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Utilitarianism and beyond

Edited by

Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams



EDITIONS DE
LA MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME
Paris

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK www.cup.cam.ac.uk
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA www.cup.org
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme,
54 Boulevard Raspail, 75270 Paris Cedex 06

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First published 1982
Reprinted 1983, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1996, 1999

Printed in the United States of America

Typeset in Bembo

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalog card number: 81-17981

ISBN 0 521 28771 5 paperback

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
AMARTYA SEN AND BERNARD WILLIAMS Introduction: Utilitarianism and beyond	1
1 R. M. HARE Ethical theory and utilitarianism	23
2 JOHN C. HARSANYI Morality and the theory of rational behaviour	39
3 J. A. MIRRELES The economic uses of utilitarianism	63
4 PETER J. HAMMOND Utilitarianism, uncertainty and information	85
5 T. M. SCANLON Contractualism and utilitarianism	103
6 CHARLES TAYLOR The diversity of goods	129
7 STUART HAMPSHIRE Morality and convention	145
8 JOHN RAWLS Social unity and primary goods	159
9 FRANK HAHN On some difficulties of the utilitarian economist	187
10 PARTHA DASGUPTA Utilitarianism, information and rights	199

11	JON ELSTER	
	Sour grapes – utilitarianism and the genesis of wants	219
12	ISAAC LEVI	
	Liberty and welfare	239
13	FREDERIC SCHICK	
	Under which descriptions?	251
14	AMY GUTMANN	
	What's the use of going to school?	261
	Bibliography	279

Preface

These papers discuss utilitarianism, criticisms of it, and possible alternatives to it, and so raise issues which concern not only moral and political philosophy, but also economics and the theory of social choice. Some contributors to this collection are primarily philosophers, while others are primarily economists, and we hope that comparison of their various outlooks and argumentative styles will itself contribute to understanding of these issues.

The papers, with two exceptions, have been specially written for this volume and appear here for the first time. The exceptions are the papers of Hare and Harsanyi, which we have included because we thought it useful to offer, as a background to a collection which is largely, but not exclusively, critical of utilitarianism, two well-known and distinguished modern statements which offer arguments for the utilitarian outlook. We are grateful to these authors for permission to reprint, and to all our contributors for their papers.

Our own contribution takes the form of an Introduction, in which we do not try to summarise the papers, but rather to argue for our own opinions. A good deal of our discussion is explicitly directed to points raised in the papers, but we have also chosen to pursue one or two considerations which seem to us interesting but which happen not to be discussed elsewhere in the volume.

References to the literature which are given in the course of the Introduction and the papers are presented in the standard abbreviated form of an author's name and a date: full details will be found in the consolidated bibliography at the end of the book. We are grateful to Mark Sacks for assistance in preparing it.

A.K.S.
B.A.O.W.

comparison of losses, which I have employed. But these wider applications of the principle are not always plausible, and I do not think that Rawls intends it to be applied so widely. His intention is that the Difference Principle should be applied only to major inequalities generated by the basic institutions of a society, and this limitation is a reflection of the special conditions under which he holds maximin to be the appropriate basis for rational choice: some choices have outcomes one could hardly accept, while gains above the minimum one can assure one's self matter very little, and so on. It follows, then, that in applying the Difference Principle – in identifying the limits of its applicability – we must fall back on the informal comparison of losses which is central to the form of contractualism I have described.

V

I have described this version of contractualism only in outline. Much more needs to be said to clarify its central notions and to work out its normative implications. I hope that I have said enough to indicate its appeal as a philosophical theory of morality and as an account of moral motivation. I have put forward contractualism as an alternative to utilitarianism, but the characteristic feature of the doctrine can be brought out by contrasting it with a somewhat different view.

It is sometimes said²⁸ that morality is a device for our mutual protection. According to contractualism, this view is partly true but in an important way incomplete. Our concern to protect our central interests will have an important effect on what we could reasonably agree to. It will thus have an important effect on the content of morality if contractualism is correct. To the degree that this morality is observed, these interests will gain from it. If we had no desire to be able to justify our actions to others on grounds they could reasonably accept, the hope of gaining this protection would give us reason to try to instil this desire in others, perhaps through mass hypnosis or conditioning, even if this also meant acquiring it ourselves. But given that we have this desire already, our concern with morality is less instrumental.

The contrast might be put as follows. On one view, concern with protection is fundamental, and general agreement becomes relevant as a means or a necessary condition for securing this protection. On the other, contractualist view, the desire for protection is an important factor determining the content of morality because it determines what can reasonably be agreed to. But the idea of general agreement does not arise as a means of securing protection. It is, in a more fundamental sense, what morality is about.

