ETHICS IN THE CONFLICTS OF MODERNITY

An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

A shaoghail, tha sinn ann g'a aindeoin;
Tha a'ghriosach theth fo'n luaithre fhathast.
George Campbell Hay

Contents

This essay is divided into five chapters. In the first the questions initially posed about our desires and how we should think about them are questions that plain nonphilosophical persons often find themselves asking. When, however, they carry their attempt to answer these questions a little further, they find that they have, perhaps inadvertently, become philosophers and that they need some at least of the conceptual and argumentative resources which professional philosophers provide. So their enquiry, like this one, becomes philosophical. But philosophy in our culture has become an almost exclusively specialized academic discipline whose practitioners for the most part address only each other rather than the educated layperson. Moreover, those same practitioners have for the last fifty years been harassed by the academic system into publishing more and more as a condition for academic survival, so that on most topics of philosophical interest there is by now an increasingly large, an often unmanageably large, body of literature that has to be read as a prologue before adding to it one more item. Readers should be warned that my references to this literature are selective and few. Had I conscientiously attempted not only to find my way through all the relevant published writing in the philosophy of mind and in ethics but then also to explain how I had come to terms with the claims advanced by its authors, I would have had to write at impossible length and in a format that would have made this essay inaccessible to the lay reader for whom it is written.

Nonetheless, I have worked my own way slowly and painfully – the pain is sometimes, although far from always, the pain of boredom – through what matters in that literature and, if I have readers who are professional philosophers, they can be assured that if I make no reference to a vast body of published work, including their own, it is because nothing in it has given me reason to abandon or to modify the views here expressed and the arguments here advanced. My readers are invited to think their way through my extended argument on their own terms, whatever those terms

may be. My primary aim is not to secure their agreement, since whether I do so or not depends in key part on the convictions and assumptions that they bring with them to their reading, but rather to invite them to redefine their own positions in the light of the case that I make.

The enquiries of the first chapter lead to a philosophical impasse, to a confrontation between two rival and incompatible positions, that of expressivism and that of a certain kind of Aristotelianism, two sets of theses and arguments about the meaning and use of 'good' and about the nature of goods, the protagonists of which are unable to provide sufficient reasons for their critics and opponents to change their minds. It matters that from each of these two rival standpoints the relationships between desires and practical reasoning is understood very differently and that the impasse, although theoretical, has important implications for practice. Is there then any way of moving beyond it? My strategy in the second chapter is to turn to another kind of enquiry, one in which I consider some social and historical contexts in which philosophical theorizing on relevant issues has functioned and of how it has functioned in those contexts. I take particular note of how such theorizing may sometimes function so as to generate misunderstandings in ethics and politics by disguising the social and economic realities of particular times and places. I note too that the remedy for such theorizing is, in part at least, better theorizing, theorizing that has the power to make us aware of those same realities. Examples drawn from Hume, Aristotle, Aquinas, Marx, and others provide a first step in rethinking the relationships between philosophical theorizing and everyday practice so that it becomes possible to pose as yet unasked questions about the conclusions at which I had arrived in the first chapter, questions that concern the relevant features of the distinctively modern moral and social contexts in terms of which, so it turns out, we need to understand the rival philosophical claims that I had discussed.

The third chapter of this essay, therefore, is a historical and sociological account, albeit a bare and skeletal one, of key features of the social structures and social life of advanced modernity in the course of which morality took on a new and peculiar aspect and from which the present form of the opposition between the two philosophical standpoints that I discuss in the first chapter emerged. I argue that we can understand how and why the morality peculiar to the modern world, the morality that I name 'Morality', has functioned as it has, only if we consider it in relationship not only to the political, economic, and social structures that are distinctive of modernity but also to characteristically modern modes of feeling and desiring. I argue further that we can understand expressivism adequately

only by considering both how it provides a subversive critique of Morality and the limitations of that critique. Those limitations, which turn out to be limitations of expressivism as a theory, are identified in the course of discussing the claims of three notable critics of Morality, Oscar Wilde, D. H. Lawrence, and Bernard Williams, a philosopher whose enquiries were informed by an unusual awareness of the historical and social contexts of those enquiries. It is Williams who does most in enabling us to understand the present situation of the reflective agent and the alternatives that she or he confronts, in part by his insights, in part by the issues that his work raises but is unable to resolve.

In the fourth chapter I am able to return to the original philosophical enquiry, but now with resources for better understanding and for moving beyond the impasse at which we had arrived, not only because I have now been able to identify where it is that expressivism succeeds and where it is that it fails, but also because I am now able to supply a more adequate account of what it is to advance rational justifications in the contexts of practice. The discussion of Williams' views had already thrown important light on what is at stake in our contemporary situation in either accepting or rejecting a NeoAristotelian standpoint in ethics and politics. This fourth chapter is therefore principally a fuller exposition of NeoAristotelianism, and more specifically of Thomism, in its relationship to the moral, political, and economic limitations and possibilities of the contemporary social order. My argument is designed to show that it is only from a Thomistic Aristotelian perspective that we are able to characterize adequately some key features of the social order of advanced modernity and that Thomistic Aristotelianism, when informed by Marx's insights, is able to provide us with the resources for constructing a contemporary politics and ethics, one that enables and requires us to act against modernity from within modernity. Its conclusion is that a certain kind of narrative is indispensable for understanding the practical and the moral life.

The fifth and final chapter exemplifies this thesis by providing a biographical study of the relationship of theory to practice and of desire to practical reasoning in four very different twentieth-century lives, those of the Soviet novelist, Vasily Grossman, of the American judge, Sandra Day O'Connor, of the Trinidadian Marxist historian and political activist, C. L. R. James, and of the Irish Catholic priest and political activist, Monsignor Denis Faul. It was from such as them, quite as much as from Aristotle, Aquinas, and Marx, that I learned to understand both the unity of political and moral enquiry and its complexity, in that its subject matter is at once philosophical, historical, and sociological. One moral to be drawn by

anyone who shares my conclusions is that the present organization of the academic disciplines is inimical to such enquiry.

I am all too aware of having attempted both too much and too little: too little because of the need to engage with adversarial positions in greater depth than I have done, too much because of the extensive ground that I have covered. One consequence is that I have had on a number of occasions to make the same point in different contexts. Readers who are understandably irritated by these repetitions should note that the alternative would have been to refer them too frequently to other passages in the text, so disrupting their reading. Some of the theses that I assert and some of the arguments that I advance repeat, revise, correct, or replace theses asserted and arguments advanced in my earlier books and articles, so that I could have cluttered the text with references to these earlier statements, but it seems better not to do so.[1] I am also happy to acknowledge my debts first of all to those institutions who have provided me with much needed and much appreciated academic hospitality since I retired from teaching in the Philosophy Department of the University of Notre Dame: Notre Dame's Center for Ethics and Culture and its Maritain Center and London Metropolitan University's Centre for Aristotelian Studies of Contemporary Ethics and Politics. I am most grateful for the remarkable generosity of those colleagues in a number of universities who read and commented on an earlier draft of this book: Joseph Dunne, Raymond Geuss, Kelvin Knight, and Elijah Millgram, each from a standpoint significantly different from my own. I learned a great deal from them, although not as much as they may have hoped. I also owe a considerable debt to Jonathan Lear, Jeffery Nicholas, and John O'Callaghan, who commented incisively on particular passages, and to the two readers for the Cambridge University Press for their identifications of errors and unclarities. I am especially grateful to my copyeditor, Jacqueline French. Earlier versions of some parts of this book were read to seminars at London Metropolitan University. I could not have had better critics than those who participated in those seminars and to them too I am immensely grateful. I scarcely need to add that the flaws and errors that remain are mine.

Let me also acknowledge a very different kind of debt. In philosophy it is only rarely that anyone or any argument has the last word. Debate almost always continues, and this is notably so with the topics and issues with

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[1] I must, however, note that in Chapter 4 parts of sections 4.6 and 4.7 were originally published as parts of my "Philosophical Education Against Contemporary Culture," in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 87 (2013): 43–56, and parts of section 4.12 as parts of my "Ends and Endings," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88, 4 (Fall 2014): 807–821.

which I am concerned in this book: how normative and evaluative judgments are to be understood, how desire and practical reasoning are to be characterized, what it is to have adequate self-knowledge, what part narrative plays in our understanding of human lives, and what it is to understand these matters from a Thomistic perspective. Each of the positions to which I am committed puts me at odds with philosophers of insight, penetration, and wit who will remain unpersuaded by my arguments. To them I am very much in debt, since it is they who have forced me again and again to rethink those arguments.

My greatest debt of all is to Lynn Sumida Joy, not only for her particular perceptive and instructive comments on earlier drafts of this book, but for making the whole enterprise possible.

Desires, goods, and 'good'
Some philosophical issues

1.1 Desires, why they matter, what they are; what is it to have a good reason for desiring something?

Human lives can go wrong in a variety of ways and from different causes: as a result of malnutrition, illness, injury, or untimely death, from the malice, envy, or insensitivity of others, because of lack of self-knowledge or excess of self-doubt – the list is a long one. I want to focus on lives that go wrong on account of misdirected or frustrated desire. These too can be of different kinds. Someone who had set her heart on just one thing – athletic success, fame as a celebrity, preeminence as a physicist – and fails to achieve it may thereafter lead the unhappy life of a disappointed woman. Someone who wants too many different things and is recurrently diverted from his pursuit of this by the attractions of that may suddenly find that he has squandered his life away without achieving very much. Someone who wants and aspires to too little, perhaps from fear of the pain of disappointment, may never recognize that their talents and skills have never been put to adequate use. Such examples make it clear that when lives go wrong in these various ways, frustrated or misdirected or inadequate desire has played a part, even if not the only part, in making them go wrong.

The woman who had set her heart on athletic success perhaps failed to achieve it because of an injury. But it is her inability to find and pursue other objects of desire that makes her life one of disappointment. The man who wants and aspires to too little does so perhaps because of lack of self-knowledge or excess of self-doubt or both. The flibbertigibbet who pursued too many things may have had friends who encouraged him in his wasteful ways, not friends who might have given him good advice. The woman or man who invests all their hopes in a single lifelong project and is then defeated in their final attempt to complete that project will, like Gatsby in Scott Fitzgerald's novel, have "paid a high price for living too long with a single dream." If then we, thinking about such cases, are to

enquire about how things might go well or badly with our own desires, we will have to keep in mind the relationships between our desires and many other aspects of our lives. One question to ask about those of us who lead such flawed lives is: Did we or they desire what we or they had good reason to desire, given their or our circumstances, character, relationships, and past history?

Before we can pose this question profitably, however, we should note some other characteristics of our desires. The first is the large variety of their objects and so also, since we individuate desires by their objects, the large variety of our desires. She wants, among other things, a cup of coffee, to solve this differential equation, to join the local theatre group, never to have to return to South Bend, Indiana. He wants to lose weight, to be successful as a teacher, to visit Florence before he dies. What they want is that such and such should be the case at some point in the future. Yet what we desire for the future is sometimes that things should continue just as they now are. She is well liked and wants to go on being well liked. He is the proud owner of a Bugatti and wants to go on being the proud owner of a Bugatti. Moreover, we often desire not only that things should go well for us but also that they should go well or badly for particular others. She wants her friend to do well in her examination and the local food bank to flourish. He would be delighted if something very bad happened to the salesman who cheated him when he bought the Bugatti.

Such everyday examples draw our attention to still other relevant features of some desires. There are desires that we all share, yet may not even notice, so long as they are easily and routinely satisfied – the desire to have enough to eat, for example. But for those for whom hunger, as a result of poverty or famine, is an inescapable daily experience of felt need, this desire will be urgent and impossible to set aside. Yet we should not make the mistake of identifying the desire to eat with the felt need of hunger. Consider the case of an experimental psychologist who is studying the effects of food deprivation on a number of subjects, including herself. One of those effects is an increasingly intense felt need for food. However, the experimenter wants not to eat – and does not want to eat – for an extended period of time so that she can study the accompanying changes in herself. The felt hunger is one thing, the desire to eat another. So it might be too with a fashion model anxious to remain extraordinarily and elegantly thin. She feels hunger, but she does not want to eat.

It is of course quite otherwise with human infants, for whom the expression of desire just is the expression of felt need and the expression of frustration at not having that need met immediately. The difference between

such infants and human adults is at least threefold. The adult, feeling some bodily need, is able to ask, as the infant cannot, 'Is here and now the place and time to meet this need?', and perhaps to answer as my imagined experimental psychologist and fashion model do. Such adults recognize that their needs, felt or otherwise, are one thing, what they want to do about satisfying or not satisfying them quite another. In so distinguishing needs and desires, adults differentiate themselves from infants in a second way. They look beyond the present to a series of futures, tomorrow, next month, next year, ten years later, when it will become possible to achieve some objects of present desires that are not yet attainable. And they know, although they do not always bear in mind, that how they act now may make it easier or more difficult or impossible to satisfy those desires in the future. So they sometimes have to consider whether or not they should forego satisfying some present desire for the sake of keeping open some future possibility.

A third way in which human adults differ from human infants in respect of their desires is in their awareness not only of their future but also of their past. For they know that once they were small children and now they are not and that their desires as adults are significantly different from their desires as small children. That is, they know, even if they seldom reflect upon it, that their desires have a history, a history during which objects of desire have multiplied. Some of their earlier desires have been transformed, others replaced. New and changing experiences and new and changing relationships have provided a widening range of possible objects of desire. Infantile libido has become first adolescent and then adult sexual desire, infantile hunger has become a taste for fish and chips or foie gras. And wants as various as those catalogued earlier may now find a place in their lives.

If we find reason to reflect upon the history of our own desires, we soon become aware of other aspects of that history. First, it is inseparable not only from the history of our emotions, tastes, affections, habits, and beliefs but also from that of our biochemical and neurophysiological development. Our emotions are obviously closely related to our desires. We become angry when some harm that we very much did not want to see inflicted on a friend is gratuitously inflicted on him. We grieve when someone whose wellbeing we desired falls ill or dies. So too with our tastes and our affections. I want tickets for this concert because of my liking for this kind of music; I want the radio turned off because of my aversion to that other kind of music. I want this student to do well because of my affection for her parents. With habits and beliefs the relationships to desires are

again obvious. Initially I have no particular liking for this kind of music – Tudor madrigals, punk rock, whatever. Then I learn that someone whose judgment I greatly respect not only values this kind of music as a listener but is learning an instrument so as to become a performer. Impressed by this, I start listening carefully to recordings of it, I change my habits, I redirect my attention, and in time I find it rewarding to have done so. A change in belief and the development of a new habit result in changes in my desires, to what performers I want to listen, and on what occasions I want the radio turned off.

If we need convincing that the history of our desires is also inseparable from our biochemical and neurophysiological history, we need only remind ourselves of the kinds of effects that various illnesses and drugs, including alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana, can have upon our desires. But we should also notice a variety of discoveries made by neuroscientific researchers concerning what must not happen in the brain if our desires and emotions are to function as they normally do, discoveries about what happens when our lives are disordered by emotions and desires resulting from injury or other interference with the normal functioning of the brain. Why then with all these complexities should we focus especially on desires?

Consider two different types of occasion which give us good reason to reflect upon our desires. Occasions of the first type are part of the fabric of everyone's life, occasions when we cannot avoid making choices that will dictate the shape of our future lives, as when students decide for what kind of work to prepare themselves, or someone in midcareer faces alternative career paths, or someone decides to get married or not to get married, or someone decides to commit themselves to a life of religious contemplation or a life of revolutionary politics. Occasions of a second type are those when the routines of everyday life have been disrupted by, say, a serious illness or the outbreak of a war or a discovery that one has alienated one's friends, or by being unexpectedly told that one has been fired or is going to be divorced. In such situations it requires little reflection to recognize that if I am to answer the question 'What shall I do?' I had better first pause and pose the question 'What is it that I want?' Somewhat more reflection is needed to recognize that I also need to think critically about my present desires, to ask 'Is what I now want what I want myself to want?' and 'Do I have sufficiently good reasons to want what I now want?' and still further reflection to recognize that I will be likely to go astray in answering these questions if I do not also ask how I came to be the kind of person that I now am, with the desires that I now have, that is, to ask about the history of my desires.

We began by taking note of some ways in which someone's life could go wrong because there was something amiss with her or his desires. What we have now recognized is that whether a life goes well or badly may depend and often does depend on whether in the types of situation that I have identified someone thinks well or badly about their present, past, and future desires. To understand what it is to think well or badly about our desires, we need first to say more about what a desire is and about how desires relate to actions. A good place to begin is with Elizabeth Anscombe's remark that "The primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*."[1] Here the word 'primitive' is important. What small children desire they try to get. But, as we already noticed, as they grow older they learn to delay satisfying some of their desires and develop desires that can be satisfied only at some time, even some distant time, in the future. If then it is true of some adult that she very much wants to travel to Italy next summer, it does not follow that she is doing anything to implement that desire now, but only perhaps that she is so disposed that, if and when the opportunity occurs and it is the appropriate time, she will do such things as buy tickets and make hotel reservations and that, when at the moment she entertains thoughts of Italy, she thinks such thoughts as 'I hope to be there next summer'. Yet here we are wise to say 'perhaps'. For she may indeed want very much to go to Italy next summer and yet see no possibility of doing so. In this case her dispositions are such that if the obstacles to her traveling to Italy were to be removed, which, so she firmly believes, they will not be, then she would indeed be disposed to do such things as buy tickets and make hotel reservations and to entertain the hopes of an expectant traveler.

There are then, even in such simple cases, a range of ways in which someone's desires may find expression in their thoughts and actions. At one extreme are idle wishes for states of affairs that are impossible and known to be impossible by those who wish for them. "I wish," say I, who have a voice like a corncrake and know it, "that I could sing like Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau." About such wishes there is nothing to be done, as in all those cases where we very much want something to happen, but whether it happens or not is not at all in our power. At the other extreme are desires that translate immediately into action. I want not to get wet and, as it starts to rain, I put up my umbrella. I want to quench my thirst now and I fill a glass with water and drink it. The same action can of course on different occasions express different desires, and the same desire can be expressed in different actions. Putting up my umbrella might be an expression of my

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[1] G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2nd edn., 1958, p. 67.

desire to show someone what an elegant and expensive umbrella I own. And my desire to quench my thirst might be expressed in my searching for a drinking fountain.

Between those extremes are a range of other cases. If what I want is that things should go on as they are, my desire will be expressed in my letting things be, at least until and unless something happens to disturb them. If what I want is that something – anything – should disturb the hopelessly boring routine of my life, my desire will be expressed in my openness to invitations to disturbance and disruption. If what I want is that my wants should be other than they now are, my actions will be directed, often in complex ways, to altering my habits, redirecting my attention, perhaps to conditioning myself not to respond to certain stimuli. (Whether we want to want otherwise than we now do or instead want to want just what we now do is obviously often of crucial importance at turning points in our lives. Philosophers owe their understanding of the significance of such second order desires to Harry Frankfurt's 1971 paper, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person."[2] What all such cases, as contrasted with idle wishes, have in common is that our desires are expressed both in action and in those states of mind that motivate us to act. Of course, it is not only desires that motivate; so do emotions and tastes. And so too do those attitudes that some philosophers have named pro-attitudes, attitudes of liking or approval (or anti-attitudes, dislikings, aversions). I have, let us say, an attitude of approval toward those who work to mitigate the evils of world hunger. When someone asks me to make a donation in support of this cause, it is this pro-attitude that is expressed in my immediate positive response. But notice that what the request to contribute elicits is a desire, a desire to help, a desire expressed in my handing over dollar bills. As with emotions and tastes, pro-attitudes issue in actions as they do only because of their relationships to desires and to actions expressive of desires.

Some philosophers have talked as if every action must have some particular motivation of its own, as if the question 'Why did she do that?' will always have an answer that refers us immediately to some particular desire, emotion, or the like. But this is to ignore how much of our activity is what it is because of the structures and patterns of each individual's normal day, normal week, normal year. So often enough the first answer to the 'Why?' question should be of the form 'It's a Friday afternoon and that is what she generally does on Friday afternoons.' For most of the lives of most people,

[2] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 1, reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 11–25.

there is a daily, weekly, and annual routine. This does not mean that there are not many occasions for spontaneity, for choice, and for improvisation, but these generally have as their context structures that each of us can take for granted in our interactions with others. I enter the café at 7.30 am on my way to work, knowing that someone will have made the coffee. She phones the office after 9.00, knowing that the secretary will be there to answer the phone. He arrives at the station at 10.00, since the train is due to arrive ten minutes later. And on the mornings when someone sleeps late or the coffee machine or the telephone or the train breaks down, there are standard ways of responding and coping and standard ways of responding when someone fails to cope. Let us call the dispositions to act and to react in these patterned ways – somewhat extending our everyday use of the word – habits. For the moment it is enough to note the importance of such habits and their relationship to those institutionalized routines that structure our everyday lives. But later we will have to ask questions about how our lives come to be thus structured and how in consequence our desires are transformed. For the moment I turn from habits to beliefs.

Beliefs may on occasion play a crucial part in making our desires and the actions issuing from our desires what they are. Someone may be satisfied with her present life only because she believes that there is no more pleasing alternative that is open to her. What she takes to be possible depends on her beliefs both about herself and about the relevant aspects of the social world. Imagination too has a part to play. It may never have occurred to her that she might run away and join the circus or learn to speak Japanese and take a job in Kyoto. Indeed, if someone were to suggest either of these courses of action to her, her response would be dismissive, because she would be unable to imagine herself as, say, a trapeze artist or an interpreter for tourists curious about Zen Buddhism. Her beliefs and her imagination combine to set limits to what she takes to be possible and so to her present desires. And this is not the only way in which beliefs may be related to desires.

Each of us, in acting as we do, has to take some account of the desires of others with whom we interact. Sometimes we may want to act as they desire because we love them, or because we fear them, or because we want to secure their cooperation. We may perhaps see them as dangerous competitors for scarce resources, so that, if we are to satisfy our own desires, we must prevent them from satisfying theirs. In all these cases it matters to us that our beliefs about their desires are true beliefs, just as it matters to them that their beliefs about our desires are true beliefs. Sometimes we

may find it difficult to believe of certain others that they really do desire what, on the best interpretation that we can devise, they seem to desire. How, we ask, could anyone want *that*? What would be the good of acting so as to achieve *that*? These are very much the same questions that, as we noted earlier, we put to ourselves when we become reflective about our own desires. To be reflective about one's desires is to ask whether one has sufficiently good reasons for desiring whatever it is that one presently desires. To have a good reason for desiring something – when that desire is not an idle wish – is to have a good reason for acting in some particular way. So what is it to act for a good reason?

