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IN DEFENSE OF PRACTICAL REASON
A Study and an Application of Arthur Murphy’s Theory

KONSTANTIN KOLENDA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One frequently hears complaints that contemporary philosophical ethics has no bearing on actual practical issues. Such complaints are sometimes met by saying that it is not the business of philosophical ethics to provide answers to concrete moral issues. The philosophical interest is limited to finding out what are the special features of moral language or, if one prefers a more inclusive term, of moral experience. Yet there seems to be a lack of agreement on this point among philosophers. Some claim that the only philosophical task is to analyze the meanings of key ethical terms, while others insist that it must include normative ethics as well. This controversy has been quite alive in recent literature, which may indicate that there is something to be said on each side of the question.

Recently there appeared a work which, in my opinion, puts this issue into a new perspective. I am referring to Arthur E. Murphy’s Carus Lectures, *The Theory of Practical Reason.* Murphy’s theory is an eloquent defense of practical reason. He attempts to provide an account of human action which would do justice to all its characteristic elements. He is willing to learn from the past contributions to this area of philosophical reflection, yet is openly critical of interpretations which would make a mockery of man’s attempts to be rational in his actions. Murphy’s work deserves careful study not only as an example of convincing theorizing; it may also help to restore our faith in the relevance of careful philosophical reflection to the problems of life.

To the question whether philosophical ethics has practical relevance Murphy gives a definite and unequivocal answer: “The point of a better understanding of the use of practical discourse is to use it better for its own practical purposes so that men, in the light of it, may know better how to live” (19).? Notice that Murphy does not see the question in terms of either/or. A theory of ethics must be philosophically convincing and practically useful. When we understand what is involved in the use of normative discourse, we should be able to deal more effectively with whatever practical problems may confront us. Part of the intention of the study under-
taken here is to develop this side of Murphy's theory and to show that our practical problems are indeed illuminated by it.

Murphy's theory is a result of his lifelong reflections on the subject. He was thoroughly familiar with the history of ethics and contributed to it through numerous publications, teaching, and vigorous participation in other professional philosophical activities. Prior to writing the Carus Lectures he had published The Uses of Reason and many articles in the area of ethics, some of which were included in the posthumously published collection, Reason and the Common Good. Murphy develops his position partly within a polemic against influential traditional and contemporary views, thus calling attention to what he finds wrong or mistaken about them. The main thrust of his theory emerges more clearly when it is compared and contrasted with other points of view. This I shall do in the third chapter. There is a double advantage in such a critical comparison. First, it puts before our eyes the entire spectrum of considerations that have figured prominently in the field of ethics, and secondly, it brings into relief the key points of Murphy's theory. In looking at the main contributions to the field of ethics from the direction of a definite point of view, we are provided both a focus of attention and a critical angle from which the entire field can be seen.

The fourth chapter, "Contemporary Erosion of Practical Reason," intends to show how certain current and popular pictures of the human condition would deprive us of the positive uses of practical reason as they emerge from Murphy's analysis of it. The point of the argument is that if certain conditions for the use of practical reason are denied, then we are likely to fall back on alternatives which may be philosophically indefensible and practically perilous. One of such alternatives is existentialism, and the fifth chapter, "The Importance of Being Agent," attempts to meet the challenge of this increasingly influential point of view.

The final chapter is devoted to a discussion of some contemporary practical problems. It cannot be claimed that a philosophical theory, by itself, can provide solutions to these problems. As Murphy insists throughout, moral thinking has to be done in a situation which gives rise to such problems. This requires a requisite familiarity with the factual and moral claims incumbent on the agents involved. But a theory may provide us with a set of general clues as to what conditions need to be met if the problem is to be solved satisfactorily. It may tell us how to think about our problem. Every problem has several different aspects, and it is important to determine which aspect constitutes the focal point of the problem. Similarly, since
the problem is practical, i.e., has to do with action, it is always important to be clear whose action one is talking about.

One of the novel and refreshing features of Murphy’s view of ethics is that it shifts our attention to the broad dimension which lies midway between the simple requirements of daily life, such as keeping one’s promises and returning borrowed books (examples to which, unfortunately, many texts in ethics seem to limit themselves, to the disappointment of those who expect more from philosophy), and the individual crisis situations, such as fundamental choice, radical conversion, ontological guilt, and death, which are the favored themes of the existentialist approach. Murphy brings us back into the main stream of life, where practical decisions not only involve consequences for individual lives but also affect processes and practices which will determine the course of events in the life of large human communities and, in some instances, the destiny of the whole of mankind. Part of the merit of the theory is that it turns our attention in the direction of issues which are neither trivial, nor narrowly personal, nor dominated by some special metaphysical preconceptions and pictures of human nature. Such issues do not admit of easy solutions. As already indicated, to deal with them one needs not only to be equipped with firsthand detailed knowledge of factors, factual and normative, that have a bearing on them but also be called upon to come up with a practical judgment. Neither of these conditions is met fully in this case. My aim is but to provide an example of how such problems could be approached when the theoretical conclusions of Murphy’s study are accepted.

Here is a brief summary of the objectives of this study as pursued in its individual chapters:

1) To present in some detail a comprehensive theory of normative discourse. (This, of course, could be followed up by a more intensive study of Murphy’s work itself.)

2) To consider in what ways this point of view differs from other prominent theories and approaches.

3) To examine some phenomena which tend to destroy or undermine the conditions under which normative discourse is possible.

4) To give recognition to the basic character of a condition without which the whole “game” of practical justification could not be played: the moral self.

5) To use the framework of the theory to identify the focus of some important contemporary issues and to show that the initiative and responsibility of moral agents are prerequisite to their solution.
CHAPTER II

ARTHUR MURPHY'S THEORY OF PRACTICAL REASON

Murphy's objective is to discover and to describe what underlies and animates the language of justification. We resort to this language whenever we need to settle differences of opinion arising in the realm of action. Such differences can be settled by pointing to reasons why one course of action is preferable to others. One of the tasks of ethics is to investigate the nature and the content of reasons which deserve this normative, action-justifying status. The practice of justification not only has its procedures—it also has its purpose. Something is intended to be accomplished through its use. What precisely? In many different ways Murphy shows that the point or purpose of the language of justification is to offer and to examine rational grounds for action. Some statements that we address to one another are intended to provide reasons why something should or should not be done. These are their purport and function. “The use of practical reasons, for those who know how to understand and use them, is to provide a warrant for the claim that some things are, in our human situation, worth having and some actions worth doing, where their warranted presentation in this status is the proper justification for the should of doing” (54).

To understand the language of justification we must understand the conditions of its use, and to specify these conditions is to do more than to translate one set of words or expressions into others. Even if it were possible to establish equivalences among the meanings of typical normative expressions with any degree of finality (the history of such attempts to date indicates that this is not likely), we still would lack the requisite understanding of the practice within which such equivalences hold. Furthermore, if we understand clearly the purpose of this practice we may be in a position to suggest improvements in its linguistic articulation. “...as our inquiry proceeds, we shall increasingly point out ways in which the concepts embodied in ordinary language must be altered and developed if they are to meet the requirements of the practices in which they have a normative use” (19). Murphy sees the task of
an ethical theorist as more than just offering a linguistic analysis of normative expressions. He must also give an account of the “way of life” which this use of language embodies and expresses. Linguistic expressions in this use are varied, and it would be fruitless to look for their common features. The inclination to choose some form of statement, say, “X is good,” and to declare it to be representative of all normative language has appeared tempting to many philosophers who dealt with the subject. But it is obvious that many other forms of expressions are used in this language game. They may be declarative, exhortative, gerundive, or rhetorical. “X is undesirable,” “You should do X,” “It would be better to do X,” “Don’t do X!” “X is unthinkable,”—here are but a few examples of many different forms of expressions used in normative discourse. If what we are seeking is not the meaning of these expressions but the role they play in a certain kind of practice, then it is important to understand first of all the point and the “surroundings” of that practice. For that purpose any of the expressions could provide an illustration of the aims which this practice is trying to secure. As an example of an expression that is frequently used in practical discourse, we may take a form of statement, “You should do X.” We understand its purport when it is offered in the context of weighing alternatives for action, seeking and offering advice, urging, exhorting, commending. But in order to see its function it would not do just to stare at it or at its “meaning.” Instead, we need to explore its surroundings and its background, to examine the conditions from which it acquires its force.

This is what Murphy does. His analysis is not an analysis of words functioning in normative discourse, but of the whole practice of which the appropriate language is obviously a part. He is inquiring into the nature of the conditions which make the use of this language appropriate and without which we may come up with various metaethical theories but in the process of doing so will lose the substance of the inquiry itself. “Our purpose is not to make either a metaphysical mystery or metaethically certified nonsense of practical understanding, but so to clarify its conceptual structure that we can make sense of it, in its own distinctive terms and about its own proper business” (22).

What can we legitimately expect to be the background of a statement, “You should do X,” offered in good faith in the course of a serious conversation? Murphy shows that the answer to this question is complex, more complex than ethical theorists in the past tended to assume, but nevertheless that the question is answerable.
His book is an extended informal development of such an answer, but its essential points can be presented in a condensed form. The exploration of the background which a statement like “You should do X” can be legitimately expected to have would lead us to discover two different bases to which the statement can be tied: the factual and the normative. The utterance, “You should do X,” has two general conditions of appropriateness. The speaker could replace this utterance, let us call it P, by two utterances: F, “X accomplishes K (satisfies a want, a need, fulfills a goal, etc.)”—a judgment of fact, and N, “K is worth accomplishing”—a normative judgment. Here again it would not be quite correct to say that P means F + N. The connection between P and F + N is effected by the presupposed working agreement among language users that to the question “Why P?” “F + N” can be legitimately expected. This is an empirical observation and it could be defeated by the claim that in normal cases it would be proper for a person who says, “You should do X,” to refuse following it up with some F and N. But given our practice of justification as we know it, it is doubtful that such a claim could be correct. Of course, it may be perfectly clear both to the speaker and to the hearer that F and N are implied by P, hence the spelling out of F and N need not be made, but if the hearer should not see the implication, it would be up to the speaker to call attention to F and N. At this point the hearer could dispute either F or N or both, but this could take place only after the entire point of P, explicated through F and N, has been made.

So far I have only stated the two basic conditions of the justificatory use of language. Their structure, however, needs to be laid out. Both of these conditions have a “dimension of depth,” but there is nothing hidden about that dimension. It is open to view for all who are familiar with this use of language. What needs to be done is to assemble reminders which would make this use more perspicuous. This I shall, with Murphy’s aid, attempt to do.

First, the condition F. What goes into it? There are at least two components to this condition. 1) It must connect the statement P with some facts in the world. 2) The facts mentioned must be of some interest to the persons engaged in a normative quest. Murphy makes clear that both components of the condition F (let us call them F1 and F2) must be satisfied. Our practical judgments, our appraisal of relevant facts must be correct. Furthermore, only as wanting, needing, aspiring creatures could we have any use for normative language. This language is rooted in certain facts of human existence, which find expression in certain attitudes. “If a
man had no such attitudes he could find nothing valuable, for it is in the right satisfaction of his wants and fulfillment of his purposes that good objects can authentically maintain this status. . . . without this rooting in our nature as wanting beings there would be no rationally normative sense in calling one thing rather than another good” (74). “If our reasons for doing were not rooted in our needs and concerns as wanting, loving and competing human beings, we should have nothing to be practical about” (137). Were we disembodied, had we no wants of any sort, there would be no point in saying to anyone that something was worth doing or going for. A part of what we are trying to do in practical discourse is to communicate some facts about the world of nature or the man-made world, and also some facts about ourselves, our society, or human beings in general. Thus, in a successful communication both parts of the condition F are satisfied, i.e., it is true that doing X generally satisfies an existing need or want. The needs in question and the facts that satisfy them may be of different sorts: physiological, psychological, sociological, or political. The clause following the “because” in each of the following statements purports to be a statement of fact, however established. “You ought to take this medicine (distasteful as it may be) because it will relieve your pain.” “You ought to buy a Chrysler because this will establish your position in a social circle to which you aspire.” “You ought to vote in this election because your party is likely to be defeated if the voting turnout is slight.” “You ought to see this movie because you generally enjoy musicals.” The “because” part, Murphy insists, is a necessary component of the language of justification and must connect with some facts bearing on the existing needs or wants. If it does not, if the condition F2 as a matter of fact does not hold, that is, if the facts stated in F1 are either false or of no interest to the hearer, then the statement P does not reach its target; it misfires.

