HOW TO DECIDE MORAL QUESTIONS RATIONALLY

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If we look back over the development of moral (and also of legal) philosophy over the past fifty years or so, we can see it as the unfolding of the consequences of a fundamental mistake. Almost the first thing that happened to me when I started doing moral philosophy was that I saw that it was a mistake. I have been trying ever since to make people see that it is a mistake. But I have not been very successful. Let me now try to explain again what the mistake is.

It is the mistake of thinking that the only possible exercise of reason is in determining facts or discovering truths. That there can be practical as well as theoretical reason was a cardinal thesis of Kant; and Aristotle, with his concept of *phronesis*, or practical as opposed to theoretical wisdom, showed that he thought the same. But now nearly everybody, whether or not he calls himself a rationalist, seems to agree in thinking that *if* one wishes to be a rationalist (if, that is to say, one wishes to find a place for rationality in moral thinking), one has to be a descriptivist (that is to say, one has to believe that there are moral facts to be discovered). This almost universal mistake has had the most harmful consequences in recent moral philosophy, which it is my purpose in this paper to explore.

The effect of the mistake has been to preclude its victims from finding an account of moral thinking which has any hope of showing it to be a rational activity. The reasons for this are simple. If one thinks that the only function of reason is to discover facts, then obviously one will think that in order to make moral thinking a rational activity one has to

show moral judgements to be some sort of factual or descriptive judgements. But both of the possible types of theory which claim to show this turn out to be dead ends, each of them leading in its own way into a kind of relativism that would be wholly unacceptable to most of the adherents of these 'objectivist' views. I shall explain in a moment how this comes about. On the other hand, if one makes the mistake, but at the same time realizes that moral judgements are *not* (or at least not purely or primarily) statements of fact, then one will be led into a completely irrationalist view about moral thinking: one will be led to think that since the only possible exercise of reason is in discovering facts, and since there are no moral facts to be discovered, reason cannot be used in establishing them; they must therefore be the province of the irrational emotions or, as Hume called them, passions.

Those who take the first horn of this dilemma, and say that moral judgements state facts and that therefore they can be rational fall into two main schools. We have, first, various so-called 'naturalist' theories. The distinguishing feature of these is that they hold that moral judgements are equivalent in meaning to factual statements of some ordinary non-moral kind. They can therefore be established by whatever methods are appropriate to discovering facts of that ordinary non-moral kind. It is difficult to find convincing examples of such theories. A simple example —a theory which has probably never been held in this simple form, though James Mill and indeed Bentham made occasional remarks which might lead one to suppose that they held it— would be a theory which held that 'right action' *means the same as* 'action which maximizes pleasure', and that 'maximising pleasure' is a description of an observable empirical property of actions. That it is impossible to find convincing statements of any naturalist theory has not prevented people to this day going on claiming that moral judgments do state facts which are open to discovery by the normal processes of observation not involving any special power of moral cognition.

Secondly, we have various kinds of 'intuitionist' theories, according to which moral judgments are statements of fact indeed, but statements of a special kind of fact which is not open to ordinary methods of discovery, but requires a special kind of moral thinking to ascertain it. Such a crude statement of the intuitionist view would not be acceptable to many modern moral philosophers; but if you look carefully at their arguments you will see that at many crucial points they make appeal to intuitions (sometimes called 'moral convictions') which are unsupported by argument. This is true of John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, Bernard Williams and Stuart Hampshire, for example. The arguments of such writers will not survive scrutiny, unless the scrutiny is conducted by sympathetic people —that is, by people who already share the writers' convictions. Against those who do not, no arguments are provided. So we are bound to conclude that they are placing reliance on their ability to discern the moral truth without argument, by exercising their power of moral cognition, and think that all who similarly exercise it will come to the same conclusions. This, though, is clearly false, because, to take an obvious example, Rawls and Nozick come to radically opposed conclusions by exercising their respective moral intuitions. To these I fear that we must add Putnam, in the light of his paper in this issue (see Appendix). However, to find writers who actually *avow* intuitionist views, one has, with a few exceptions, to go back to the previous generation, to people like Ross and Prichard. But in spite of this it is fair to say that the majority of moral philosophers today, at any rate in the English-speaking world, are some kind of crypto-intuitionist.

