with perfect patience and guidance. There will be a time when they won't listen to healthy teaching, and will turn away to what they like to hear and look for teachers that tickle their ears; they'll plug up their ears to the truth and listen to stories instead.

So the psychological necessities involved in the passage of the years, if Jesus in fact came back to life, predicts that (a) authentic accounts from the eye-witnesses would be written down; (b) spurious accounts would begin to be written also, passing themselves off as

authentic; and (c) a definite structure would arise preserving what was authentic from what was spurious. And this is just what we find evidence of.

But if Jesus was really the Galilean Guru, what you would find first would be the sayings (and, by the way, though there are manuscripts of the rejected Gnostic Gospels, there is not the smallest scintilla of manuscript evidence for the famous "Q"). Then, as the legends began to form, you would find numbers of these legends appearing; but on this hypothesis there would be no grounds for distinguishing different sets of legends and rejecting some as "inauthentic." The legends about other figures, such as the heavenly portents around Augustus's birth and so on, weren't categorized into "authentic" and "spurious"; how could they be?

But in this connection, the beginning of Luke's Report is extremely interesting. Luke was a companion of Paul in his travels, and also of Peter, but apparently had not himself been a witness of what happened to Jesus. This is what he says:

> Although, my noble Theophilus ["God-lover"—a name, but possibly also a literary device], there have been many attempts to give a description of the events that have taken place among us—apparently based on what we have been told from the original eye-witnesses who dedicated themselves to the service of what they were affirming—I still thought it would be useful to research the whole matter from the beginning and write you the results of a careful study, so that you would know what would be safe to consider factual in what you have been told.

That is, "It is my purpose to do research to weed out the authentic from the spurious in the reports that are circulating" and presumably consulting those who were still around and ought to know. As a companion of Peter, he had access to at least one witness who had seen a lot of what happened with his own eyes; and there is

no reason why he wouldn't have been acquainted with many others. Judging by the closings of Paul's letters, these people intermingled rather freely.

This intermingling, by the way, is a very good argument *against* the hypothesis that there were "Lukan communities" and "Matthean communities" and so on, following one person and relatively insulated from the rest. Paul himself shows that in Corinth, there were the followers not only of himself, but of Apollos and Peter; and when he wrote to Rome, he gave his regards to all sorts of people there, in spite of the fact that he had never up to that time visited the city. And Paul's letters were causing all kinds of trouble as time went on, throughout the whole Christian world. No, there was mixing all over the place.

Furthermore, the notion that these reports were orally circulated and only written down years after the originators of the reports had died supposes that these people stayed in more or less the same place—against which there's good evidence—and more importantly, flies in the face of the psychological exigency that there be written documents to preserve the *ipsissima verba*. Can you imagine the people *not* demanding that Matthew, say, write down what he had been telling them? Especially the people who were circulating Paul's letters all through the communities, to such an extent that the letter found in Ephesus (*Ephesians,* of course), was obviously *not* written to his friends there, since it was directed at strangers, and was evidently the one he refers to in *Colossians* that he was sending to Laodicea. The best manuscripts, in fact, have a blank where the name of the addressee is.

Finally, let me say a couple of things about John's very different report of the Good News. It was written toward the end of the century; there's quite good evidence for this; and the whole purport of it is to make it crystal clear (a) that Jesus is God, and not just "a son of God"; (b) that he is completely human and flesh and blood;

and (c) that we become "one thing" with him by believing. He also says at the end, "it is an eye-witness who is reporting this, one who knows of his own knowledge the facts he is relating. It's purpose is for you to believe it."

Some have said that this is evidence that John didn't write this, because he "wouldn't have needed" to claim that he was an eye-witness. This is grasping at straws. First of all, the author never says that *he* is John (which has led some, since he claims to be "the student Jesus loved," to say that the Gospel was written by *Lazarus,* for God's sake, because it says there that "Jesus was fond of Lazarus"! That shows you what you have to wade through if you want to study this field).

That aside, why write this book so late? People by this time (we have independent evidence) were beginning to claim that Jesus didn't have a real body, but was just an apparition, and others (of course) that he wasn't divine. What would you expect from one of the very last survivors but the very thing that we have? In fact, it's also the burden of his first letter.

Incidentally, if the documents were written late "as from" earlier people (a practice I admit was not uncommon in those days), then why didn't these later authors do what the author of the Book of Wisdom did when he claimed to be Solomon? Why didn't they say that the books were written by James, or Andrew, or one of the Twelve? Only two of them even claim to be by these Representatives: Matthew, who was pretty much a nobody among the Twelve, except that he had been a tax collector, and, years and years later, John, who doesn't identify himself in the text. That's a pretty silly way of associating yourself with somebody famous. And who are Mark and Luke? They were barely mentioned in Paul's letters, and not always terribly favorably. It's the Gnostic Gospels, rejected as inauthentic, which have the famous names attached to them. Then why were these four documents thought to have been written by these four

people? Because they wrote them.