We need first to note that whether or not someone has a good reason to act in this or that particular way is one thing. Whether she or he is aware that they have a good reason so to act is another. And whether they so act just because they have a good reason so to act is a third. To act for a good reason is to act for the sake of achieving some good or preventing or avoiding some evil. The good to be achieved may be achieved simply in performing that particular action, as when someone acts generously by feeding a hungry person who would otherwise go unfed. Or it may be achieved by contributing to some shared activity, as when someone acts gracefully and beautifully by playing the cello in a performance of a Beethoven quartet. Or it may be achieved by producing some good as an effect, as when someone by eating and drinking temperately becomes healthy. To spell out the notion of acting for a good reason fully, we would have both to say more about these distinctions and to make some further distinctions, but enough has been said to make the point that we have a good reason to want some particular object of desire only if and when to act so as to achieve the object of that desire is to act so as to achieve some good.

We may of course have good reason to act in some particular way without having *sufficiently* good reason so to act, as when I have good reason to act self-interestedly by fleeing from some danger, but better reason to act courageously by standing fast in defense of innocent others who will otherwise lose their lives. So too I may have good reason to want something, but better reason to want something else. And I am able to justify acting so as to satisfy some desire, only if I can show that I had good reason for so acting and no better reason for acting otherwise. When I ask, therefore, whether I do or do not have good reason or sufficiently good reason to satisfy this or that particular desire, I am asking what good or goods are or might be at stake in my acting so as to satisfy it rather than some other desire.

To this there may be an immediate objection. Someone – anyone – may say "But surely we always have *some* reason to satisfy *any* desire. When asked to give our reasons for acting as we did, don't we often say that by acting as we did we got what we wanted? And isn't this in itself a perfectly good reason? We may perhaps have further reasons, but we don't need them." With those who make this complaint, I will at once agree that often enough in our culture 'Doing that got me what I wanted' is taken to have been a good, even a sufficient reason for some agent's having done whatever she or he did. Such an agent's claim may be no more than that it is good that this particular desire of theirs should have been satisfied. And there are of course many desires that, in particular contexts, it is good to satisfy. But the more radical claim voiced in the objection is that any desire provides not just a motive, but also some reason for acting so as to satisfy that desire. What should we say to this?

To ask what reasons I have for choosing to act in this way rather than that, in order to satisfy some desire, is to ask what would justify me as a rational agent in acting in this way rather than that. And to justify an action just is to show that the good to be achieved by so acting outweighs the good to be achieved by any alternative course of action open to the agent. Of course questions about rational justification are not the only questions that may be posed about our reasons for acting as we do. Others may on occasion find our desires and the actions that give expression to those desires not so much unjustified as unintelligible. We become intelligible to others just insofar as they can identify and understand as possible goods the goods that furnish us with reasons for desiring as we do and acting as we do. If, therefore, someone were to give as their sole reason for acting as they do that it achieves the satisfaction of some desire, without also claiming that in satisfying their desire they were achieving some good, they would have done nothing to make their action intelligible as an intended action, let alone to show that it was justified.

Yet it is of course true that considerations that have to do with our desires play a variety of parts in our practical reasoning. That I want something badly may in some circumstances give me a reason for satisfying that desire, if, for example, I will be distracted from acting as I should be acting, so long as that desire remains unsatisfied. That I want something badly may in other circumstances give me a reason for not satisfying that desire, if, for example, it is Lent and I am resisting my tendencies toward self-indulgence. But in all such cases considerations about our desires have the place that they have in our practical reasoning only because of the

relationship between satisfying or failing to satisfy this or that desire and the achievement of this or that good.

A very different rejoinder to my claim that our desires are both intelligible and justifiable only if we have good reason to act so as to satisfy them would be made by someone who recognized that I have come very close to reiterating Aquinas's thesis that "Every desire is for some good" (*Summa Theologiae* I–IIae, qu. 8, art. 1, resp.) and who held that there are counterexamples that are fatal to that thesis. Aquinas's view was that every desire has as its object something taken to be good by the agent, and some critics have supposed that he cannot therefore allow for those cases where someone desires something that is on any reasonable account bad and where the agent knows that it is bad, as when the fat man with a heart condition wants to feast on profiteroles. Those critics have misunderstood Aquinas's claim. What the imprudent fat man desires is the pleasure afforded by the delicious taste of the profiteroles, and this is indeed a good. So the fat man's desire is for some good. But in that his desire is for something that will shorten his life and impoverish his family, it is also a desire for something bad. So in acting for the sake of some good, he knowingly acts from a desire for what is bad. And there is no inconsistency here. We must look elsewhere for counterexamples to Aquinas's thesis.

Walking along the street I idly kick a stone. 'What did you do that for?' 'I just felt like it.' 'But what did you want to do it for?' 'I had no particular reason for wanting to do it.' Such impulses belong to a familiar class of momentary whims, where there is indeed a species of desire, but no particular good in view. Less common are those plainly neurotic desires that are unintelligible not only to others but also to the agent whose desires they are. Someone finds herself wanting to walk only on that side of the road where the house numbers are odd rather than even. She cannot say why. Her desire, as she feels it and expresses it, is not for any good. These are genuine counterexamples not only to Aquinas's thesis but also to such contemporary versions of it as that advanced by Joseph Raz, according to which it is not desires, but intentional actions that are always directed toward something that the agent takes to be of genuine worth: "intentional actions are actions that we perform because we endorse them in light of what we believe about them, and that means that we must believe that they have features that make them attractive, or as we say, features that give them value."[3] How, then, should we respond to such counterexamples?

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[3] Joseph Raz, "On the Guise of the Good," in *Desire, Practical Reason and the Good*, ed. Sergio Tenenbaum, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 116.

We can bring out their significance by considering situations in which some desire or intention aimed at no particular good conflicts with a desire or intention to achieve some palpable good, so that, if we were to continue to act as the former desire or intention directs us, we would have to forego that good. I am, say, sitting on a bench, idly whistling a tune. If someone were to ask why I am sitting there and whistling, my answer would be "For no particular reason." I am not waiting for a friend; I did not feel a need to rest. But then I hear a child's voice calling for help. If I ignore that cry, but remain sitting there, continuing to whistle, my action or failure to act at once becomes puzzling. For anyone in such a situation has good reason to respond to such a cry, unless they have an even better reason to act otherwise. *Ex hypothesi* I have no particular reason for continuing to act as I do, yet I seem to place a value on so acting that outweighs the reason that I have for responding to the child's cry. Do such cases occur? Plainly they do and equally plainly they invite us to infer that something more is going on, perhaps that such an agent is motivated by some desire to achieve some good or to avoid some evil that she or he is not able to acknowledge, certainly to others, but perhaps also to her or himself. So, in the case of the agent who remains unmoved by the child's cry for help, the lack of response to the child's cry may be and may only be intelligible as an expression of a deep and unacknowledgable fear of getting involved.

Such situations provide further counterexamples to the theses advanced by Aquinas and Raz. But it is important that they are all of them examples of desires and intentions that the agents whose desires and intentions they are find themselves unable to make intelligible to themselves, let alone to others. So the theses advanced by Aquinas and by Raz do hold of our desires and intentions, just insofar as they satisfy two conditions. They are not momentary whims and they are intelligible. With this qualification we can reaffirm the account of desires and reasons for action that emerged from our earlier discussions, while noting the importance of the distinction between those actions where the agent is able to supply a reason for acting as she or he does and those where this is not the case. On that account we present ourselves to others, and they to us, as moved by desires for what we take to be goods. It is, insofar as the object of some particular desire really is a good, that it provides us with a good reason for acting so as to satisfy that desire. And it is always possible that on such an occasion we have an even better reason for acting in some other way, because by so acting we could achieve some significantly greater good. To be reflective about our own desires is, whenever it is appropriate, to pause before acting and to ask how good our reasons are for acting so as to satisfy that desire. To be reflective in

our relations with others is to take their measure by considering both what real or supposed goods are the objects of their desires and how reflective they are with respect to those desires.

We should not, however, underestimate the extent to which we may on occasion be mistaken as to what the true object of some desire is, that is, as to what would satisfy it. And we should not ignore the importance of desires for that which we cannot as yet make it intelligible that we should desire. Desires sometimes point beyond themselves to some as yet unacknowledged, but felt lack in ourselves, something that William Desmond has made central to his treatment of desire.[4] We have to take time to learn what we do desire as well as to learn what we have good reason to desire. Nonetheless, it remains true that we need to make our desires intelligible and that to find a desire intelligible is to have identified the good or goods that would be achieved by satisfying it.

This account does of course at once raise further questions. The most important concern 'good' and good, the word 'good' and that of which we speak, when we use it. I have spoken of good reasons for actions and also of reasons that are good, but not good enough. I have distinguished objects of desire, the achievement of which would be the achievement of a good, from objects of desire of which this is not true. I have contrasted what is taken to be good by this or that agent with what is in fact good. What do we mean when we use 'good' in these various ways? A first step in answering this question is perhaps to take note of those words that we sometimes substitute for 'good', words such as 'desirable' and 'choiceworthy'. But this only takes us a very little way, since, if we are puzzled about what 'good' means, we will also be puzzled about what they mean. Why then should we be puzzled and how are such puzzles to be resolved?

First of all because of the range of disagreements and the kinds of disagreements over what is to be called good and why, that is, over what is and is not genuinely desirable and choiceworthy, and then because of the apparent inability on many occasions of those who disagree to resolve their disagreements. So we need, if we are to make further progress in our enquiries, an account of 'good' and of good which will enable us to understand these various disagreements better and to enquire how, if at all, they might be resolved, and, if not, why not. Note that what began as an enquiry into why lives go wrong because of misdirected desires then became an enquiry into what it is to have good or bad reasons for desiring what we do in fact desire, and must now become an enquiry into 'good'

[4] William Desmond, *Desire, Dialectic and Otherness*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987.

and good. But the point and purpose of this further enquiry, even if it proceeds at some very considerable length and in various directions, will be in the end to return us to our original questions.

1.2   'Good', goods, and disagreements about goods

J. L. Austin[5] and G. H. von Wright[6] more recently and Aristotle and Aquinas long ago (*Nicomachean Ethics* I, 1096a19–23 and Aquinas's *Commentary on the Ethics*) emphasized the multiplicity and variety of our uses of 'good'. We speak of good knives, good jam, good poems, and good kings, but also of a good time to apply for a job or to make oneself scarce, a good place to take a vacation or to build a prison, and good qualities to look for in candidates for public office. We may say of someone that she is good with children, good at tennis, or good for nothing. And what is true of our uses of 'good' is true also and obviously of our uses of 'bad,' 'better,' and 'worse'. When 'good', 'bad', and their cognates are used as adjectives in these ways, the criteria governing their use depend upon the nouns to which they are applied.[7] What makes jam good jam is very different from what makes a poem a good poem. What makes this a bad time to apply for a job is not at all the same as what makes that a bad place to take a vacation. So what, if any, is the underlying unity in these various uses of 'good' and 'bad'? What makes them more than a series of puns?

To speak in this way of something as good or bad is to evaluate it as a member of a class or from a point of view or both. But when we attempt to go further than this, we encounter difficulties. We might think, for example, that a rough and ready characterization of what is meant should run: to say of something that it is a good something is to say that, if you want or need that something for the reasons for which things of that kind – or things viewed from that point of view – are characteristically wanted or needed, then this particular something will meet your want or need. So it certainly seems to be with good knives and good jam, with good places to take a vacation or to build a prison, but any such formulation needs to be carefully qualified. Consider the kind of difficulty posed by the word 'characteristically'. In some impoverished populations some things are characteristically wanted because, although bad of their kind, they are cheap. This type of qualification does not give us reason to

[5] J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, p. 151.
[6] G. H. von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness*, London: Routledge, 1963.
[7] See Peter Geach, "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17 (1956): 33–42, reprinted in *Theories of Ethics*, ed. P. Foot, Oxford University Press, 1967.

abandon our original rough and ready formulation – which does indeed capture something of the first importance about such uses of 'good' – but to proceed with care in our employment of it.

What we need to do next is to note two features of such ascriptions of good. The first is the enormously varying extent to which those who use them agree or disagree as to what it is that makes this or that good of its kind or good from this particular point of view. As to what makes a good watch a good watch or good jam good jam, there is large, if not universal agreement. As to what makes good education good education, good architecture good architecture, or good government good government, there are the sharpest of disagreements. The second is that, although the *Oxford English Dictionary* says of 'good' that it is the most general adjective of commendation, to say that something is good of its kind or good from a point of view is not necessarily to commend it or to express approval. We speak not only of good violinists, but also of good thieves and forgers. We speak not only of those who are good at tennis or at making friends, but also of those who are good at cheating at cards or at corrupting the young. Any adequate account of good and 'good' will have to make these two features of our uses of 'good' intelligible.

A first step toward doing so is to take note of an at first sight quite different use of 'good' and 'bad'. It is not in the least paradoxical to assert that it is bad for someone to be good at cheating at cards, and there is no redundancy in asserting that it is good to be good at making friends. Both assertions seem to presuppose a distinction, first remarked upon by W. D. Ross, between two uses of 'good' and its cognates, one the attributive, adjectival use that we first noticed and the other the predicative use exemplified in these two assertions and in all asserted sentences of the form 'It is good to be, do, or have such and such' or 'It is good that such and such is, was, or will be the case.' It is this latter use that enables us to express not just disagreements, but complex disagreements, the kinds of disagreements that characteristically presuppose certain limited agreements.

Ferdinand and Isabella happen to agree in their evaluations of art, food, and clothes. Yet to Ferdinand's assertion that "It is good to cultivate a taste for fine art, fine food, fine clothes, so that, if you are ever able to afford them, you will know how to choose well," Isabella replies "It is bad to develop desires that you may never be able to satisfy. That way lies nagging discontent." Ferdinand retorts that it is better to be discontented as a result of having good taste than to be contented with inferior taste.

To this too Isabella registers her disagreement, a kind of disagreement that is often not resolvable. So it is also with Edward and Eleanor. Eleanor expresses her intention to recruit her coworkers to her trade union, since it would be better for them to confront their employer as union members. Edward replies that it would be better for Eleanor not to do this, since she will almost certainly be fired. Eleanor retorts that she would be worse off still if she allowed herself to be cowed by fear of her employer. Edward disagrees.

Notice first on how much Ferdinand and Isabella and Edward and Eleanor agree. In the former case they agree about what good taste is and perhaps that it is bad to be discontented, in the latter that it is bad to lose one's job and perhaps also about the benefits of trade union membership. Where they disagree is in their rank ordering of goods and in their consequent choices. Their agreements about goods and therefore about what each has good reason to desire make them and their choices unproblematically intelligible to each other. Their disagreements over the rank ordering of goods are disagreements about what provides a sufficient reason for arriving at the conclusions at which each arrives. Disagreement may, however, run much deeper than this, especially when there is little or no agreement underlying the disagreement. So, for example, there are those for whom pleasure – the pleasures of the senses, aesthetic pleasures – counts for very little, for whom it is generally a distraction from the serious business of life, and those for whom such pleasure gives life for the moment at least – and their lives are sometimes a succession of moments – its sole point and purpose. The former will renounce pleasure for what they take to be worthwhile achievement. The latter will on occasion renounce almost anything if the pleasure to be enjoyed is great enough. The judgments and actions of each may horrify the other. Indeed each may find it difficult to understand the other except in pathological terms.

Notice further that all these disagreements about goods and their rank ordering can be expressed as disagreements about what some individual or group in some particular situation have good reason or sufficiently good reason to desire. If then we are to understand what it is to have a good reason or a sufficiently good reason to desire this rather than that, we will have to be able to say just what it is that the parties to such disagreements are disagreeing about and how far, if at all, their disagreements might be resolvable. It may well turn out that we will need more than philosophy, if we are to supply adequate answers to those questions. But we certainly need whatever insights and arguments philosophy can supply. So what can

moral philosophers supply, if we ask them to throw light on the nature of such disagreements?

The answer may at first seem disappointing. For what the moral philosophers of the present day supply are their own disagreements concerning the nature of such disagreements. About the meaning and use of asserted sentences of the form 'It is good to...' or 'It is good that...', they advance a number of rival and incompatible accounts. Moreover, there seems no prospect of their resolving these disagreements. What view a moral philosopher takes of how to characterize and understand those evaluative disagreements that we have been discussing will depend upon which of these rival accounts she or he accepts. I intend to consider in some detail just two such accounts, immediately inviting on the one hand the questions 'Why only two?' and 'Why these particular two?' and on the other the question 'If first rate moral philosophers with different and conflicting standpoints are unable to advance arguments that convince the adherents of rival views, why should the rest of us take their conclusions seriously?' To none of these questions can I at this stage give a satisfactory reply. It will be only after I have outlined the arguments and claims of the two rival philosophical accounts that I will be able to explain why those two deserve our attention and scrutiny in a way and to a degree that others do not. Only at that later stage will I be in a position to argue that it is only by understanding the inability of the exponents and defenders of each account to convince those who hold the rival view that the relevance of those two accounts to our enquiry will become fully clear.

Remember once again that the line of thought that I have been following in this essay began with questions about the part that desires of certain kinds have played in lives that have gone badly wrong. It became clear that if we were to find answers to those questions, we would need to distinguish between desires whose objects particular agents in their particular situations have sufficiently good reason to desire and desires of which this is not so. But there are often disagreements and sometimes unresolvable disagreements over what is and what is not a good reason to want this or that, and these sometimes give expression to larger disagreements about how it is good and best to act, both generally and in particular situations. What are those who thus disagree disagreeing about? And how should we characterize their disagreements? It is here that we cannot do without a well-grounded philosophical account of what we are doing and saying when we assert "It is good to..." or "It is good that..." and other such cognate sentences. It is in search of such an account that I first turn to the claims and arguments advanced under the title of "expressivism."

1.3   Expressivist accounts of 'good' and of disagreements about goods

Expressivism in its earlier and less philosophically sophisticated forms was known as emotivism. Both emotivists and expressivists were and are concerned with the whole range of evaluative and normative utterances. So their account of 'good' and good finds its place within a larger account, something that we should note, but can for the moment put on one side. The classic statement of emotivism is by Charles L. Stevenson in his *Ethics and Language*.[8] On Stevenson's view asserted sentences are of three kinds, those that express true or false beliefs and have what Stevenson calls descriptive meaning, those that express attitudes of approval and disapproval and have emotive meaning, and those that are both descriptive and emotive. Sentences ascribing goodness are of the latter kinds and a first rough approximation to the meaning of 'This is good' is 'I approve of this; do so as well.'[9] What this approximation may fail to suggest are the complex ways in which many sentences combine descriptive and emotive meaning. But, on Stevenson's view, what matters is that such sentences can always be analyzed so that their emotive component is distinguished from their descriptive fact-stating component.

Sentences that state purported facts are true or false. Sentences that express evaluative attitudes toward such facts are not. Disagreements in belief, disagreements, that is, over what is in fact the case, can be settled by appeal to sense experience. Disagreements in attitude cannot be settled thus, but can only be resolved if one of the parties to the disagreement is persuaded to change her or his attitude. And one of the functions of evaluative utterances is to persuade others to align their attitudes with those of the speaker. An obvious first objection to this emotivist account of 'good' and other evaluative expressions is that it is in conflict with some of our ordinary language uses of 'true' and 'fact', as when we assert that "It is a fact that it is bad to take pleasure in the misfortunes of others" or we respond to someone's assertion that rising unemployment is a bad thing by saying "What you have just said is true." How should emotivists respond to this?

They should do so and in fact do so by arguing that uses of expressions such as 'It is true that' and 'It is a fact that' function as and only as endorsements by a speaker of the asserted sentences that they govern. So a counterpart to an emotivist understanding of evaluative utterances is a

[8]   Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1945.
[9]   Ibid., p. 21.

minimalist view of truth. What this reformulation of emotivism leaves untouched is the distinction between asserted sentences whose meaning is such that they are expressions of some evaluative (or normative) attitude, so that to endorse them is to give further expression to that same attitude, and asserted sentences whose meaning is such that they tell us how the world is, so that to endorse them is to say "That is indeed how the world is!" and to open oneself up to refutation by the facts of the matter, as determined by sense experience, being quite otherwise. This reformulation of Stevenson's account has one further advantage.

Asserted evaluative sentences at first sight function in our inferences in precisely the same way as do asserted sentences that purport to tell us how the world is. So from the premises "It is bad to take pleasure in the misfortunes of others" and "She takes pleasure in the misfortunes of others," it follows that "It is bad to take pleasure as she does." And this, it seems, would not be so, if the first of these premises could not be understood as either true or false. Yet a further consideration of the types of inference from evaluative premises that we are able to make suggests a second objection to emotivism. From the premises "If it is bad to take pleasure in the misfortunes of others, then those who do so should be condemned" and "It is bad to take pleasure in the misfortunes of others," it plainly follows that "Those who do so should be condemned." But this can be so only if and because the sentence used in the second premise is the same sentence and has the same meaning as the sentence embedded in the conditional clause of the first premise. Yet, on Stevenson's account, it seems that this cannot be so. For the sentence embedded in the conditional clause is not asserted and so cannot express the speaker's attitude, and so lacks emotive meaning, while the sentence used in the second premise is asserted, expresses the speaker's attitude, and so has emotive meaning. What has gone wrong? The notion of emotive meaning upon which Stevenson relied cannot, it seems, do the work that he tried to make it do.

What someone who wishes to rescue the core of Stevenson's theory from Stevenson in order to address this criticism has to do is to reformulate that theory in terms of some more adequate conception of the relationships between the meanings of sentences and their uses. On this revised view, the meaning of evaluative (and normative) sentences is such that to assert them is to endorse them. So someone who asserts the first premise expresses her or his endorsement of it, but, likewise, someone who asserts the second premise asserts her or his endorsement of it. And someone who endorses both premises is thereby committed to endorsing the conclusion, since inexpressive uses of normative or evaluative sentences as constituents

of conditionals are to be understood as preserving their meaning in conditional sentences, the assertion of which express an endorsement of those conditionals. The argument that emotivists cannot account for the kind of inference that we have been discussing was first advanced by Peter Geach.[10] An expressivist reply to Geach that provided an interpretation of such valid inferences in terms of this richer notion of the relationships between meaning and endorsement was advanced by Simon Blackburn.[11] Was that reply adequate?