²⁸ In different ways by G. J. Warnock in Warnock 1971, and by J. L. Mackie in Mackie 1977. See also Richard Brandt's remarks on justification in Chapter X of Brandt 1979.

6 The diversity of goods

CHARLES TAYLOR

1

What did utilitarianism have going for it? A lot of things undoubtedly: its seeming compatibility with scientific thought; its this-worldly humanist focus, its concern with suffering. But one of the powerful background factors behind much of this appeal was *epistemological*. A utilitarian ethic seemed to be able to fit the canons of rational validation as these were understood in the intellectual culture nourished by the epistemological revolution of the seventeenth century and the scientific outlook which partly sprang from it.

In the utilitarian perspective, one validated an ethical position by hard evidence. You count the consequences for human happiness of one or another course, and you go with the one with the highest favourable total. What counts as human happiness was thought to be something conceptually unproblematic, a scientifically establishable domain of facts like others. One could abandon all the metaphysical or theological factors – commands of God, natural rights, virtues – which made ethical questions scientifically undecidable. Bluntly, we could calculate.

Ultimately, I should like to argue that this is but another example of the baleful effect of the classical epistemological model, common to Cartesians and empiricists, which has had such a distorting effect on the theoretical self-understanding of moderns. This is something which is above all visible in the sciences of man, but I think it has wreaked as great havoc in ethical theory.

The distortive effect comes in that we tend to start formulating our meta-theory of a given domain with an already formed model of valid reasoning, all the more dogmatically held because we are oblivious to the alternatives. This model then makes us quite incapable of seeing how reason does and can really function in the domain, to the degree that it does not fit the model. We cut and chop the reality of, in this case, ethical thought to fit the Procrustean bed of our model of validation. Then, since meta-theory and theory cannot be isolated from one another, the distortive conception begins to shape our ethical thought itself.

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Rawls's theory of justice
epistemological perspective
epistemological perspective
epistemological perspective

A parallel process, I should like to argue, has been visible in the sciences of man, with similar stultifying effects on the practice of students of human behaviour. The best, most insightful, practice of history, sociology, psychology is either devalued or misunderstood, and as a consequence we find masses of researchers engaging in what very often turns out to be futile exercises, of no scientific value whatever, sustained only by the institutional inertia of a professionalised discipline. The history of behaviourism stands as a warning of the virtual immortality that can be attained by such institutionalised futility.

In the case of ethics, two patterns of thought have especially benefited from the influence of the underlying model of validation. One is utilitarianism, which as I have just mentioned seemed to offer calculation over verifiable empirical quantities in the place of metaphysical distinctions. The other is various species of formalism. Kant is the originator of one of the most influential variants, without himself having fallen victim, I believe, to the narrowing consequences that usually follow the adoption of a formalism.

Formalisms, like utilitarianism, have the apparent value that they would allow us to ignore the problematic distinctions between different qualities of action or modes of life, which play such a large part in our actual moral decisions, feelings of admiration, remorse, etc., but which are so hard to justify when others controvert them. They offer the hope of deciding ethical questions without having to determine which of a number of rival languages of moral virtue and vice, of the admirable and the contemptible, of unconditional versus conditional obligation, are valid. You could finesse all this, if you could determine the cases where a maxim of action would be unrealisable if everyone adopted it, or where its universal realisation was something you could not possibly desire; or if you could determine what actions you could approve no matter whose standpoint you adopted of those persons affected; or if you could circumscribe the principles that would be adopted by free rational agents in certain paradigm circumstances.

Of course, all these formulae for ethical decision repose on some substantive moral insights; otherwise they would not seem even plausible candidates as models of ethical reasoning. Behind these Kant-derived formulae stands one of the most fundamental insights of modern Western civilisation, the universal attribution of moral personality: in fundamental ethical matters, everyone ought to count, and all ought to count in the same way. Within this outlook, one absolute requirement of ethical thinking is that we respect other human agents as subjects of practical reasoning on the same footing as ourselves.

In a sense, this principle is historically parochial. This is not the way the

average Greek in ancient times, for instance, looked on his Thracian slave. But, in a sense, it also corresponds to something very deep in human moral reasoning. All moral reasoning is carried on within a community; and it is essential to the very existence of this community that each accord the other interlocutors this status as moral agents. The Greek who may not have accorded it to his Thracian slave most certainly did to his compatriots. That was part and parcel of there being recognised issues of justice between them. What modern civilisation has done, partly under the influence of Stoic natural law and Christianity, has been to lift all the parochial restrictions that surrounded this recognition of moral personality in earlier civilisations.