It is clear that what we here call F2 is the familiar feature of pro-attitudes, pushed to the foreground of ethical inquiry by emotivist theories. Of these theories more will be said in a sequel, but for the present let us merely note that in Murphy’s theory the emotive or attitudinal element of ethical discourse is not left out. In fact it is given a prominent position. Had we no pro-attitudes, i.e., no wants or desires, the normative discourse would not get off the ground. “Men do indeed come to hunger and thirst after righteousness, but if they did not hunger and thirst after other things, food, shelter, security and affection, for example, which can be reliably attained, on humanly liveable terms, only on the condition that they
deal righteously with each other in the pursuit and enjoyment of them, righteousness would have no content and its dictates no normative cogency” (97). “We may well hold that in themselves moral values are the ‘highest’ human values that we know, but we must also recognize that they could not have this value by themselves or make, as merely moral in the strict or narrow sense, the claim we rightly honor in them” (98). In sum, the conditions F point to the factual rootedness of normative language. That language is concerned with practice, with the need for action, for changing facts. It has its original home in the natural world and loses its point when separated from facts about which human beings can be practically concerned.

Let us now turn to the condition N. The distinctive character of this condition can be elicited by raising a fundamental question: How, when, under what circumstances does a fact, a want, a pro-attitude become a reason? Murphy reminds us that a want as a want is not yet a reason. In the realm of facts perfect democracy reigns; a fact is a fact, a want is a want, a pro-attitude is a pro-attitude. At this level normative questions need not be asked, and if they are not, we have not yet embarked upon practical inquiry. We can, of course, be interested in wants or pro-attitudes for other reasons, say as students of culture, or sociologists, but then we are merely interested in describing facts, not in changing them. That someone has certain wants or attitudes may be of interest to us for many different reasons, but solely to declare that one has these wants or attitudes is to contribute nothing toward their justification. “The request for reasons is pertinent precisely where just wanting does not answer the question of what is to be done one way or the other” (45). “... when the question of a reason does arise, a want is not the proper answer to it unless it is understood not merely as a want, but one whose satisfaction, in these circumstances provides a sufficient ground for action” (46). Only when we ask whether or which of the many wants are entitled to recognition and should be allowed satisfaction do we reach the level of rational normative inquiry. “Unless I wanted something nothing could (for me) be good. But it is not as something wanted that it has this status. It must at least be something that will satisfy my want, and satisfy it in a way that is appropriate to the aims and requirements of the practice in which its claim to merit makes examinable sense. And that means that it must satisfy not just my wants but me, as a being who wants to eat, for example, but not just any way, and wants to live, but not at any price. Only for such a being does the
distinction between what is valued and what has value or is good make normative sense” (69). The entire condition N could be seen then as a quest for a reasoned judgment for it addresses itself to our capacity to stand a certain distance from our wants and to examine them in the light of certain standards. This is the point at which the quest for correctness or rightness has its origin. To a person for whom these notions have no meaning and no application the normative quest would be incomprehensible. This quest also has its components, and in a serious practical inquiry it can be shown to have at least three: universality, community, and moral selfhood. In conformity to our scheme, let us call them the conditions N1, N2, and N3 respectively.

Let us first examine N1, universality. This requirement helps to answer the question just asked: When does a want become a reason? It becomes a reason when it is allowed a universal status, that is, when a person who points to a want as a ground of action is prepared to treat this want as deserving this status regardless of who happens to be its possessor. “Reasons are public essentially; they must be common grounds for action if they are warrantably to be grounds at all, and it is in the establishment of such community of understanding that they prove their cogency as reasons. All reasons are in this sense universal, that if they are valid grounds for one man’s actions they must be no less so for any other man whose situation is, in all morally relevant circumstances, the same” (114-15).

This willingness to give equal justificatory status to a want or interest, no matter whose want or interest it is, is the foundation of the universality principle as it has found expression in the history of mankind, from the Golden Rule to the Categorical Imperative. This principle is important because it introduces the theme of rationality into ethical discourse; it brings reason into action. Only when it is possible to treat a want as a reason can any kind of justification take place. This condition must obtain if we are to be in a position rationally to advise, commend, evaluate, or grade. If I want to live and offer this desire as a reason why I should be afforded protection, then I am logically committed to accepting the same reason when it is offered by others. To accept this reason is not just to nod an intellectual assent to it; it means also to act in ways which promote the fulfillment of this desire in whomever it arises. “This is what it is to be objective in such judgments. And it is just here that the distinction between wants and reasons is of practical importance” (280). Once this requirement is met, practical inquiry has reached rational normative status. For it is now
possible to uncover irrational claims and/or irrational behavior. If I treat my wants as deserving recognition but refuse to recognize the same want of others, I have failed to reach this minimum of practical understanding, a failure or deficiency which will disqualify me from participating in the practices embodied in the language of justification. "Practical reasons . . . are in their intent never merely yours or mine. They (or those who use them) claim a cogency for action that any rational being ought to recognize and respect" (276).

Of course, the condition N1 is not independent of conditions F; I find myself to be a certain living organism (F1) with a strong disposition and desire to remain alive (F2). In other words, what I propose to treat as a norm, namely, everyone's right to life, has its factual or material content; without such a content there would be no practical recommendation in the universalizing move. "It is as wanting beings that they [men] have such reasons, though their reasons are never merely the articulation of their wants" (277). If in being rational one includes the ability to discern certain facts, then, of course, the factual discernment is an indispensable rational component of the normative judgment: respect everyone's right to live. We should add that the granting of a reason-status to a want usually has support from still further dimension of rationality, namely, a demand for congruence and harmony among the universal grounds for action. Universalization of a want, i.e., its elevation to the status of a reason, is facilitated by a recognition that it is likely to support or to harmonize with other rational grounds for action. Truth telling, for instance, can be generally expected to aid in the attainment of other ends, and tolerance is likely to minimize potentially troublesome conflicts. These considerations offer additional support to the claim that the satisfaction of the condition N1 indeed transforms the proposition P into a reasoned judgment.

The condition N2, community, although it presupposes the condition N1, universality, also goes beyond it. This condition obtains when certain reasons (all reasons are universal reasons, i.e., they apply to all situations of the same sort) for action are not only acknowledged theoretically, but are also regarded as practically binding for the given community, that is, as providing a background of practices on which there is general agreement in this community. Only within a community can appeal to reasons be effectively made. A community comes into being when a group of persons recognizes that in being free to satisfy certain wants or interests they are under an obligation to respect similar pursuits on the part of others.
This is how community of interest or the common good arises. It is a result of a practical commitment to afford some wants the status of reasons. Once this happens, a social group becomes a moral community and the actions of its members exhibit a certain agreement in judgments and in practice. “It is that minimum of practical understanding required for membership in any community in which ‘right’ can have a moral cogency for action, in which the requirements of a man’s moral situation are recognized and used as grounds for warrantable claims that he is bound, as a brother, for example, or a citizen, to honor in his conduct” (111). By reference to some such basic agreements in practical judgment, which now define the common good of the group, some disagreements and conflicts can be adjudicated and perhaps resolved. When no such basic agreements as to the common good exist, the normative use of language is not possible. The extent of the actual moral community among people is determined by the presupposed agreement as to the kinds of goods and procedures which the members of this community are prepared to regard as worth having, and therefore, as providing legitimate arguments for moral discourse. “A ‘community’ is not just any group that influences the behavior of its members. It is a group whose members are related in a quite distinctive way, the way of moral understanding, and the group is a community only insofar as they are thus related” (215). There are many ways in which people can be bound together in moral communities. The bond may be strong and constant, as it is often found in families, but in larger, loosely-knit groups, it may be limited to a mere “live and let live.” But even this latter, admittedly limited agreement in the mode of life can constitute a genuine moral bond among men, for the desire to live is easily transformable, by practical judgment, into a binding moral reason. It is quite natural that the conditions of proximity and of close mutual dependence will provide incentives for the establishment of a moral community, and that people living “poles apart”—physically, politically, and culturally—will have no occasion to develop a workable set of justifying reasons. Potentially, however, there seems to be no assignable limit to the extent and intensity of the mutual pursuit of common good.

The creation and extension of moral communities is not the work of disinterested parties; it calls for initiative of moral agents. “That actual human beings should so think and act is not a logical or a causal but a moral ‘must’—it is a requirement for the achievement of that ‘realm of ends’ or community of understanding in which a
common good and right can have a practical cogency for action. Such personality is not a gift of nature or society; it is an achievement and humanly a great one” (282). This quotation points to the third component of N, moral selfhood. It cannot be excluded in specifying necessary conditions for genuine participation in the language of justification. “There are no communities save as actual men in social groups are so related as to share in rights and goods that in common they can recognize as their own. It is as persons or moral agents that they can be thus related” (378). “... moral relations are essentially and inescapably relations between persons” (219). We have seen that at least a minimal moral selfhood must be presupposed in the ability to move from recognizing something as a want or pro-attitude to treating it as a reason, as a consideration which sometimes will need to be taken into account when facing a practical decision affecting others. It is precisely in recognizing the validity of some practical reasons that the agency of a moral self emerges. But since the presence of a working agreement on some practical judgments constitutes a moral community, the moral community and the moral self mutually depend on one another. “On moral issues a man who judges for himself speaks for the moral order of a community, however widely or narrowly he conceives it” (283). On one hand, only for a moral self can there be universally valid justifying reasons and common good. On the other hand, it is through the influence of a community that the moral self can emerge and grow. Once this growth has been initiated, the set of the person’s reasoned universal commitments and concerns constitutes the content of his moral self or character. It is by reference to some such commitments and concerns that personal character is identified. “A man’s character is at least as important to us as his actions, and one of the most important things about his actions is that they in some way shed light upon his character or nature or person” (132). A person is what he stands for and stands by as an agent.

We have now essentially completed the task of “unpacking” the conditions for full-fledged participation in the language of justification. The claim is that any serious normative discourse has a background in which all of the above mentioned components are in principle identifiable. There is an explicit or implicit reference to some natural facts (F1), personal and social attitudes (F2), universally valid rules (N1), community (N2), and moral selfhood (N3). We cannot stop short of N3 because, as Murphy points out, a person’s “hunger and thirst after righteousness ... is bound up
with his integrity as a self, or practical agent, and it is as a self that he can have justifying reasons for any action at all" (129). "Only for men concerned and competent to act as responsible agents in the right conduct of their lives can it [practical justification] have the sense and cogency we have ascribed to it. If there were no such men the language of practical justification would have no use, for nobody would know what to make of it" (55).

If we are to describe accurately what is involved in the use of practical discourse, we need to include all of the conditions mentioned. Only when all of them are satisfied can one be sure that an utterance, say, “You should take this medicine,” is offered in the way it should be offered, i.e., responsibly and in good faith. We are so used to expecting that these conditions of practical discourse are fulfilled that only in special circumstances we feel called upon to check their presence. To see that this is so, imagine the absence of one or some of these conditions: 1) Should I not really know that the recommended medicine can be used for this particular ailment, i.e., should I not be in a position to claim the truth of F1, I would not be entitled to say, “You should take this medicine.” 2) Similarly, if I did not understand or appreciate the hearer’s attitude toward his physical state, the force of “should” in my statement would lose its practical ground. 3) If I failed to offer the same advice to another person in relevantly similar circumstances (other things being equal), I would speak unreasonably and perhaps even irresponsibly. 4) If I actually did not share the hearer’s concern for health, my advice would be at most that of “disinterested bystander,” and consequently would lack the requisite degree of concern which the statement of the form “You should...” in this case would be expected to carry. Offering advice implies also a willingness to share a certain degree of responsibility for the consequences of following the advice. A person uncommitted to health as a common end could not feel such responsibility. 5) Should one discover that the giver of advice (N3) is either not committed to the end in question (N2), or not consistent in the advice he gives (N1), or not concerned about the attitudes or wants in question (F2), or not careful about the facts involved (F1), his statement, “You should take this medicine,” would correspondingly fail to meet the conditions of its appropriate use.