Those who take the second horn of the dilemma, and say that moral judgments are *not* statements of fact, and that therefore moral thinking *cannot* be a rational activity, include mainly the emotivists, such as Hägerström, Carnap, Ayer and Stevenson. The view is not held by many people nowadays, largely because by now those who think that moral judgments are not (or not purely) statements of fact have disabused themselves of the mistake I am exposing,

and come to see that the denial that there are moral facts does not entail that moral thinking has to be irrational. But the people who see this are still relatively few. It is much more common to find their *opponents* (who think that there are moral facts) accusing those who deny this of irrationalism, because they, the opponents, are the victims of the mistake and do not see the possibility of a rationalist, but non-factualist and non-descriptivist, theory.

Let me now explain, as I promised to do, how both sorts of factualism or descriptivism are bound to collapse in their different ways into relativism. I will start with a naturalist. Let us suppose that he maintains that, for example, the sentence '*X* (some act) is wrong' means the same as '*X* is *F*', where '*F*' stands for some factual or descriptive predicate, such that the statement that *X* is *F* is verifiable by some ordinary fact-finding procedure. Now consider the position of someone who disagrees with him about some fundamental moral question. Suppose, for example, that '*F*' stands for 'not pleasure-maximizing'. The two will then be thinking, one of them that all acts which do not maximize pleasure are wrong, and the other that some acts which do not maximize pleasure are not wrong. The first of these two people, the naturalist, will maintain that his own opinion is true by definition, because 'wrong' *means* 'not pleasure-maximizing'. The second, however, is not going to be defeated so easily. Since what he thinks is that there are some acts which are not pleasure-maximizing but yet are not wrong, he cannot be using the word 'wrong' in such a way that it is logically imppossible for this to be the case. He can present himself as a standing counter-example to the naturalist's definition.

It then becomes a question of whether one, or whether the other, of them is correct in his use of the word 'wrong'. Let us suppose that they set out to decide this question in what seems the only possible way, by linguistic research —that is, by examining the way the word is used by speakers of their language. It will be the case that the people of their linguistic community are divided into two classes, one of

which uses the word 'wrong' in the same way as the naturalist, to mean 'not pleasure-maximizing', and the other uses it in some different way, or in a variety of ways. The object of their investigation is to determine the relative sizes of these two classes. They know already that neither of them is empty; for one of the disputants is a member of the first class, and the other of the second.

People of the first class think that whatever acts are not pleasure-maximizing are always wrong, and people of the second class do not think this. But is this really no more than a disagreement about the use or meaning of the word 'wrong'? Obviously not. It is a *moral* disagreement of substance between the two classes of people. But it is worth exploring the consequences for the naturalist of his thinking, as he does, that it is just a verbal disagreement.

Why do I say that naturalism collapses into relativism? Let us suppose, for the sake of simplicity, though it makes no difference to the argument, that the two classes of people are both fairly numerous, and that they are divided geographically. Everybody living south of a certain latitude within the country in question says that whatever is not pleasure-maximizing is wrong, and everybody living north of the same latitude disagrees with this. According to the naturalist, the first lot *have* to think what they think, because they *mean* by 'wrong', 'not pleasure-maximizing'. If somebody living north of the critical latitude were to migrate to the southern part of the country and were determined, in order to be able to communicate with his new neighbours, to learn to speak the language precisely as they speak it, he would have to *change* his use of the word 'wrong', so that he too would become constrained to think that whatever did not maximize pleasure was wrong.

You will see that there are two possible interpretations of what has happened. One of them is not open to the naturalist: it is the one which I said just now is obviously the right interpretation. This is that the disagreement is not just a linguistic disagreement but a substantial moral disagreement. But this the naturalist cannot admit. He has to say

that it *is* just a linguistic disagreement. He has to say that the people in the southern part of the country *mean* by 'wrong', not 'pleasure-maximizing'. What he will say about the people in the north I do not know. Possibly he will say that they use the word in a different sense. Possibly he will say that they are somehow mistaken to use it in this sense; but if that is the sense in which they do use it, it is hard to see how he can say this. It would be like the Americans saying that Englishmen are wrong to use 'solicitor' to mean what Americans mean by 'attorney'. The English would justly retort that is how they do use the word in their country, and who are the Americans to tell them to use it in some other way?