The modern insight, therefore, flows very naturally from one of the basic preconditions of moral thinking itself, along with the view – overwhelmingly plausible, to us moderns – that there is no defensible distinction to be made in this regard between different classes of human beings. This has become so widespread that even discrimination and domination is in fact justified on universalist grounds. (Even South Africa has an official ideology of *apartheid*, which can allow theoretically for the peoples concerned to be not unequal, but just different.)

So we seem on very safe ground in adopting a decision procedure which can be shown to flow from this principle. Indeed, this seems to be a moral principle of a quite different order from the various contested languages of moral praise, condemnation, aspiration or aversion, which distinguish rival conceptions of virtue and paradigm modes of life. We might even talk ourselves into believing that it is not a moral principle in any substantive contestable sense at all, but some kind of limiting principle of moral reasoning. Thus we might say with Richard Hare, for example, that in applying this kind of decision procedure we are following not moral intuitions, but rather our linguistic intuitions concerning the use of the word 'moral'.

Classical utilitarianism itself incorporated this universal principle in the procedural demand that in calculating the best course, the happiness of each agent count for one, and of no agent for more than one. Here again one of the fundamental issues of modern thought is decided by what looks like a formal principle, and utilitarianism itself got a great deal of its *prima facie* plausibility from the strength of the same principle. If everyone counts as a moral agent, then what they desire and aim at ought to count, and the right course of action should be what satisfies all, or the largest number possible. At least this chain of reasoning can appear plausible.

But clear reasoning ought to demand that we counteract this tendency to slip over our deepest moral convictions unexamined. They look like formal principles only because they are so foundational to the moral

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rival languages of morals

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a principle of moral reasoning

thinking of our civilisation. We should strive to formulate the underlying moral insights just as clearly and expressly as we do all others.

When we do so, of course, we shall find that they stand in need of justification like the others. This points us to one of the motives for construing them as formal principles. For those who despair of reason as the arbiter of moral disputes (and the epistemological tradition has tended to induce this despair in many), making the fundamental insights into a formal principle has seemed a way of avoiding a moral scepticism which was both implausible and distasteful.

But, I want to argue, the price of this formalism, as also of the utilitarian reduction, has been a severe distortion of our understanding of our moral thinking. One of the big illusions which grows from either of these reductions is the belief that there is a single consistent domain of the 'moral', that there is one set of considerations, or mode of calculation, which determines what we ought 'morally' to do. The unity of the moral is a question which is conceptually decided from the first on the grounds that moral reasoning just is equivalent to calculating consequences for human happiness, or determining the universal applicability of maxims, or something of the sort.

But once we shake ourselves clear from the formalist illusion, of the utilitarian reduction – and this means resisting the blandishments of their underlying model of rational validation – we can see that the boundaries of the moral are an open question; indeed, the very appropriateness of a single term here can be an issue.

We could easily decide – a view which I would defend – that the universal attribution of moral personality is valid, and lays obligations on us which we cannot ignore; but that there are also other moral ideals and goals – e.g. of less than universal solidarity, or of personal excellence – which cannot be easily coordinated with universalism, and can even enter into conflict with it. To decide *a priori* what the bounds of the moral are is just to obfuscate the question whether and to what degree this is so, and to make it incapable of being coherently stated.

2

I should like to concentrate here on a particular aspect of moral language and moral thinking that gets obscured by the epistemologically-motivated reduction and homogenisation of the 'moral' we find in both utilitarianism and formalism. These are the qualitative distinctions we make between different actions, or feelings, or modes of life, as being in some way morally higher or lower, noble or base, admirable or contemptible. It is these languages of qualitative contrast that get marginalised, or even

expunged altogether, by the utilitarian or formalist reductions. I want to argue, in opposition to this, that they are central to our moral thinking and ineradicable from it.

Some examples might help here of such qualitative distinctions which are commonly subscribed to. For some people, personal integrity is a central goal: what matters is that one's life express what one truly senses as important, admirable, noble, desirable. The temptations to be avoided here are those of conformity to established standards which are not really one's own, or of dishonesty with oneself concerning one's own convictions or affinities. The chief threat to integrity is a lack of courage in face of social demands, or in face of what one has been brought up to see as the unthinkable. This is a recognisable type of moral outlook.