Now then, given that all the original Emissaries got into all kinds of trouble for saying what they said, and were killed in horrible ways for sticking to their statement that they were just telling the facts that they themselves saw, then the only way you can say that the documents don't report the facts is to claim (a) that the people who were supposed to have written them didn't write them, and the writing came much later—which, as I said, there's a great deal of evidence against, and for which the evidence is very feeble *except* on the *a priori* supposition that they couldn't have been written by the people who were supposed to have written them, because then they'd be true—or (b) the original observers were deluded.

But against this last point, there's the statement in John about what happened in the empty tomb. "The other student, the one who had arrived first, then went in also, and saw for himself what was there, and then began to believe what had happened. Up to this point, they had not understood what the Scripture meant when it foretold that he was to come back to life." And of course, John relates the case of Thomas, who won't believe what the others tell him until Jesus asks him to put his hand into the hole in his chest. (Did he actually do it?)

There is also ample evidence in Luke and the other evangelists that the students were not expecting him to come back to life, even though he had foretold it; they apparently thought he was using another analogy in referring to his return on the third day.

But what I find most interesting is how John undercuts his own case in the episode of the catch of fish on the banks of the Lake of Galilee. They were in the boat fishing, and saw Jesus on the bank, and John only recognized who it was by the fact that, following the man's advice, they had suddenly found their nets full. But then when they got back to the bank and approached him, John says, "None of the students dared ask him who he was, since they knew that it was

the Master." Here they are, looking straight at him, and "none of them dared ask him who he was." Obviously, he must have looked very different from the Jesus they knew before.

Now why did John write that? He was trying to prove that Jesus got up out of the grave, and actually walked around again; and they saw him and can testify to what they saw. And yet, at this point, they didn't recognize him by sight. The only sensible reason I can find for this is that John was trying to be scrupulously honest. It was evidently perfectly clear to him then and later that he was looking at Jesus; but he didn't look the same, somehow. But rather than mask this to strengthen the case, he put it in, so that centuries later, we still wonder at it.

Duplicity is, I think, the last thing you could accuse the writers of these documents of. Nor are they the naive little peasants we think of when we speak of "fishermen" in that demeaning tone. Peter and John both owned fishing *businesses,* with hired hands, and so must have been fairly prosperous. After all, Peter went back to his fishing after three years, and apparently the boat was still there. And John was well enough known to the high priest that he could get into his courtyard on that fatal night, no questions asked. Because Jesus said it was a good thing to be poor, it doesn't follow that he recruited from among the poor; in fact, in at least one case, we know he didn't: Matthew was a tax-collector, and they were anything but poor.

Then where are we? I think that if you read the documents in order, there is only one rational explanation for why Christianity caught on, and why these documents exist today: the authors were reporting facts, facts that the people of that sophisticated age couldn't get around and explain away. That's why I'm a Christian. Of course, I believe that the free gift of God has allowed me to approach the documents with an open mind, and not be convinced that, because the events sound like things told in many other

religions, and because they couldn't have happened, they didn't really happen.

As to why I am a Catholic, three things: First, Catholics are the most "fundamentalist" of the fundamentalists. I don't know any Protestant, still less fundamentalist, who doesn't try to explain away the "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community" by saying, something like "*You* are Peter," pointing to him, "and on *this* rock" (pointing to himself) "I will build my community." There is absolutely no textual justification for this. Granted, *petros* is masculine, and *petra* feminine, and the masculine *petros* means the kind of rock you can pick up and throw, while *petra* means "bedrock." But the difference in gender is just as easily explained by saying that you don't go around calling a man something feminine; and anyway, the Aramaic *Cephas,* which is certainly what Jesus used (Paul also uses the term), doesn't admit this neat little distinction. Nor are there many other Christians who take, "This is my body" literally; though it makes it hard to see what the sense is in Paul's statements to the Corinthians or John's reporting of the so-called "bread of life" speech if it isn't literal. Many students left Jesus after trying to get him to explain himself; but Jesus only became more and more literal the more they pressed him.

The second reason I am a Catholic is that this is the community which can trace its origins back to the original representatives, and which has dedicated itself to keeping the original teaching intact. I know that the Orthodox also have a good claim on this; but you have the problem of "You are Peter" once again.

And the third reason is what I said earlier: The Catholic Church in the modern world is almost the only one that has remained steadfast in the face of intellectual fads, particularly that of relativism and individualism. It has said, "Sorry, but facts are facts, and no matter how beneficial it might be to declare them non-facts, we simply can't do it." *If* Jesus is God, and *if* he wanted people to know of it, *then*

the logic of this would demand a preservation of the facts so that even today they could still be known as facts.

I don't know how convincing I have been; but these are my reasons why I think that Christianity is unique, and that the Catholic version of it is the most complete understanding of it. And that why I think my faith is reasonable.

As to what my faith entails, I won't bore you with it. I wrote what I think it implies for people's lives in a book called *Preface to the Lay Life*, which is another of those books that no one has yet read and which no one will probably read until I die if I'm right, and which will never be read if I'm mistaken.

Let us now leave religion, then, and get back to philosophy, where we'll discuss the ways people relate to each other.