However, whatever the naturalist says about the people in the north, he will have to say that, on his view, the person who goes to the south and learns to speak the southern language will have come to think that whatever is not pleasure-maximizing is wrong. This is the relativism into which, as I said, naturalism inevitably collapses. It ties moral opinions to the meanings of the moral words, the effect of which is that we have to adopt the moral views of those who use the words. Otherwise we are linguistically at fault. I have chosen too simple an example. But if you take some more sophisticated example of a naturalist position, you will see that exactly the same thing happens. Moral disagreements are reduced to linguistic disagreements, and the result is that we become constrained to adopt the moral opinions of those whose language we are speaking.

I come now to the intuitionists, whose doctrine collapses into a different sort of relativism. Here too we must start with the fact of moral disagreement. Let us suppose again that two people disagree about some important moral question. According to the intuitionist, each of them is using his moral intuitions, and, since they disagree, one of them must be using it wrongly. One thing at any rate is clear, that both of them have moral convictions of the sort that intuitionists appeal to. The convictions may be strong ones, so that each will say, 'I know I am right'. The question is, whether the

intuitionist has left himself any way of deciding *which* is right. Since he has no appeal except to convictions, it would seem that he has not.

To put the point another way: there is no dispute about the *phenomena* of the moral life between this intuitionist and someone who thinks that the moral convictions are just feelings or attitudes. What this second person will say is that the two disputants have different attitudes, or feel differently about the matter. Unless the intuitionist can produce some way of deciding which of the two convictions is the correct one, does his theory differ in any important respect from that of the person who speaks of attitudes and feelings? I cannot see that it does.

To this an intuitionist is likely to reply that the intuitions or convictions to which he appeals are not just *any* convictions that anybody happens to have, but the convictions of morally well educated people. If this is so, then one of our two disputants must have been badly educated morally. But which? It is easy to think of cases where different cultures bring up their children differently. For example, in many circles in India, meat-eating is considered wrong, and children, when they get to the age at which they ask such questions, are led to think that it is sinful. By contrast, in most, but not all, circles in the West it is regarded as perfectly legitimate. What will the intuitionist say about two people, one from each of these cultures, who are in dispute on this question? There may be no doubt about the strength of their convictions, nor any doubt that these convictions are the result of their education. But which was the good education? The intuitionist has left himself no way of deciding this question.

The same trouble arises at a more theoretical level. An intuitionist who (as is usual) calls himself a cognitivist or a realist will often say that moral qualities are really no different in status from perceptible qualities like redness. Just as those who have learn the use of the word 'red' and have normal eyesight can say which objects are red, so those who have learn the use of the word 'wrong' and have normal

moral reactions can say which actions are wrong. But if we try out this theory on the dispute about meat-eating we shall see into what trouble we get. It turns out that the two disputants have *different* reactions to meat-eating. Which of these reactions are the *normal* ones? If such a dispute arose about the redness of some object, then we should have to say that one of the disputants was either colour-blind, or mistaken in his use of the word 'red'. But in the case of wrongness the intuitionist will not say (because he is not a naturalist) that the dispute between the two people is a verbal one; he will say that it is a difference between the moral reactions that they respectively have. He is required by his theory, therefore, to say that one of them (though he has not told us how to say which) is 'morally colour-blind', that is, that he has the wrong moral reactions to the facts about meat-eating on which they are both agreed.

However, it is clear that the case of redness and the case of wrongness are quite different. This can be seen from the fact that in many cases we allow moral disagreements to continue without insisting that one of the parties must either be misusing the moral words or be morally colour-blind. They just disagree about a moral question. I shall ask later how we are to do the thinking which would resolve such disagreements. But for the moment let us be clear that this case is not like that of redness. The person who says that an object seen in a normal light is red, when everybody else agrees that it is not red, is constrained to admit that he either does not know the use of 'red' or has made a mistake. In the face of this general dissent from his statement, he has to withdraw it. But the man who says that eating meat is wrong can stick to his opinion, even if nobody agrees with him; he does not have to admit that he has misunderstood the word 'wrong' or has a faulty moral faculty. He is using the word 'wrong' in just the same way as everybody else (otherwise it could not be used to express their disagreement: when he said that meat-eating was wrong and they said that it was not wrong, they would be meaning different things by 'wrong' and so their statements would not really

contradict one another). He just thinks wrong, something that all the rest of them do not think wrong (in the *same* sense of 'wrong'). Do the vegetarians have to adopt the views of all the rest just because they are a minority?