That Murphy points to familiar conditions of the use of the language of justification can be seen from another example. Suppose Smith offers Robinson some practical advice: “You should run for this office.” What would show that Smith has failed to meet the
conditions which such an utterance would normally be expected to meet? What tests could be applied to show that the utterance is not in order, or should not be taken seriously? Upon examining the background of the utterance we could find a number of different things: 1) Smith is ignorant of the nature of the office and/or of Robinson’s qualifications for it. 2) Either Smith or Robinson or both have no interest, no stake, and no connection with the tasks and objectives of the office in question. The goals of the office to one or to both of them are utterly indifferent. 3) Smith endorses Robinson but is against the candidacy of Taylor whose qualifications in all relevant respects are like Robinson’s and against whom Smith has no special personal objections. 4) There is no agreement on the part of both men that the goals of the office in question are mutually desirable, i.e., that they constitute a common good to which both subscribe. 5) Smith is a person who, for some reason or another, cannot be relied upon for having sound factual information, has constantly shifting attitudes and interests, does not mind contradicting himself, and is incapable of treating any value or end as constituting common good.

It is unlikely that in actual life we would find behind an utterance such as the one we are considering a total failure on all five points. But this is because by and large the users of language know what the requirements of the language of justification are. Still, it may be helpful to imagine such a complete fiasco. It would present us with a situation in which the statement, “You ought to run for this office,” is completely out of order—its background is such as to entitle us to conclude that it has no justificatory force whatever. In such a case it would be quite proper to speak of a misuse of language. Indeed, once we have discovered that the background of an utterance, on all five counts, is as described above, we would probably not know what to make of it, or how to understand it, for it has failed to meet the expected conditions of its use.

Murphy underscores the connection between the factual and the normative conditions of the proper use of the language of justification. “... it is only as related to the intentions of practical action that information, no matter how formally or factually certified, can be a ground for doing anything at all” (44). “Between a practically neutral reason and a want which has no practical concern for reasons there can be no conflict” (143). These observations point to a logical unity which characterizes practical statements. If the premises asserted in F and N are accepted, then the practical proposition P follows logically from them. If all of the assertions are made
explicit (in practice they frequently are not), \( P \) could be shown to be a conclusion from \( F + N \). This is another way of saying that \( P \) can be justified, that there are conclusive reasons for it.\(^4\)

Murphy's account is a *theory* of practical reason. What he intends to elicit are general features of practical discourse, of which moral discourse is a species. The conditions which have been brought to surface are, therefore, *formal* conditions; their specific practical and moral content in a concrete case is supplied by particular moral concerns and values which can be brought to bear on a given issue. It would be unreasonable to complain that Murphy does not go on to tell his readers just what concrete ethical goals and norms he would like to champion. Such a list of values and norms would, of course, reveal something about the moral character of the person holding them, but the mere fact that these values are held by a moral philosopher does not, of itself, guarantee their soundness or applicability. On this score, Murphy appears to be of the opinion that moral wisdom is not necessarily the possession of a few selected individuals but can be found in a great many men who are capable of reasonableness and good will. Morality for him is not an endowment but an achievement. Seldom is it fully secure; each one of us is capable of moral growth and of backsliding. In the final analysis, it is the men who find themselves facing moral problems who must judge which moral considerations are relevant and how they are to be balanced or reconciled.\(^5\)

If we combine Murphy's view that the generic intent of all practical judgments is to provide reasons for action with his insistence that such reasons would have no task to perform if human beings found nothing valuable or worth going for, then we get a new perspective on the old question about the relation of nonmoral to moral values. Murphy's main enterprise is to show how a nonmoral situation is transformed into a moral one when an appeal to the language of justification is possible. When is such a transformation most likely to occur? When the values in question are deep and serious enough to elicit strong concern. These will be values relating to typical human needs, goals, and interests, such as life, food, shelter, education, freedom, and peace. It is not surprising that these words quickly find their way into the language of justification. They are the stuff of which moral codes and creeds are made. And, as Murphy reminds us, because of the seriousness and the universality of such values, moral language has a certain admonitory and demanding tone. When such serious values and their likes and corollaries are at stake, practical discourse can be expected to take on
deep moral tone. As the history of the subject shows, there is no simple way of drawing a boundary between a moral and a nonmoral practical problem. But is such a boundary needed? Moral and nonmoral concerns find their way into practical discourse. The intent of this discourse is to establish what reasons, if any, there are for recommending this or that action. If the values that go into the formulation of such reasons are clearly of important and serious sort, the discussion and its upshot will obviously have moral significance. How much moral import a given issue has, is a question that must be answered in concreto in the light of the particular values at stake. No preconceived formula or definition is likely to be of any real use here.

Having explored the conditions that underlie the language of justification, we are now in a position to see that we are provided with more than a description of a certain practice. Murphy’s account of the nature of practical discourse shows us also why it is important to keep it intact. “If this kind of thinking were rejected, this way of acting would go with it, for the thinking is the conceptual structure of the action, and the action, practically, makes no sense without it. There can be a society of sorts without this kind of action. Ants and bees appear to have no use for it. And as Ionesco’s ‘Rhinoceros’ points out, if we all became rhinoceri we should no longer use it either. To say that in that case something of great worth in man would have been lost is to make an assertion whose cogency no rhinoceros would understand” (56). “Morality, in its stringent sense of ‘ought’ and ‘duty’ is but one aspect of practical experience and one that could not possibly exist alone. It draws its resources and its reasons from a wider world and uses them for purposes which are never merely moral. But it is an essential and distinctive aspect and we literally should not be ourselves without it” (123, italics added). This is why Murphy thinks it essential to describe the uses of practical reason in morally loaded and not in sociological neutral terms. Although such moral loading may appear moralistic and old-fashioned “by current research standards,” Murphy reminds us that this “is a game that all of us are obliged to play, not as professional researchers merely, but as men. It is of some importance therefore that its normative requirements be adequately understood” (217). “There can be no ethically non-committal or ‘value-free’ moral judgments. And for the most part there is substantial agreement as to their proper use” (414).

The passages just cited contain an answer to a question that stubbornly reemerges after every effort to describe the nature of
morality: What precisely distinguishes moral from nonmoral practical judgments? An objector may claim that Murphy's theory does not provide a convincing answer to the question. His inclusion of the condition N2, community, either begs the question or issues in ethical relativism, for what we need is a reference to a moral community, not just to any common agreement on practical norms. In answering this objection we should begin by noting what gives it an appearance of validity. Murphy admits that his account is "morally loaded," and he does not try to define the content of moral judgments. He seems to be satisfied with saying that "for the most part there is substantial agreement as to their proper use." But this should not be taken to mean that there is no way of identifying the moral aspect of practical judgments. The point is rather that such an identification is possible only from a moral point of view, that is, when it is made by a person who already is committed to some moral values and sees the particular practical judgment in the light of such values. The theory provides a means of subjecting these values to an analysis which will test their rational cogency. Do these values grow out of facts giving rise to universalizable attitudes? Here the test is not a mere subjective affirmation but a reference to general facts about man, his needs and wants, and his ability to think impartially about them.

According to Murphy, moral norms give expression to some prominent needs, goals, and values such as the desire for safety, health, freedom, prosperity, well-being. These are some of the things about which human beings are not likely to be indifferent; all men can be expected to feel strongly about the basic conditions under which they are to live their lives. Among these conditions, which set the stage for successful pursuit in any field of human endeavor, must be included a mutual respect for life and liberty of all members of the group. Whenever people appeal to their "natural" or "inalienable" rights, they speak of these conditions. Although it may sometimes be difficult to draw a clear line between moral and other norms, we ordinarily have no difficulty in identifying those which have a definite moral import. Some of our disputes move explicitly within the moral dimension and, consequently, have a requisite seriousness about them. Since ordinarily people do not ask for justification of actions unless these actions concern them, or unless they matter in some important ways, the language of justification is used primarily in moral contexts.

Murphy does not dispute the ethical naturalists' contention that facts are important for practical judgments. He agrees with them
that moral values are rooted in natural needs, but he offers a different analysis of what it means to make these facts a part of one's moral experience. He admits that morality is only one aspect of practical experience, yet he does not attempt a neat formula for distinguishing the narrower from the wider class of practical action. Such a distinction, if made, would presuppose that a given action can be seen in the light of some moral concern. There are, of course, many instances in which the moral relevance is minimal or in which the borderline between the moral and the nonmoral is blurred. The example used above seems to be such an instance. "You should take this medicine" may be straightforward, nonmoral practical advice. But in some circumstances, e.g., when used by a parent discussing the question with a reluctant adolescent, the advice may contain the full force of a moral concern. In the realm of action there is no antecedent way of separating clearly the moral from the nonmoral aspects because this act of separation would also be a result of moral thinking.

If the question is raised whether Murphy believes to have provided a set of necessary conditions for the use of moral language, the answer, I believe, would be a qualified "Yes." Murphy is aware of the fact that he is describing ideal requirements of the moral use of language. A practical judgment would be right if it were based on the correct appraisal of facts and relevant attitudes and if it advocated sincerely an action which is universally approved by the moral community (or communities) affected by that action. The "Yes" is qualified because our actual use of the language of justification falls short of its ideal requirements. We offer reasons and advice, we commend and exhort, without always meeting fully the conditions specified above. Our facts are not always straight, our avowals of reasons (i.e., as applicable to ourselves as well) not always sincere, and our commitment to the common good we invoke not seldom doubtful. But these too are discoverable facts and when discovered they undermine to that extent the cogency and validity of our judgments. Murphy shows (especially in the context of his discussion of Kierkegaard and Freud) that even the "impostor" normative language is parasitic on the conditions specified above.

"It is the essence of moral evil that it apes the justifying cogency of good by denying the conditions under which, and the just claims of the community in which, such cogency could be honestly established" (148). "Rationalization" is the homage that the irrational pays to reason, for it is only under some form of practical justification that the irrational can be willed. And only a self or practical
Another point to keep in mind is that practical judgments are by definition relevant to situations in which something is to be done. This means that we ought to distinguish the contexts of their use from the situations in which no action at all turns on the outcome of a judgment. We can of course offer “moral remarks” about certain events in history, or about the practices of some far-off tribes. These remarks may play a useful role, say, in an “evaluative” contemplation of history, in our reflections about the ways of the world or about the evolution of morals. Such activities may even play an important role in our general and moral education. But because in such contemplative observations no practical issue needs to be resolved, they should be demarcated from the explicitly normative use of language. This distinction needs to be underscored because in talking about ethics we frequently move from one level to the other without noticing that in so doing we are really changing the subject. If we keep in mind that a reference to a moral community is a necessary move in an attempt to solve a practical problem, we will not confuse the issue by constantly shifting the boundaries of that community. One begins to consider a concrete problem of concern to, say, Londoners, and all of a sudden one is confronted with unusual customs of Trobriand Islanders. This does not mean that a moral issue could not arise for a Trobriander among the Londoners or vice versa. But then the problem would need to be solved within the compass of agreements to which both could morally assent. In general, one cannot stand outside the practice of normative discourse and merely use the language characteristic of such discourse. The judgments of an uncommitted, uninvolved bystander can acquire practical validity only when he hypothetically assumes the validity of relevant concerns and speaks from the point of view of such hypothetical assumption. Expressions like “If I were you,” or “If I were in your situation,” (meaning, “having the obligations and opportunities that you actually have”) usually precede a judgment or advice of an uncommitted observer. His moral relation to the hearer is at least characterized by good will, by a desire to help him solve his practical problems. We ask a “third party” for an opinion not because his noninvolvement makes him a better judge, but because we are sometimes too involved to see the situation clearly. Yet, we would be foolish to accept his advice unless we had grounds for believing that his practical judgment is sound, or, in other words, that he understands the purpose and the point of normative discourse.
CHAP7ER III

CRITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MURPHY’S THEORY

The full force of Murphy’s analysis of the language of justification can be seen more clearly when we set it side by side with some traditional and contemporary ethical theories. His theory can serve as an effective critical tool, as a foil against which the inadequacies of past ethical theorizing can be disclosed. In comparing other theories with the structure which Murphy brings to light we can see how they go wrong, in what ways they are either distorting the familiar normative practices or are incomplete in some important respects. In giving wrong analysis of normative practices they contribute to radically altering these practices, and this is one important practical reason why they should be examined.