We can see a very different type if we look at a Christian model of *agapê*, such as one sees, e.g., with Mother Theresa. The aim here is to associate oneself with, to become in a sense a channel of, God's love for men, which is seen as having the power to heal the divisions among men and take them beyond what they usually recognise as the limits to their love for one another. The obstacles to this are seen as various forms of refusal of God's *agapê*, either through a sense of self-sufficiency, or despair. This outlook understands human moral transformation in terms of images of healing, such as one sees in the New Testament narratives.

A very different, yet historically related, modern view centres around the goal of liberation. This sees the dignity of human beings as consisting in their directing their own lives, in their deciding for themselves the conditions of their own existence, as against falling prey to the domination of others, or to impersonal natural or social mechanisms which they fail to understand, and therefore cannot control or transform. The inner obstacles to this are ignorance, or lack of courage, or falsely self-depreciatory images of the self; but these are connected with external obstacles in many variants of modern liberation theory. This is particularly so of the last: self-depreciating images are seen as inculcated by others who benefit from the structures of domination in which subject groups are encased. Fanon has made this kind of analysis very familiar for the colonial context, and his categories have been transposed to a host of others, especially to that of women's liberation.

Let us look briefly at one other such language, that of rationality, as this is understood, for instance, by utilitarians. We have here the model of a human being who is clairvoyant about his goals, and capable of objectifying and understanding himself and the world which surrounds him. He can get a clear grasp of the mechanisms at work in self and world, and can thus direct his action clear-sightedly and deliberately. To do this he must resist the temptations offered by the various comforting illusions that

make the self or the world so much more attractive than they really are in the cold light of science. He must fight off the self-indulgence which consists of giving oneself a picture of the world which is satisfying to one's *amour propre*, or one's sense of drama, or one's craving for meaning, or any of these metaphysical temptations. The rational man has the courage of austerity; he is marked by his ability to adopt an objective stance to things.

I introduce these four examples so as to give some intuitive basis to an otherwise abstract discussion. But I did not have to look far. These moral outlooks are very familiar to us from our own moral reasoning and sensibility, or those of people we know (and sometimes of people we love to hate). I am sure that some of the details of my formulation will jar with just about any reader. But that is not surprising. Formulating these views is a very difficult job. Like all self-interpretive activity, it is open to potentially endless dispute. This is, indeed, part of the reason why these outlooks have fallen under the epistemological cloud and therefore have tended to be excluded from the formalist and utilitarian meta-ethical pictures. But one or some of these, or others like them, underly much of our deciding what to do, our moral admirations, condemnations, contempts, and so on.

Another thing that is evident straight off is how different they are from each other. I mean by that not only that they are based on very different pictures of man, human possibility and the human condition; but that they frequently lead to incompatible prescriptions in our lives — incompatible with each other, and also with the utilitarian calculation which unquestionably plays some part in the moral reasoning of most moderns. (The modern dispute about utilitarianism is not about whether it occupies some of the space of moral reason, but whether it fills the whole space.) It could be doubted whether giving comfort to the dying is the highest util-producing activity possible in contemporary Calcutta. But, from another point of view, the dying are in an extremity that makes calculation irrelevant.

But, nevertheless, many people find themselves drawn by more than one of these views, and are faced with the job of somehow making them compatible in their lives. This is where the question can arise whether all the demands that we might consider moral and which we recognise as valid can be coherently combined. This question naturally raises another one, whether it is really appropriate to talk of a single type of demand called 'moral'? This is the more problematic when we reflect that we all recognise other qualitative distinctions which we would not class right off as moral, or perhaps even on reflection would refuse the title to; for instance, being 'cool', or being macho, or others of this sort. So that the question of drawing a line around the moral becomes a difficult one. And it

may even come to appear as an uninteresting verbal one in the last analysis. The really important question may turn out to be how we combine in our lives two or three or four different goals, or virtues, or standards, which we feel we cannot repudiate but which seem to demand incompatible things of us. Which of these we dignify with the term 'moral', or whether we so designate all of them, may end up appearing a mere question of labelling — unless, that is, it confuses us into thinking that there is in principle only one set of goals or standards which can be accorded ultimate significance. In certain contexts, it might help clarity to drop the word, at least provisionally, until we get over the baleful effects of reductive thinking on our meta-ethical views.

3

Before going on to examine further the implications of this for social theory, it will be useful to look more closely at these languages of qualitative contrast. What I am gesturing at with the term 'qualitative contrast' is the sense that one way of acting or living is higher than others, or in other cases that a certain way of living is debased. It is essential to the kind of moral view just exemplified that this kind of contrast be made. Some ways of living and acting have a special status, they stand out above others; while, in certain cases, others are seen as despicable.