Note that although vegetarians in the West started by being in a very small minority there are now many of them, and they are increasing. The same is true of pacifists. Can we say that at any stage in this process the vegetarians or the pacifists could be ruled out of court by pointing out that they are in a small minority. That really would be relativism.

It is no accident that both naturalism and intuitionism, when faced with moral disagreements, collapse into relativism. The basic reason is the same in both cases. It is that both, seeking some source of moral authority, find it in something that is relative to particular cultures. The naturalist finds it in linguistic usage. But this obviously varies from one culture to another, with the result that, by tying correct moral judgement to the correct use of the moral words, he binds our morality to the culture of the people whose language we happen to speak. The intuitionist, on the other hand, finds his moral authority in the moral convictions of people. But these vary according to the attitudes, engendered by the upbringings, that are favoured in particular places. Here too there is no firm ground on which to stand.

So far as I can see, naturalism and intuitionism are the only two possible kinds of descriptivism (though there are of course many thinkers who are so unclear that it is impossible to say to which school they belong). It is therefore time to ask whether we ought not, in our search for moral rationality, to abandon descriptivism altogether, and whether, if we do, we can find any form of non-descriptivism that will serve our rational purposes. I have maintained in many places that we can. Those who have not followed these disputes may find it surprising that a non-descriptivist could be a rationalist; but that is because

they are the victims of the mistake I have been trying to expose. I think I have Kant on my side.

Suppose, therefore, that we abandon once for all the claim that moral judgments are mere statements of fact, and seek for a rational form of non-descriptivism. What then can we do to provide rational moral arguments? I have suggested in my writings that the first thing we have to do is to seek an understanding of the moral words or concepts. This understanding will bring with it a grasp of the logical rules which govern our moral thinking; for to understand a word is to understand the implications of propositions containing it. However, the meaning and the logic of the moral words that we do discover is not primarily a descriptive meaning but a prescriptive. We do not discover that their meaning is tied to the truth-conditions of propositions containing them. Rather, we discover that to say of some act that it is wrong is to condemn it, or to prescribe the avoidance of it. At this point those who have made the descriptivist mistake will ask how, if that is what moral words mean, there can possibly be any moral reasoning. But I ask them to be patient.

When we are wondering whether to call some kind of act wrong, we are wondering whether to prescribe its avoidance. But there is more to it than that. We are wondering whether to prescribe its *universal* avoidance (in cases just like the one we are considering). In words which Kant might have used, we are wondering whether to prescribe its avoidance as a universal law. And analogously, when we are asking whether an act is obligatory, we are wondering whether to prescribe its performance, in just those circumstances, as a universal law. I have argued elsewhere, in highly Kantian style, that this requirement of universality in our moral judgmens places severe constraints on the moral judgements or universal prescriptions that we shall be prepared to accept. To take a simple case: if I had only to utter singular prescriptions, I might well be prepared to prescribe that I should snatch the food off other people's plates if I had a mind

to it and was stronger than them. But if I ask whether I am prepared to prescribe that this should be done universally, including cases where I am the victim and am weaker, I unhesitatingly answer that I am not. So, reasoning in this way, we come to adopt a universal principle, acceptable to all of us, which condemns such behaviour. In my books I have elaborated this line of argument, using examples that are less simple and more serious. I have time now only to say very briefly how the argument goes. In doing so, I shall not be able to counter numerous objections which may occur to those who have not become acquainted with the places where I, and others also, have answered them.

The argument, although it has started from a Kantian view about the logic of the moral words, now takes a utilitarian turn. It is commonly thought that there are two schools of thought in moral philosophy called the Kantian and the utilitarian, and that these hold views diametrically opposed to each other. Those who say this show only how superficially they have studied Kant and the utilitarian writers. John Stuart Mill gives good reasons, in his essay *Utilitarianism,* for saying that the Kantian Categorical Imperative is satisfied by the utilitarian doctrine. After investigating the matter in more detail I have found this to be so, and indeed I am inclined to accept Mill's hint that it is the *only* doctrine which does so. I will try to explain why.