It was in fact followed by a series of replies to Blackburn's reply and then of replies to the replies to the reply by, among others, G. F. Schueler, Bob Hale, Mark van Roojen, Nicholas Unwin, Alan Thomas, and Mark Schroeder, with further interventions by Blackburn. And by now there is no reason to believe that this series of exchanges will ever arrive at a decisive end, since, although what was and is at issue was restated in philosophically more sophisticated and illuminating terms, no progress was made in resolving the basic disagreement. Everyone was given sufficient reason to refine their point of view. No one was given sufficient reason to change it.[12] Moreover, if we were to consider those other issues on which expressivists and their critics disagree, we would find that there is a story of the same kind to be told, a story of apparently ineliminable disagreement. We are entitled to conclude not only that no decisive argument, or at least no argument that an honest and philosophically sophisticated expressivist would find decisive, has as yet been mounted against expressivism, but also that there is little or no prospect of such an argument being mounted. So let us consider the expressivist case – from now on using the adjective 'emotivist' to characterize only the views of Stevenson and such immediate predecessors and contemporaries of his as A. J. Ayer – in further detail. What account have expressivists provided of good and 'good'?

Alan Gibbard has written that "Good things are desirable, and the better of two things is the one that is preferable."[13] Gibbard goes on, "the

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[10] Peter Geach, "Assertion," *Philosophical Review* 74, 4 (1965): 449–465.

[11] Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, Oxford University Press, 1985, chapter 6, section 2.

[12] Essential reading is Mark Schroeder, *Being For: Evaluating the Semantic Program of Expressivism*, Oxford University Press, 2010, and subsequent discussions of Schroeder's version of expressivism, most recently, as I write, John Skorupski, "The Frege–Geach Objection to Expressivism: Still Unanswered," *Analysis* 72, 1 (2012): 9–18; Mark Schroeder, "Skorupski on Being For," *Analysis* 72, 4 (2012): 735–739; and Skorupski's reply to Schroeder's reply, "Reply to Schroeder on Being For," *Analysis* 73, 3 (2013): 483–487. I have not found reason here to pursue issues raised by other versions of antirealism in ethics. Some of them are discussed in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 6, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, Oxford University Press, 2011.

[13] Alan Gibbard, "Preference and Preferability," in *Preferences*, ed. Christoph Fehige and Ulla Wessels, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998, p. 241.

preferable thing is the one that it would be rational to prefer," so that our preference is warranted. "To call a preference 'warranted' is to express one's acceptance of norms that say to have the preference."[14] And "Someone who calls something 'rational' is is therefore expressing his state of mind."[15] So, when I call something good or assert that it would be good if such and such were the case, I am not only expressing preferences but also giving expression to an attitude, to my allegiance to a set of norms, norms that I may well never have made explicit. In many cases those preferences and norms will be ones that I share with others.

Gibbard is careful to do justice to the impersonal character of our judgments about what is good or bad. We are not merely giving expression to our own individual preferences and normative commitments. Those preferences and commitments and the states of mind in virtue of which they are taken to be rational may vary a good deal from individual to individual, but "Goodness is what our rational aims have in common. Goodness, in other words, is what everyone has some reason to promote if he can, whatever other rational grounds for choice apply to him in particular."[16] It is unsurprising, then, that in our judgments both about what it is for jam or watches or weather to be good or bad, and about whether it would be good or bad for this or that individual to be or do or have such and such, we find so much agreement on what the relevant criteria are. That agreement, on Gibbard's view, must give expression to an underlying agreement in attitude on what it is rational to prefer, on the norms that each of us has accepted. But what then of the cases where there are disagreements of varying extents and kinds, disagreements such as those between Ferdinand and Isabella or Edward and Eleanor? These, it seems, on Gibbard's view, must express disagreements on the norms that govern our judgments about what is good, disagreements in some cases about what the criteria for judging something to be good are, in others about the weight to be given to different criteria.

There is of course an explanatory story to be told, on Gibbard's view a naturalistic story, about the biological evolution and history of our evaluative and normative development, a story part of which Gibbard has told elsewhere.[17] It is the story of how our need to secure the cooperation

[14] Ibid., p. 243.
[15] Alan Gibbard, "A Pragmatic Justification of Morality," in *Conversations on Ethics*, Conversations with Alex Voorheve, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 161–162.
[16] Gibbard, "Preference and Preferability," p. 255.
[17] See Alan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgement*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

of others has issued in a responsiveness to the preferences and norms of others, to a pressure toward consensus. But any credible account of this need, this responsiveness, and these pressures must of course leave open the possibility of that range of disagreements that actually occurs. When sharp and serious disagreement does occur, disagreements as to what reasons may relevantly be adduced in support of some disputed evaluative judgment or as to what weight is to be given to different types of reason, the limits to the possibilities of resolving those disagreements will be set, on Gibbards view, perhaps by differences in the preferences of the parties to the dispute, perhaps by differences in those norms, the acceptance of which governs each of the disputants' conceptions of what it is to be rational, perhaps by both. For there is no further type of consideration to which appeal could be made.

Gibbard is then, if I have understood him correctly, committed to holding that for each of us there are limits to rational justification, so far as our judgments about good and bad are concerned, limits set by whatever fundamental cast of mind and inclination it is that finds expression in our preferences, in the norms governing our judgments, and consequently in those judgments. Our practical reasoning and our reasoned appeals to others are what they are in virtue of our underlying psychological states being what they are, and the openness of others to our reasoned appeals is what it is in virtue of the underlying psychological states of those others being what they are. An analogous point is made by Blackburn in a very different context. Those engaged in moral reflection have sometimes understood themselves as having to choose between what passion and impulse bid them do and what reason requires. Romantic thinkers have warned us against allowing passion and impulse to be stifled by the deadening influence of a calculating rationality, while those influenced by Stoics or Kantians are apt to fear that we may be seduced from the path of reason by passion and desire. And plain persons, reflecting on their moral choices, may frame them in terms of this apparent opposition between reason and passion, reason and desire. But if expressivism is true, to think in these terms is misguided. So Blackburn has insisted that "if we pose practical problems in terms of 'what I would do if I were reasonable' or 'what the reasonable person would do', we should not think we have thereby got *beyond* the subjection of the will to desire and passion. 'Reasonable' here stands a label for an admired freedom from various traits – ignorance, incapacity to understand our situation, shortsightedness, lack of concern for the common point of view." Blackburn goes on to assert that the first person use of the expression 'what I would do if I were reasonable' "signals

a consideration or set of considerations that only affect me because of a contingent profile of concerns or desires or passions."[18]

This last point is of some importance. Our evaluative and normative judgments provide us with motives for action. When we utter them to others, we hope and intend to move those others to act in accordance with those judgments. But, so the expressivist asserts, merely factual judgments can never so move us. If, on seeing someone else in distress, I act so as to relieve that distress, what moves me is not the mere fact of the distress, but my attitude toward that fact, my pity or my affection or my wish to be thought compassionate. From Hume to Blackburn and Gibbard, expressivists have argued that only an expressivist account of our evaluative and normative judgments enables us to understand how those judgments motivate.

When two people disagree about what it is or would be good for someone to be, do, or have, they are then, on an expressivist view, disagreeing in their – but what shall we call them – preferences, endorsements, attitudes of approval, concerns, desires, passions, or some combination of these? For the moment it does not greatly matter how we characterize the psychological stances involved, although later it may be important to ask some questions about them. Yet it matters at once, if we are to understand such disagreements, that, on an expressivist view, they are not disagreements concerning some matter of fact, concerning something independent of the psychological stances or states of those who find themselves in disagreement. The relevant contrast remains what it was from the outset in Stevenson's formulation of emotivism. It is with disagreements about everyday matters of fact or about natural science: "It did not snow here last year before New Year" and "You are mistaken. There was nearly an inch of snow in early December"; or "Chemical chain reactions always involve free radicals" and "No, there are some exceptions." In both types of case, one party to the dispute is in the right and the other not so, in virtue of how things were or are with the weather or chemical reactions. But on an expressivist view, whether framed in Stevenson's terms or Gibbard's or Blackburn's, nothing corresponds to this in evaluative disagreements.

"It is bad to hunt foxes and to allow the hunting of foxes" and "There is nothing bad about it and therefore nothing which would justify prohibiting it." Agreement both on the relevant facts about fox hunting and on which facts are the relevant facts is perfectly compatible with this evaluative disagreement. So what is someone claiming if she not only asserts her own

point of view but insists that she is unqualifiedly in the right and that those who disagree with her are quite mistaken? She is asserting both that fox hunting is bad and that she can envisage no consideration that might lead her to alter her judgment. Indeed, were she to change her mind, she might say, she would be mistaken. For her attitude toward the badness of fox hunting is that the badness of fox hunting does not depend upon her or anyone else's attitude toward the badness of fox hunting. And of course those who disagree with her could say the same. Nonetheless their evaluative judgments are what they are, on this expressivist view, only because their attitudes and feelings are what they are.

Were either party instead to concede that they might be in error, this would be to say only that they can envisage some possibility that further consideration might lead to a change of attitude. In both cases each party would have to recognize, if sufficiently self-aware, that what they were doing in judging as they do was giving expression to their own often complex states of mind. And this is quite different from the condition of those voicing their judgments in controversy over everyday or scientific factual questions. On such questions we justify our judgments by appeal to an authoritative standard – that of conformity to how things are – that is external to and independent of everyone's and anyone's feelings, concerns, commitments, and attitudes.

By contrast, where normative or evaluative issues are in question there is, on any expressivist view, no such authoritative standard, external to and independent of an agent's feelings, concerns, commitments, and attitudes to which appeal may be made. Or rather, if an agent does appeal to some external standard, it is only in virtue of her or his endorsement of it that it has whatever authority it has for that particular agent. In this rejection of any standard external to and independent of agents' feelings, concerns, commitments, and attitudes by appeal to which their normative and evaluative judgments might be justified, expressivists have on occasion found common ground with at least one version of existentialism. So A. J. Ayer could say of Sartre that "It is one of Sartre's merits that he sees that no system of values can be binding on someone unless he chooses to make it so,"[19] that is, unless the agent endorses it.

That evaluative and normative disagreements are not resolvable in the way that everyday factual and scientific disagreements are may be taken by expressivists to strengthen the case for expressivism. For it is a recurrent experience in our culture, as we already noted in considering the examples

of Ferdinand and Isobella and of Edward and Eleanor, to find ourselves
in evaluative or normative disagreement with others, where disagreement
is not to be resolved by any rehearsal of what both we and they take to
be the relevant facts, since about these, it turns out, we agree. But such
unresolvable disagreements are only to be expected, if expressivism is true.
Moreover, as I remarked earlier, on those issues concerning expressivism
which have elicited most philosophical debate, expressivists have been
given no decisive reason – decisive from their point of view, that is – to
change their minds. Do *we* then perhaps have sufficient reason to assent
to expressivism? To answer 'Yes' would be premature. For we cannot say
how good or bad the case for expressivism is, until and unless we have
compared that case in some detail with the case in favor of alternative and
incompatible philosophical accounts of good and 'good'. To the task of
outlining one such account I now turn.

1.4   'Good' and goods understood in terms of human flourishing: enter Aristotle

The concept central to this rival and alternative account is that of human
flourishing. Those who study the behavior of a variety of nonhuman animal
species distinguish uncontroversially between individuals and groups of a
given species that are flourishing and individuals and groups that are not,
among them wolves and wolf packs, dolphins and herds of dolphins,
gorillas and troops of gorillas. For the members of such nonhuman animal
species, their flourishing requires some particular type of environment in
which they can move in good health through the stages of a determinate
life cycle, developing and exercising their specific powers, learning what
they need to learn, protecting and bringing up their young, achieving the
ends to which they are by their biological nature directed. Disease, injury,
predators, including human predators, and shortages of needed food or
water are bad for such animals. Their impact is to produce animals unable
to develop and exercise their specific powers, animals who fail to learn,
and who may as a result be bad at hunting or foraging, bad at bringing up
their young. Note the indispensability of the words 'good' and 'bad' and
of cognate terms in characterizing animals in this way. Note also that what
it is good or bad for this particular individual or group to be, do, or have
depends upon what species it is to which they belong. What is good for
the members of one species – say, foxes – may be bad for the members of
another – say, rabbits. Note thirdly that when we say of this wolf or wolf
pack, this dolphin or herd of dolphins, that they are doing well or badly in

this particular environment, our judgment is not expressive of our feelings,
attitudes, or other psychological states. Its truth or falsity is determined by
appeal to standards that are independent of the observer.

Just as wolves, dolphins, gorillas, foxes, and rabbits flourish or fail to
flourish, so, on this rival account of 'good' and good, it is too with human
animals. About human individuals and groups we may say, just as we
do of members of other species, that it is or would be good or bad if
they are, do, or have such and such, meaning by this that such and such
conduces to their flourishing or failing to flourish qua human beings.
And among such individuals and groups are of course ourselves. So, on
this view, when we compare future courses of action or states of affairs
as better or worse, our standard is that of how far and in what ways
each will contribute to or frustrate our human flourishing. Our everyday
judgments about the good and the bad, the better and the worse, at least
when our evaluative language is in good order, presuppose some perhaps
inchoate view of what it is that human flourishing consists in, even though
it may be one that we ourselves have never spelled out. Disagreements
with others on particular occasions about how it would be best to act may
give expression either to disagreements about what human flourishing is
in general or to disagreements about what conduces to human flourishing
in this particular set of circumstances. (What do I mean when I speak of
our evaluative language being in good order? That will have to emerge
later.)

As with judgments about the flourishing or the failure to flourish of
members of other animal species, the contrast with expressivism is obvious.
Judgments about what it is good or best for me, you, or us to be, do, or
have are not taken to be expressive of my, your, or our psychological states.
And disagreements about what it is good or best to be, do, or have are
to be settled by appeal to a standard that is independent of the feelings,
concerns, commitments, and attitudes of those individuals who happen
to be in contention. At once an objection will come to mind. "Is it not
notorious," someone will say, "that people are often unable to resolve their
disagreements about what it is to flourish as a human being? Disagreements
about matters where there are genuinely independent standards of truth or
falsity about, say, the weather or chemical reactions, are always resolvable.
So how can they be disagreements of the same kind?" The question is
very much to the point, but it poses an objection to a position that has
not as yet been sketched even in outline. So for now let me remark only
that, on the view that I have begun to outline, rational enquiry into and
consequent disagreement about what human flourishing consists in in this

or that set of circumstances is itself one of the marks of human flourishing. I postpone further consideration of possible replies to this objection, but I do need at once to say something more about the analogy between human flourishing and the flourishing of some types of nonhuman animal. Begin by considering some key differences.

For nonhuman animals their environment, whatever it is, is given. To flourish is to flourish within this or that particular environment. It is to have adapted successfully to it. Members of some species migrate seasonally from environment to environment. Members of many species interact with their environment so as to change it in this or that respect. But human beings are unique in the extent to which they have from time to time transformed environments drastically, adapting them to their needs, reshaping landscapes, harnessing and redirecting natural powers so that they serve human purposes, often with large unintended effects. In the course of changing nature, they changed themselves so that in the course of their life cycle they developed a greater range of powers than does any other animal, many of them unique to human beings. Most notable is the power of language use, a power without which their other distinctive powers could not be what they are. Four aspects of human language are crucial.

The first is its syntactic structure. It is only because sentences can be embedded within other sentences that we can ask and answer questions about the truth of our assertions, the validity of our inferences, and the justifiability of our conclusions. "Do I have reason to believe that what I saw was my father's ghost?" "Is it true that, if this well has dried up, there is no other source of water?" It is in and through asking and answering such questions that we become reflective. A second crucial aspect of language use is its enhancement of our powers of communication. We are able to formulate complex and detailed intentions, to communicate them to others, to understand their complex and detailed responses, and to respond to those responses in ways that are impossible for species without language. This makes possible kinds of cooperation and forms of association that are distinctively human. We identify not only individual but also common goods. Thirdly we are able, only because we possess languages with tenses and logical connectives of various kinds, to envisage alternative futures, long term and short term, and to set ourselves individual and shared goals that take time to accomplish. We form expectations of each other and of ourselves, and we are pleased or disappointed by how things turn out. And fourthly these same linguistic resources enable us to tell each other stories about our projects, our heroic enterprises and our tragic failures, stories

that we narrate, stories that we enact, stories that we sing, stories from which we learn.

The counterpart to our possession of these capacities is the possibility for things to go wrong with our lives in a range of ways in which they cannot go wrong for nonhuman animals. We are apt to make false judgments and invalid inferences, we too often misunderstand each other and deceive each other, our thinking about the future is often wishful or fearful thinking, our stories can be distortions of and distractions from reality. It is our nature as rational animals to try to understand, but we are apt to misunderstand ourselves as well as others, and this misunderstanding sometimes extends to our and their shared uses of language. A great deal turns then on yet another distinctively human power, the ability to identify our mistakes and to learn from them. It is a notable fact about all these powers that they can be and have been developed in indefinitely many different ways – hence, the multiplicity of human cultures, each with its own way of educating its young and of understanding the human condition. Think only of the differences between ancient Sparta, ancient Corinth, and ancient Athens: a military, gymnastic, and laconic culture, a commercial and aesthetic culture, and a naval, rhetorical, theatrical, and democratic culture. Each of these rival and incompatible cultures embodied and gave its allegiance to a distinctive conception of human flourishing, expressed in its evaluative judgments.

Go further afield to, say, medieval Persia, or the Tang dynasty in China, or Mayan culture at its highest point, and it is at once evident that there are inconveniently many incompatible and rival ways in which human flourishing has been and is conceived. It may seem obvious, therefore, that there is little or no analogy between the way in which we think about the flourishing of nonhuman animals and the way in which we think about human flourishing. Human observers have little difficulty in agreeing about what it is for wolves, dolphins, and gorillas to flourish, while the prospects for arriving at agreement on what human flourishing is may seem slender, if only because it must seem that what each of us take the flourishing of human beings to consist in cannot but depend largely on what culture it is that we happen to inhabit and on what set of evaluative resources have been provided by that culture. But in fact these considerations suggest a line of thought that make an account of good and 'good' that understands them in terms of conceptions of human flourishing more rather than less credible.

First, the range of disagreements between and within cultures as to what human flourishing is is well matched by the disagreements between

and within cultures as to what is to be judged good and bad, as to how goods are to be rank ordered and, more generally, as to how 'good' is to be used. And this is what we should expect, if this kind of account of good and 'good' is true. Secondly, in most cultures, perhaps in all, it is taken for granted that human flourishing is what it is taken to be in that particular culture. "In Java . . . the people quite flatly say, 'To be human is to be Javanese,'" reported Clifford Geertz, noting also that "small children, boors, simpletons, the insane, the flagrantly immoral" – that is, those who are not flourishing qua human beings – are said by the Javanese to be "not yet Javanese."[20] So in each culture, whether Javanese or that of Periclean Athens or that of NeoConfucian Imperial China, evaluative judgments express rival claims about a single subject matter, namely what it is for distinctively human powers to be exercised effectively and distinctively human ends to be achieved.

The problem is then to identify a measure for deciding between those rival claims. Is it possible for each of us to stand back from the view of human flourishing embodied in and presupposed by our own culture so that we become able to contrast that view and the rival views of other cultures with the realities of human flourishing? Enter Aristotle. It is perhaps because Aristotle's beliefs and attitudes were in so many respects, some of them highly regrettable, so characteristic of the educated Greeks of his time that we fail to emphasize sufficiently how much his conception of human flourishing put him at odds with most of his Greek contemporaries. Aristotle had drawn upon resources afforded by his culture to move beyond it, to stand back from it, and to judge its practices and institutions by standards that he was able to present as deserving the allegiance of any adequately rational enquirer. This is what made possible Aristotle's vigorous critiques of Athens, Corinth, and Sparta as inadequate political societies and his insistence that nonetheless it is only in and through the type of political society exemplified by the *polis* that human beings can flourish, an insistence that put him at odds with the Macedonian elite. What then was his core conception of human flourishing?

It has four components. First, Aristotle recognized the full range of human powers, physical, perceptual, emotional, rational, political, moral, and aesthetic. Secondly, he identified as the distinctively human powers those that I identified as powers made possible by the possession of language, notably those powers of practically and theoretically rational agents that enable us not only to reflect on what we are doing and saying

[20] Clifford Geertz, *New Views of the Nature of Man*, ed. John R. Platt, University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 116.

or are about to do or to say but also to redirect our activities and our enquiries as reason prescribes. Thirdly, there are too those distinctively human abilities, the exercise of which also requires language, that enable us to associate cooperatively with others in ways not open to nonhuman animals. Human beings are by their nature both rational and political animals, and they achieve rational agency in and through their political relationships. Fourthly, our nature is such that we find ourselves directed by our upbringing, if we have been adequately educated, toward ends that we take to be goods and we have some conception, even if initially inchoate, of what it would be for someone to achieve those ends in such a way that their life would be a perfected human life, that they might justly be called *eudaimōn*.

Aristotle needs to call upon all four of these aspects of human activity, if he is to explain what it is for a human agent to flourish, to function well. For his core thought is that to flourish is to function well. Machines function well or badly. Nonhuman animals function well or badly. And, as with machines and wolves, dolphins, and gorillas, so too is it with human agents and human societies. They too function well or badly. Once again a contrast with expressivism is clear. Whether a machine, given the kind of machine that it is, functions well or badly is a matter of fact. To judge that some machine is functioning well or badly is to evaluate it and its performances, but it is not to express an attitude toward it, let alone an attitude of approval or disapproval. I may indeed, if a Luddite, have negative feelings about some well-functioning machines, but my judgment that they are functioning well is true or false, depending only on what the facts are about these particular machines. It is not in any way expressive. As with judgments about the functioning of machines, so too is it with judgments about the functioning of wolves, dolphins, and gorillas and with judgments about the functioning of particular human agents. They too are both factual and evaluative, but not expressive. They too are true or false, depending only on what the relevant facts are about those particular human agents, although, as we have noticed, the relevant facts about human agents are a good deal more complex than the relevant facts about nonhuman animals. And on the account of 'good' and good that I am now outlining, if someone judges that it would be good for some particular individual or group to be, do, or have this or that, they are judging that for them to do, be or have this or that would contribute to human flourishing. But at this point someone may protest: Are you suggesting, they may ask, or rather are the protagonists of the view that you are sketching suggesting that when we plain speakers of English or Irish or Mandarin or whatever make our everyday judgments about what it would be good to do next

Sunday or about how badly the neighbors are behaving or about what policies it would be best for the city council to implement, we are all of us speaking as covert Aristotelians? Is this not plainly preposterous? Perhaps not.

Aristotle's own claim was that in his politics and ethics he had made explicit and articulated the standards presupposed by the judgments and actions of those human beings in his own culture who themselves, as rational agents, exemplified human flourishing and in so doing had provided the grounds for an explanation of why many human beings do not flourish and why therefore there is a range of diverse and incompatible judgments about what is good and how it is good to live. My claim is that in many other cultures too the inchoate conception of human flourishing presupposed by the judgments and actions of plain persons is in important respects Aristotelian and that, when this is not so, it is because and insofar as those agents misconceive human flourishing and fail to flourish, a strong claim that may seem less preposterous once we recognize the large variety of ways in which, on a NeoAristotelian view, human beings may act well and live well.