This contrast is essential. We should be distorting these views if we tried to construe the difference between higher and lower as a mere difference of degree in the attainment of some common good, as utilitarian theory would have us do. Integrity, charity, liberation, and the like stand out as worthy of pursuit in a special way, incommensurable with other goals we might have, such as the pursuit of wealth, or comfort, or the approval of those who surround us. Indeed, for those who hold to such views of the good, we ought to be ready to sacrifice some of these lesser goods for the higher.

Moreover, the agent's being sensible of this distinction is an essential condition of his realising the good concerned. For our recognising the higher value of integrity, or charity, or rationality, etc., is an essential part of our being rational, charitable, having integrity and so on. True, we recognise such a thing as unconscious virtue, which we ascribe to people who are good but quite without a sense of their superiority over others. This lack of self-congratulation we consider itself to be a virtue, as the deprecatory expression 'holier than thou' implies. But the absence of self-conscious superiority does not mean an absence of sensitivity to the higher goal. The saintly person is not 'holier than thou', but he is necessarily moved by the demands of charity in a special way, moved to recognise that there is something special here; in this particular case, he has a

Handwritten notes in Spanish at the bottom of the page, including phrases like "Cada vez que se dice, parece más de...", "una equitativa", "una obligación", "de ser más", "de ser más", "de ser más".

sense of awe before the power of God, or of wonder at the greatness of man as seen by God. And a similar point could be made for the other examples: an essential part of achieving liberation is sensing the greatness of liberated humanity – and consequently being sensible of the degradation of the dominated victim; an essential part of integrity is the recognition that it represents a demand on us of a special type, and so on.

Another way of making this point is to say that motivation enters into the definition of the higher activity or way of being in all these cases. The aspiration to achieve one of these goods is also an aspiration to be motivated in a certain way, or to have certain motivations win out in oneself. This is why we can speak of these aspirations as involving 'second-order' motivations (as I have tried to do elsewhere, following Harry Frankfurt¹).

We can articulate the contrast or incommensurability involved here in a number of ways. One way of saying it is via the notion of obligation. Ordinary goals, e.g. for wealth or comfort, are goals that a person may have or not. If he does, then there a number of instrumental things that he ought to do – hypothetically, in Kant's sense – to attain them. But if he lacks these goals, no criticism attaches to him for neglecting to pursue them. By contrast, it is in the nature of what I have called a higher goal that it is one we *should* have. Those who lack them are not just free of some additional instrumental obligations which weigh with the rest of us; they are open to censure. For those who subscribe to integrity, the person who cares not a whit for it is morally insensitive, or lacks courage, or is morally coarse. A higher goal is one from which one cannot detach oneself just by expressing a sincere lack of interest, because to recognise something as a higher goal is to recognise it as one that men ought to follow. This is, of course, the distinction that Kant drew between hypothetical and categorical imperatives.

Or rather, I should say that it is a closely related distinction. For Kant the boundary between the categorical and the hypothetical was meant to mark the line between the moral and the non-moral. But there are languages of qualitative contrast which we are quite ready to recognise as non-moral, even bearing in mind the fuzzy boundaries of the domain which this word picks out. We often apply such languages in what we call the aesthetic domain. If I see something especially magnificent in the music of Mozart as against some of his humdrum contemporaries, then I will judge you as insensitive in some way if you rate them on a par. The word 'insensitive' here is a word of depreciation. This is a difference one *should* be sensible of, in my view.

¹ Cf. Taylor 1977; Frankfurt 1971.

Of course, I would not speak of this as a *moral* condemnation, but condemnation it would be nevertheless. I do not react to this difference as I do to differences of taste which correspond to no such incommensurability, e.g. whether you like the symphonies of Bruckner or not.

The criterion for incommensurability I am offering here is therefore not the same as Kant's for the moral. But, as I have already indicated, I do not think that a line can be drawn neatly and unproblematically around the moral. Of course, if someone professes to see no distinction between his concern for the flowers in his garden and that for the lives of refugees faced with starvation, so that he proposes to act in both cases just to the degree that he feels interested at the time, we are rightly alarmed, and take this more seriously than the failure to appreciate Mozart over Boieldieu. We feel more justified in intervening here, and remonstrating with him, even forcing him to act, or subjecting him to some social or other penalty for non-acting. We feel, in other words, that the obligation here is 'categorical' in the stronger sense that licenses our intervention even against his will.