If we are, in our moral reasoning, required to prescribe universally for cases of a given sort, then these universal prescriptions will have to apply to all cases of that sort, including cases in which *we* are in the various situations resulting from possible alternative actions. The universality of the prescriptions prevents us from prescribing differently for cases in which we ourselves would be adversely affected. We have, in other words, to treat the preferences of any party in a given situation as of equal weight, strength for strength, whether that party is ourselves or somebody else. In a universal prescription,

no mention can be made of individuals as such, and therefore in adopting such a prescription we cannot exclude the possibility that the individual affected by its carrying out might be ourselves. Only by giving equal positive weight to the equal preferences of all individuals can we find universal prescriptions which are the most acceptable to us.

You will see that this is simply utilitarianism put into other words. It is that variety of utilitarianism which says that we ought to choose that alternative, of those available to us, which maximizes the preference-satisfactions, in sum, of all those affected by our action, considered impartially. For this is the alternative which we shall choose if we give equal weight to equal preferences, whosever preferences they are. Since there are, as you know, a great many different varieties of utilitarianism, and some of them (for example the naturalistic version mentioned earlier) are open to very obvious objections, it is necessary to be extremely careful which variety we are discussing. I shall be defending my own variety, which is not open to these objections.

Most of the common objections rely on finding discrepancies betwen what, it is said, a utilitarian would have to prescribe and what our common moral convictions tell us. The examples used always concern highly unusual sets of circumstances. The short answer to such objections is that our common moral convictions, and the strong moral feelings that go with them, are not designed to deal with such improbable cases. They are the result of our upbringing, which (if those who brought us up were wise) was intended to fit us for life in the world as it is, and cope with its common contingencies. In order to keep us in the path of virtue, we have, most of us, been imbued with very strong and deep convictions of this sort. A wise utilitarian educator would do his best to achieve this. But in unusual situations these deep convictions will conflict with one another, and are not able by them-

selves to resolve the conflict. This gives rise to the agonizing dilemmas so beloved of writers of fiction.

This short answer to these objections is capable of being developed into a complete account of the moral life with all its complex phenomena. The principal feature of such an account is the division of moral thinking into two levels. There is, first of all, the intuitive level, at which we apply to normal situations that confront us the moral principles and convictions that we have acquired through our upbringing. Intuitionist philosophers give, generally speaking, an adequate account of this level of thinking. In it, as they say, the morally well educated person will know what he ought to do. Their fault is to think that this is a sufficient description of the whole of moral thinking. It is quite powerless to deal with two crucial questions that remain. First, how do we know which moral convictions are the right ones to cultivate, or what is the best kind of moral education? Secondly, what do we do when, as inevitably happens in unusual cases, these moral convictions conflict with one another?

To these questions the intuitionists have no answer, but utilitarians have one. The answer is to say that there is another level of moral thinking, which I call the critical level, at which we ask, first of all what are the best moral convictions and dispositions to cultivate, and secondly what to do when they conflict in difficult cases, as they inevitably will.

The virtue of this account is that it leaves intact that part of intuitionism which has the greatest intuitive appeal, its description of the moral thinking that we do in all normal cases, while at the same time enabling us to explain, as the intuitionists cannot, how to deal with out-of-the-way cases, and how to justify the convictions to which intuitionists appeal. Their justification is that it is best that we have them. Those are the convictions which a wise utilitarian educator would seek to cultivate. Religious people will say that God, who is a wise educator, has cultivated them in us under the name of 'conscience'.

That was the view of Joseph Butler, whose remarks on this subject at the end of his *Sermons* and in his *Dissertation on Virtue* are very penetrating.

So then, the answer to the question in my title, 'How to decide moral questions rationally,' is this. First of all, we are to realize that deciding a moral question is committing oneself to a universal prescription for all similar cases. Because the prescription has to be universal, we shall not be able in choosing it to give particular weight to our own interests, but shall have to choose in the interests of all those affected considered impartially. This means doing the best, in sum, for them all; and this in turn means that we have to give equal weight to the equal preferences of all.

If we were completely rational beings, and had unlimited information and superhuman powers of clear thinking, then what we should do would be to find out all the facts and then determine what would be best in the particular case. This is what would be done by the being whom I call in my recent book 'the archangel'. We may assume that it is what is done by God.