Begin with an Aristotelian formula. Those who are or are on the way to becoming flourishing human beings have those qualities of mind and character that enable them, in the company of others and through their relationships with others, to develop their powers, so that they achieve those goods that complete and perfect their lives. What any such formula obscures is how very different in different circumstances within different cultural and social orders the lives which exemplify it must be and are. What it was to flourish qua human being was one thing for an Athenian contemporary of Aristotle, quite another for a medieval Irish farmer or an eighteenth-century Japanese merchant or a nineteenth-century English trade union organizer. And for us too, within one and the same culture, there are different ways of flourishing, given our differing abilities and circumstances. This variety of ways of flourishing Aristotle himself did not always recognize, but it is crucial for the NeoAristotelian account of 'good' and good that I am sketching that there are numerous ways in which human beings can flourish, although even more in which they can fail to flourish. So in different times and places, what is in fact the same underlying view of human flourishing may be expressed in very different and even apparently incompatible judgments about what it is good for these particular agents in these particular circumstances to be, do, and have.

Unsurprisingly, then, what it is to flourish in this or that set of particular circumstances has to be discovered and often enough rediscovered. Such discovery and rediscovery are commonly the outcome of disagreement

and debate, sometimes in everyday circumstances by plain persons arguing together about what to do next for their common good, sometimes by theorists reflecting on the practical questioning of those plain persons. It is therefore equally unsurprising that from time to time disagreements about what it is to flourish multiply, and the occurrence of such disagreements provides no sort of reason for rejecting the NeoAristotelian account of human flourishing.

When I call this account NeoAristotelian, the force of the 'Neo' is intended to be this. Aristotle has had and has commentators and interpreters who disagree widely about how the relevant texts are to be construed. Into these disputes I shall not enter. The views that I am advancing I do indeed take to be derived from Aristotle's, but what matters most are the views. It matters a good deal less whether or not they are Aristotle's. Moreover, as will become evident later, they are views to the development of which a number of Aristotle's Islamic, Jewish, and Christian interpreters have notably contributed, most of all Aquinas. Yet if I were at this point to call those views Thomistic, I would find myself engaged in unnecessary controversy with rival interpreters of Aquinas. So I stay for the moment with the clumsy label 'NeoAristotelian'.

Note that this NeoAristotelian account of what we are saying and doing when we make evaluative judgments, like its expressivist rival and counterpart, does not explain 'good' and good by translating 'good' into other terms. Neither account is reductionist. The protagonists of both take it for granted that they are addressing an audience who already have at the level of ordinary language use an excellent grasp of the meaning of 'good' and who make many unhesitating judgments about goods. The members of that audience understand that 'good' is very often replaceable without change of meaning by 'desirable' or by 'choiceworthy', and they make and criticize inferences from premises containing those words. They know how to translate them into other languages. Indeed, were all this not so, they would not be able to understand the claims advanced by either expressivists or NeoAristotelian theorists. But, once they have understood those claims, it is clear to them that they are confronted by rival and incompatible accounts of what they are saying and doing in their uses of 'good' and their judgments about goods. Why should this matter to them? It should matter for a number of reasons.

1.5   What is at odds between expressivists and NeoAristotelians

If the NeoAristotelians are right, then there is a truth waiting to be discovered both about how it is good and best to act on particular occasions

and about how in general it is good and best to live out our lives. When we are puzzled about how to make major decisions or when we look back with regret on our past choices, we will on the NeoAristotelian view do well not just to embark on an enquiry into those particular judgments or misjudgments, but to consider whether it may not be best to conceive of our lives as extended enquiries into how it is best to live. For if we have been or are mistaken, there is a fact of the matter about which we have been or are mistaken. By contrast on an expressivist view there is no such truth waiting to be discovered, and when we find ourselves puzzled or regretful, what we need to ask is how far and in what ways we need to reconsider and reorder our attitudes or commitments. We can bring out the nature of this contrast a little further by returning to questions that have been central to our enquiries.

Suppose that someone, a plain unphilosophical person, desires something very much but judges after prolonged consideration that she has no good reason to desire it and moreover that she has excellent reason for desiring to act in ways that would make it impossible for her to satisfy her still ardent desire. She finds herself in acute conflict and she asks herself the questions: How should I weigh my heartfelt desire against my good reasons for acting in ways that will frustrate my desire? Should I as an agent identify with my desire or with my reasons and my reasoning? If philosophers were to convince her of the truth of expressivism, it would at once occur to her that her conflict is between one part of her self and another. Her evaluative reasoning issues from and is shaped by that prerational commitment or attitude or set of feelings which finds expression in her evaluative and normative judgments. Her desires are those drives and longings within her of which she is presently aware. So now she will ask: What reasons might I have for siding with one of these parts rather than the other?

Either of two lines of thought might then occur to her. The first would begin from her noticing how little expressivists have told us about the precise psychological character of the attitudes, feelings, commitments, and endorsements which on their view find expression in evaluative and normative judgments. She might therefore open up a psychological enquiry and if, for example, she became convinced by some version of Freud's thesis that what we take to be the promptings of the norms of morality are no more than the disguised and unrecognized demands of the superego, the internalized imperatives of the paternal voice as once heard by the infant, she might well conclude that morality, as a set of constraints upon desire, was thereby discredited.

A second line of thought might begin from her noting the emphasis that Gibbard – and not only he – places upon the extent to which, on an expressivist view, our evaluative and normative attitudes have been influenced by and become what they are because of our and our ancestors' interactions with others. She has already noted in herself and is uncomfortable with what she suspects to be a disposition to be too deferential to others. At this point the author whom she comes across is not Freud, but Nietzsche, whose genealogical explanation of how she comes to have her present evaluative and normative attitudes she finds persuasive and takes to be true. She concludes that the evaluative and normative beliefs and attitudes that she has hitherto treated with great seriousness have been imposed upon her and that she herself has colluded in this imposition. She understands herself as having been the victim of a herd mentality, and she must now acknowledge in herself and in others those expressions of the will to power that she has hitherto misinterpreted. So she might now conclude, although on somewhat different grounds, that morality has been discredited.

The point that I am making here is not advanced as a hostile criticism of expressivism. What I am identifying is not a mistake, but a lacuna. Anyone who understands a conflict between what she or he in fact desires and what she or he has good reason to desire as a conflict between two parts of her or himself will be able to resolve that conflict rationally, only if she or he has a much richer understanding of the psychology of morality than any expressivist has so far provided. Freud and Nietzsche both claim to provide just such an understanding. Critics of Freud and Nietzsche have argued that their claims are unjustified. What should matter to expressivists is that, unless and until they provide an account of the moral agent's psychology which enables them, among other things, to reckon with Freud and Nietzsche, their theory is radically incomplete. And its incompleteness becomes not just theoretically, but practically important when agents find themselves in the kind of conflict that I have described.

The NeoAristotelian account, as I have so far characterized it, is incomplete in another way. Imagine once again the state of mind of someone who strongly desires something that, so she judges, she has excellent reason not to desire. In this case, however, she understands her conflict in NeoAristotelian terms and, understanding it in this way, she has already implicitly rejected either Freud's or Nietzsche's account of the origin and nature of her moral judgments. Were she to become convinced of the truth of either account, she would thereby cease to be an Aristotelian, Neo- or otherwise. So let us also suppose – for the moment at least, since we shall have to return to this issue – that she has not become thus convinced. How then

is she to understand her predicament? Her strong desire, even though it is one that she has very good reasons not to satisfy or even pursue, will, unless it is the kind of neurotic desire that I identified earlier, be a desire for some good. Her predicament is one of desiring a lesser and inappropriate good over a greater and appropriate good. So, as a NeoAristotelian, she cannot but conclude that her desires are misdirected and in need of transformation. She has every *reason* to redirect them. But what *motive* might she have? It is the NeoAristotelian view that, as a rational agent, she desires to act as practical reason dictates and desires to desire only what she has good reason to desire. That is, as a rational agent she rank orders goods and has a higher order desire not to prefer the lesser to the greater good in particular situations. Yet as an imperfectly rational agent she may find herself drawn in more than one direction, and she will need to draw upon the resources provided by her earlier moral training and education and by her present social relationships if she is to act rightly. Aristotle provided an outline account of her situation, partly in what he said about *akrasia* (sometimes, but not well translated as 'weakness of will') and partly elsewhere. Later Aristotelians, most notably Aquinas, have provided further resources, but the NeoAristotelian account of such conflicts needs further development and rendering into contemporary terms. Until these have been provided, there is a psychological lacuna in NeoAristotelian theory, just as there is in expressivist. And, as with expressivism, I see no reason to believe that what is needed cannot be provided.

We have then before us two rival and incompatible theories concerning how we are to understand 'good' and good, each of them a theory that has developed through a considerable period of time and each open to and in need of further development. Each draws upon the insights and arguments of an undeniably great philosopher, in the one case Hume, in the other Aristotle. How then should we decide between them? To the posing of this question there may well be a dismissive reaction by philosophically well-informed readers. Why, they will object, should we be asked to decide between *them*? After all the vast majority of contemporary academic moral philosophers reject both, finding neither acceptable as a metaethical theory, that is, a theory of the meaning and reference of the key expressions in our evaluative and normative discourse, and finding no merit in the distinctive evaluative and normative claims of NeoAristotelianism. Should this give us pause?

Certainly, by proceeding as I have done and shall continue to do, I am committed to holding that academic moral philosophy at some point in its past history took a wrong turning, marched off in the wrong direction,

set itself the task, if I may borrow a metaphor, of climbing the wrong mountain. I therefore must at some point explain and justify these large claims. But, so I shall be arguing, a necessary condition for doing this is first to understand what is at stake in deciding between the rival theses and arguments of expressivism and NeoAristotelianism. It is, however, relevant to note one striking feature of contemporary philosophy. In the course of discussing one standard criticism of expressivism, I remarked earlier that the outcome of extended debate between critics and defenders of expressivism, while it had resulted in subtler and more sophisticated statements of their disagreement, had done nothing to resolve it. But the same holds of every major disagreement in contemporary moral philosophy, whether in metaethics or normative ethics, and it holds too in a number of other areas of philosophical enquiry. Protagonists of each standpoint take themselves to have conclusive objections to every rival point of view, but deny that this is true of the protagonists of rival standpoints. And those who take themselves to have successfully resolved one or more of these disagreements find themselves embroiled in new disagreements as to whether or not they have in fact succeeded. So we can perhaps for the moment say only this, that those who are convinced of the truth of expressivism or NeoAristotelianism have as yet been given no sufficient reason to think otherwise. Yet this only makes it more pressing to decide on how the issues that divide them are to be resolved.

What is at issue is the nature or the relationship between our judgments on particular occasions about what it is good or best to be, do, or have, the attitudes or feelings expressed in those judgments, and the desires, including the higher order desires, that prompt us to act so as to satisfy them on those same occasions. One good place to begin further enquiry is with the history of those relationships in each of our lives, a history that begins in early childhood. So I return to a subject matter that I touched on briefly at the outset, the desires and frustrations of early childhood, but now with a very different set of questions.

1.6   Two rival characterizations of moral development

The thinker from whom we need first and most to learn is D. W. Winnicott, whose psychoanalytically informed advice to new mothers, in England during and after the World War II, is relevant to our present enquiry in two ways. One of Winnicott's aims was to rescue those mothers from anxiety-engendering attempts to become perfect mothers, so becoming less good mothers than they would otherwise have been. What they should

aim at instead was to become good-enough mothers. The good-enough mother does what she takes to be best for the infant, knowing that, like every mother, she will act imperfectly. So we can ask what a mother has to do to be good-enough, what is meant by saying that what she does is good or best for the infant, and what the relationship between goods and desires is in each case. But first we must consider just what Winnicott told those mothers and what he tells us.

The good-enough mother has to steer a course between being overprotective of her child and thus affording her child insufficient security and being overindulgent to her child and so being too severe.[21] The infant who is not allowed sufficient freedom to explore the realities that confront her or him will be apt later to have an insufficient ability to imagine alternative possibilities. The infant whose wishes are granted too often and too easily will be apt later to become a victim of her or his wishful thinking, someone who has not learned how to draw the line between phantasy and reality. Why are those outcomes bad for the child and for the adult whom the child becomes? Such adults will frame their choices badly, in the one case unimaginatively failing to recognize the full range of possibilities open to them, in the other failing to acknowledge the constraints that reality imposes. What the good-enough mother hopes and tries to bring up are children who have the traits that, when they become adults, will issue in better choices. She functions well as a mother by enabling them to function well in their choice making. 'Good' in 'good mother' then is, so it seems, the same use of 'good' as in 'good farmer' or 'good machine' and a key mark of goodness in all three cases is that others who depend on mothers, farmers, or machines for their own functioning well, their own flourishing, are provided with what they need to flourish. So far at least the uses of 'good' are just what a NeoAristotelian would take them to be. But things are not quite as straightforward as this.

It matters that the good-enough mother wants to be a good mother and that she wants this because she wants the good of her child. Her uses of 'good', whatever else they are, are expressive of those desires and of her consequent approvals and disapprovals. And when others praise her as a good mother, they endorse those approvals and disapprovals. Our account of these uses of 'good' would therefore be misleadingly incomplete if we did not recognize the expressive aspect of these uses and their relationship to the desires that motivate and find expression in these uses. How then

[21] See D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1987, especially chapter 10, and Adam Phillips, *Winnicott*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, chapter 3, III.

should we understand the relationship between what is NeoAristotelian and what is expressivist in this family of uses of 'good'?

Begin with the obvious. 'Good' belongs to our practical vocabulary, and it has the place that it has in that vocabulary in part because, as we already have had occasion to emphasize, it is a recurrent feature of our human condition that we are involved in conflicts of desire, in situations in which our desires point us in too many and incompatible directions. If we were not practical reasoners, those conflicts would be resolved by the relative strengths of the warring desires, the relative attractions of the competing objects of desire. We become practical reasoners by learning how to use 'good' and its cognates in judgments that provide us with reasons for treating one object of desire as better than its rivals, and so with arguments whose conclusion is that it is or would be best if we were to be, do, or have such and such. But this transformation requires another transformation. For learning how to use good in this reason giving and argumentative way would be pointless if we did not also become motivated so that we act as the conclusions of our practical reasoning require, or rather, as Aristotle puts it, so that the conclusions of our practical reasoning *are* our actions.

We have to become, that is, agents who desire to act as reason directs, who desire to act for the sake of the good and the best, and who have a second order desire that this desire for the good and the best is a desire that we will satisfy. It is the central characteristic of human beings that they are born with the potentiality of becoming reasoning and desiring animals of this kind. And one reason that we have for gratitude to so many child psychologists and paediatricians, including such psychoanalysts as Winnicott, is that they have done so much to identify and provide the means for overcoming the obstacles to the actualization of this potentiality under the conditions of modernity. The philosophical task is to chart the different relationships that may hold between reasoning and desiring in the course of those transformations and so to throw light on how 'good' is being used, whether by mother, by child, or by psychological observer. In order to do this we need to think further about two aspects of the child's development.

As infants are transformed into children, they learn to distinguish between, on the one hand, goods and, on the other, objects of desire. "Don't eat, take, do that!" says the parent. "But I want it!" replies the child. "It will be bad for you," says the parent. Or perhaps what the parent says is "Don't eat, take, do that now. It will be better to leave it until later," to which the reply is "But I want it now!" Why should children do what their parents take to be good for them rather than what they want? Why should

a child defer the satisfaction of its wants because its parent takes it to be better to do so? Initially, it can only be because the child desires the parent's approval and fears its disapproval, a disapproval sometimes expressed in punishment. But later the good-enough parent provides reasons for discriminating between objects of desire and hopes that the child will come to recognize these reasons as good reasons. How might a child do so?

One of the salient differences between young human beings and the young of other species is that the former, unlike the latter, are at a certain point treated as accountable for their actions. "What was/is the good of doing that?" they are asked, not only by parents and by other adults but also by their contemporaries, and this in a number of contexts. For as they are initiated into a variety of practices at home, at school, in the workplace, they learn to recognize goods internal to each practice, goods that they and other participants can achieve only through the exercise of virtues and skills.[22] If and when they fail in respect of these, they will commonly be put to the question. So they find themselves having to give reasons for their actions to others and on occasion having to advance arguments in support of those reasons. They become rational agents when they first pose such questions to themselves about their own failures and act upon the answers. If they are so to act, they must of course be motivated by the prospect of achieving those goods that have provided them with what they take to be good reasons for acting. Their desires must to some large degree direct them as their reasoning directs them. Insofar as this is so, they will have begun to become accountable rational agents, accountable both to themselves and to others.

To say this is at once to be reminded of Aristotle's characterization of *prohairesis*, in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as desire informed by reason or as reason informed by desire (1139b4–5). On Aristotle's account, rational deliberation by agents who are rightly disposed by their virtues issues in *prohairesis* – often, but misleadingly translated by 'choice' – which in turn issues in action. *Prohairesis* is rational wanting and that idea, so G. E. M. Anscombe suggested "should be explained in terms of what is wanted being wanted qua conducive to or part of 'doing well,'" that is, conducive to or part of human flourishing.[23] So this bare and skeletal account of how the relationship between desires, feelings and attitudes, and reason-supported judgments about what is good and desirable develops

[22] On the relation of virtues to practices, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd edn., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, pp. 187–196.
[23] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Thought and Action in Aristotle," in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. R. Bambrough, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965, p. 155.

from infancy through childhood toward adult life, an account that began from Winnicott's psychoanalytic insights, has at its outcome a portrait of the agent that is in key respects the same as Aristotle's. Does this mean that the NeoAristotelian understanding of the use and meaning of 'good' has thereby been vindicated? Not quite yet. For as any expressivist will remind us, we still have to determine how such apparently NeoAristotelian agents are using 'good', when they judge that it is good or best to be do or have such and such.

We have already taken notice of the range of disagreements both between particular agents about what it is best to be, do, or have on particular occasions and between cultures as to what it is for human beings to flourish. Whatever particular view of human flourishing is presupposed by or expressed in the actions of this individual or that set of individuals or in the prescriptions and actions of this or that culture is, so the expressivist will insist, the expression of a prerational endorsement of the evaluations and normative judgments that constitute a particular view of human flourishing and an implicit or explicit rejection of alternative and rival views. It is the voicing of whatever set of preferences or aversions has emerged from the individual's upbringing and in many cases of those preferences and aversions that are widely shared in that individual's culture. It could not be otherwise, so the expressivist will continue, since, contrary to the claims of the NeoAristotelian, there is no fact of the matter about human flourishing, independent of the various accounts of human flourishing that are in contention. And the expressivist, noting that many of our locutions about human flourishing do indeed suggest that there is such a fact of the matter, will once again find in Blackburn's quasirealism the resources for giving an expressivist account of those locutions.

To this we NeoAristotelians would do well to reply by cataloguing what we take to be the facts concerning human failures to flourish. There are failures resulting from malnutrition, injury, and ill health. There are failures of otherwise deprived and materially or culturally impoverished lives. There are failures that are a consequence of laziness or incompetence in an agent's preparing her or himself through self-discipline and the acquisition of skills for various types of rewarding activity. There are failures that result from an agent's sacrificing either the present to the future or the future to the present. There are failures that are due to an agent's inadequate relationships with others, so that there is a lack of badly needed cooperation and the agent does not learn from those others what it is of great importance for her or him to learn. And these are not all. Failures come in different sizes, some of them restricted to one particular area or aspect of

an agent's activities, some affecting the agent's life as a whole, some minor and unimportant, some of great significance, some temporary and easily remediable, some more difficult to deal with or even irremediable. What they have in common, what makes them all cases of failure, is that the variety of causes that I have catalogued have in such cases prevented to some noteworthy degree an agent's realization of certain of her or his human potentialities, the development of some of her or his powers, and in consequence the achievement of some or good or goods of crucial importance for that particular agent's flourishing qua human being.

The causes of such failures are sometimes beyond an agent's control. But in other cases the failure is a matter either of agents acting against their own best judgment as to what they have good reason to desire and to do or of agents reasoning their way to false conclusions about what it is best for them to be, do, or have. In every case in which an agent survives a time of failure, what is crucial is whether or not that agent is able to learn from her or his experience. What then does such learning involve? In the former type of case, it involves an acknowledgment of the agent's deficiencies as a rational agent. In the latter type of case, it involves a recognition that either some particular judgment by the agent about what it was good and best for her or him to be, do, or have, or a series of such judgments – judgments as to how that agent should act, if her or his actions were to contribute to her or his flourishing qua human being – have been *falsified* by the outcome, so that certainly her or his conception of what it would be for her or him to flourish qua human being in her or his particular situation needs to be revised, and perhaps indeed her or his larger conception of human flourishing.

Failures then, on this NeoAristotelian view, are occasions for learning what is true and what is false, and a life in which an agent moves toward the achievement of her or his specific goods and good will characteristically be a life in which it is through constructive responses to failure that agents comes to understand what that good in fact is, an understanding commonly expressed at the level of everyday practice in particular judgments, in the directedness of desires, in intellectual and moral dispositions, and in actions, and sometimes, although much less often, as well-articulated theory. Such education in the practical life may then have as one of its outcomes a conception of the practical life as a life of enquiry whose evaluative conclusions at each stage of that life accord with or fail to accord with the facts concerning human flourishing, that is, are true or false, and this in a stronger sense than any that a quasirealist expressivist can admit.