Before undertaking to examine the critical consequences of Murphy’s theory let us review briefly its basic components. As we have seen, it intends to elicit, to bring to the surface, the requisite background of the language of justification. Whenever a person offers a practical judgment expressed in a proposition P, it should be in principle possible to develop this statement in ways which would show the full force or import of that judgment. That development could be also expressed in corresponding propositions. For example, the statement P, “You should do X,” could be “unpacked” to show that the speaker would also be prepared to assert the following:

F1— “Doing X satisfies a want K” (fact).
F2— “Satisfaction of K is desired” (attitude).
N1— “Satisfaction of K is generally desirable” (reason, norm).
N2— “K is an instance of common good” (community).
N3— “As a moral self, the speaker is committed to the satisfaction of wants K” (moral selfhood).

When we examine various theories in the light of this analysis we shall find that some of them fail to take seriously conditions N, while others underestimate or even ignore the requirements of conditions F. On one hand, we have positions which may be labeled factualist, and on the other hand, different versions of a view that
could be called transcendentalist. Actually, within each spectrum we can identify positions which emphasize different features and go wrong in different ways. Murphy discusses them in the context of expounding his own views and does not follow the pattern proposed here. He concentrates on views which he regards as more important and more typical, and in that we shall follow his lead. But his analysis could be used as a touchstone to uncover errors or distortions in many other theories of philosophical ethics. Of course, it may be an open question in many instances whether Murphy is fair to the theories he criticizes. But our interest here is not historical. We are concerned with indicating what Murphy saw as inadequate in previous contributions to ethics and what kind of reaction was called forth by his own view on the matter. In such an enterprise the rival doctrines cannot and need not be presented fully; only the points of critical importance require attention. Hence, the subsequent discussion presupposes some acquaintance with the theories discussed, but even in the absence of such acquaintance it may provide a stimulating introduction to them. With this proviso, let us turn our attention to some of the views which Murphy has found wanting. I shall list them under two general headings: factualist theories and transcendentalist theories. The first group runs afoul essentially (though not exclusively) of the conditions N, while the second fails to come to grips properly with conditions F.

**Factualist Theories**

1. *Naive Factualism*

   This position frequently is presented as innocence itself, but in fact it covers a multitude of sins. Basically it arises from a supposition that an adequate account of the conditions F will of itself provide intelligible answers to practical questions. All that is needed is the spelling out of the relevant facts—everything else will obviously follow. But since the facts to which one may point are of many varieties, factualism takes on many guises. In its most unsophisticated form it amounts to the claim that practical communication consists only in the statement of certain facts. These facts, merely in being stated, point to obligations. It is a fact, one will say, that men desire food, survival, peace. To describe what men desire is to describe what they will do and ought to do in a practical way. It is as simple as that.

   But another simple, undeniable fact is that human desires conflict. They conflict not only among men, but often within a person
as well. If they did not, there would be no need for the language of justification; everyone would do "what comes naturally" and no questions would be asked. But questions are being asked; practical discourse is very much alive. What is it all about? This question forces the unsophisticated version of factualism to the level of theories, among which we may find the following.

2. Scientism

This view supposes that the procedures of factual scientific inquiry provide ways of harmonizing various conflicting natural aims and desires. This is what science is for. Medicine, for instance, includes the study of various processes taking place in the body. A physician, after an examination of a patient, may make a diagnosis and conclude: "You ought to take this drug." If one were to inquire on what this verdict is based, one might be informed that this drug cures the disease diagnosed. This in turn could be explained by a detailed description of physiological events, including the action of germs and counteraction of antibiotics. And since it is also taken for granted that everyone desires to be healthy, the prescription is justified.

If this is taken as a model of scientific account of practical judgment, it should be noted that only some of our practical problems are that easily solved. But even in such a simple case as this the theory overlooks the obvious: that communication about factual properties of drugs makes sense only to a person who is concerned about health. Given agreement on this practical end, the relevance of facts can be immediately seen. But health is not only desired, it is also desirable, universally so, and a person who is not committed to this good, in theory and in practice, can rightly be censured for being practically and sometimes even morally deficient. "How can a fact . . . have moral implications? The answer is, of course, that it has them when and insofar as it is understood and used, not as a fact merely, though it must be this at least, but as a ground for action. The categories of such understanding, as we have seen, are not those of impersonal description, but of intentional action, personal agency or freedom, and the justifying reasons that make sense of it" (267).

The scientific model oversimplifies and thus distorts the structure of practical argument. It seems to be concerned merely with the question whether given facts satisfy a presupposed goal, rule, or norm. But in an actual practical argument not only the facts are compared but also the competing goals, rules, or norms. We are
concerned not only with the question: “Given this norm, do the facts satisfy it?” but also with the question: “Which norm or norms are to be admitted into the discussion?” And here an appeal to facts alone will not do, because the admissibility of a norm has to be judged on some independent grounds. In practical reasoning these grounds are supplied by the normative conditions N. They are brought forward by the discussants as exemplifying various legitimate components of the common good to which the parties concerned are allegedly committed. To return to our medical example, the moral issue is not just health of people—on that there is not likely to be much argument—but whose health, looked after by whom, with what means, at what cost, etc. Our recent national debate about Medicare was a moral, not just a factual, debate. The health of senior citizens was accepted by all as an important goal; the argument revolved around the distribution of the financial burden connected with assuring the elderly better medical care.

What is missing from the scientistic model is a due recognition of what is brought into the practical debate from its normative side. What is brought into it depends on the sort of commitments that the agents constituting a moral community regard as justifiable. Murphy observes that scientific humanists “offer as the findings of scientific inquiry programs of social policy that borrow their moral significance from humanitarian ideals they learned to accept as gospel long ago” (261). To arrive at such ideals, as we have seen, is also a reasoned judgment, requiring discernment and sensitivity that is sometimes achieved by fair-minded people. But it is not automatically guaranteed by any neutral process of grinding out factual conclusions. Practical decisions are decisions of concerned persons; they are not impartial, value-free findings of scientific machinery. In short, the scientistic model fails because it either underestimates or ignores the necessary contributions of conditions N1, N2, and N3.

3. Sociologism

We have seen that the entire normative side of a practical judgment is a reasoned judgment. It expresses what the speaker judges to be relevant and justifiable. N1 calls for the readiness to affirm a given want or desire as a universal counter in practical discourse. This is the place where the transition from what is to what ought to be is most conspicuous. But if it did not take place we would never be able to offer reasons for anything because reasons, as reasons, are universal. Furthermore, N2 and N3 place the want which is pre-
sented as reasonable within the context of common good to whose attainment the speaker is committed. This marks him as a member of a community and also as a certain sort of person.

Now, if these distinctions are relevant and applicable to the phenomena of normative discourse, then an account that is either silent about them or shows them to be something else must be mistaken. This does not mean that a sociological account of the function and relative weight of interrelated social norms within a given social group is useless or unimportant. Without the sociologist’s findings we would be deprived of many significant and perhaps indispensable facts. But if we are presented by a sociologist with a theory as to the way a norm is used by an individual in his practical dealings with other members of the group, then we can ask whether his theory corresponds to facts. The trouble is that we may be prevented from looking at the facts—in this case, the relevant features of the language of justification—if the terms of the theory are so loaded as to beg the question. This seems to happen when the sociologists tend to work with unanalyzed mechanical concepts such as “social conditioning,” “social pressure,” “internalization of goals,” or “taking the role of the other.” “For ‘community’ they will substitute ‘society,’ for the moral agent the socialized ‘self’ or ‘me’ of the well-conditioned organism, and for ‘obligations’ the pressures of ‘the group’ as these are ‘internalized’ and generalized in individual behavior as goals and guides for socially normalized behavior. Such a substitution appears to put the discussion on a sound factual basis and to bring it into fruitful connection with the advancing sciences of sociology and social psychology” (211).

In the name of the goal of science, that is, for the sake of seeing the facts more truthfully, we should not be satisfied to think exclusively with such rough conceptual tools if they hide or distort important distinctions. Murphy’s work points to the obvious need to make such distinctions. “‘This is right,’ where it makes rational sense at all, is a ‘move’ in a different game from that of the conditioning of behavior by peremptory and/or persuasive speech. The action is something to be done or not done for a reason, and ‘right’ in its moral use is an indicator of the kind of reason that would here be relevant to warrant action. ‘Look at it this way’” (191). “Such admonitions are addressed to men as moral agents, and it is in this capacity that they can practically respond to them as such. Moral training is the training of actual human beings to become and act as such agents—men who, in their own persons can distinguish between right and wrong and will sometimes, of their own will, act
If Murphy is right, any theory which purports to describe scientifically verbal "transactions" among human beings and in fact ignores the distinctions to which he calls attention is not scientific enough. In other words, we must be sure to acknowledge the presence of conditions N, if and when they are indeed present. We should not rule them out of court on the basis of a preconceived theoretical scheme. "An obligation, as a ground for action, is not a social pressure. A moral self is not a mechanism of social control built into the individual by the appropriate conditioning of his responses. And a community that can rightly claim the loyalty of its members is not a pressure group thus organized. Something has been left out here that makes all the difference between a social tool, however well processed, and a moral person. And it is not really difficult to see what this something is. For it is just morality itself" (212).

In discussing scientism and sociologism Murphy also refers to the philosophy of John Dewey. Dewey was determined to show how ethical issues should be handled with scientific and sociological tools. It is evident that the criticism raised against scientism and sociologism is applicable to Dewey's views as well. It is also to be noted, as Murphy does in his book, that what Dewey regards as "scientific findings" are in truth disguised moral recommendations. "Where, then, does 'scientific humanism' of this sort get its animus and tone? The answer is not far to seek. It borrows them from the moral preconceptions of its advocates here not recognized as such but projected on 'the facts' themselves as something that the scientific method, in complete abstraction from all considerations of sin and righteousness, virtuous or vicious motives, has somehow discovered in them" (259).

4. Psychologism

While sociologism fails to give due recognition mainly to conditions N1 and N2, psychologism undermines the rational integrity of practical judgments by disintegrating the condition N3. This is done by producing a picture of the self which is incapable of rational judgment. Perhaps Freud's account of selfhood as a battleground of three competing elements is the clearest example of what is meant here. Murphy singles out Freud in his criticism. Freud "disintegrates the divided self into what are essentially three antagonistic agents—id, ego, and super-ego—which must somehow get along together if the human being is not to be a nervous wreck. Each of these has some of the characteristics of a person, but none has
enough of them to act in practically rational terms" (151). It would be a mistake to deny that the Freudian abstractions help articulate certain conditions and processes to which human beings may be subjected from within. The human psyche is complex enough for us to expect in it discoveries of many more surprising phenomena. But the self is not explained by being explained away. The claim that Freud is all for making the human self more rational sounds hollow indeed. The ego is supposed to bring rationality into the self. “But what a truncated thing this rationality is! Stripped of its appetitive basis in libido which it cannot trust and of its moral concern, now pre-empted, in a distorted form, by the super-ego, against whose punitive activities it must defend itself, it amounts practically to little more than a cautious self-concern for such pleasures as will not be unduly disturbing to its unstable equilibrium. The self in which these agencies compete for power is intrinsically a divided self, for there is no ground or basis in it on which it could be made whole” (152).

In fact, the Freudian dramatic terminology borrows from the normative language of practical discourse whatever partial meaning it may have. How could we otherwise make sense of the “censoring” activity of the super-ego? The functions which Freud attributes only to the fraction of the human person, his ego, are the functions which we normally attribute to the person as a whole. Only persons can act, decide, or reason, not their egos. Mechanistic pictures of the self, such as Freud’s, since they are creations of thinking and reasoning persons, are refuted by the very realities which brought them into being, namely thinking, reasoning, deciding selves. If this were not so, psychiatry, as a practice devoted to healing disturbed selves, to making them as whole and integral as possible, would lose its point and purpose. “Human selfhood, as we know it, in ourselves and others, is a precarious achievement—a synthesis . . . of elements that must be held together within the requirements of a moral order if a man, John Smith or Henry Robinson, is to act as a self at all. . . . Yet it is only insofar as a man is to some degree a self that his failure to achieve this synthesis can be judged to be a moral failure, for which he is responsible” (149).