But the boundary here is necessarily *fuzzier* and very much open to dispute. Whereas the weaker sense of 'categorical' that could apply to the distinction I am drawing above turns on the question whether a declared lack of interest in a certain good simply neutralises it for you, or whether on the contrary, it redounds to your condemnation, shows you up as being blind, or coarse, or insensitive, or cowardly, or brutalised, too self-absorbed, or in some other way subject to censure. This, I would like to argue, is a relatively firm boundary – although the languages in which we draw it, each of us according to his own outlook, are very much in dispute between us – but it does not mark the moral from the non-moral. The languages of qualitative contrast embrace more than the moral.

A second way in which we can articulate this contrast is through the notions of admiration and contempt. People who exhibit higher goods to a signal degree are objects of our admiration; and those who fail are sometimes objects of our contempt. These emotions are bound up with our sense that there are higher and lower goals and activities. I would like to claim that if we did not mark these contrasts, if we did not have a sense of the incommensurably higher, then these emotions would have no place in our lives.

In the end, we can find ourselves experiencing very mitigated admiration for *feats* which we barely consider worthy of special consideration. I have a sort of admiration, mixed with tolerant amusement, for the person who has just *downed* 22 pancakes to win the eating contest. But that is because I see some kind of victory over self in the name of something which resembles a self-ideal. He wanted to be first, and he was willing to go to

for the sake of it, and perhaps
 we change to higher goods
 A = where
 O = motivation = desires etc. that a person would like to attain. But he

great lengths for it; and that goal at least stands out from that of being an average person, living just like everybody else. It is only because I see the feat in these terms, which are rather a caricature than an example of a higher aspiration, that the feeling of admiration can get even a mitigated grip on this case.

But we also find ourselves admiring people where there is no victory over self, where there is no recognisable achievement in the ordinary sense at all. We can admire people who are very beautiful, or have a striking grace or personal style, even though we may recognise that it is none of their doing. But we do so only because the aura of something higher, some magic quality contrasting with the ordinary and the humdrum, surrounds such people. The reasons why this should be so go very deep into the human psyche and the human form of life, and we find them hard to understand, but a special aura of this kind contributes often to what we call the 'charisma' of public figures (a word which conveys just this sense of a gift from on high, something we have not done for ourselves). Those who consider this kind of aura irrational, who resist the sense of something higher here, are precisely those who refuse their admiration to the 'charismatic', or to 'beautiful people'. Or at least they are those who claim to do so; for sometimes one senses that they are fighting a losing battle with their own feelings on this score.

In this way, admiration and contempt are bound up with our sense of the qualitative contrasts in our lives, of there being modes of life, activities, feeling, qualities, which are incommensurably higher. Where these are moral qualities, we can speak of moral admiration. These emotions provide one of the ways that we articulate this sense of the higher in our lives.

A third way we do so is in the experience we can call very loosely ('awe') I mentioned above that a sensibility to the higher good is part of its realisation. The sense that a good occupies a special place, that it is higher, is the sense that it somehow commands our respect. This is why there is a dimension of human emotion, which we can all recognise, and which Kant again tried to articulate with his notion of the *Achtung* which we feel before the moral law. Once again, I propose to extend a Kantian analysis beyond the case of the unambiguously moral. Just as our admiration for the virtuosi of some higher goal extends to other contexts than the moral, so our sense of the incommensurable value of the goal does. For this sense, as a term of art translating Kant's *Achtung*, I propose 'awe'.

4

It is this dimension of qualitative contrast in our moral sensibility and thinking that gets short shrift in the utilitarian and formalist reductions.

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One of the main points of utilitarianism was to do away with this and reduce all judgements of ethical preference to quantitative form in a single dimension. In a different way, formalisms manage to reduce these contrasts to irrelevance; ethical reasoning can finesse them through a procedure of determining what is right which takes no account of them, or allows them in merely as subjective preferences, and therefore is not called upon to judge their substantive merits.

Now my argument was that a big part of the motivation for both reductions was epistemological; that they seemed to allow for a mode of ethical reasoning which fitted widely held canons of validation. We can now see better why this was so.

It is partly because these languages of contrast are so hard to validate once they come into dispute. If someone does not see that integrity is a goal one should seek, or that liberation is alone consistent with the dignity of man, how do you go about demonstrating this? But this is not the whole story. That argument is difficult in this area does not mean that it is impossible, that there is no such thing as a rationally induced conviction. That so many who have opted for utilitarianism or formalism can jump to this latter conclusion as far as higher goals are concerned is due to two underlying considerations which are rarely spelled out.