To all this such an expresssivist has a simple and straightforward reply. It is that there can be nothing more to any declaration of either agreement or disagreement with this NeoAristotelian catalogue of alleged facts about moral failure than an act of endorsement, expressive of the particular speaker's attitudes, feelings, and commitments. For the NeoAristotelian's attempt to appeal to facts already presupposes the NeoAristotelian interpretation of those alleged facts and the NeoAristotelian's choice of a standpoint from which to interpret. What from the standpoint of the NeoAristotelian is argument and enquiry, from the standpoint of the expressivist is rhetoric. We have arrived at an argumentative impasse. Yet we have learned something. About expressivism in all its versions we can now remark that, although a metaethical rather than a first order moral theory, it is not in fact neutral between all rival first order substantive accounts of the life of practice, the moral life, since, if expressivism is true, then NeoAristotelianism is false. Expressivism is, however, compatible with and neutral between a range of other rival moral standpoints, something that becomes clear if we consider a number of different ways in which agents persuaded of the truth of expressivism might structure their practical reasoning, all of them ways that presuppose some version of the fact-value distinction, a distinction indispensable to any version of expressivism.[24]

1.7   Instructive conflicts between an agent's judgments and her desires: expressivists, Frankfurt, and Nietzsche

The extent and nature of the evaluative and normative commitments that, on an expressivist account, give expression to the attitudes and feelings of agents may vary a very good deal. They may issue in a set of utilitarian convictions or a rejection of utilitarianism. They may require that the agent gives her or his allegiance to some demanding conception of duty or to some well worked out doctrine of human rights or to a rejection of either or both of these. And we have some admirable examples of expressivist moral philosophers working their way argumentatively through alternative possibilities. So Simon Blackburn has argued that "we want our sensibilities

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[24] That some version or other of a distinction between declarative sentences which somehow or other report or describe features of the external world and declarative sentences which afford expression to sentiments remains an ineliminable mark of expressivist theories is confirmed by the conclusion of Huw Price, "From Quasirealism to Global Expressivism – and Back Again?" in *Passions and Projections: Themes from the Philosophy of Simon Blackburn*, ed. R. Johnson and M. Smith, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 151.

to be reliable and projectible (pulling in the direction of general rules) but also sensitive and flexible (pulling in the direction of emphasis on particular contexts). Quasi-realism, I would urge, is well placed to explain and to justify our tendency toward a mean here."[25] That is, our morality should be a judicious mix of some principles that we treat as genuinely general and universal with others about whose scope and content we are more cautious. And Blackburn appeals to a variety of reasons in arriving at this conclusion. What then is it, on an expressivist view, that determines what counts as a reason and what does not so count?

Gibbard, as we noticed while considering his account of 'good' and good in his essay "Preference and Preferability," has a straightforward answer to this question. "When a person calls something – call it R – a reason for doing X, he expresses his acceptance of norms that say to treat R as weighing in favor of doing X . . . To say that an act is rational is to say that it is supported by the preponderance of reasons."[26] Some set of norms, accepted by each agent, prescribes, that is, some rank ordering of goods and presumably also some procedure for on occasion reconsidering that rank ordering. But the acceptance of that particular set of norms is a prerational attitude or state of mind. And therefore on occasions when there is some large disagreement between what some agent, in accordance with the particular set of norms that she accepts, judges that it is good and best for her to be, do, or have and what that agent passionately and deeply desires, then she can have no further reason for identifying with her judgments rather than with her desires or vice versa. What is she to do in this predicament?

It is then that she may find further relevance in those questions posed by Freud and Nietzsche that, as I noted earlier, expressivism invites. However, while I then suggested only that expressivists had failed to pose and answer those questions, I now want to argue that Nietzsche, in particular the Nietzsche of *Beyond Good and Evil*, has arguments that, if treated with adequate seriousness, force on expressivists a significant reformulation and extension of expressivism. For what such an agent cannot avoid is a choice, an existential choice, between identifying either with that prerational attitude that finds expression in her normative and evaluative judgments or with her present passionate and deep desires. Nietzsche's invitation to such an agent is first to investigate the genealogy of her present normative and evaluative judgments and then to recognize, in the light of that genealogy, the discreditable nature of the hold that they have upon her. Where

[25] Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, p. 308.   [26] Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, p. 163.

Gibbard and Blackburn speak neutrally of the influence of others upon the norms that govern our relationships to those others, Nietzsche takes those same norms to express past and present patterns of domination in which our role is either such that we share in the herdlike and resentful mentality of the vast majority or else such that we assert our independence as those who acknowledge no law but that of which we ourselves are the authors. A condition of such independence is a recognition of the various forms that the will to power can take, of the various masks that it wears, and such a recognition will discredit both the forms that past morality has taken and the forms that past moral philosophy has taken.

Morality has on this view been an oppressive expression of the *ressentiment* of the herd. As for moral philosophy – "May I be forgiven the discovery that all moral philosophy has hitherto been boring and a soporific,"[27] a complaint later to be echoed by Bernard Williams. Our deliverance from boredom is to come with Nietzsche's discovery that the philosopher who has traversed the history of past moral thought and practice, who has perhaps been "critic and sceptic and dogmatist and historian, and, in addition, poet and collector and traveler and reader of riddles and moralist and seer and free spirit and practically everything," that such a one now confronts a task which "demands something different – it demands that he *create values.*" Such philosophers have to become commanders and law-givers. "Their 'knowing' is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving, their will to truth is – *will to power.*"[28]

So our reflective agent will take from Nietzsche a set of questions about her past and present self, questions posed, if she is sensible, in a less inflated, less world historical style than Nietzsche's. Her dilemma, we recall, is whether to act as her judgments about how it is best to act dictate or as her strong desires dictate. How, she will now ask, did I come to have the judgments that I do? And how did I come to have the desires that I do? What makes them genuinely mine? Her answers will take the form of a genealogical narrative, and what is most important about that narrative is not only that it should be true but also that it should disclose what needs to be disclosed, if it is to be a source of relevant self-knowledge. What through that narrative she may become able to ask is whether and how far she identifies with her judgments, whether and how far she identifies with her desires. What she will be asking is what it is that she now most cares

[27] F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books, 1973, 228, p. 138.
[28] Ibid., 211, p. 122.

about, including those attachments from her past which are still part of her present.

If this kind of reflective appraisal is successfully carried through, in what might it issue? Perhaps in a type of moral life in which the expressive commitments of the agent have been made explicit, so that they are not just expressed in but are evident to the agent in her or his first and higher order dispositions, feelings, reasonings, judgments, and actions. So what would it be to live reflectively in this way? This is a question that expressivists need to answer. Happily we already have an account of something very like this kind of life, that advanced by Harry Frankfurt, not as an account of one kind of life among others but as an account of what human life, if adequately understood, is. Frankfurt's starting point is close to my own, a conception of human agents as differing from animals of other species in our ability to stand back from our desires and other motives and to reflect upon whether or not we desire to be motivated as we presently are. (I referred earlier, in section 1.1, to the importance of Frankfurt's distinction between first and second order desires.) He notes that we identify with some of our desires and not with others, and we are, on Frankfurt's account, free agents just insofar as we are motivated by desires with which we identify and by which, therefore, we desire to be motivated. What we care about are the objects of those of our settled desires with which we identify.

The agent whom we imagined as successfully finding her way through her dilemma with the aid of Nietzsche would at once recognize in Frankfurt's account a description of her present condition, one in which she has identified with some of her desires and motivations and not with others, making it clear to herself in so doing what it is that she really cares about. "A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He identifies himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits, depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced. Thus he concerns himself with what concerns it . . . "[29] What we care about is in part up to us, but in part not. "There are some things that we cannot help caring about" and "Among the things that we cannot help caring about are the things that we love."[30]

What we *should* care about depends entirely on what we do care about, since "it is only in virtue of what we actually care about that anything

[29] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 83.
[30] Harry G. Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 24.

is important to us."[31] "There can be no rationally warranted criteria for establishing anything as inherently important."[32] And so "our final ends are provided and legitimated by love."[33] Frankfurt, that is, takes a final end to be some strong affective commitment that provides a terminus for our practical reasoning but cannot itself be rationally justified.[34] Reasoning can play no part in determining our final ends, since "the lover does not depend for his loving upon reasons of any kind." Love "creates reasons."[35] What each of us treats as desirable, that is, is determined by what each of us desires. And what we desire, what we care about varies a good deal from individual to individual. It is not always the same as what we approve of.[36]

Because we are dependent on others, because we fear loneliness and being held to be of no account by others, we have a motive "to follow some general principles of good behavior which can reasonably be expected to lead to orderly, peaceful, and amicable relationships."[37] But considerations derived from such principles are only one set of considerations among others. So Frankfurt has said that he does not understand and that he sees no justification for the claim "that moral considerations are always overriding."[38] Whether they are or are not overriding for this particular individual in these particular circumstances will depend upon what that individual cares about and on her or his rank ordering of her or his cares and desires. Individuals will differ in the outcomes of their practical reasoning just as they do and because they do in their affective commitments.

Our imagined reflective expressivist will recognize that the account of practical reasoning advanced and implied by Frankfurt is in some respects different from the accounts proposed by either Blackburn or Gibbard. But my claim is not that Frankfurt is to be understood as one more expressivist moral philosopher, but rather that a reflective expressivist agent, responding to her discovery of a conflict between her evaluative judgments and her strongest desires and confronting Nietzsche's challenge to reexamine her fundamental attitudes, feelings, and other sources of motivation in the light of his type of genealogical account, might well arrive at a set of positions remarkably close to, perhaps even identical with, Frankfurt's. Frankfurt's kinship to some recent expressivists becomes clear when we consider his avowed need, like them, to dissociate himself from some

[31] Ibid., p. 20. [32] Ibid., p. 22. [33] Ibid., p. 26.
[34] Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 47.
[35] Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 25.
[36] Harry G. Frankfurt, "The Necessity of Love," in *Conversations on Ethics*, Conversations with Alex Voorheve, Oxford University Press, p. 222.
[37] Ibid., p. 219. [38] Ibid., p. 220.

notorious aspects of Hume's original expressivism. On Hume's view our passions and, consequently, our preferences can be neither rational nor irrational, neither according with reason nor violating its canons, so that "'tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger."[39]

Since, according to Frankfurt, our preferences are determined by our final ends and reason can play no part in determining those ends, it might seem that Frankfurt would have to agree with Hume in this conclusion. But he does not. Frankfurt allows that this preference involves no purely logical mistake, but he asserts that of someone who chose to destroy the world rather than endure minor discomfort we, unlike Hume, would have to say that he "must be crazy" and that his choice is "*lunatic*" and "*inhuman*." Frankfurt ascribes to such a one an irrationality that is not a cognitive defect, but "a defect of the will."[40] In what does such volitional irrationality consist? It is not just that the preferences of such an agent differ radically from ours. They are "incommensurate with ours."[41] We transgress the boundaries of formal reason, if we take some self-contradictory state of affairs to be possible. We transgress the boundaries of volitional rationality, if we do not find certain preferences and choices unthinkable. To be rational is not only to be careful in making judgments about matters of fact and in reasoning instrumentally. It is, according to Frankfurt, also to acknowledge constraints on our preferences and choices. Whence, on his view, do these constraints derive?

They are not and cannot be responses to some independent normative reality. "The standards of volitional rationality and of practical reason are grounded only in ourselves . . . only in what we cannot help caring about and cannot help considering important."[42] There are indeed norms of practical reason to which we cannot but assent. An example of such a norm is this: "the fact that an action would protect a person's life is universally acknowledged to be a reason for that person to perform the action,"[43] even though that person may have a better reason for doing something else. Why is this so?

"Our desire to live, and our readiness to invoke this desire as generating reasons for performing actions that contribute to that end, are not themselves based on reasons . . . They derive from and express the fact that, presumably as an outcome of natural selection, we love . . . living."[44] So it

[39] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford University Press, 1888, ii, 3, 3, p. 416.
[40] Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, pp. 29–30.
[41] Ibid., p. 30.   [42] Ibid., p. 33.   [43] Ibid., p. 34.   [44] Ibid., p. 37.

is too with other reason-generating desires such as those that derive from our love of "being intact and healthy, being satisfied, and being in touch." Frankfurt concludes that these "fundamental necessities of the will" are not the outcome of social or cultural habit or of individual preferences. "They are solidly entrenched in our nature from the start."[45] How closely will our imagined postNietzschean reflective expressivist agree with Frankfurt in arriving at these conclusions?

She will have asked all the same first person questions that Frankfurt asks, but she will have her own first person answers about which of her desires it is with which *she* identifies, about what therefore *she* cares about and loves, about what therefore *she* should care about, and about what practical thoughts *she* takes to be unthinkable and what *she* discovers to be necessities of *her* will. It is from Nietzsche rather than Frankfurt that she will have learned the importance of the first person pronoun. Like both Nietzsche and Frankfurt, she will often say 'we' rather than 'I', but the import of her 'we' will be 'I and others who feel, reflect, and will as I do'. Her attitude to rival accounts of desire and of evaluative and normative judgment will be both Frankfurtian and Nietzschean in its modes of argument, Nietzschean in its scorn. What then are the answers that she will give to the questions that are central to our present enquiry?

She will understand both her own and others' uses of 'good' and its cognates in such assertions as "It is (or would be) best for me (or her, him, us, or them) in these particular circumstances to be, do, or have such and such" as expressive of her and their desires, especially of those desires with which she and they identify, and of what it is that she and they most care about. She will evaluate reasons for action as good reasons insofar as by acting on them she will attain the objects of such desires. Her ordering of reasons as better or worse will derive from her ordering of her desires, and it is by reference to those orderings that she will resolve conflicts, whether conflicts between desires or conflicts between judgments, as to how it would be best for her to act and strongly felt desires. Her practical reasoning will thus express this ordering of her desires and the coherence of her reasoning will be threatened only by incoherence in her desires. And since incoherence in one's reasoning is apt to be self-frustrating, she will value coherence in her desires and the kind of self-knowledge that is needed, if coherence is to be achieved.

That self-knowledge will take the form of a narrative, a history of her desires and judgments, which will begin with an account of the formation

[45] Ibid., p. 38.

and consequent content and ordering of her desires – and their expression in her normative and evaluative judgments – up to the point at which she became reflective about them. A second stage in her history will recount her discovery of Nietzsche's critique of evaluative and normative judgments and of desires, and her reinterpretation of her past and present self in the light afforded by that discovery, while the third stage will concern the disciplined remaking of herself into the kind of self-aware agent that she has now become. When she explains herself, whether to others or to herself, her basic appeal will therefore be to an account of the motivations of herself and others grounded in a more general account of human nature. She will, insofar as she follows Nietzsche, interpret antiexpressivist views as expressions of an inability or a lack of will on the part of those who hold them to admit to the underlying motivation of their judgments and actions, an inability to recognize who and what they are.

What those who hold antiexpressivist views cannot or will not acknowledge, on her view, is the imposition upon them, an imposition in which they cooperate, of constraints upon their thoughts and feelings which masquerade as constraints of reason. The history of these masquerades and disguises, these misrepresentations of reason, is the history of much philosophy and theology, including Aristotelianism in all its various forms. Nietzsche says little about Aristotelianism, yet enough to make it clear that, on his view, to be an Aristotelian is to be a doubly defective human being, one who both suffers from "that depression of the emotions to a harmless mean at which they may be satisfied, the Aristotelianism of morals"[46] and is a victim of "the discipline thinkers imposed on themselves to think . . . under Aristotelian presuppositions," a discipline that Nietzsche classifies with other medieval habits of mind as arbitrary and antirational, belonging to a "protracted unfreedom of spirit,"[47] one that issues in conformist and sterile habits of mind and spirit.

There is thus a double case to be made out against any NeoAristotelian point of view. Expressivists charge that it fails to recognize the truth in expressivism concerning the meaning and use of normative and evaluative sentences and the nature of moral judgment. It fails as a metaethical theory. Nietzscheans charge that it presents what is not just a false account of human flourishing, a series of philosophical mistakes, but mistakes that express both an inability and a refusal to recognize the realities of the human condition. For the expressivist NeoAristotelianism is false. For the Nietzschean it is corrupting.

[46] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 198.   [47] Ibid., p. 188.

1.8   The NeoAristotelian conception of the rational agent

In the discussion of expressivism, I moved from an initial consideration of expressivism as a metaethical theory about the meaning of evaluative and normative expressions to an enquiry into what kind of evaluative and normative commitments might issue from a reflective search for practical self-knowledge by someone persuaded of the truth of expressivism. Where NeoAristotelianism is concerned, this double aspect of the theory, its combination of metaethical claims and closely related evaluative and normative claims, has been evident from the beginning. If what we mean when we say that it would be best to do such and such is that by so acting we will contribute more to human flourishing, both our own and that of others, than we would by any other course of action open to us, then we only, it seems, have to spell out what, on our view, human flourishing consists in, to identify our evaluative and normative commitments. The joke is in the word 'only'. For on any Aristotelian view we can only understand adequately what it is for human beings to flourish by developing an account of the structures of human activity and of how our uses of 'good' and its cognates find application within and to those structures. Why so?

In section 1.6 of this chapter, we took note of how young children first learn from parents and other teachers to distinguish between what they want to be, do, or have and what, so they are told, it is good for them to be, do, or have. When they are given reasons for making this distinction, they begin to learn how to make it for themselves and to make it in what are, over the years, increasingly well-defined contexts of activity. What they want may often be at variance with how it is best for them to act, but, as we also noted in section 1.6, what they want generally includes their parents' and teachers' approval. Thus, they have to learn to value and to desire what is good just because it is good, and not because it is what others whom they want to impress take to be good. So how do they – how do we – learn to distinguish what is good from what is taken to be good?

We do so, as I also noticed earlier, in the context of a variety of practices, each with its own ends internal to it, generally first by learning how to contribute to the goods of the family and household in which we find ourselves and then learning how to do better or worse in the various activities of the school, the workplace, and the sports field, activities as different as solving equations, growing vegetables, mending broken machines, playing the clarinet, reading Greek poetry, drawing cartoons, making clay pots, playing soccer. If all goes well, we develop in each area those habits, those dispositions, without which we cannot exercise the moral virtues. We also

develop a habit of good practical judgment, the moral and intellectual virtue of prudence. Both types of habituation involve a transformation of desires and an increasingly sophisticated grasp of those standards, initially accepted on the authority of our teachers, by which they and hopefully we distinguish good from bad making and doing.

It is important that this kind of development of powers in and through practices is to be found in many different social and cultural contexts, many of them contexts in which the name of Aristotle, let alone his texts, is unknown. Yet the activities of those engaged in such practices are best understood in Aristotelian terms and so are their patterns of learning. Insofar as we learn successfully, on this NeoAristotelian view, we make the achievement of excellence, or at least of whatever excellence we are capable of achieving, in at least some of our activities, our own end. So in each type of activity we have a double end. We on the one hand aim to bring about that end state, the achievement of which in this particular time and place is the appropriate end of that type of activity: the statement of the elegant, significant, and difficult proof in mathematics, the harvesting of a crop of perfect vegetables and the renewal of the soil each year under unfavorable conditions in farming, the insightful performance by an orchestra of work too often taken for granted, say, Mozart's clarinet music, and so on. On the other hand, we each of us aim to become the kind of agent whose doing and whose making is informed by those skills and those qualities of mind and character that are necessary, if excellence is to be achieved. So it is with practices in general. The physician's ends are to restore to health this particular set of patients and to become or remain an excellent physician. The portrait painter's ends are to capture what is unique in this particular face and to extend her or his powers as a painter.

What such examples make clear is that some of our important ends are such that it would be a mistake to think of them as adequately specifiable by us in advance of and independently of our involvement in those activities through which we try to realize them. It is often true that it is only in and through those activities that we arrive at more adequate ideas of how to think about those ends and of how to be guided by them. So a farmer has to arrive through her or his work at a highly particular set of notions of what good farming is on this particular terrain, in this particular climate, with this kind of plough, and this kind of labor force. So a physician is concerned to learn through her or his work how to restore and sustain the health of *these* patients, with *these* particular vulnerabilities, through the use of *these* pharmacological and surgical resources. So the musician or the painter may be as surprised as anyone else when the end to which

they have directed their activities emerges as *this* performance or *that* portrait.

It is not only the conception of such ends that may be unexpectedly transformed in the course of our activities. We too, while developing those skills and qualities of mind and character needed to achieve those ends, may discover that the transformation of ourselves that is involved is significantly different from what we had expected, in part perhaps because of the particularities of our circumstances, but in part because what such virtues as courage, patience, truthfulness, and justice require can never be fully specified in advance. Hence, as Aquinas emphasized, in the life of practice there are no fully adequate generalizations to guide us, no set of rules sufficient to do the work for us, something that each of us has to learn for her or himself as we move toward the achievement of the ends of our activities and the end of excellence in those activities.

To move toward these two sets of ends requires, on any Aristotelian view, Neo or otherwise, just that integration of rational judgment and desire to which, as again we noticed earlier, Aristotle gave the name *prohairesis*. Failure to move toward them, if not due to misfortune, will be evidence of bad practical or productive reasoning rooted in inadequately educated judgment or in misdirected desire or in both. It is important that – contrary to what seems to have been Aristotle's mistaken view; here he needs correction by Aquinas – progress toward good judgment and rightly directed desire is often partial and uneven, so that someone who exemplifies them admirably in some area of her or his activities may fail miserably in either or both in some other area. For even the most successful, however, there remains a problem. Granted that there are goods to be achieved and excellence to be attained in a wide range of practices, of types of activity, to which of these should I give a central place in my life, to which a marginal place, and to which no place at all?

This is a question that I cannot ask and answer entirely on my own, just by myself, and this for two reasons. First, what place I am able to give to this or that type of activity in my life and what goods I am able to achieve often depends on what place others give to these same types of activity in their lives and on how far they and I cooperate. Each of us generally relies on others in pursuing our own individual goods. And this is even more obviously the case when the goods in question are not individual, but common goods, the goods of family, of political society, of workplace, of sports teams, orchestras, and theatre companies. Such goods we can achieve and enjoy only qua family member, qua citizen, qua participant in the relevant types of activity. Deliberation as to how such common

goods are to be achieved can only be shared deliberation. Moreover, it is only through such shared deliberation that we are able to overcome the partiality and one-sidedness of our own initial judgments and to correct our prejudices. Nonetheless, at certain points in our lives each of us has to make her or his own decisions as to what place this or that type of activity is to have in her or his life. So how are we, how am I to make this decision? What gives me good reason to integrate the various facets of my life in one way rather than another? (I speak in the first person to make it clear that it is I as a NeoAristotelian who am posing these questions.) In answering them several aspects of our lives need to be kept in mind.

First, there are goods central to our lives over and above the goods internal to practices: the goods of affection and friendship and the good of self-knowledge are examples, but so is the good of light conversation and joking between workmates or groups of casual acquaintances. Secondly, not only is it the case that the goods that are most important to us at one stage of life may be and characteristically are not the same as the goods that are most important at other stages, but what it is to pursue and to achieve those goods also changes over time. The friendships of the young are not the same as the friendships of the old, those friendships in which shared memories play so large a part. The self-deceptions of the young are not the same as the self-deceptions of the old, those self-deceptions in which the editing of memories plays so large a part. The jokes of the young are not the jokes of the old.

It is then with a strong sense of the heterogeneity and variety of the particularities of our lives that we should ask the question: in terms of what should we set about the task of integrating our lives, of deciding upon the due place that each good should have at each stage in my particular life? This is of course one more version of the question: How is it best for me to live qua human being rather than just qua family member or qua friend or qua student or qua farmer? We may perhaps and characteristically will already know at what ends to aim, if we are to achieve excellence in a variety of types of activity, when young as student or apprentice, later in the workplace and as spouse and parent, later still perhaps as teacher or trade union organizer, at all stages as friend, and yet may still have to learn at what end we must aim, if we are to order those other ends so that we achieve excellence as human beings. What kind of end might this final end be?