5. Emotivism

Although emotivist and imperativist doctrines arose as an alternative both to naturalism and to cognitivism and are frequently labeled as forms of nonnaturalism, it is quite clear that they have strong ties with factualism. “Ethics, as a branch of knowledge, is
nothing more than a department of psychology and sociology,” pronounced A. J. Ayer in his book, *Language, Truth, and Logic.* In our analysis of Murphy’s view of the structure of practical reasoning we have acknowledged, in the condition F2, the presence of an emotion generated by a want or a desire, or an impulse to urge it on others in various ways (commanding, commending, or persuading). This emotion or this impulse quite properly belongs to the psychological facts of the situation because it arises from that situation. The relation between a want and an emotion is a causal relation. Murphy shows that in the emotivist theory there is no rational transition from the having of a want to a proclamation of this want as worth having, i.e., the conditions N are ignored. The emotivist seems satisfied with noting that there is a transition from having a want to an impulse to urge on others the acceptance of this want. “I like it; do so as well.” But this move toward persuasion or commendation—we have a whole spectrum of nuances here in the literature of the subject—is groundless. The imperativist version of the emotivist view, for instance, seems unduly influenced by the grammatical form of some normative utterances. It is sometimes true that such judgments are uttered in a tone of command or urging, but this is certainly not true of all or even of most cases. Murphy repeatedly emphasizes that normative utterances are offered as reasons, as imparting information of a special kind, and are not intended as imposition of one will on the wills of others. “Obligations, we have said, are reasons. And it is no less important to be clear that in the solution of our moral problems they are only reasons, not directives to perform in all circumstances certain kinds of action that are universally required of us” (116). “Moral obligations are reasons, but they are only reasons, not unqualified commands, and to interpret them as such is to dodge the responsibility for finding out what, in a morally complex situation, specifically is right” (120). “. . . a reason has done its job when it has disclosed the facts and what is done about them is simply none of its business” (143). It is worth noting that the emotivist misunderstands the relation between F1 and F2 even within the subject’s experience. Here also there is no rational transition from F1 (“I have a want K”) to F2 (“I approve of the want K”). Murphy reminds us that many of the wants we have and like we know to be worthless. As long as they do no serious harm we may indulge in them. But we would not be justified in making a transition from mere having the want to regarding it as a good reason for liking it. At most, F1 can be said
to support F2 causally, but not logically. For it is often true that we find ourselves rationally, on good grounds, disapproving of wants we actually have. "Some things that I like are trash—a certain type of television program for example—but I like them just the same. Whether or how far I ought to indulge my taste for trash is a practical and moral question which mere liking cannot answer" (68). The emotivist has no way to account for such situations. His analysis is so truncated that it does not allow him to move from the occurrence of certain facts to a rational account and control of these facts, even within the subject's own experience. No wonder that the emotivist does not understand the importance of conditions N. "The basic objection to any form of the imperativist account of the normative cogency of this 'because' of practical reasons, however generously it may be stated, is that by reducing the language of justification in the end to that of commands and directives, it strips this language of its justifying sense, for a command is not a justification, and deprives us of all rational means of making this distinction" (38). "The basic trouble with the emotivist analysis is that by identifying the normative cogency of practical discourse with its persuasive efficacy in non-rational behavior, it robs us of the right and the capacity to distinguish right from wrong 'persuasion' on any but emotive 'grounds'" (41).

6. Intuitionism (Cognitivism)

It may seem strange that a view of ethics which stresses the act of cognition in the discernment of ethical truths should be lumped with theories which founder on the rock of factualism. Murphy's analysis shows, however, that philosophically intuitionism is indeed a brother under the skin of the views just presented. The reason for this is that intuitionism appeals to the discernment of certain unanalyzable facts, which Murphy calls "should-be-doneness," as the ultimate ground of moral action. The discernment, intuition, or the special kind of moral cognition is presented as the final, not further justifiable link in normative decisions and practices. One either perceives that special fact or not. At this juncture all argument ceases. "This object, or this man, has the property of goodness. How so? Perhaps we just see it with an inner, a priori eye. Perhaps we are acquainted in immediate experience with a 'value' quality and in the course of experience learn to make probable predictions concerning the things in the world that will produce it and are valuable accordingly" (34).

The cognitivist appeals to the "fact of reason" as a final arbiter
in a moral debate. He conceives of this fact in a different way than did Kant, who was willing to move out into the noumenal transcendental realm, but the outcome is the same: the road to justification is blocked at this point. A practical agent is not a disinterested inquirer into the "constituents" of a world; he is "an agent whose concern and responsibility is to seek good and to act rightly" (35). Even when he agrees that something has the property of "should-be-doneness," he has further questions to ask. "The question here is not as to whether the possession of this information will in fact move him to perform the 'right' action, but why it should do so" (35).

Why one is tempted to condense the complex condition N into an occult act of cognition is perhaps for the historian of ethics to answer. There seems to be a definite bias in that direction among the British moral philosophers, from Bradley, through Moore and Pritchard, to Toulmin and Hare, as if there were a stubborn Cartesian holdout in the citadel of Humean empiricism. "That which tells us what in particular is right and wrong is not reflection but intuition," says F. H. Bradley in his Ethical Studies. He also adds that a man who would do what is right "should have imbibed by precept, and still more by example, the spirit of his community, its general and special beliefs as to right and wrong." This reference to one's society has remained prominent in the philosophy of British (and some American) moralists. Of course, they do not claim that the "fact of reason" will assert itself apart from certain empirical conditions. These conditions are provided by the moral training a person receives from his society and his peers. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ultimate arbiter will be the voice of the actual community. Murphy called attention to the tendency of Oxford philosophers to identify local orthodoxies with universal truth. "The 'we' to whom Carritt appeals are a select group whose moral apprehensions and language habits have been specially trained to emphasize certain aspects of the moral situation and to minimize or even to exclude others from their ethical calculations." But he also noted that the same status quo bias, expressing parochial moral values, can be found in more recent studies of Toulmin and Hare, who are prepared to regard the acceptance of one's way of life as a final arbiter in a moral argument.

Murphy notes that even in the analysis of such moral philosophers as H. L. A. Hart and John Rawls the "'why' of obligation is answered by reference to the rules as thus existing" (196). "For the rules themselves, however, there is no 'why' of this [moral] sort
at all. They simply are the structure of the way this game is played and unless we act in accordance with them it is not this game that we are playing. Their correct observance is a conceptual must of the practice that, as a social fact, exists” (197). Murphy realizes that according to those philosophers, the rule-bound behavior “does not cover the whole area of moral action” (197). He notes that at this point they tend to seek refuge in some form of utilitarianism; they claim that the questions that cannot be raised within the practice can and should be asked about the good of the practice. But, Murphy remarks, “Of the nature of this good the analysts have so far not had much to say. Their remarks concerning it are utilitarian in a large, loose way; it is to be estimated somehow in terms of consequences and of welfare for ‘society’” (198). This “why,” since it is unbound by any obligation, is morally equivocal, concludes Murphy. “We often have an obligation to follow socially accepted rules—though we sometimes also have an obligation to break them” (200). Hence, it cannot be the case that the whole of ethics consists in an explanation or elucidation of rules within a given practice. Certainly, the moral force of obligation does not consist in its social acceptance. “That the rules are so accepted is not a sufficient answer to the ‘why’ of duty. If it were, social conformity, or doing the done thing, would be the final ground of moral obligation. When the analysts so far forget themselves as to import a moral significance into their elucidations, the words are those of the (informal) logician, but the voice is that of the games master, or football coach exhorting us to ‘play up and play the game’ or ‘pull, pull together.’ It is not surprising that those who have thus understood them have interpreted what they have to say as an expression of the ideology of socially respectable conservatism” (201).16

All of the above criticisms of factualist theories point to the importance of seeing clearly the nature of the components of the condition N. Murphy insists that unless these components are properly understood, the language of justification will be reduced and impoverished, making it impossible for us to move beyond the confines of conventional moralities. But if the components of N and their relations to one another are properly understood, we will not be tempted to seek refuge in some ultimate facts, be they sociological or vaguely utilitarian. We will not be drawing arbitrary boundaries for moral understanding. Murphy saw the dangers of this misunderstanding as early as 1947, when he wrote “Who Are ‘We’?” “At a time when the communities in which our immediately obvious duties had an assured meaning are breaking down and the wider
community which would make sense of our moral aspirations is still
to be built, the appeal to self-evidence is a tragically inadequate
guide to ethical understanding. Taken as the final and sufficient
norm of moral truth it blocks the path of inquiry and narrows the
area within which value claims are reasonably discussible—the area
of effective moral community.”

Transcendentalist Theories

1. *Kantian Noumenalism*

A strange thing happens when Kant describes in detail the nature
of the Categorical Imperative, the central point of which is acknowl-
edged in the condition N1 in Murphy’s theory. It seems that the
factual conditions to which Murphy wanted to call attention, and
which I have labeled F1 and F2, drop completely out of sight in
Kant’s theory. The morality of a motive is said to be due only to the
universalty of the agent’s volition. As Murphy interprets Kant,
“you may will anything so long as you can thus will its [categorical
imperative’s] maxim universally, for a maxim thus willed is objec-
tively valid as a practical principle of reason and what is done will-
ingly, in conformity to it is *eo ipso* right” (289). The mere ability
to will a maxim as universally binding makes that maxim moral. But
this, argues Murphy, generalizes morality clear out of existence. “A
rational will that could ‘determine’ what is worth doing ‘independ-
ently of the faculty of desire’ would have no practical reasons for
doing anything” (290). “The road from Kantian reason leads
straight to the ‘irrational.’ If this is what it would be like to be
objective, ‘subjectivity’ seems our only practical way of being
human” (291). The contentless rational willing is essentially an
irrational willing; it cuts itself off from the natural roots of all
practical thinking. Such thinking must not lose sight of what it is
that is claimed to be universally desirable. “Obligation statements
have an ought or ought not to do in them in any case in which they
have a moral sense” (113). But in Kant’s transcendental system the
content of each obligation disappears. It is important to note that
the distortion of N1 also distorts N2 and N3. The common good
becomes an abstract community of “pure” wills, where nothing in
particular is willed, thus making the Kantian “Kingdom of Ends”
morally empty. Correspondingly, the moral self becomes a noumenal
entity whose only office is to guard the contentless purity of “ra-
tional” willing. “This is not objectivity at all, as we usually under-
stand it. Rather it is the transcendental subjectivity of a self-
centered willfulness that has become ‘rational’ by making its own ‘rationality’ the sole object of its practical concerns” (295).

2. **Kierkegaardian Theocentrism**

For Kierkegaard also the factual conditions should play no serious role in practical decisions. But the reasons he uses to dissociate important decisions from what are termed conditions F are very different from Kant’s. Kant trusts only man’s noumenal “rationality.” Kierkegaard distrusts man’s capacity to will rationally on all levels. “Sin does not consist in the fact that man does not understand what is right, but in the fact that he will not understand it, and in the fact that he will not do it” (140, Murphy quoting from Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness Unto Death*). Thus all important decisions must proceed from a repudiation of any F1 or any F2, for all human ends are tainted by man’s sinfulness and inauthenticity (a metaphysical picture of N3 at work). We ought to will an end which has nothing to do with finite human ends; these ends stand in the way of reaching God. The self—and its finite ends—must be broken if it is to be saved. But, as Murphy remarks, “The remedy is willful belief or a faith secured at the price of losing all understanding. ... Such a faith may be ‘grounded’ in power in the way in which an electric wire is ‘grounded,’ but power grounds nothing in the way in which a justification is a ground for action, and so far is it from being morally transparent that the acceptance of an order to believe on such ‘grounds’ would rightly be accounted as an act of moral cowardice. Kierkegaard is quite right in calling it, from the standpoint of the understanding, an offense” (154-55). Since N considerations presuppose the relevance of some F’s (facts and attitudes), the whole practice of justification is rejected. In addition, such a view of things rests on a very insecure and disingenuous kind of faith. “The man who believes with his will only, and in defiance of his understanding, only half believes.... [Such belief] is one of the manifestations of the sickness for which it is here offered as a cure. It uses the language of practical justification under conditions that rob it of its justifying sense” (156).