The first is that the ethical views couched in languages of contrast seem to differ in contestability from those which underlie utilitarianism and formalism. No-one seems very ready to challenge the view that, other things being equal, it is better that men's desires be fulfilled than that they be frustrated, that they be happy rather than miserable. Counter-utilitarians challenge rather whether the entire range of ethical issues can be put in these terms, whether there are not other goals which can conflict with happiness, whose claims have to be adjudicated together with utility. Again, as we saw, formalistic theories get their plausibility from the fact that they are grounded on certain moral intuitions which are almost unchallenged in modern society, based as they are in certain preconditions of moral discourse itself combined with a thesis about the racial homogeneity of humanity which it is pretty hard to challenge in a scientific, de-parochialised and historically sensitive contemporary culture.

The premisses of these forms of moral reasoning can therefore easily appear to be of a quite different provenance from those that deal with qualitative contrast. Against these latter, we can allow ourselves to slip into ethical scepticism while exempting the former, either on the grounds that they are somehow self-evident, or even that they are not based on ethical insight at all but on something firmer, like the logic of our language.

But, in fact, these claims to firmer foundation are illusory. What is really going on is that some forms of ethical reasoning are being privileged over

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In the absence of some demonstration of the validity of naturalism of this kind, the utilitarian and formalist reductions are clearly arbitrary. For they have little foundation in our ethical sensibility and practice. Even utilitarians and formalists make use of languages of contrast in their lives, decisions, admirations and contempts. One can see that in my fourth example above. 'Rational' as used by most utilitarians is a term in a qualitative contrast; it is the basis of moral admiration and contempt; it is a goal worthy of respect. The fact that it finds no place in their own meta-theory says a lot about the value of this theory.

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Once we get over the epistemologically-induced reductions of the ethical, the problems of moral reasoning appear in a quite different light. I just have space here to mention some of the consequences for social theory.

An obviously relevant point is that we come to recognise that the ethical is not a homogeneous domain, with a single kind of good, based on a single kind of consideration. We have already noted at least three kinds of consideration which are morally relevant. The first is captured by the notion of utility, that what produces happiness is preferable to its opposite. The second is what I called the universal attribution of moral personality. These can combine to produce modern utilitarianism, as a theory that lays on us the obligation of universal benevolence in the form of the maximisation of general happiness. But the second principle is also the source of moral imperatives that conflict with utilitarianism; and this in notorious ways, e.g. demanding that we put equal distribution before the goal of maximising utility. Then, thirdly, there are the variety of goals that we express in languages of qualitative contrast, which are of course very different from each other.

The goods we recognise as moral, which means at least as laying the most important demands on us, over-riding all lesser ones, are therefore diverse. But the habit of treating the moral as a single domain is not just gratuitous or based on a mere mistake. The domain of ultimately important goods has a sort of prescriptive unity. Each of us has to answer all these demands in the course of a single life, and this means that we have to find some way of assessing their relative validity, or putting them in an order of priority. A single coherent order of goods is rather like an idea of reason in the Kantian sense, something we always try to define without ever managing to achieve it definitively.

The plurality of goods ought to be evident in modern society, if we could set aside the blinkers that our reductive meta-ethics imposes on us. Certainly we reason often about social policies in terms of utility. And we also take into account considerations of just distribution, as also of the rights

of individuals, which are grounded on the principle of universal moral personality. But there are also considerations of the contrastive kind which play an important role. For instance, modern Western societies are all citizen republics, or strive to be. Their conception of the good is partly shaped by the tradition of civic humanism. The citizen republic is to be valued not just as a guarantee of general utility, or as a bulwark of rights. It may even endanger these in certain circumstances. We value it also because we generally hold that the form of life in which men govern themselves, and decide their own fate through common deliberation, is higher than one in which they live as subjects of even an enlightened despotism.

But just as the demands of utility and rights may diverge, so those of the citizen republic may conflict with both. For instance, the citizen republic requires a certain sense of community, and what is needed to foster this may go against the demands of maximum utility. Or it may threaten to enter into conflict with some of the rights of minorities. And there is a standing divergence between the demands of international equality and those of democratic self-rule in advanced Western societies. Democratic electorates in these societies will probably never agree to the amount of redistribution consistent with redressing the past wrongs of imperialism, or meeting in full the present requirements of universal human solidarity. Only despotic régimes, like Cuba and the DDR, bleed themselves for the Third World – not necessarily for the best of motives, of course.

It ought to be clear from this that no single-consideration procedure, be it that of utilitarianism, or a theory of justice based on an ideal contract, can do justice to the diversity of goods we have to weigh together in normative political thinking. Such one-factor functions appeal to our epistemological squeamishness which makes us dislike contrastive languages. And they may even have a positive appeal of the same kind insofar as they seem to offer the prospect of exact calculation of policy, through counting utils, or rational choice theory. But this kind of exactness is bogus. In fact, they only have a semblance of validity through leaving out all that they cannot calculate.