It must, given what has just been said, be an end that can be pursued by a rational agent through all the very different stages of her or his life, an end to the achievement of which all the very different activities of such a life, each

with its own particular end, can be directed. That is to say, it must be the end of rational activity as such, an end to be contrasted with those various and particular ends. As the end of rational activity, its achievement must involve the attainment of some high degree of self-knowledge, of what we are, have been, and can be. Secondly, it must be an end that completes and perfects the life of the agent who achieves it. It must be such that someone who had achieved it could have no reason to want anything further or to seek anything further. It is not just that it happens to be more desirable and more choiceworthy than all other objects of desire, but that its desirability is of a different order. Thirdly, in contrasting it with other goods we are able to say a good deal about what it is not, and this is instructive. As Aquinas argues powerfully (*Summa Theologiae* Ia–IIae, qu. 2–3), life aimed at the achievement of that final good cannot be a life whose principal aim is the attainment of pleasure, power, political honor, money, or physical, intellectual, moral, aesthetic, or even spiritual excellence, although every one of these is a genuine good. For these are among the goods that have to be ordered. Fourthly, that final good must stand to all other goods in this way: that, if and insofar as other goods are given a due place in an agent's life, that agent is directed toward the achievement of this, her or his final good, and vice versa. Those other goods are all goods for this or that agent, in this or that set of circumstances, in this or that respect. Such a final good is by contrast unqualifiedly good and stands to those other goods as a measure stands to what is measured. So what does or could be such a final good?

This question, posed in this general way, may seem to demand an immediate answer, but it is too soon to ask it. Consider some general answers proposed by thinkers who have contributed strikingly to those accounts of goods and the good upon which the NeoAristotelian tradition has drawn: for Plato it is the apprehension of the Form of the Good, for Aristotle the contemplation of that which we contemplate, when, so far as we can, we view things as God views them, for Plotinus the achievement of unity with the One, for Boethius and Aquinas the vision of God. Should we assent to one of these answers or propose another such? Not until we have noted that these are answers supplied by philosophical theorists, theorists engaged in characterizing the life of practice from a standpoint external to it. But we make a mistake, if we try to characterize the life of practice in theoretical terms before we have described it in its own terms. What needs to be considered first is the place that the conception of a final end, of an ultimate human good, has in the life of practice. For it is only in making practical judgments and choices, through the exercise of the virtues, that

each of us discovers in our lives a certain kind of directedness toward a final end that is our own, toward perfecting and completing the lives that are our own, by living out what in terms of our particular abilities and circumstances we judge to be the best possible life for us.

Reflective agents thus increasingly understand themselves and others in terms of a certain kind of narrative, a story in which they as agents direct themselves or fail to direct themselves toward a final end, the nature of which they initially apprehend in and through their activities as rational agents. Progress toward that final end is marked by slowly and unevenly increasing self-awareness and self-knowledge, so that agents become better able to understand what in their past has gone well and what has gone badly in their own lives and in the lives of others with whom they have interacted and why. Failure to understand is often on this view a sign that things have gone badly. And the conception of a state in which we have achieved our final end is a conception of a state in which our retrospective understanding has become such that we are able to retell the story of our lives, but now truthfully, able to take the true measure of all our failures.

It may seem paradoxical to say that it is only when we have recognized the fragile and partial character of our own present goodness, such as it is, and the realities, often the trivializing realities, of our own past badness, such as it has been, that we finally can have good reason to be satisfied with the outcomes of our lives. This is why we should resist the temptation to follow some of Aristotle's translators in giving this end state the name 'happiness'. For in contemporary English, to be happy is to be and feel satisfied with one's present state or with some aspect of it, whether one has good reason to be and feel satisfied or not. But the state to which Aristotle gave the name *eudaimonia* and Aquinas the name *beatitudo* is that state in which one is and feels satisfied with one's condition only because one has good reason to be and to feel satisfied. As both Aristotle and Aquinas point out, this is a state in which every rational agent desires to be. So our end state is to be one in which desire is finally and justifiably satisfied. It is not only an end, but – in an older sense of 'happy' – a happy ending. And to fail to attain it is to end unhappily.

Imagine now, just as we did in the case of expressivism, a reflective agent who has become persuaded of the truth of the central contentions of the NeoAristotelian position. How might this have happened? She has found herself, as we all do, pursuing a variety of goods in her life. But then she finds reason to ask: Why am I living like this? For the sake of what am I pursuing these particular goods? For their own sake or for the sake of something else? To what would each contribute in my overall life? Somehow

she learns that she has been asking Aristotle's questions and she then learns from him how to pose them more sharply. Perhaps to her surprise she then finds his answers a good starting point for elaborating her own answers. She now understands her uses of 'good' in NeoAristotelian terms, and she rank orders goods as NeoAristotelians rank order them. Her life will have developed as a life of practical questioning and practical learning through which her dispositions to feel, to desire, to argue, to judge, and to act are gradually transformed. And she will increasingly order the goods between which she has to choose in a way that directs her toward her final end, so that she becomes aware of what the character of that end must be.

How, then, will she think about the relationships between her desires and her judgments when she experiences a painful conflict between what she wants most on some particular occasion and how she judges it best for her to act? She will first ask what it is about the object of her desire that attracts her and what the best case is that could be made for judging it to be genuinely desirable. She will then ask what the argument or arguments are that issue in the conclusion that she should act otherwise than as her strong desire bids her to act. So she will entertain two practical syllogisms with incompatible conclusions, a situation that Aquinas has described for us (*Summa Theologiae* Ia–IIae, qu. 77, art. 2). Her further questions to herself will be: How are the goods cited in the premises of those syllogisms to be rank ordered by a rational agent exercising the virtues of temperateness, courage, justice, and prudence? And is the way in which *she* will be rank ordering them, if she acts as her desire bids her act, be consistent with a continuing exercise of those virtues by her that will direct her toward her final good, as she now understands it? Is it at this point her judgments or her desires that are pointing her in the wrong direction, a direction defined by her relationship to that final good?

At certain points in her reflections upon herself, she may well be compelled to resort to higher order reflection upon her practical thinking. She will have to ask how she is to articulate the theoretical presuppositions of her practical stances. It is at such points that she will have to reckon with the theoretical claims of those who have most adequately spelled out those presuppositions, Aristotle and such Aristotelians as Ibn Roschd, Maimonides, and Aquinas. What their arguments will perhaps bring home to her is that her and their conception of the final end of human activity is inescapably theological, that the nature of her practical reasoning and of the practical reasoning of those in whose company she deliberates has from the outset committed her and them to a shared belief in God, to a belief that, if there is nothing beyond the finite, there is no final end, no

ultimate human good, to be achieved. So she may complete her reasoning by discovering that what is at stake in her decisions in moments of conflict is the directedness of her life, if not toward God, at least beyond finitude.

It is of course only insofar as she has set herself to become a fully rational agent, only insofar as she has already developed a higher order desire, a higher order set of dispositions, to act as such an agent and to achieve the final end of such an agent, that this discovery will be motivating, rather than disturbing and disrupting. It will generally have been through decision making in the course of resolving earlier conflicts that the relevant higher order dispositions will have been developed, the relevant higher order desire strengthened. How one works through those conflicts, how one develops those dispositions depends in key part not only on one's early practical education but also on one's continuing social relationships and friendships. I already noted that many of our key decisions about how to pursue our individual goods need to be made in consultation with others, that this is always the case with respect to our pursuit of common goods, and that, as Aquinas emphasized (*Summa Theologiae* Ia–IIae, qu. 14, art. 3), our partiality and one-sidedness in deliberation need to be corrected by the judgments of competent and critical others. Our aptness to be the victims of our own fantasies, of our tendencies to engage in wishful or fearful thinking make this need even more acute. So our imagined NeoAristotelian will have recognized the indispensability of the good of friendship and will have consulted with her friends and, if some common good is in question, with others whose good that common good is, family members, fellow citizens, coworkers. How will her relationship with this range of others have to be structured if they are to share systematically in the tasks of rational deliberation?

Those who deliberate together need to ensure that no relevant voice is either excluded or ignored, that, so far as possible, what is said about both ends and means is true, and that each consideration advanced is given its due rational weight and not assigned too little or too great importance, because of who said it or how they said it or what nonrational inducements accompanied that saying. Participants in deliberation must make their decisions because of how their practical reasoning went and not from fear or as a result of fraud or because they were bribed or seduced. But this is only possible if the participants in deliberation are bound by precepts that unconditionally forbid the use of force or the threat of force against innocent individuals, precepts that prohibit the taking of innocent life or of the legitimate property of others, precepts that require truthfulness and the honoring of our commitments and obligations. Without unconditional

obedience to such precepts there cannot be shared rational deliberation, and without shared rational deliberation there cannot be rational agents. So some of what Aquinas called the precepts of the natural law, that law whose authority we recognize in virtue of our nature as rational agents, are needed to structure the relationships of those who pursue their individual and common goods in the company of others. And on a NeoAristotelian and more specifically a Thomistic view, there is no other way to pursue them.

Return now to our imagined NeoAristotelian reflecting on her resolution of her conflict. It will find its place in a narrative of her life as agent, a narrative with three salient characteristics. It will, first of all, be a narrative of her life not just as an individual, but as an individual-in-relationships, of herself as family member, as student and, later on, teacher, as coworker, perhaps member of a fishing crew or an orchestra, relationships in which she is or has been dependent on others and others are or have been dependent on her. She will think primarily of how 'we' failed or succeeded at certain points, rather than only 'I', although she will have learned how to move between 'I' and 'we'. Secondly, this narrative will concern how she and those others with whom she shares common goods have learned from their failures and mistakes how to move toward the achievement of those common goods. It is of crucial importance that mistakes, even, perhaps especially, gross mistakes, come to be understood as occasions for learning and not as mere lapses in judgment or yieldings to misdirected desire. Thirdly, as we have already noted, that narrative will exhibit an increasing directedness, an increasing success in integrating her pursuits of the various individual and common goods that she values into a unified pursuit of her final good, a good that she now may or may not recognize as consisting in a relationship to God. Her narrative will thus have a teleological structure, so that, if she were to recount it to us, we would find ourselves asking 'Will she achieve her end? Will her life be completed or left unfinished?'

Whether she does conceive her final good theoretically will of course depend on what kind of a person she is, how apt to become theoretically articulate in her reflections. How she so conceives it will depend in part on the resources of the culture that she shares with those who are her partners in their pursuit of common goods, on whether she and they inhabit an ancient, a medieval or an early modern or an Enlightenment or post Enlightenment culture, on whether she and her community are pagan, Jewish, Christian, or Islamic. We have imagined her so far as both reflective and articulate, as able to tell the story of her life in an appropriate way. But many practically rational agents who are reflective about the particular

situations in which they find themselves never find occasion to or may not have the resources to recount the stories of their lives. There always is a true story to recount, one which would capture the narrative structure of their lives, but rational agency does not require that agents are always able to think of themselves in terms of that story.

Whether our imagined NeoAristotelian agent does so or not, let us compare her with our imagined expressivist agent by asking how she will respond to the challenge presented by Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*. She will agree with Nietzsche that to be the kind of rational agent envisaged by Aristotle, Aquinas, and their heirs is to live and act under certain constraints, that it involves a disciplining of one's desires and one's will, but where Nietzsche views these particular constraints and that particular discipline as "unfreedom of spirit,"[48] she will understand them as enabling. What they make possible is participation in those social relationships through which she has learned how to transform her dispositions, to improve her capacity for practical judgment, and to pursue common goods. She will be impressed by the contrast between those relationships and both the relationships that Nietzsche takes to characterize the morality that he denounces, those of slave morality, and the relationships which he commends, those of master morality.[49] She will respond very differently from our imagined expressivist to Nietzsche's portrait of the philosophers of the future with their will to power.

What will strike our imagined NeoAristotelian most, perhaps, is that Nietzsche has deliberately excluded himself from and invited others to exclude themselves from just those types of practice and just those types of relationship in and through which we learn how to become practically rational agents and how to exercise those virtues without which rational deliberation is not possible. But to exclude oneself from those practices and relationships is, by impoverishing one's moral experience, to deny oneself the possibility of understanding what it is to be such a rational agent. To lead certain kinds of life is to deprive oneself of just those experiences that one most needs, if one is to know where to begin in moral and political enquiry. It is therefore to condemn oneself to misunderstanding, as Nietzsche's imagined new philosophers, whose will to truth is will to power, are condemned to misunderstanding. So the lessons that our reflective NeoAristotelian takes herself to have learned from the Nietzsche of *Beyond Good and Evil* are very different from the lessons that our reflective expressivist took herself to have learned. Yet it is not unimportant that both took

48 Ibid.   49 Ibid., p. 260.

from their reading of Nietzsche insights that it would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, for them to find elsewhere. That some of Nietzsche's texts are indispensable reading for any student of modern morality and moral philosophy – as indispensable as the writings of Hume, Kant, and Mill – is even now not as widely recognized as it should be.

1.9   Expressivists versus NeoAristotelians: a philosophical conflict in which neither party seems able to defeat the other

We have then arrived at two sets of different and incompatible answers to our initial questions. Those questions concerned how it is that someone's desires can be such as to make her or his life go well or go badly, what is involved in resolving conflicts in which either desire is pitted against desire or desire is at odds with rational judgment, and what constitutes a good reason for trying to satisfy this or that particular desire. The practical reasoning of agents whose patterns of thought and action give expression to their commitment to the truth of either of those two sets of rival and alternative philosophical answers will be significantly different from the practical reasoning of agents whose commitment is to the other. The ends set for themselves by reflective expressivists, expressivists who have learned what they need to learn from Frankfurt, will be those which give expression to what it is that they care about and they will rank order those ends in accordance with how much they care about this rather than that. It is this rank ordering of their ends that will provide them with some of the premises for their practical reasoning. They will also need premises about the situations in which they find themselves and the alternatives between which they have to choose by acting in one way rather than another. So for them as practical reasoners the immediate question will be of this form: 'Given the ends that I now have, rank ordered as they are, and given the alternative courses of action between which I have to choose, which course of action will best serve the achievement of those ends?'

Notice that this question will also be posed by NeoAristotelians. So what are the respects in which they differ? If we attend only to particular occasions of choice and action, there may well be some on which there seems to be no difference at all between the practical reasoning and the judgments of an agent who exemplifies an expressivist stance and those of a NeoAristotelian agent. However, if we look beyond such episodes to the larger histories in which each episode has its place, crucial differences are at once evident. The histories of expressivist agents are primarily histories of their affections, of what they have cared about and of how they came to

care about what they now care about. The histories of NeoAristotelians are histories of how they succeeded or failed in becoming better judges of what it is for a human being to flourish qua human being and to act accordingly. They are histories of learning or failing to learn, and the standards by which success or failure is judged are independent of the learner. The expressivist histories are indeed also histories of judgments and reasoning, but of these as expressive of affections. The histories of NeoAristotelians are indeed also histories of affections and desires, but of these as according with or failing to accord with the conclusions of sound practical reasoning.

There will be moments in both types of history in which agents put in question some of the premises on which they have been relying in their practical reasoning, and these will be the moments when the differences between the two types of history become most obvious. For at such moments the expressivist agent will ask 'What is it that I really most care about?' and 'Is the pursuit of the ends that I have been pursuing well designed to further the well-being of that or those about which I most care?' while the NeoAristotelian will ask 'Have I understood adequately what it is for human beings to flourish qua human beings in this type of situation?' and 'Is the pursuit of the ends that I have been pursuing conducive to my human flourishing and to the human flourishing of those with whom I interact?' The differences in the answers are from time to time likely to be as striking as the differences in the questions.

What then happens in situations in which advocates of those rival answers confront one another? I have already given reasons for thinking that each will find the argumentative objections posed by the other uncompelling, so that exchanges between them are likely to be barren. What is instructive, however, is to remind ourselves of the types of consideration that gives each confidence in her own position. The NeoAristotelian will focus on those relationships with others without which she would be unable to achieve either those common goods that she shares with those others, such common goods as those of family, of political society, of the workplace, and so on, or the individual goods made possible by participation in the projects of achieving those common goods. She will note that it is a fact that those relationships require a high degree of mutual trust, that it is a fact that without those relationships human powers cannot be fully developed, and that whether a particular human being or group flourishes or fails to flourish is to be discovered by empirical observation. Of course on certain aspects of flourishing, there have been and will be disagreements, but it is a mark of human flourishing to make of such disagreements matter for further enquiry. So our imagined NeoAristotelian will reflect that her

relationships presuppose a large degree of agreement on what she and those with whom she shares common goods take to be the truths about human flourishing, truths that are what they are prior to and independently of their assent to them.

By contrast the reflective expressivist regards her relationships, like her normative and evaluative judgments, as expressing her attitudes, concerns, and feelings, more especially those attitudes, concerns, and feelings directed toward those individuals and groups, those ideals, and those causes about which she cares most. How indeed, she judges, could it be otherwise, since, if a change in what she cares about were to occur, or if she were to discover that her relationships or her normative or evaluative judgments did not in fact contribute to satisfying her desires for those individuals, groups, ideals, and causes that she most cares about, she would at once remake those relationships and revise those judgments. The NeoAristotelian's question is 'What is it that *we* presuppose?' The expresssivist's question is 'What is it to which *I* am committed?' And this difference in questions corresponds to a difference in the histories through which both we and they understand the positions that they now hold.

The expressivist's history is a history of her herself, of this particular individual interacting with and learning from other individuals, but most importantly of how *she* responded in and to those interactions and of what *she* learned or failed to learn. What her social context provides is a setting for *her* actions and reactions. What the history of her relationships provides is insight into aspects of *her* history. It is a history that begins with her birth and ends with her death. She, if she recounts it, can justly say "This is my history." By contrast the NeoAristotelian's history is a history both of her and of those groups with whom she shares common goods and within which she pursues her individual good. It is a history of how the shared project of achieving those goods, the attainment of which constitutes human flourishing, came to inform each of their lives. Her history as an individual is adequately intelligible only as a part of that history, and so she will commonly speak of *our* history rather than of her history as my history.

In both cases, as we already noticed, the content of each particular history will depend in part on which society the agent inhabits and at what period. Eighteenth-century individuals who recognized themselves in the portraits of the moral agent drawn by Hume or Adam Smith had significantly different moral histories from their twentieth-century counterparts. Thirteenth-century NeoAristotelians in Paris were engaged in very different controversies from their sixteenth-century Spanish or their

twentieth-century Irish heirs. And on occasion the partisans of each stand-point will play a part in the other's history, providing a critique of the judgments and arguments of the other and sometimes a critique of the other's critique. If that critique were to be systematically carried through, it would result in each party writing a critical history of the other, a history designed to show how only from the standpoint of the writers can the errors and confusions that they ascribe to their rivals be adequately identified and explained.

We have, then, three levels of disagreement between the kind of reflective expressivist that I have described and the kind of NeoAristotelian that I have characterized. There are first order practical disagreements about how it is best to resolve this or that conflict of desires or this or that conflict between judgment and desire. There are second order philosophical disagreements about how judgments of the form 'It is in this situation good or best to feel, judge, and act thus' are to be interpreted and therefore about the form that an agent's practical reasoning with respect to such conflicts should take. And thirdly, there are disagreements about how the narratives of an agent's practical history, that history through which agents make themselves as desiring and reasoning animals intelligible to themselves and others, should be recounted.

The claim made on behalf of each of those rival histories by the protagonists of each, explicitly or implicitly, is that it enables us to understand the conflict between those contending points of view in ways in which and to a degree in which the other does not, that it exhibits an inability on the part of the protagonist of the other party to understand their own predicaments. NeoAristotelians do not deny that there are and have been many individuals and groups, even perhaps some cultures, whose evaluative and normative attitudes and judgments are very much what expressivists take them to be. They allow that such individuals and groups speak and act on many occasions just as if expressivism were true, and, if reflective, understand themselves in expressivist terms.

What NeoAristotelians claim – and I write as such a NeoAristotelian – is that, in so understanding themselves, expressivists are unable to reckon with important aspects of themselves and that their activities over extended periods of time can only be characterized and understood adequately in Aristotelian terms. So their own histories of themselves will always be defective histories. It is with this claim and its relevance to our enquiries about desires that part of the rest of this book will be concerned. Reflective expressivists, of course, take the histories of NeoAristotelians to be histories of obfuscation and error, just as both the thinkers of the Enlightenment

and Nietszche did. And neither party has the resources to refute the other by appeal to standards that the other recognizes. So what more is there to be said?

We should first remind ourselves that a philosophical impasse is not necessarily or even usually a practical impasse. Aristotelians in ethics and politics who find that their arguments are unconvincing to expressivists have been given no reason thereby to put their Aristotelianism in question. They are after all Aristotelians not because they first arrived at a set of theoretical conclusions and then put them into practice, but rather because of the way in which they were educated into and in various practices by their elders or reeducated by others or by themselves. Their theory articulates the presuppositions of their practice in what they take to be rationally compelling arguments. Similarly, although for different reasons, expressivists, whether followers of Hume, Nietzsche, or Frankfurt, will have been given no reason for putting in question *their* attitudes and commitments. Yet there are those for whom this particular philosophical impasse may have practical import.

Remember those whose plight I described at the very beginning of this chapter, those whose lives had gone wrong, or were in danger of going wrong, because of inordinate or inadequate or distorted desire. For them, if they have become reflective, questions about the relationship of reasoning to desire and of what it is to have good or bad reasons for desiring this or that may be at once philosophical and practical and so in consequence may questions about good and 'good'. For them therefore, if they have followed the lines of argument developed so far, their discovery that there are no neutral standards by appeal to which the rival claims of NeoAristotelianism and expressivism can be adjudicated may seem to entail the frustration of an enquiry that is, for them, at once philosophical and practical. So it is not at all unimportant that the philosophical enquiry is not in fact at an end, that there are further questions to be asked.

The first of these is one that has to be put to the protagonists of both rival parties, and therefore one that I have to put to myself. It is: What conditions would have to be satisfied for you to acknowledge that the central theses of the view that you now hold are mistaken? Philosophers should have learned by now from C. S. Peirce that their claims, like those of scientists and theologians, have significant content only insofar as they are refutable, only insofar as their truth excludes certain possibilities. A statement of those possibilities is a statement of the conditions that, if satisfied, would show that particular claim or set of claims to be unjustified. This question therefore will provide a later stage of this enquiry with its subject matter.