3. **Sartreian Voluntarism**

According to Sartre, whose views we shall examine in greater detail in the next chapter, an action based on what I have called conditions F would be an unfree action, an instance of “bad faith.” Only an unconditioned free choice, completely cut off from its natural and rational background, should characterize human action. Any content of F is declared unsuitable as a departure for a moral decision. Man
gives himself meaning by creating it out of his own inner resources. “There are for me no values but those which my pre-self created, and to these my conscious self is tied until a new inception of ontological spontaneity, a new thrust toward existence, changes my direction” (392). Once again we have on our hands a metaphysical picture of the self—as pure, always unconditioned spontaneity—and it is not surprising that with such a variable for N3 all attempts at justification are adjudged useless or in bad faith. “The will that legislates itself into moral selfhood is nothing but our old acquaintance, the dislocated ‘act of volition’ cut off from its roots in the concrete world of responsible human selfhood and operating on the loose on what, in the Kantian tradition, is still called noumenal freedom” (390).

R. M. Hare’s views are criticized by Murphy in the same chapter as are Sartre’s. Murphy finds a move toward Sartrian irrationality in Hare’s claim that a person’s acceptance of his way of life is a matter of arbitrary choice in which reasons simply give out. “A complete description of the universe is still practically and morally incomplete—it gives no ground for choosing one thing rather than another . . . Hence, this ultimate decision of principle, on which all else depends, is arbitrary, in the quite simple sense that it is practically and morally groundless” (387). Whether Murphy is fair to Hare may be perhaps disputed, but it is clear that Murphy finds it to be philosophically suicidal to look for a justification of practical decisions outside the scope of reasons and considerations actually available to us in our moral heritage. Moreover, to say that “‘in our way of life this is what we do’ makes the claim intolerably pretentious. . . . it is morally arbitrary to legislate my own de facto preferences into the status of a universal norm of right” (388).

4. Ethical Monism

The great variety of goods which appear worth pursuing is distressing to a mind bent on finding an underlying unity and identity. If there is any meaning in the phrase “the good life” then it should be possible to identify the common element in all the goods worth having. “Some final end we must have ‘in the end,’ and some one big obligation . . . as our final principle of decision in the adjudication of conflicting claims” (225). And so the hedgehog’s hunt for one big thing is initiated, with various candidates for “the ultimate good” as a consequence.

While this philosophical search for order and simplicity is understandable, the successes claimed for it do not stand up under scrut-
tiny. For in its zeal to succeed, the "unified theory" proponent tends to disregard another, an even more crucial philosophical requirement: not to distort what one is describing. Unfortunately, this is what happens when all of the different goods worth pursuing are forced to fit the purported requirements of the one big model. As an example of this approach Murphy singles out Utilitarianism." He shows that the attempts to judge all desirable actions in terms of the principle of happiness, however formulated, force us to construe in artificial and distorted ways the meanings of various candidates for F1 and F2. The danger here lies in misunderstanding the specific character of our actual pursuits. In fixing our attention on the "one big obligation" and in trying to see it from "the point of view of the Universe," we are likely to lose sight of the obligations that we actually have. "Doubtless the consumption of Christians by lions in the Roman arena was very painful to the Christians. But there is the large audience to consider, and the lions. And whether, in the long run of recorded history, such spectacles cause more pleasure than pain. At least they fortify the moral stamina of the sufferers. Again, who knows? And who's to judge? Yet, on Sidgwick's view, unless we can know this, the right of the particular action must in principle remain in doubt" (228). To say that what we really seek in all the different kinds of goals we may justifiably pursue is maximization of pleasure is in many instances simply unbelievable. Humanly desirable goods, once they are passed through the grinder of "ultimate good," whatever it is, no longer look the same and are frequently distorted beyond recognition. Hence, concludes Murphy, "A one-obligation theory of right can be made to cover the complexities of our actual moral situation only if it ceases in the process to be a one-obligation theory—if, in other words, it is torn apart" (326). "We can no more moralize at large than we can live at large" (323-24). "This kind of generality is as morally rootless as Kant's Categorical Imperative and for a similar reason. It has generalized itself clear out of the human situation, while it is in this situation and subject to its limitations that rationally cogent judgments must be made" (320; see also 241, 302, 355, and 413).

5. Absolutism

The difficulty of reducing the variety and multiplicity of justifi-
able values to one ultimate value may produce two kinds of reac-
tion. One may conclude that since an agreement on the ultimate good is impossible, and since one still feels that his values and commit-
ments cannot be shoved aside, the only honest thing to do is to
admit one's biases and to stand by them no matter what, while granting the same right to others whose values and commitments are different. This position has been eloquently stated by Oliver Wendell Holmes, who frankly advocated the adoption of resolute relativism as the only defensible position. Murphy quotes Holmes: "...it is true that beliefs and wishes have a transcendental basis in the sense that their foundation is arbitrary. You cannot help entertaining and feeling them and there is an end of it" (331). The other reaction is to refuse this relativist conclusion and to declare some of one's values as absolute, in spite of the fact that they are not universally shared. "There must, he [the Absolutist] says, be moral judgments that are true for all men everywhere, unaffected by their individual differences and the culture under which they live, for if there were not, we should be driven to moral skepticism" (333). In a case like this it invariably happens, claims Murphy, that some parochial values are dogmatically and without argument assumed to be correct and the opponents are labeled as moral enemies. The upshot of both of these reactions is that any rational comparison of goods and values is precluded and an atmosphere of belligerency is generated.

Both reactions are forms of transcendentalism. The Holmsian relativism appeals to a "right" to stand by one's own convictions "no matter what"; the dogmatic absolutist somehow feels confident that his values deserve to be given ultimate status without being justifiable by argument; their justifiability, he believes, transcends any argument. These conclusions are forced on both positions because they are willing to dismiss the conditions F as providing a factual basis for practical judgments: they are skeptical about the possibility of turning to some F's as providing a legitimate starting point for a moral argument. "What makes Holmes and Adler brothers under the skin...is their joint assumption that a local reason, rooted in preferences and folkways, is not a reason at all, but a mere preference, bias or temperamental predilection—like a taste for barberry bushes or for beer" (332). The absolutist position "is merely skepticism on stilts, affirming the 'universality' of a moral truth that could be the same for all men everywhere only so long as it had nothing in particular to say, and that in fact proclaims its own parochial origin and limitations in the vehemence of its claims to universal truth" (336). It is not surprising, therefore, that the absolutist's appeal to conditions N appear hollow; he has left the domain where the language of practical justification has its home and where its machinery does not idle. Like all other theories of the
transcendentalist type, absolutism fails to appreciate the working order of moral reasons at our disposal. It leaves the realm of practical discourse and seeks "overarching" and "ultimate" grounds. This leads, paradoxically enough, to a sort of moral skepticism, for it undermines the confidence in our ability to find rational grounds for action in familiar, proximate moral standards on which our concrete moral experience ultimately rests.

Our objective in following Murphy on his critical journey across a large area of ethical studies was not merely negative. He was not primarily interested in disproving other theories. His writings indicate that he was clearly aware of the many positive insights contained in the views he discusses. As a historian of ethics he was anxious to acknowledge the contributions of such highly original yet divergent thinkers as Kant or Dewey. What concerns him, however, is that even the most fruitful contributions become weakened and questionable when they are forced in directions away from the center of the area of concern which they initially set out to illuminate. The only way to escape the temptation of wandering off toward one's philosophical predilections is to establish firm bearings in the territory for which the language of justification has been devised. This is what Murphy tried to provide in his positive account, and this is what I tried to reproduce in Chapter II. By holding on to these bearings it is possible to show why we should resist being tugged in doubtful directions, which was the objective in this chapter. My criticism was directed only at those points of a philosophical account where the function and purpose of normative discourse are misrepresented or distorted, resulting in an off-center or truncated account of our actual experience. This means that on other points the view criticized may contain sound and helpful insights. Murphy’s intent has been primarily to restore the proper balance among considerations that play a role in practical discourse and to steer clear of pitfalls which would impair or diminish the effectiveness of reason in human actions.
CHAPTER IV
CONTEMPORARY EROSION OF PRACTICAL REASON

Murphy’s main objectives have been to show that morality is a certain kind of practice and to outline the general requirements of this practice. His procedure is mainly descriptive and consists in explaining what is presupposed in the use of normative discourse, or the language of justification. As we have seen, a person indulging in it can be expected to see certain facts in the light of attitudes which he treats, both in utterance and in behavior, as universally valid and as constituting a moral bond between him and his community. The moral “game” cannot be played, or is played only partially or disingenuously, if this general description does not characterize a person purporting to play it. In Chapter III we have examined some theories of practical reason which fall short of taking properly into account all the conditions of the use of practical reason. But Murphy’s interest is not only theoretical; he believed that a better understanding of the purposes of normative discourse should have practical consequences as well. He told us, we may recall, that the “point of a better understanding of the use of practical discourse is to use it better for its own practical purposes so that men, in the light of it, may know better how to live” (19). The corollary of this statement is that a misrepresentation of the nature of practical discourse will work against the attainment of this general goal: to know better how to live. Consequently, it is of interest to us not only to point out inadequacies in other theories but also to look at some attitudes and opinions that appear to play a role in the actual thinking of contemporary men. Whether these attitudes really exist, and if so, how widespread and influential they are, may be a matter for a sociological investigation. Short of such an investigation, a writer can express no more than his personal impression, and it must be left to the reader to decide on the basis of his own experience whether the impression is warranted by actual facts. In this enterprise there are no preestablished guidelines and every observer is “on his own.” It is extremely difficult to feel the pulse of the
times. Consequently, there is bound to be a subjective element in the choice of phenomena to which I am inclined to call attention in this chapter. Nevertheless, an attempt in this direction needs to be made. It will at least indicate what bearing Murphy's theory has on some contemporary attitudes. In my opinion, these attitudes not only exist but also seem to be fairly widespread and to affect the use of normative discourse. My thesis will be that they contribute to a gradual erosion of reason from our practices by ignoring or eliminating the conditions which underlie the language of justification.

1. The "Uselessness" of General Standards

One of the conditions of normative discourse is, as we have seen, that it should be possible at some point of deliberation or discussion to respond to some general consideration valid for the community in question. Such a response is no more than a recognition that there exists a given practice in the community, e.g., a respect for one's neighbor's property or his right to privacy. Just so, says the adherent of the point of view we want to discuss. But what is moral about such requirements? Of course we keep our promises, return debts, and pay taxes. But there is nothing moral about behavior which conforms to such familiar elementary social requirements. We do not perform these tasks because we are consciously committed to some standards which oblige us to do so. It would be a useless, uninformative, and unnecessary move to answer the question "Why did you keep the promise?" with "It is my principle to keep promises." If I know what promising means, then I cannot be asked whether I subscribe to the principle of promise keeping. Keeping promises is part of understanding the meaning of "promise." In cases like these no moral problems arise and, consequently, when we try to invoke standards in such situations, our move is trivial. There is nothing to be learned, the objection continues, about the nature of morality or of practical reason from such "trivial" situations where people follow their familiar duties.

Nor is this all. When applied to complex situations, general standards are useless. The really interesting and significant contexts of practical decision are those in which the pros and cons of our action are so delicately balanced that it is difficult, even impossible, to conclude what the right solution would be. Here the appeal to common norms will not do because such an appeal can be made on both sides of the issue. Unless one is in possession of some absolute standards applicable in all cases and overriding all less in-
inclusive norms, no solution can be justified. But alas, all absolutes have disappeared from the modern scene.

The situation, then, appears to be as follows. In easy cases the appeal to moral standards is trivial; in difficult ones it is useless. That this conclusion should have a strong appeal nowadays is undoubtedly due to the rapid economic, political, social, and cultural changes of our era. Where traditional practices and ways of thinking are undergoing an intense transvaluation, it is to be expected that crisis situations will dominate men's minds. Moreover, there will be a tendency to be skeptical about the adequacy of old norms; they no longer can cope with new, unprecedented situations. And so, the uselessness of general norms appears to be established.