But since we humans are far from being completely rational beings, the best way of achieving the decisions that a completely rational being *would* make is to cultivate in ourselves, and in those whom we influence, dispositions which on the whole will make our decisions coincide with those of such a rational being. Because we are always incompletely informed and always subject to other human failings, we are more likely that way to make, over the course of our lives, the decisions that we ought to make than by doing a utilitarian calculation on each occasion. For this reason the utilitarian himself will bid us not to think in a simple utilitarian way in the normal case, but to use our intuitions; but he will add the warning that we should also cultivate the habit of critical moral thought, reviewing, when we are not subject to the stress of actual moral dilemmas, the intuitions that we have, in order to satisfy ourselves that they

are the best ones. This will also prepare us for those rare occasions on which our intuitions do not give us clear or consistent guidance.

So, if I am asked how to decide moral questions rationally, my answer will vary according to the degree of rationality that we think we possess. A supremely rational being would decide all moral questions by critical thinking; that is, by asking what universal prescriptions to acept for cases just like the one before him; and his answer would be such as to maximize the satisfactions of preferences of all considered impartially. But for somebody who recognizes his own irrationality, it will be rational not to try to think all the time like this supremely rational being. He may get the reasoning wrong. However, to the extent that we are able, we have to cultivate our resoning powers, for there is no other secure guide or authority. Even if God and archangels exist, we have no reliable line of communication with them, and have to use our reason in order to determine, if we can, what they would say. Our feeble human reason is better than no reason at all; when we are not able to rely on our intuitions, either because they conflict in a particular case, or because we are uncertain what are the right intuitions to cultivate, we have to do the best we can.

REFERENCES

This paper was first read in Siena, Italy in 1982 at the *Convegno sulla rationalità in legge e morale,* and later published in the proceedings in Italian, ed. E. Lecaldano. The present version was delivered at the *Simposio sobre racionalidad* of the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 1986. The approach to rationality in morals that it advocates is set out more fully in my *Moral Thinking: its Levels, Method and Point* (Oxford University Press, 1981), to which the reader is referred for the necessary explanations and qualifications. I show in more detail how descriptivism collapses into relativism in my 'A *Reductio ad Absurdum* of Descriptivism' in *Philosophy in Britain Today,* ed. S. Shanker (London, Croom Helm, 1986). An example of how to answer intuitionist objections to utilitarianism is given in my 'What is Wrong with Slavery,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 8 (1979), repr. in *Applied Ethics,* ed. P. Singer (Oxford U.P., 1986). There will be further discussion of this aproach by some colleagues, with replies by me, in *Hare and Critics,* ed. N. Fotion and D. Seanor (Oxford U.P., forthcoming).

APPENDIX

This paper was read in the symposium after one by Professor Hilary Putnam, and I incorporated in it some initial and tentative comments on his views which it is appropriate to add as an appendix. His paper appears on this issue.

First, I must point out that Putnam does not altogether avoid the problem of induction, as he professes. For one of the versions of this problem is how to show that what is probable in one sense is also probable in another. The first sense is the 'frequency' sense which Putnam is using in most of his paper. The second is what, following Carnap, he calls the 'logical' sense, but which I should prefer to formulate in a different way by calling those outcomes probable which there is good reason to expect. Peirce's problem could be put by asking how we can be sure that we have good reason to expect an outcome in a single instance to be the same as is the most frequent outcome in a long run of instances of the same kind. In typical formulations of the problem of induction, the single instance is in the future, and the long run of similar instances is in the past. But if we could solve Peirce's problem, we should be well on the way to solving this problem too; for the jump from a past run to the next future single instance is no more difficult than the jump from a future run (if we could predict it) to the next single future instance.

Secondly, I cannot agree that, just because it is somewhat absurd for Peirce to invoke altruism in order to solve his problem, it is equally absurd to invoke it to solve a similar problem in ethics. For altruism (or rather the requeriment to make similar moral judgements about similar cases, leading to the treatment of others as if they were ourselves, and therefore of their preferences as of equal weight with our own) is written into the concept of morality and into the logic of words like 'ought'. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that when arguing morally we are able to invoke it, in a way that we cannot when arguing about probabilities.