A second question concerns how each of these types of theory functions as a mode of self-knowledge within those particular social contexts in which they are characteristically at home. If someone understands her or himself and her or his social role in terms dictated by either of the two rival standpoints that we have been discussing, are there types of misunderstanding to which she or he may be peculiarly liable? This is a type of question that theorists of ideology, such as Karl Mannheim, used to pose, but it is one that philosophers nowadays rarely, if ever, entertain. Its unfamiliarity is indeed such that it will be important to spell out the question in some detail. And this spelling out will provide another stage of this enquiry with its subject matter. But before I move on toward those later stages, I need to acknowledge what may be taken by some readers to be unjustifiable eccentricities in the way that I have proceeded so far.

1.10 Why I have put on one side not only the philosophical standpoints of most recent moral philosophers, but also their moral standpoint

What I have not yet provided is any justification for proceeding in a manner strikingly at odds with the ways of conventional academic moral philosophy. Initially, I may have seemed to be about to proceed along its well-trodden paths. For I posed questions about the meaning and uses of 'good', topics treated at length by practitioners of that discipline as part of their more extended treatments of evaluative and normative concepts and language. I have taken with great seriousness arguments and theses advanced by such notable contributors to that discipline as Stevenson, Blackburn, Gibbard, and Frankfurt. But I have proceeded as though the only two interesting and worthwhile standpoints in thinking about evaluative judgments and the nature of good reasons for wanting this or that are some version of expressivism and some version of the view that I have named NeoAristotelianism and that the debate between these is the single most important debate in this area.

To think this is from the standpoint of most of contemporary academic practitioners of contemporary moral philosophy not just mistaken but absurd. It is to neglect the work of the most influential contributors to that discipline and to leave unaddressed most of what they take to be its central problems. I therefore owe it to my readers to say something about why I have proceeded as I have, about why my approach is so different from theirs. The largest single difference between me and them is perhaps this, that they find what they identify as the subject matter of their enquiry

unproblematic, while I do not. That subject matter they take to be Morality, a set of rules, ideals, and judgments concerning duties and obligations that are to be distinguished from religious, legal, political, and aesthetic rules, ideals, and judgments. I spell "Morality," as they conceive it, with a capital M, to distinguish it from "moralities" in the plural, as when anthropologists speak of the morality of the Dyaks of North Borneo or that of the Inuit peoples. Contemporary moral philosophers happily use both "Morality" and "moralities," just as philosophers of science speak both of "Science" and of sciences, the science of the ancient Greeks or the science of the medieval Arabs. The implication in both cases is the same. The moralities or sciences of other cultures are inferior versions of Morality or Science, as we now possess them in advanced modernity, and philosophers can safely take the authority of both for granted. What then is Morality, the morality of advanced modernity, thus understood?

It is presented as a set of impersonal rules, entitled to the assent of any rational agent whatsoever, enjoining obedience to such maxims as those that prohibit the taking of innocent life and theft and those that require at least some large degree of truthfulness and at least some significant measure of altruistic benevolence. Why should we obey such maxims? Here there are alternative answers. One is that obedience to such maxims by others in relation to ourselves is something that as rational agents we cannot but will, and so consistency requires that we also take those maxims to govern our actions toward those others. Another is that by obedience to such maxims we maximize well-being or happiness or utilty, variously understood. A third is that these represent the demands that it is or should be generally regarded as reasonable that we can make on others and others on us. Different versions of both rules and justificatory answers are to be found both in the discourse of everyday moral agents and in the writings of academic moral philosophers who make that discourse the subject of their enquiries. However, there is one notable difference between them.

In both there is recognition of an inescapable tension between the requirements of what are taken by some to be unconditional and exceptionless moral rules and the requirement that we maximize well-being or happiness or some aspect of these. So the injunction that we should refrain from lying is put to the question on occasion, when it is evident that only by lying can we avoid causing pain. Or the injunction never to violate someone's dignity by torturing them is put to the question when it appears highly probable that only by torturing a suspect will we make him divulge information that may save hundreds of lives. But in their response

to this recognition, everyday moral agents nowadays and academic moral philosophers part company.

In everyday moral life these tensions are dealt with by indefiniteness in commitment and by oscillation. The indefiniteness is expressed in the form that many give to their moral principles: 'Always do such and such or refrain from doing so and so, except when . . . ' followed by a shorter or longer set of exceptions and ending with an 'etc.' The oscillation is between on some occasions affirming a strong, even a very strong version of some rule, as though it were exceptionless, while on others allowing maximizing and consequentialist considerations to override it. Such indefiniteness and oscillation are notable features of both the political rhetoric and the political practice of advanced societies as well as of the private lives of their citizens.

What characteristically distinguishes the academic moral philosophers of those societies from everyday language users is their insistence on resolving or at least on attempting to resolve the inconsistencies in moral discourse in such a way that both indefiniteness and oscillation disappear. Depending on how they resolve those inconsistencies, they espouse this or that particular account of the rules, maxims, and justifications of morality and reject its rivals, each claiming the support of rational argument for their particular contentious conclusions. So we find both Kantian upholders of universalizable and exceptionless moral rules and theorists who defend conceptions of inviolable human rights at odds with utilitarian consequentialists, and all of these in dispute with different versions of contractarianism. More recently the advocates of virtue ethics have added their contribution to the debates. Each party finds its own objections to the other rival standpoints compelling, and no party finds the arguments advanced against it persuasive. So it has been now for some very considerable time, during which much important philosophical work has been done. New arguments have been advanced, new distinctions drawn, new insights developed, but this in general without bringing any of the contending parties any nearer to agreement on the major issues, whether substantive or metaethical.

To this it will be objected that I am taking no account of the work of those moral philosophers who claim to have decisively resolved the major disagreements, or at least some of them, by developing theses and arguments which combine elements from various contending views in a synthesis that is argumentatively superior – at least in the eyes of its authors – to all the versions of those views that had been so far advanced. The wonderfully impressive character of these normative constructions has to be acknowledged, but the response to them has in fact been the multiplication rather than the resolution of disagreement, not at all what

their authors have intended. For their syntheses have turned out to be as contestable as any other standpoint. So the protagonists of each point of view continue to represent themselves as the voice of enlightened reason, providing reason with too many conflicting voices.

Is it perhaps the case, then, that the only way to be a moral philosopher here and now is either to identify with the positions of some one of the contending parties or to construct yet one more contentious position of one's own? One can avoid having to choose between these unpalatable alternatives, I believe, only in a limited number of ways. The most interesting is that represented by expressivism. For expressivism would provide an explanation of why those who take themselves to be the voices of reason nonetheless find themselves in unresolvable disagreement. Those disagreements would be understood as giving expression to the different and incompatible prerational commitments of each party, commitments that determine which arguments each finds persuasive. But this is of course something that all those moral philosophers who take themselves to be setting out the requirements of reason are committed to denying. Hence arises the need for such moral philosophers to discover some conclusive refutation of expressivism.

This need, interestingly, is felt often enough by everyday moral agents as well as by quite a number of academic philosophers, for both take themselves to judge by a moral standard whose authority is independent of their own commitments, attitudes, concerns, and feelings. So expressions of moral conviction in our culture tend to have a peculiar character, moving between moments in which agents speak as if just such a standard were being invoked and moments apparently expressive of something quite other, of convictions prior to and stubbornly immune to argument, an ambivalence most obvious perhaps in political debates about alleged human rights. As I noticed earlier, expressivist philosophers have their own account of this double aspect of moral utterance, but it is an account that generally fails to convince those whose allegiance to Morality is paramount, that is, the large majority of the citizens of advanced modernity.

It is not of course that those citizens are able to settle their quarrels among themselves about what it is that Morality requires of them. There is more than one liberal version of Morality, more than one conservative version. And, for reasons that I already suggested, both the quarrels among liberals about what liberalism requires and among conservatives about what conservatism requires and the quarrels between liberals and conservatives are interminable. Each party speaks as if they are or are on the verge of advancing compelling reasons why their critics and opponents

should concede defeat, but that point is never quite reached and no party ever finds reason to acknowledge defeat. The dominant shared culture of moral modernity is, on the one hand, one whose assertive and expressive judgments and arguments seem to be just what expressivism says that they are, yet, on the other, also one in which agents are unable to recognize or acknowledge this fact about themselves. So the recurrent rejections of expressivism, not just by academic philosophers but by everyday moral agents, may themselves be an important symptom of that culture's moral condition.

There have of course throughout Morality's history been those who have rejected its pretensions, some because they were fortunate enough to have been brought up in a culture to which its norms and values are alien – I think here of such Russian critics of Western modernity as Dostoievski and Berdyaev – others because, like Nietzsche, or our imagined follower of Harry Frankfurt, or D. H. Lawrence, they had become disillusioned. The most notable example among our contemporaries was Bernard Williams, who spoke of morality as "a special system" and a "peculiar institution," one whose requirements are at odds with any considered understanding of the ethical.[50] On Williams' account our deepest moral convictions are expressed in and through our emotions, although they are not, as on an expressivist account, expressions *of* our emotions. Early on he was impressed by Lawrence's injunction to "Find your deepest impulse and follow that" and twenty years later he could write that "I must deliberate *from* what I am. Truthfulness requires trust in that . . . "[51] How then to characterize those situations in which recognition of the demands of the ethical makes it necessary to deliberate from that starting point? Williams' rejection both of modern conceptions of morality and of the Christianity which he saw as the precursor of those conceptions led him to follow Nietzsche in an attempt to recover from the ancient Greek world – from its tragedians and historians rather than from its philosophers – alternative ways of understanding human relationships and transactions. Yet he pursued practical enquiry as he did only because from the outset he took there to be crucial objections to any version of Aristotelianism, something that he reiterated at various points in his notable intellectual career. Hence, in stating the case for an Aristotelian view of things, I have also and incidentally been stating a case against Williams. To this quarrel and indeed to the critique of Williams' views in general, I will have to return.

[50] Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 174.
[51] Ibid., p. 200.

Is there then any other compelling and constructive way to respond to the condition of Morality and to the convictions and practices through which it finds expression as a distinctive and distinctively modern form of social and institutional life? No adequate answer to this question will be possible until we have identified and understood better those peculiarly modern social relationships and intellectual presuppositions from which Morality derives its character. And it might be thought that to pursue the task of identifying and understanding those relationships would be a distraction from the central questions of our present enquiry concerning desire and practical reasoning. It turns out, however, that what we need to understand is how the social and intellectual order in which Morality finds its place is one that involves the deformation of desire and the invention of new forms of practical reasoning so that this turn in our enquiry is in no way a distraction.

Theory, practice, and their social contexts

2.1 How to respond to the type of philosophical disagreement described in Chapter 1: the social contexts of philosophical theorizing

The impasse at which we had arrived is a philosophical impasse, one in which two incompatible sets of theses and arguments confront one another and the protagonists of each are unable to identify standards shared with their opponents by appeal to which their disagreements might be resolved. It is an impasse with a double aspect, involving two sets of rival claims, one in which an expressivist account of 'good' and good is counterposed to a NeoAristotelian account and one in which something very close to Frankfurt's account of the relation of our practical reasoning to what we care about is counterposed to a NeoAristotelian account of desire and practical reasoning. In the face of it, how should we proceed? Are we simply to leave matters so that the protagonists of each party remain as satisfied with their own position as they are dismissive of that of their rivals? Is this particular philosophical enquiry, like a number of others in contemporary philosophy, either to become interminable or to terminate in unresolvable conflict?

Perhaps what we now need to think about is the nature and limitations of philosophical enquiry or rather of philosophical enquiry as nowadays characteristically conceived, since that is the type of enquiry through which I arrived at my conclusions. Does the impasse at which I arrived perhaps result from the nature and limitations of such enquiry, enquiry that is narrowly academic? As such it operates under three sets of constraints. First, it is carried on in college and university classrooms and seminars, and in journal articles and books written almost exclusively for those who teach and learn in those classrooms and seminars. So it has its own distinctive idiom, one very different from that of most plain persons, most moral agents. The question therefore arises as to whether it may be apt in

some degree to misrepresent the commitments of plain persons. Secondly, it has an assigned and well-defined academic territory. Philosophy is one thing, physics another, sociology a third, history a fourth, but it is no one's province to identify the limitations of each of these types of enquiry so that questions which cannot be answered from within one discipline are always in danger of going unasked. One such question is: Does a philosophical understanding of politics and morals not require some acquaintance with the range of moral and political beliefs and concepts disclosed by historical, anthropological, and sociological studies? Thirdly, philosophical enquiry is almost exclusively the work of professionalized academic teachers whose professionalization ensures the inculcation of certain habits of thought, among them habits that ensure the stability of academic hierarchies. The prerequisites for initiation into academic professions are such that those engaged in philosophical enquiry are generally, like the members of other professions, limited in their life experience. They will rarely have been soldiers or trade union organizers, worked on farms, in fishing crews, or on construction sites, played in string quartets or been in prison. This is of course no fault of theirs. Yet what the compartmentalization of contemporary social life ensures is that those who do have these important life experiences in armies or factories, or farms, or prisons, or whatever are generally educated, just as professional philosophers are, to believe that philosophical reflection and enquiry are matter for academic specialists and not for them. Perhaps, however, at least so far as moral and political philosophy are concerned, this is a mistake. Perhaps philosophers need to begin from the everyday questions of plain persons, the plain persons that they themselves were before they took to the study of philosophy.

The narrowness of a modern philosophical training, like the narrowness of other specialized training, has undeniable advantages. It produces minds focused on certain problem sets, minds that often exhibit admirable conceptual subtlety, that are adept at producing counterexamples to a wide range of theses, that are for the most part rigorous both in theory construction and in criticism. But what is notable is the extent to which and the ways in which, by reason of the constraints that we have identified, philosophical enquiry into and discussion of moral theory is isolated from political and moral practice, both our own everyday practice and that of those who inhabit moral cultures very different from our own. Any conception of moral theory as rooted in and unintelligible apart from the particularities of moral practice is generally ignored. Any notion of moral enquiry as needing to begin from or even include anthropological and historical studies of moral practice is ruled out and with it any identification

of contrasts between the moral practices of the culture that we here now inhabit and those of cultures of other times and places.

So how then should moral and political enquiry begin? We are all of us agents before we are theorists, and it is only because we are agents that we have subject matter about which to ask those questions that take us into theory. Indeed, it is as agents become reflective that they find themselves compelled to ask those questions from which philosophical enquiry begins. And when agents become philosophically enquiring, they do not cease to be agents. They cannot but bring with them to their initial theorizing commitments that they have found inescapable as rational agents, and the justification of their theoretical positions presupposes the justification of their practical commitments as agents. So how do we justify those practical commitments? It depends on who we are. For how we understand ourselves varies from culture to culture and even within particular cultures such as our own. It matters a good deal therefore that we have some degree of awareness of the idiosyncracies of our own culture and society so that we can distinguish that in ourselves and in our practical choices and reasoning that belongs to us as rational agents from that which has resulted from our peculiar cultural and social formation.

Consider just one possibility. A shared assumption of almost all contemporary moral theorizing is that the judgments made by moral agents are singular first person judgments, answers to the question 'How am *I* to act?' Suppose, however, that, contrary to this common view, it is, as I suggested in presenting the NeoAristotelian account in section 1.8 of Chapter 1, a prerequisite for acting as an adequately reflective agent that one should recognize that in many situations the question to be answered is not 'How am *I* to act?', but 'How are *we* to act?', just because what is at stake is a common good and not just the goods of individuals. Suppose further both that those common goods are the goods of family or workplace or political society, goods to be achieved and enjoyed not by individuals qua individuals, but by individuals qua family member or qua fellow worker or qua citizen and that individuals cannot achieve their own individual goods except through achieving such common goods. Were this to be the case, moral agents could not act as such without also acting as political and social agents and the abstraction of 'the moral' from 'the political' and 'the social' would be a misleading and distorting abstraction, one whose outcome might be that moral theorists would be blind to important aspects of the life of practice, indeed to aspects of their own moral lives.

How then, I repeat, is one to understand oneself as a rational agent? It depends, I reiterate, on who we are and on whom it is with whom we

interact. For to be a rational agent is not only to have reasons for acting as one does and to be able to evaluate these as better or worse reasons. It is also and inseparably to offer reasons to others for acting in one way rather than another and to be responsive to the reasons that they advance. It is therefore important not only that the moral and political question is often 'How are *we* to act?', but that the *we* in question is always a culturally and socially particular *we*, an Irish or Japanese or Brazilian *we*, a *we* identifiable in terms of occupation, social class, and education. And when the question is 'How am *I* to act?', those particularities remain important. This is why the NeoAristotelian account that I spelled out briefly in section 1.8 of Chapter 1, even though it is one that I take to be correct, as far as it goes, does not of itself provide an adequate answer to the question 'How are we to understand ourselves as rational agents?'

First, that account is a theoretical account, framed so as to clarify its differences from rival theoretical accounts. But what we now need to supply is very different from the kind of account that would be elicited from an agent reflecting – for her or his own practical reasons – on her or his particular choices and actions. And that would involve an evaluation of that agent's reasons for action. Since, as I have argued, a reason for acting in some particular way always identifies some good that would be achieved by so acting, such a one might well begin on some occasion by asking "What was the good of my – or our – doing *that*?" or "Why was I – why were we – pursuing *that* rather than some other good?" What reflection may then elicit from agents is a need to make explicit the way in which they have up till now rank ordered goods in this particular area of their lives, and perhaps more generally, so that they ask not only if they were justified in acting as they did on this occasion, but also whether they are justified in general in rank ordering goods as they do. Or such agents might instead ask, reflecting on some particular episode, what difference it has made to their achievement of the goods that they pursue that they have or have not acted under the constraints imposed by the norms of justice, contrasting perhaps those social relationships that flourish when informed by those norms with those that result from the unjust and unfair treatment of others. The movement of reflection will characteristically be at first from the particular to the general and from the concrete to the abstract, but only so as to return to the particularities of the agent's decision making.

Such agents are through reflection learning to deliberate better and what they principally learn from are their own mistakes, mistakes that have put them at odds with others or with themselves. So they may come to

understand themselves as having progressed beyond their first identifications of goods, goods internal to those particular practices to which parents and teachers had introduced them and their first recognition of the qualities of mind and character needed to become excellent in pursuing those goods, through a stage in which they succeeded to greater or lesser degree in integrating the pursuit of those goods into a life which was and perhaps is their best attempt so far to flourish as a human being, toward their present condition, whatever that happens to be. What practices those were will, of course, vary with the social and cultural order that they inhabit and their place in it. Someone apprenticed to a skilled craft, whose fine singing voice is valued by local choirs, and who is developing as a cricketer will value different excellences and have a very different kind of life from someone in another country, another century, and speaking another language, who works productively on a family farm, who learns how to tell and retell artfully those stories through which a knowledge of the past is preserved, and who has served as a soldier. Their songs will be different, but the qualities of mind and character that they need to deliberate well will be in essentials one and the same.

Reflective practical agents thus become self-aware in at least three ways. They make explicit and spell out concepts and theses whose range of application and truth they had hitherto presupposed without being aware of it. They discover that the realities of their practical lives are captured by narratives of failure and success as practical reasoners, of their success or failure in exemplifying the virtue that Aristotle called '*phronēsis*' and Aquinas '*prudentia*'. And they consequently become aware of more or less of a directedness in their lives, of an uneven movement toward some end state about which they often can say very little. I have said of such reflective agents that they become self-aware by learning from their mistakes. On what resources are they able to draw in correcting in correcting their errors?

They will, as we have already noticed, have learned to take seriously the judgments of perceptive others, especially those others who exhibit the qualities of mind and character that they have learned to value. They will have learned to suspect themselves in types of situation in which in the past they have become victims of their own desires. They will have learned to give due weight to constraints such as those that the norms of justice impose. But of course in all this there will be a certain circularity in their reasoning. For, unless from near the outset they had already presupposed the truth of conclusions at which they had not yet arrived, conclusions which initially they did not know how to formulate, they would have been

unable later on to reach those conclusions. Those who go astray from the outset, who lack the early shaping of their commitments and habits that Aristotle took to be indispensable for the political and moral life, will lack the means for identifying, let alone correcting their errors.

If this is how it is with mature rational agents who have learned to understand themselves as rational agents in their own everyday idiom, then they must have found resources for identifying and dealing with two important sources of practical error. One arises from the danger that we all confront of being led astray by our feelings and affections, likings and dislikings, hopes and wishes, fears and anxieties, as these change with age and biochemistry. The other arises from the sometimes distorting and misleading influences of our own social and cultural order on our beliefs, attitudes, and choices. Just because every rational agent learns to reason in idioms informed by the particularities of her or his own culture, every rational agent is in danger of repeating and transmitting the mistakes and distortions characteristic of that culture. Those whom we initially take to be exemplars of human flourishing are likely to be those whom our elders and teachers take to be exemplars. In societies in which it matters to be rich or powerful – that is, in most societies – the lives of those who happen to be rich and powerful are often taken to be exemplary. So rational agents, if they are not to be deformed by false beliefs, must educate themselves to see through such superstitions, superstitions often a good deal more subtle and plausible than this example might suggest. Let me begin by saying something about the first of these sources of error.

Everyone needs to learn to discipline their affections, so that they do not blind us as to what is the case. Everyone needs to learn to discipline their fears and anxieties, so that they do not become disproportionate and disabling. Everyone needs to learn that if their judgments give expression to strongly felt convictions, this must be only because they have sufficient reason to assert the judgments in question as true and the truth of those judgments gives them sufficient reason for feeling as they do. It is in the course of such learning that our feelings and our dispositions to feel are transformed, so that we no longer respond as infants respond. But these tasks of disciplining and transforming our feelings have to be undertaken again and again at different stages in our lives. When we fail in them, then insofar as our judgments express our feelings, we have good reason to distrust our judgments. Insofar as we have succeeded in them, the fact that our judgments express our feelings becomes irrelevant to the question of whether or not we are justified in making those particular judgments. When, therefore, expressivist theorists give self-aware rational

agents reason to believe that their evaluative judgments give expression to underlying feelings, such agents will have no reason to quarrel with this. What they in turn will urge upon expressivists is a need to distinguish the several different relationships in which feelings and judgments can stand to each other and the importance of these differences to the moral life. The expressivist's central claims, rightly understood, are, so they will argue, not in the least incompatible with their own practical understanding of their judgments and of the justification of those judgments by appeal to the facts concerning human flourishing.