Both parts of the argument need to be examined. The answer to the first can be short. Practical norms can appear trivial only to those who follow them as a matter of course and when they are also followed by others in the same unquestioned way. The importance of these norms is all too clearly seen, however, when they are not observed. Most of our daily inconveniences, annoyances, and irritations are due to transgressions against such noncontroversial standards. We may not be inclined to invoke them because their elementary nature is obvious to us, and is so, we suppose, even to those who fail to conform to them. What this shows is that certain kinds of practices are so deeply ingrained in the customary behavior of our community that we no longer feel the need to verbalize them and to treat them as requiring a continuous recommitment. (Hence, the charge of triviality.) This does not mean, however, that we are indifferent to behavior which flaunts the familiar standards. Our reaction to such behavior is usually that of disapproval, blame, and in more serious cases, of severe condemnation. We do not always read daily accounts of thefts, embezzlements, assaults, and burglaries from a detached sociological or anthropological point of view. The validity and prescriptive authority of familiar basic standards do not strike us as trivial when we are personally affected by practices which fail to embody them. A quote from Murphy may help to make this point clearer.

The continuing understanding that is the basis of the preservation of common human decencies is ordinarily "taken for granted." And it is just because we do take it for granted, and in so many unproblematic cases accept and act on, "as a matter of course," the judgments unquestioningly based upon them, that the instances that fail to fit them can present for us a moral problem—a choice that calls for adjudication on its merits. Those morally we do not "choose," we simply understand and act. And this is not because in such cases we do not have a reason,
but because it is so obvious that there is simply no occasion to express it. In the shared activities of decent men its cogency is recognized as a matter of course (414).

The second part of the argument, namely, that the appeal to standards in more difficult cases is useless, calls for a longer answer. Perhaps such an answer can emerge more clearly if we examine an example. Let us consider what is involved in the frequently discussed "unresolvable" issue of euthanasia. The issue is problematic because both of the possible solutions—sanctioning mercy killing, or forbidding it—violate our commitment to some moral standards. Termination of a person's life strikes us as wrong, but, on the other hand, we are not indifferent to a prolongation of intense suffering. The argument for euthanasia rests essentially on the latter premise; one thinks it wrong to allow a person who has no hope of recovering to suffer intensely. The counterargument is no less powerful: the taking of life under any circumstances is wrong; it undermines the central duty of a physician—to serve life. But further arguments can be invoked in a concrete case. The proponent of euthanasia in such a case may claim, for instance, that in the light of the known facts the patient's only prospect is intense physical suffering until the moment of unretrievable death. He may also question the universal applicability of the physician's credo: do not terminate life deliberately. It is not clear, he may say, whether allowing a person to continue in pain until death is a way of serving life at all; it may be more correct to say that in this instance the physician is serving not life but disease, since irremediable disease is the patient's true and unchangeable state. Furthermore, he may reject the conclusion that the very act of administering a life-terminating agent into the sufferer's body must necessarily lead to a demoralization of the physician's commitment to the goal of healing people—this instance, he could claim, has no connection with the Hippocratic Oath and is not a violation of it. The suffering would, of course, be terminated upon the patient's wish and with his deliberate consent, and no harmful effects would result.

What can we derive from these arguments for allowing euthanasia in this particular case? (Note that we are not discussing the desirability of a legal provision for euthanasia, but only a particular case.) The difficulty with them is not that they rest on invalid considerations. As general considerations they have some force. The crucial question is whether the action proceeding from them is going to have the anticipated consequences. Is it true that prolonging a state of illness is not serving life? Is it true that a physician per-
forming euthanasia will not be morally and professionally affected in his future actions? Can one be sure on both these counts? If one can, if one truly believes that prolonging the diseased existence of a sufferer is contrary to serving life and if one is convinced that no harmful moral effects will follow for the doctor or for his other patients, then the argument of the proponent of euthanasia in this case appears convincing. But the point is that neither the proponent nor the opponent of euthanasia in this and in similar cases can be sure about the likely results. Here we deal with imponderables, and not with the validity or relevance of the general considerations adduced.

Notice that the counterarguments produced by the opponent of a direct intervention would also turn on imponderables, and not on the validity of the standards themselves. He may ask the following questions: Just what goes into the conclusion that the patient’s remaining life will consist of nothing more than intense pain? The conclusion may be premature. Is it not possible that during this final, painful stage of life the patient may reach a certain valuable understanding of himself, that he may reach moral heights he has never reached before? Can the physician take upon himself the responsibility of preventing the patient from possibly conquering his pain and approaching his own natural death with calmness and dignity? No one, the argument could continue, may know that much about a person, not even the person himself. The patient who today begs for a swift death might acquire tomorrow a power of endurance and perseverance that will surprise even himself. It may raise his person even in his own estimation and consequently may bestow on his life a meaning not suspected or anticipated before. So here too we are dealing with actual possibilities, not with general considerations and expectations, and the argument is about the former, not the latter.

The opponents of making legal provisions for euthanasia have a stronger case precisely because of these imponderables. We cannot predict with assurance of what kind of response people may be capable in conditions of stress. We do not know for sure whether a legalization of euthanasia will not have a demoralizing effect on the medical profession and will in fact contribute to abuses. This ignorance of possible or probable facts, however, is not the whole story. We also want to avoid the risk of these possibilities turning out differently from our prognostications. If they do, the responsibility is ours. We think it important to allow people to face death on their own terms and we wish to help them avoid taking premature irrevocable steps. These are also general moral considerations, and be-
cause we take them seriously, we have respect for the imponderables as well. In short, our ignorance is not moral but factual; indeed, we are concerned about the imponderables in the way we are because we hold certain definite moral convictions.

Our analysis indicates that it is possible to see a moral problem in a complex, difficult issue only when one falls back, at some point, on unquestioned and unquestionable moral convictions. This means that the dilemmas of morality cannot even be stated when morality itself, in its unproblematic form, is denied. It is as if one were to say that only the difficult problems of physics were all of physics. But this is false. Theoretically and paradigmatically significant problems of physics are those in which correct solutions can be arrived at. These solutions, reached by generally accepted procedures, provide the standards of scientific achievement. A good physicist is one who understands theoretically standard phenomena and knows how to explain and to control them. Such a physicist may not necessarily be a creative one as well, but if he cannot handle ordinary, standard physical phenomena, it is unlikely that he will be good in investigating and clearing up difficult cases in the frontier area of physics. The situation in the realm of practical reason is exactly parallel. Problematic cases of morality are not paradigmatic cases of morality. As we have seen, the disagreement about the proposed solutions does not turn on the validity of standards employed but on something entirely different, namely, the imponderables of the situations, the ignorance about some relevant facts or possibilities. Problematic cases can be shown to be significant because they presuppose and are grounded in generally valid convictions. The possibility of seeing the difficulty of the case depends on underlying moral agreement on basic issues in question. A problematic case could not even be stated if there were no general moral concerns afoot. The presence of imponderables only sharpens up these concerns and brings them to the surface, and therefore should not be used to undermine the moral enterprise of practical reason.

2. The "Naturalization" of Institutions

The reluctance to treat familiar practical standards as furnishing moral grounds for action may lead to a more general and farther-reaching conclusion. One may begin to look upon all human institutions as morally neutral. One can see them as part of the factual furniture of the human environment to be taken into account, as are taxes and death. Human institutions may be assimilated to natural forces and looked upon as morally neutral realities—to be perhaps
used or manipulated for one’s advantage, or to be tolerated or resisted. It would be a moot point to claim a connection between the emergence of this attitude and the tendency of social studies to be looked upon as sciences discovering laws and causal connections among human transactions which supposedly have nothing to do with individual decisions and wills. The temptation to look upon human relations as manifesting some transcendent law-like regularities is hard to avoid and has many positive uses, but it may have contributed to the tendency of regarding the operation of human institutions as morally neutral. Murphy, we may recall, has pointed to the theoretical inadequacy of sociologism. The attitude we are discussing here under the heading of “naturalization of institutions” is a version of the factualist account of practical reason. The consequence of taking it seriously is that one will no longer expect institutions to include a moral dimension. One may be inclined to take a neutral view even of the institutions of which one is a part. It is quite likely that the greater the impersonality and anonymity of institutions—which seems inevitable in the complex modern world—the easier it is to read the moral dimension out of them. One has less qualms in cheating a remote tax collector than one’s brother or one’s wife. Nevertheless, the evacuation of the moral dimension from any institution, large or small, reduces it to an impersonal, purely factualist structure.

This danger of moral neutralization of institutions has always existed and is often credited with contributing to the downfall of societies and civilizations. My point is merely that it is present nowadays as well, and perhaps more prominently so because of the very growth of organizational networks in the world. Consequently, there are more and greater opportunities for exploiting them—politically, economically, or socially. Our obsessive preoccupation with unlovely features of mass culture, mass behavior, corruption of public officials, conformity of old and young, other-directedness, and alienation are eloquent testimonials to the negative by-products of an increasingly institutionalized mode of life. Much of contemporary literature, especially drama, depicts the pointlessness, shallowness, and vacuity of institutionalized forms. This criticism is often very radical and spares no social medium, not even that of language. We are told that some contemporary writers intend to impress on us the fact that language itself serves as a barrier between man and reality, and therefore cannot be trusted.20

It is obvious that this distrust of institutions will tend to undermine the work of practical reason because the employment of prac-
tical reason *needs* institutions. There are, of course, many kinds of institutions. Some involve explicitly formal framework and organization, others grow up and function informally by dint of convention and tacit consensus. But all institutions, formal and informal, are public embodiments of practical commitments. Many such commitments are explicitly moral. Some institutions constitute ways of recognizing the objective character of certain moral relations. If this man is my brother, then I owe him certain considerations not necessarily applicable to others. If I have taken on the duties of an office, then I cannot disregard them at will. If I have publicly professed a certain commitment, then that commitment must be included among the considerations affecting my decisions and actions. To point to some institutions—that of family, for instance—is to be reminded of the existence of an objective bond. Similarly, an act of promising presupposes the acceptance of the institution of promising, as an act of brotherly love presupposes the moral bonds of family life. Guilt feelings about cheating, embezzling, or lying would be unfounded, were it not for the institutionally sanctioned general expectations of honesty and truthfulness.

In short, institutions help to safeguard the objective character of obligations. In addition, they are instruments and embodiments of human wills, and as such involve a moral dimension. But that dimension is left out when the "naturalization" of institutions has done its work. One forgets or ignores the fact that the energy which sustains institutions is provided by human thought and will. Institutions did not grow up "naturally" but have been devised and are maintained in existence by the commitment and practice of individual human beings. Institutions require cooperation, a concerted, consistent action of those who make it up. They presuppose the possibility of invoking general standards and public norms. If one wishes to manipulate and to exploit institutional frameworks to one's own advantage, one must do so in secret, otherwise one is likely to be excluded from it. An employee who embezzles his bank's money may *think* it right for him to do so, but he can never *say* so and remain a bank employee. This strictly logical feature of institutions is not always sufficient, even if recognized, to deter a would-be transgressor from exploiting or subverting them, but he cannot profess his real practical attitude in public. (This is perhaps one small way in which logic helps to prevent the human world from lapsing into chaos. Short of professing anarchy, a philosophic attack on all institutions cannot be made.)
It may be instructive to note in this connection that one of the dominant themes in the communist criticism of free democracies is that of moral deterioration and decadence. Institutions of the bourgeois world are dominated, so runs the charge, by the selfish principles of profit, greed, and exploitation. It is not surprising, therefore, that Western societies suffer from endemic outbreaks of indiscipline, strikes, corruption, juvenile rebellion and delinquency, decadence in art and in life. This theme is constantly hammered at in the communist educational and political propaganda. Every instance of immoral behavior within the borders of a democratic country is attributed to the corruption of institutions of the capitalist enterprise. This picture of decadence and anarchy is contrasted with that of a highly moral, productive, dedicated, altruistic way of life within the framework of institutions organized on communist principles—disciplined, socially responsible youth, hardworking, communally goal-oriented citizenry, and a serious, self-sacrificing leadership of party members.