The other strong support for single-factor theory comes from the radical side. Radical theories, such as for instance Marxism, offer an answer to the demand for a unified theory – which we saw is a demand we cannot totally repudiate, at least as a goal – by revolutionary doctrines which propose sweeping away the plurality of goods now recognised in the name of one central goal which will subsume what is valuable in all of them. Thus the classless society will allegedly make unnecessary the entrenching of individual rights, or the safeguarding of 'bourgeois' civic spirit. It will provide an unconstrained community, in which the good of each will be the goal of all, and maximum utility a by-product of free collaboration, and so on.

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But Marxism at least does not make the error of holding that all the goods we now seek can be reduced to some common coinage. At least it proposes to bring about unity through radical change. In the absence of such change, commensurability cannot be achieved. Indeed, it is of the essence of languages of contrast that they show our goals to be incommensurable.

If this is so, then there is no way of saving single-consideration theory however we try to reformulate it. Some might hope for instance to salvage at least the consequentialism out of utilitarianism: we would give up the narrow view that all that is worth valuing is states of happiness, but we would still try to evaluate different courses of action purely in terms of their consequences, hoping to state everything worth considering in our consequence-descriptions.

But unless the term 'consequentialism' is to be taken so widely as to lose all meaning, it has to contrast with other forms of deliberation, for instance one in which it matters whether I act in a certain way and not just what consequences I bring about. To put it differently, a non-consequentialist deliberation is one which values actions in ways which cannot be understood as a function of the consequences they have. Let us call this valuing actions intrinsically.

The attempt to reconstruct ethical and political thinking in consequentialist terms would in fact be another *a priori* fiat determining the domain of the good on irrelevant grounds. Not as narrow as utilitarianism perhaps, it would still legislate certain goods out of existence. For some languages of contrast involve intrinsic evaluation: the language of integrity, for instance. I have integrity to the degree to which my actions and statements are true expressions of what is really of importance to me. It is their intrinsic character as revelations or expressions that count, not their consequences. And the same objection would hold against a consequentialist social choice function. We may value our society for the way it makes integrity possible in its public life and social relations, or criticise a society for making it impossible. It may also be the case, of course, that we value the integrity for its effects on stability, or republican institutions, or something of the kind. But this cannot be all. It will certainly matter to us intrinsically as well as consequentially.

A consequentialist theory, even one which had gone beyond utilitarianism, would still be a Procrustes bed. It would once again make it impossible for us to get all the facets of our moral and political thinking in focus. And it might induce us to think that we could ignore certain demands because they fail to fit into our favoured mode of calculation. A meta-ethics of this kind stultifies thought.

Our political thinking needs to free itself both from the dead hand of the epistemological tradition, and the utopian monism of radical thought, in order to take account of the real diversity of goods that we recognise.

7 Morality and convention

STUART HAMPSHIRE

1. The philosophical dispute about the objectivity of morals has been four, or more, disputes rolled into one. First, there is the argument about predicates standing for moral qualities: are they to be construed as intrinsic qualities of actions or situations? Secondly, there is the quite different dispute as to whether to attribute a moral quality to a person or to an action is properly to be taken as describing that person or action, or to be taken as another kind of performance, e.g. as expressing an attitude, or as recommending conduct, or both. Thirdly, there is the question of whether two persons expressing disagreement about the answer to a moral problem are properly described as contradicting each other, which is usually interpreted as a question about the conditions of applicability of 'true' and 'false' to moral judgements. Fourthly, there is the related, but different, question of whether there is a respectable procedure, recognised in other contexts, for establishing the acceptability of moral judgements of various kinds, or whether moral judgement is in this respect *sui generis* and for this reason problematic.

These four are some, certainly not all, of the clearly distinguishable questions that are to be found in the literature.

2. There is another essential issue, which was best expressed in the ancient controversy about whether moral discriminations are to be accepted as true or correct, when they are true, in virtue of custom, convention and law (*νόμος*) or whether they are true in virtue of the nature of things (*φύσει*). By an essential issue I here mean an issue which unavoidably arises for thinking men, independently of any theories in philosophy, when they reflect on the apparent stringency and unavoidability of their more disagreeable duties and obligations, and when they ask themselves where this apparent unavoidability comes from. That there is a clear and unavoidable distinction between moral judgements or beliefs issuing from reason and judgements issuing from sentiment is not evident to someone who has not heard of, or is not convinced by, the philosophies of mind that are built around these psychological terms. No philosophical theories have