Thirdly, if Putnam had paid more attention to processes of *education,* whether in morality or in assessing probabilities, he might have seen a chink of light. For education is, by its very nature, a preparation for coping with long runs of instances. Moral education is, in part, the development of dispositions which will on the whole lead us to do the right thing in long runs of relevantly similar instances over the course of our lives (these dispositions are called virtues). In other words, virtue renders right action probable. The same applies if what we are after is successful prediction; the person who has learn to be good at predicting outcomes has a disposition which of necessity covers many similar cases (even if they do not actually confront him in his life). Such dispositions, like their moral counterparts, get built into us in the form of intuitions, so that we expect things to happen and call them probable. This is all at what I have called the intuitive level of thinking.

If we ask, at the critical level, whether it is a good thing to develop these dispositions and intuitions, the answer is that it obviously is, provided that they are the right ones. If our predictions, made on the basis of what we thought were probable expectations, frequently go wrong, we shall think they were not the right ones and alter them. So, when faced in old age with a single choice as in Peirce's example, we shall, if we have been through this educative and self-educative process, have the intuition that we should expect this instance to conform to the probability in the frequency sense, and shall choose accordingly. This is no guarantee that the outcome in this instance *will* conform to the predominant pattern (there cannot in any case be any guarantee of that); but it is what a wise person (that is, a person who has good predictive dispositions) would expect. But I am not claiming by this to have solved the problem of induction.

Lastly, I must draw attention to a very serious danger in Putnam's intuitionist approach to moral issues at the end of his paper. As I have argued, intuitions are quite all right, and indeed beneficial and necessary, if they are the right ones; but this needs to be assured by critical thinking. Putnam says, in his third from last paragraph, that he thinks it *warranted* to think certain things which are possibly disputable. They may sound admirable enough; but their precise interpretation by politically highly engaged people like Putnam could lead to actions which are silly, harmful and worse. For example, have not the most abominable crimes been committed by people who do not want to be thought of as 'disloyal human beings'? When Putnam says that he does not know how he knows these things, I suspect that he does not know them at all, but has merely become convinced of them, and is not prepared to question them.

Hitler and Jerry Falwell also know or knew things without knowing how they knew them. Putnam's use of Wittgenstein's 'bedrock' metaphor makes me think that he, like Falwell, is a fundamentalist, and maybe even, like Hitler, he wants to think with his blood, however unlike them he is in other respects. He thus abdicates from the role which philosophers should play in the fight against the Hitlers and Jerry Falwells of this world: namely to give reasons why they are evil men and should be resisted. The American Civil War happened because both sides knew that they knew incompatible things about slavery and states' rights, and were not prepared to question and perhaps modify these convictions with the hope of reaching a reconciliation. The same thing is happening now in South Africa. Putnam's way of thinking about morality and politics will not lead to a civil war in America, because people there have learnt by experience to be more sensible; but there is hardly a country in Latin America where this kind of attitude could not have (indeed in some cases it has already had) similar results. That is why I have been glad of the opportunity to come to Mexico and point out its dangers.

RESUMEN

He aquí un falso dilema: o los juicios morales se han de equiparar con enunciados de hecho (descriptivismo), o el pensamiento moral no es de índole racional (emotivismo). Los dos únicos tipos posibles de descriptivismo, el naturalismo y el intuicionismo, se reducen al relativismo: el primero porque liga la corrección de los juicios morales a la conformidad con las reglas del lenguaje relativas a la cultura, y el segundo porque los liga con los hábitos de pensamiento y pautas de reacción producidas por la educación que, de igual forma, son relativas a la cultura. La solución del dilema estriba en buscar una forma racionalista de no descriptivismo, es decir una manera de que tenga lugar el razonamiento moral aun cuando los juicios morales no sean fácticos. Atender a las propiedades lógicas de los juicios morales, la prescriptividad y la universalizabilidad, lleva a una perspectiva kantiana en cuanto a la forma y utilitaria por lo que hace al contenido. Se salvan las objeciones comunes al utilitarismo separando el pensamiento moral en dos niveles: el intuitivo y el crítico, del cual procede el primero, según afirman los intuicionistas, pero el segundo puede usarse para justificar nuestras intuiciones y para resolver los conflictos entre ellas.

En el Apéndice se comenta el artículo del Prof. Putnam incluido en este mismo número de *Crítica.*