They will be similarly accepting of and perhaps at first similarly unimpressed by the claims of NeoAristotelian theorists, pointing out that if those claims are true, it is only because they are an accurate representation of the stances and reasoning of self-aware rational agents. Aristotle may have argued compellingly that theoretical enquiry will be certain to go astray if its starting point is not in truths learned and only to be learned in and through practice (*Nicomachean Ethics* I, 1094b27–1095b2–8). And he may have given us good reason to hold that practice provides the test of whether we have been acting well or badly (*Nicomachean Ethics* X, 1179a18–22). But, so they may complain, it is not Aristotle's theorizing, but their own practice from which they learned this. So self-aware rational agents may take themselves to be unthreatened by the disagreements of theorists, even when those disagreements are unresolvable. They may feel in particular unthreatened by either expressivism or NeoAristotelianism, finding a place for what each has to say within their own practical reflections. So it may seem, at least for a moment, that the impasse that we were unable to move beyond in our theorizing becomes irrelevant from the standpoint of practical agency and can be put aside. However, here it is the NeoAristotelian who must demur, pointing out that even if the commitments of the rational agent do indeed provide the starting point for theoretical reflection, such reflection is indispensable to rational agents who do not break off their enquiries prematurely. Practice is apt to go seriously astray unless informed by the conclusions and insights of certain kinds of theorizing. What kinds of theorizing are those?

I remarked earlier that we are all of apt to take for granted and to adopt into our own thinking those conceptions of human flourishing and human excellence that are dominant in our own culture. But, as I also noticed, such conceptions may be and often are dangerously mistaken. And it is perhaps the principal task of the political and moral theorist to enable rational agents to learn what they need to learn from the social and cultural tradition that they inherit, while becoming able to put in question that

particular tradition's distortions and errors and so, often enough, engaging in a quarrel with some dominant forms of their own political and moral culture. For much of the rest of this book, I shall be engaging in just such a quarrel with dominant modes of thought in our own culture.

Let me begin that quarrel by reiterating my claim that contemporary philosophical theorizing about morality is flawed, insofar as it concerns itself not with the range of moralities that we encounter in different cultures, but with only one of them, 'Morality', the presently dominant moral system in advanced societies, which it presents as morality as such. Central to that system, as I also remarked earlier, are certain conceptions of utility and of individual human rights, so that there are recurring debates among those who invoke these conceptions as to whether or not some violation of this or that right can be justified, if the consequences of that violation for the utility of some set of individuals are taken into account. But what if utility thus conceived and human rights thus conceived are both of them fictions and the debates which employ them charades, socially indispensable charades, but nonetheless charades?

To maximize utility was on an earlier utilitarian view to maximize pleasure and to minimize pain. More recently the thought has been that to maximize utility is to maximize preference satisfaction. Neither formulation pays regard to the fact that what we are each of us pleased or pained by and what we each of us prefer depend in key part upon our prior moral formation, upon how far we are just, courageous and temperate, and therefore disposed to act rightly. How we conceive utility thus depends on our prior formation and commitments, so that it cannot provide a standard independent of them. To propose utility maximization as such as the measure of right action must therefore be a mistake. What, then, are we in fact doing when we make decisions on the basis of cost–benefit analyses as we often do? The answer is that we are always working with some highly determinate and contestable conception of what is to count as a cost and what as a benefit in this or that type of case and with some prior determination of whose costs and whose benefits are to be counted, whose costs and benefits ignored. It is evaluations already made or presupposed that allow us to find application for the notion of utility in our decision making. The notion of utility maximization as a freestanding notion that by itself provides guidance for action is a philosophical fiction.

Another such fiction is the notion of a human right. Protagonists of this notion characteristically take it to be indispensable, if they are to be able to assert that there are some types of harm and wrong the infliction of which

on others is unconditionally prohibited, prior to and independently of any particular system of positive law. My quarrel is not at all with their claim that there are such unconditional prohibitions. It is with their advancing the thesis that appeals to human rights, understood as rights attaching to each and every human individual qua human individual, provide a justification for asserting and enforcing such prohibitions. Such appeals could only function as justifications, if there were sound arguments for asserting the existence of such rights. And there are no such arguments. To show this, we would have of course to proceed argument by argument from the eighteenth-century theorists of natural rights to such twentieth-century theorists as Hillel Steiner, identifying in each case the particular argumentative failure. But this can be done. The notion of a human right is another philosophical fiction.

It is of course true that in many situations appeals to human rights thus conceived have played an important part in securing the rights of deprived and oppressed individuals and groups, just as it is true that appeals to the maximization of utility, conceived in a crude Benthamite form, have played an important part in securing benefits for those who badly needed and need them, in the field of public health, for example. In all such cases there were and are better arguments for doing what justice and the common good require than those appeals provide. But their effectiveness in such cases is at once to be welcomed and yet subjected to critical scrutiny. For debates in which claims about the maximization of utility are matched against claims about some human right are never quite what they are presented as being. Often enough there is indeed something real at issue, but something disguised by its presentation in terms of the notions of utility and rights. Later I will be arguing more generally that contemporary philosophical theorizing about morality, instead of illuminating the realities with which we have to deal as rational agents, misleads and distorts and, more than this, that it has the social function of misleading and distorting. I shall argue further that it is only when we have understood how it so functions that we will be able to characterize the theoretical impasse at which we arrived in the first part of this essay more adequately. And this will be a necessary preliminary to saying more about the questions concerning desires and reasons which were my initial and remain my central preoccupation. So what do we need to do next? We need an account of how philosophical theorizing about morality, even powerful philosophical theorizing, does on occasion function so as to disguise and conceal key aspects of social realities, of practice. Such an account best begins from an example.

I begin therefore with one particular philosophical theorist. David Hume's writings are peculiarly relevant to my overall argument, in part because the exponents of expressivism are all to some degree his heirs, and in part because he made wonderfully explicit some of the key differences between his views and those of the NeoAristotelian tradition. But Hume's moral theorizing also functioned so as to disguise and conceal from his educated contemporaries key aspects of their own social and political order and of his attachment to it. That this is so does not in the least detract from Hume's greatness, and I begin where he himself would have begun, with his moral psychology.

2.2   Hume as an example: his local and particular conception of the natural and the universal

"The chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain," so Hume asserted in introducing his discussion of what he identified as natural virtues and vices,[1] and in his treatment of particular cases it is always pleasure or pain in one of their various guises that is taken to move agents to act. Earlier in the *Treatise* Hume had straightforwardly identified good and evil with pleasure and pain, speaking of "good and evil, or in other words, pain and pleasure." "DESIRE," he had said, "arises from good consider'd simply, and AVERSION is deriv'd from evil. The WILL exerts itself, when either the good or the absence of the evil may be attain'd by any action of the mind or body."[2] Hence, Hume's account of practical reasoning: "It appears evident that the ultimate ends of human actions can never, in any case, be accounted for by *reason*, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without any dependence on the intellectual faculties."[3] So if we ask someone why he acts as he does, he will answer that he desires such and such and that by so acting he brings about such and such. If then asked why he desires such and such, he will reply that he is pleased by such and such or that he is pained by its absence, so terminating his explanation. "If you demand *Why? It is the instrument of pleasure*, says he. And beyond this it is an absurdity to ask for a reason."

[1] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford University Press, 1888, iii, 3, 1.
[2] Ibid., ii, 3, 9.
[3] David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902, Appendix 1, 244, p. 293.

Hume therefore has no place for a distinction between desires whose objects are such that their attainment will please us and desires whose objects are such that, whether they please us or not, their achievement will be the achievement of a genuine good. This renders the vocabulary that he employs to speak of desire very different from, for example, Aristotle's, and the contrast with Aristotle is very much to the point, if we wish to understand Hume. Aristotle too had asserted that the genesis of action is never a matter of reason alone: "Now intelligence (*nous*) does not move without desire (*orexis*). For wish (*boulēsis*) is a [species of] desire (*orexis*), and, whenever someone is moved in accordance with reasoning, he is indeed moved in accordance with wish (*boulēsis*). But desire (*orexis*) also moves contrary to reasoning, for appetite (*epithumia*) is [a species of] desire (*orexis*)" (*De Anima* 433a22–26). Terence Irwin has explained Aristotle's contrasting uses of *boulēsis*, *epithumia*, and *thumos* by saying that "Rational desire, wish, *boulēsis*, is for an object believed to be good," while "Appetite, *epithumia*, is nonrational desire for an object believed to be pleasant," and "Emotion, *thumos*, is nonrational desire for objects that appear good, not merely pleasant, because of the agent's emotions."[4]

The difference between Aristotle and Hume is that while, on Aristotle's view, desires for objects that attract only because they are pleasing to the agent who desires them are to be distinguished from desires for objects taken to be good, on Hume's there can, as I already noted, be no such distinction, just because what we take to be good and what we find to be pleasant have been identified. What follows for Hume? On Aristotle's view, as on Hume's, agreement with others in sentiments, affections, and judgments is important, but on Aristotle's view it must be agreement informed by a shared recognition of standards of practical reasoning very different from Hume's. On Hume's view agreement in sentiments is prior to and a necessary condition both for common standards and for shared practical reasoning. Individuals need to measure themselves against and to correct their judgments by appeal to those standards that express what Hume takes to be the general agreement in sentiment of humankind. So Hume is not open to the possibility that even in so measuring and correcting themselves they may be in unperceived error. Those near universal sentiments are the only measure in moral matters, and those who quarrel with those sentiments are always in the wrong.

[4] Terence Irwin, "Annotated Glossary," in *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1985, p. 394.

So it is with all deviations from the normal and the natural, from those judgments that express "the *natural* and *usual* force of the passions, when we determine concerning vice and virtue,"[5] deviations due to the adoption of motivating beliefs that result in artificial lives, lives such as those of Diogenes the Cynic or Pascal the Jansenist Christian. Such individuals are eccentric in what pleases and pains them and so put themselves at odds with the generality of humankind, inviting the condemnation of all those who identify themselves with the standard that Hume takes to be natural to humankind. Hume judges that in so arguing as a philosopher he is in moral agreement with all but the eccentric. The philosopher, so Hume asserts in the first section of the *Enquiry*, can assure himself of "the true origin of morals" by cataloguing those habits, sentiments, and faculties which, if ascribed to someone, imply praise or blame. "The quick sensibility, which, on this head, is so universal among mankind, gives a philosopher sufficient assurance, that he can never be considerably mistaken in framing the catalogue, or incur any danger of misplacing the objects of his contemplation: he need only enter into his own breast for a moment, and consider whether or not he should desire to have this or that quality ascribed to him, and whether or not such an imputation would proceed from a friend or an enemy."

The philosopher, that is to say, although he may introduce his hitherto nonphilosophical readers to philosophical arguments about the place of reason and the passions or sentiments in the moral life, has no advantage over those readers in respect of the facts and judgments that have provided the philosopher with his data. Any reader who is not an eccentric can at any time confirm the philosopher's judgments by entering into his own breast for a moment. Was Hume right about this? Was there and is there in fact this broad and near universal human consensus in sentiments and in judgments? The answer to these questions is of some importance in arriving at a verdict on Hume's moral philosophy. Yet to answer them, we have to put philosophical argument on one side for the moment and consider some salient features of the social and historical setting in which and about which Hume theorized. I begin with a general point.

In the course of discussing Hume's account of justice, Stuart Hampshire remarked that "So great has been the influence within contemporary moral philosophy of Hume, Kant, and the utilitarians that it has been possible to forget that for centuries the warrior and the priest, the landowner

[5] Hume, *Treatise*, iii, 2, 1.

and the peasant, the merchant and the craftsman, the bishop and the monk, the clerk who lives by his learning and the musician or poet who lives by his performances have coexisted in society with sharply distinct dispositions and virtues . . . Varied social roles and functions, each with its typical virtues and its peculiar obligations, have been the normal situation in most societies."[6] Moreover, it was the explicit or implicit claim of each of these social orders that to live and act as its norms and values dictated is to flourish both qua warrior or peasant or monk or poet, and qua human being. It was therefore impossible for Aristotle's medieval heirs, for example, to ignore the roles and relationships, norms and values, of the societies in which they found themselves. In giving their own account of human flourishing and of the virtues required for such flourishing, they could not avoid asking whether and how far individual and common goods could be achieved through the social roles and relationships of their own time and place.

With Hume it is very different. In his moral theorizing he invites his readers to think of themselves and others only as individuals, quite apart from their social roles, motivated in their activities and relationships by what they find agreeable or useful in others and in themselves, with no standard of good beyond that provided by their agreement in sentiments with others. He explains differences between cultures in their judgments concerning personal qualities by pointing out that a quality which it is useful for individuals to possess in one set of circumstances may lack utility in another. But Hume does not for a moment entertain the possibility that some large and numerous part of the inhabitants of his own social order in Scotland and England might have sentiments and act on judgments radically at odds with those that he takes to be universal. Consider one example of such a sentiment.

In his essay "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," Hume declared that "Avarice, or the desire of gain, is an universal passion, which operates at all times, in all places, and upon all persons." In the *Treatise* he had asserted that "Nothing has a greater tendency to give us an esteem for any person than his power and riches," and he had explained "the *satisfaction* we take in the riches of others, and the *esteem* we have for the possessors" by referring first to the possessions of the rich "such as houses, gardens, equipages" and the like, which "being agreeable in themselves, necessarily produce a sentiment of pleasure in every one, that considers or

[6] Stuart Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 108.

surveys them," secondly to our "expectation of advantage from the rich and powerful by our sharing their possessions," and thirdly to "sympathy, which makes us partake of the satisfaction of every one, that approaches us."[7]

It is unsurprising, then that whenever in his essays Hume alludes to the progress from less to more sophisticated agricultural economies, and beyond these to the changing forms of trade and of manufacturing that had resulted in the commercial and mercantile society of his own day, there is rarely a hint that the continuing and growing prosperity of the rich and powerful has invited anything other than the applause and approbation of the less prosperous. It is true that in the *Enquiry* Hume did for a moment entertain the possibility of replacing the inequalities of the present by an equal distribution of goods, remarking that "wherever we depart from this equality, we rob the poor of more satisfaction than we add to the rich."[8] But he at once dismissed this possibility as absurd, speaking of the seventeenth-century Levellers, who had believed in such an equal distribution of property, as "*political* fanatics" and claiming that all such egalitarian schemes are "*impracticable*; and were they not so, would be extremely pernicious to human society. Render possessions ever so equal, men's different degrees of art, care, and industry will immediately break that equality. Or if you check these virtues you reduce society to the most extreme indigence . . . "[9]

Hume thus identifies the standpoint of what he takes to be natural and universal sentiments, and so of what he takes to be natural and universal morality, with an uncompromising endorsement of the values of the eighteenth-century British social and economic order. Any – in Hume's terms – artificial questioning of those values, whether from the standpoint of such ascetics as Diogenes and Pascal, or from that of the egalitarian Levellers is condemned. Yet this leaves unheard the voices of those eighteenth-century English common people whom historians have described as ruled "through forms of judicial terror" and as "deferential by day and deeply insubordinate by night."[10] Indeed, they were not always deferential by day and this in respect of ideas and sentiments as well as actions. Of the crowds who engaged in food riots, E. P. Thompson wrote that the rebellious actions of "almost every eighteenth century crowd" were informed by "some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were

[7] Hume, *Treatise*, ii, 2, 5.   [8] Hume, *Enquiry*, iii, 2.   [9] Ibid.
[10] D. Hay, P. Linebaugh, J. G. Rule, E. P. Thompson, and C. Winslow, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England*, New York: Pantheon, 1975.

defending traditional rights and customs,"[11] rights and customs excluded from recognition by Hume's moral scheme.

What Hume's account leaves wholly unconsidered are three possibilities. The first is that as a matter of fact the degree and kind of disagreement in sentiments and judgments, both in Britain and elsewhere, is such that his claims concerning what is natural to and universal in humankind are seriously undermined. I will not pass judgment here on Hume's attempt to find a place within his moral scheme for large differences in sentiments and judgments between very different cultures, but note only that attention to the class and occupational structures of Britain, Ireland, and France provides by itself sufficient evidence to discredit some of Hume's central claims. The second is that the standpoints that give rise to these disagreements are all of them, *including Hume's own*, expressive not of universal sentiments, but of the kind of motivating beliefs that Hume is compelled to characterize as artificial. What on this supposition are Hume's motivating beliefs? They are those that put him in opposition in one way to Aristotle, in another to Pascal, in a third to the insubordinate eighteenth-century laborers, his beliefs that avarice is not a corrosive vice, that humility is not a virtue, that justice may not put in question established property rights. They are, to put it in terms quite other than his, his convictions concerning what human flourishing consists in. The third possibility that Hume's account rules out is that these moral disagreements, these disagreements in motivating beliefs, are rooted in differences between and potential or actual antagonisms between those who occupy very different positions in the economic structure, differences, as the Levellers put it, between "the poorest he" and "the richest he," differences, as Hampshire put it, between landowners and peasants, merchants, craftsmen, and laborers.

What I am suggesting is not only that some of Hume's claims were mistaken, but also that one effect of his advancing them in the way that he did was to conceal and disguise from his readers the importance of certain facts about the condition of their social and economic order. (I am not imputing any such intention to Hume.) Perhaps we can go further than this. What might justify us in asserting not only that this was an effect of Hume's theorizing, but also that that theorizing *functioned* so as to produce just this effect? We may say of some set of activities or states of affairs that they function so as to sustain the ongoing workings of some institution or set of institutions, if, were it the case that the former were not what they were, the latter would be in some way and to some degree frustrated.

[11] E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, New York: The New Press, 1991, p. 188.

So we may also say of some set of beliefs that they function so as to sustain the workings of some set of social or economic institutions, if, were it the case that those false beliefs were not held by the relevant individuals or groups, the workings of those social or economic institutions would be to some significant extent frustrated.

What I am entertaining, then, is the possibility that in eighteenth-century Britain a widely held belief in the universality of morality, conceived roughly as Hume conceived it, functioned so as to conceal from the view of many of his contemporaries the underlying moral and social conflicts of their society and by so doing sustained the workings of the agricultural, commercial, and mercantile economy to the profit of some and to the detriment of others, others who are for the most part invisible to Hume. Hume's theorizing was of course only one – and certainly far from the most influential – of the intellectual defenses of that morality, an early stage in the development of Morality. But those philosophical opponents who criticized Hume's philosophical views of morality by and large shared the substance of his moral stance.

None of this, let me reiterate, detracts from Hume's greatness as a moral philosopher. Very obviously it has no direct bearing on the truth or falsity of Hume's expressivism, let alone on those later versions of expressivism whose authors have held moral, political, and economic views quite other than Hume's. It does, however, show the bearing that historical enquiry can have on philosophical debate. Hume's claims about the universality of the moral sentiments, as he understands them, are undermined by the findings of historians and this in a way that suggests that moral theorizing may be a less innocent activity than it is usually taken to be, that philosophical theorizing about morality in some social contexts may function as a source of potentially dangerous moral and political misunderstanding.

2.3   Aristotle and his social context; Aquinas's recovery of aristotle from that context; how Aquinas seemed to have become irrelevant

Hume is of course far from the only philosopher whose political and moral philosophy is informed by the deformations of his own social and cultural order. Aristotle is even more obviously someone whose arguments go badly astray in this way. His conception of the natural slave as one who can act in accordance with reason only as the instrument of another and his claim that women are unlike men in their inability to control their passions as reason dictates are both wrongheaded in themselves and

cheerful illusions fostered by our imaginations about the satisfactions afforded to the great and the rich by their possessions and powers, illusions that, except "in times of sickness and low spirit," set us to work. "And it is well," adds Smith, "that nature imposes on us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continued motion the industry of mankind."[14] It is, that is, for the general good, for the good of the large majority of individuals in the long run, that each individual should act not for the sake of that general good but so as to achieve what each individual takes, although sometimes quite mistakenly, to be her or his good. It is better that we should be victims of self-deception than that we should see things as they are. What makes this unqualified claim more surprising is that Smith himself was in no way a victim of such illusions, someone as well aware of the negative as of the positive aspects of economic and financial aspiration. It was the "disposition to admire, and almost to worship the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition," he had argued earlier in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that was at once necessary, if the social order was to be sustained, and yet "the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments."[15]

What is missing from Smith's account is any conception of economic activity as capable of being cooperatively and intentionally directed toward the achievement of common goods, understood as Aristotle and Aquinas understood them, let alone any thought that it is only in and through the achievement of such goods that individuals are able to achieve their individual goods. But it should at once occur to us that that conception and that thought are not be found in Hume's writings any more than they are in Smith's. And this suggests that their absence was a matter of the general culture shared by Hume, Smith and those educated contemporaries in Scotland, England, France, and the Netherlands who were their readers and who provided the political, mercantile, commercial, and academic leadership of their societies. They shared a way of life which no longer had any place for that conception or that thought. So the sentiments that Smith and Hume catalogue and describe with such care and wit are in part not sentiments shared by all humankind, but sentiments praised and cultivated by eighteenth-century commercial and mercantile humankind and often enough by their present-day heirs.

[14] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, IV, i, 9–10, p. 183.
[15] Ibid., I, iii, 1, p. 61.

The question therefore arises: What happened in Europe between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries that could account for this state of affairs? One answer often given to questions of this kind is that Aristotle's thought, and with it Aquinas's, had been intellectually defeated in the philosophical debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But in fact, so far as Aristotelian and Thomistic ethics and politics are concerned, there were few such systematic debates and those that did occur provide not even the beginning of an explanation for this kind of change or this degree of change. Moreover, it is not that there were that many Thomists in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe. In the Middle Ages Aquinas as a moral and political thinker was an outsider, as were his Dominican followers. But what was plain at that time to theorists and plain persons alike was the immediate relevance of his thought, so that he had to be agreed with or answered, so that his questions were too often inescapable for those who were adequately reflective. The change that we need to explain therefore was not primarily a matter of episodes in the history of philosophical theorizing, but rather one of large social dimensions, one whereby the irrelevance of Aquinas's thought to the everyday life and labors of plain people came to be almost, if not quite universally, taken for granted. Plain people and theorists alike came to understand their lives in terms which seemed to rule out any possibility of conversation with Aquinas. The theorist who provides us with some of the key resources for understanding how this happened is Karl Marx.

2.4   Marx, surplus value, and the explanation of Aquinas's apparent irrelevance

The Marx to whom we need to go is not the mythological figure who was, together with Engels, the author of Marxism. 'Marxism' is the name of a system, indeed of a number of rival systems. Marx himself, although a notably systematic thinker, left us an incomplete body of work in which the bearing of one part on another often poses questions, questions generally left unrecognized by those who have projected on to his texts large and general doctrines, some of which he never held.[16] When it was suggested to Marx by Kautsky that he should publish his completed works, Marx's reply was that they would first have to be completed.

[16] On this see George L. Kline, "The Myth of Marx's Materialism," *Annals of Scholarship* 3, 2 (1984): 1–38.