It would be a mistake to write off these criticisms as sheer propaganda. There is no denying that the incidence of crime and violence, of cynical attitudes toward social institutions, both on the part of adults and of adolescents, often assume alarming proportions in noncommunist countries. What we should recognize is that much of antisocial behavior stems from what we are calling here the moral neutralization of institutions. Those who show disrespect for social frameworks and practices often express this disrespect in destructive acts, because they feel no moral bond toward such institutions. Whether the cure is to replace free institutions by those established and maintained by the will of one all-powerful political party is another question. This would amount to turning over all institution-making processes to a group of men who claim to have all wisdom and righteousness on their side. By now we know enough about the mode of life in totalitarian states to be sure that the moral health of a society is not secured by delivering all aspects of life into the hands of an all-powerful hierarchy of one political party. The price paid in individual life and freedom is too high for the advantages of a regimented society, regulated from above in all significant areas of human experience. We also have reason to doubt that the publicly expressed allegiance of citizens to institutions of a totalitarian state corresponds to the way this allegiance is actually experienced. In a society where the criticism of official institutions is not tolerated, the truth on these matters is not easily accessible. But the disclosures and admissions which come out of the commu-
nist world, sometimes clandestinely, like the books of Pasternak and of other Soviet writers, plainly show that the discrepancy between the proclaimed word and the actual state of affairs is staggering. Otherwise, there would be no need for "rehabilitation" of political victims, or for constant "rewriting" of history.

The insincerity, dishonesty, and cynicism that actually exist in a regimented country can reach depths which are no less tragic than in a "decadent" bourgeois society. What makes them even more tragic is that the avenues for regeneration from within the social framework itself, from the spontaneous renewal and recovery of moral health on the part of those immediately concerned, is not possible within a system where institutions are governed from above by abstract political power. A disillusioned citizen of a communist country, having lost faith in the purity of motives and in the unquestioned wisdom of those who lay down policies, is likely to treat the system under which he lives as a nonrational framework, to the physical power of which one must simply submit without hope of becoming related to it as a freely-asserting and consulted participant in the pursuit of common ends. This sort of disillusionment is even bleaker than that of the one who despairs of some institution in a democratic society, for the latter has at least some recourse to other institutions of his pluralistic social and political system. This recourse is not available in a monolithic totalitarian state. Regimentation of individuals under the banner of an ideology-bound political party is not a desirable way to bring the moral fibre back into human institutions. An externally imposed reform is no guarantee of health, no matter how historically and economically "inevitable" and "natural" such a reform is purported to be by its power-hungry proponents. Ailing institutions can become well again when their regeneration takes place within a framework of freedom and of voluntarily assumed responsibility. This, however, calls for a reintroduction of the moral dimension into the structure of institutions. One must begin by asking what common goals the given institution is meant to safeguard, and if these goals are indeed worthy of respect and commitment, then an appropriate attitude and behavior will be justified. Obviously, such a regeneration cannot take place when one begins with a blank a priori disparagement of all institutional frameworks.

3. The Challenge of Existentialism

So far we have discussed opinions and attitudes which, though common and influential, are not expressed in an explicit philosophical doctrine. In many different ways they register a "no confidence"
mood toward norms and institutions as providing guidelines for action. The same mood of general protest is discernible in a philosophical point of view which appears to be quite influential in the contemporary climate of opinion. Indeed, existentialism seems to furnish an official focus which gathers up various strands of the quest for a "new morality." It is of interest to us because its doctrines can be seen as providing an alternative to the description of practical reason as it is found in Murphy's theory.

At this point we should remind ourselves that Murphy's analysis is not tied to any presupposed doctrine of human nature or of the human situation. Murphy looks at morality as an activity of a certain sort. It is not something that characterizes all men at all times. Sometimes the conditions of moral practical discourse are fulfilled, and sometimes they are not. In this sense, morality is not a constant state of being—either in particular societies or in particular individuals. As Murphy puts it, it is an achievement and as such always contingent and never guaranteed. No society and no individual is always moral, and it is possible to distinguish actions which meet the requirements of practical reason from those which do not.

When we turn to a general estimate of the human situation from the existentialist point of view, such as it is found, for example, in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, we encounter an explicit metaphysical doctrine about the nature of man. This is Sartre's doctrine of freedom. The question we need to ask is whether this doctrine is compatible with the requirements of practical reason. Before we can answer it, we need to know something about the doctrine itself. Sartre's key ontological distinction is that between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The latter characterizes human existence, the former is applicable to entities other than human. The for-itself, or human existence, is contrasted with the in-itself. Sometimes this contrast is expressed in a paradoxically sounding sentence: man is what he is not and is not what he is. When expanded, this expression calls attention to man's ability to "nihilate" his being by embracing a "project." As long as a man lives, his being is partly in the future, in the way he will choose himself. The possibility of this choice is never eliminated and cannot be annihilated by the facts of the situation, be they internal or external. Free choice is a constant possibility for man. In Sartre's more fanciful vocabulary, man introduces a gap, a hole into being; the nothingness which the consciousness opens between itself and its object is at the same time a fount of new, original possibilities for decision. This amounts to no less than absolute freedom—in every act man is said to choose
and to make himself. This "nothingness" of man's existence is closer to him and more characteristic of him than any of the structures which make up his personality, for those, after all, have become a part of the situational in-itself, hence a mere material or setting for the exercise of freedom.

This is then the picture of man as it emerges from an existentialist analysis. Man is essentially and in principle free of all molding influences and claims and, the conclusion or recommendation seems to be, he should remain so. To allow any component of the in-itself—whatever its character: a network of social, moral, political, or religious norms—to govern one's actions is to act in bad faith, to fall into inauthenticity. Nothing, no institutional structure should infringe on the absoluteness of human freedom. A man whose existence is dominated by past commitments to personal or social goals sells out his birthright of independence; the plasticity of his possibilities is fossilized, and he allows himself, a free subject, to behave as if he were an object. A truly wise man will not become involved in affairs which limit his freedom. Once a person commits himself seriously to certain general moral standards which bind his action and entitle others to expect from him a conformity to these standards, he is no longer in a position to act unencumbered and freely at any given moment. Because this view values individual freedom more than morality, it champions a constant right of dissent. The Protagorean slogan, "Man is the measure of all things," has fought its way to complete acceptance. There are no standards, moral or otherwise, which ought to bind a person permanently in his actions; any really serious commitment to a norm is an abdication of one's constant and absolute (because grounded in nothingness) freedom to strike out on one's own. One should not even be bound by requirements of consistency, for this too is a form of slavery to a precedent. Instead, man must choose each act from the "nothingness" of his own being—only then does he escape acting in bad faith.

There seems to be something exhilarating in this picture of man—it elevates the individual person to the status of the final arbiter of value, not dependent on any force or will. It is reminiscent of Nietzsche's Zarathustra who also insisted on subjecting everything that came his way—his own personality, environment, and tradition included—to fiercest critical scrutiny: "Jeden Zufall kochte ich in meinem Topf." Nietzsche wanted to affirm man's inalienable right to say "No" to every value put in his path—this is what the doctrine of the transvaluation of all values amounts to. He wanted to see
man liberated from all dependencies on received values, hence he has sent his Zarathustra to breathe the uncontaminated air in the mountains of absolute freedom.

The question we need to ask is this: What is moral about this sort of freedom? It appears to be purely negative. The injunction is: don’t act from bad faith, that is, out of regard for anything that might tend to limit your freedom, whatever it might be. This view can be likened to the political doctrine of interpositionism. As a state in a federal system may claim the right to interpose itself between the federal law and its execution, so the individual may say “No” to any demand presented to his consciousness. This, we may recall, is the consequence of the general view that human consciousness consists in its ability to “nih Tate” any of its objects.

There seems to be something childishly and egotistically romantic about this. It calls to mind a boy who always joins his playmates with a reservation in his mind: “Alright, I’ll play with them, but the moment my feelings are hurt, I’ll quit.” The consequence of this view is that a man cannot really be engaged, for he reserves the right to leave the scene at any moment. It is not surprising, therefore, that many people took existentialism to advocate arbitrary and esoteric choices, and interpreted it as a nihilistic doctrine. These criticisms are not without point. The constant guarding of one’s freedom—die Wacht am Nein—may mean that one never really gives full support to the projects one temporarily embraces; their value as compared with that of freedom is relatively insignificant. For, after all, they are in fact a part of fossilized structure, being-in-itself. Hence the justified suspicion that, in the light of his basic beliefs about man, an existentialist cannot really be serious about anything. (Ironically, it was Sartre who called the inauthentic mode of existence, the “serious world.”) This may appear surprising because existentialism also poses as a champion of commitment, of being “engagé.” But the possibility of commitment seems to be precluded by the basic existentialist picture of man. One can accept this picture only by closing one’s eyes to the fundamental split in the doctrine.

But to return to our question: What is moral about this doctrine? When we recall the basic conditions of normative discourse, we shall notice that they are incompatible with the insistence on absolute and constant right of dissent. To play the moral “game” is to give up this right at a certain point. To choose morality is to limit one’s freedom. This is what moral commitment amounts to. This does not involve a denial of the value of freedom. Freedom undoubt-
edly is a value, perhaps one of the most precious values we possess and cherish. But in recognizing the claims of morality we recognize other values as well, values which, as Kant rightly observed, may strike us as legitimate limitation on our freedom. Morality may presuppose freedom, but it is not derived from it. (This mistake may be at the base of Sartre’s subsequent conclusion that ethics is impossible.) To define man as unencumbered consciousness, always free to pass its personal subjective judgment (is it really a judgment?) on what is to be done, is to deny that human consciousness is sometimes confronted with objective obligations which it is morally bound to recognize. From the existentialist view, the bindingness of moral obligations does not exist until it is brought into being by the subject who, by first “nihilating” it, decides to recognize it. This is contrary to moral experience, where we recognize that it is not up to our free consciousness to confer value on a certain demand—that demand already has a value, a moral value, in it and we are merely asked to acknowledge it.

It is probably more correct to say that in actual life we do not choose to be moral. We learn how to think and to act morally, how to participate in a certain sort of practice. Once we have understood the claims of morality, our consciousness is no longer absolutely free. For to understand something from the moral point of view means to be committed to the moral claims contained in that understanding. Perhaps we might be inclined to go even further and to agree with Socrates that in a sense “virtue cannot be taught,” although it can be recognized. Morality may be more like grace (to shift the context of comparison again); it is not chosen but descends upon one, even though, as Socrates and a Christian would agree, one must be properly prepared to receive it. But once received, its claims on us cannot be shaken off by an act of will. To insist on one’s right to shake it off at any moment is to imply that one has not adopted a moral point of view, or has adopted it with “mental reservations.”

It is sometimes suggested that Sartre’s doctrine of freedom does have a moral content. There are passages in Sartre’s writings where he says that everyone’s freedom is indissolubly linked to that of other men. This is taken to mean that authenticity, or respect for one’s own freedom, involves a moral respect for other people’s freedom. This sounds like a move in moral direction, but is it really? First of all, is it intelligible in terms of the key doctrine of freedom as the constant right to repudiate its commitment? If this part of the doctrine is kept intact, the link to which Sartre refers is fragile indeed. The point is that a recognition of the freedom of
others involves a limitation on one’s own freedom. Otherwise the link, whatever else it may be, is not a moral link. A longer quotation from *Being and Nothingness* will show that Sartre did not believe that a sense of moral community among people could be genuine.

Thus whereas in the experience of being-for-others the upsurge of a dimension of real and concrete being is the condition for the very experience, the experience of the We-subject is a pure psychological, subjective event in a single consciousness; it corresponds to an inner modification of the structure of this consciousness but does not appear on the foundation of a concrete ontological relation with others and does not realize any Mitsein. It is a question only of a way of feeling myself in the midst of others. Of course this experience can be looked on as a symbol of an absolute, metaphysical unity of transcendences; it seems, in fact, that it overcomes the original conflict of transcendences by making them converge in the direction of the world. But the experience of the “we” remains on the ground of individual psychology and remains a simple symbol of the longed-for unity of transcendences. It is, in fact, in no way a lateral, real apprehension of subjectivities as such by a single subjectivity; the subjectivities remain out of reach and radically separated.

It is instructive that when Sartre looked for an illustration of a linking of free wills he thought of violent behavior of human groups, such as breaking of a police cordon by a group of strikers, or the storming of the Bastille. Contrary to the view expressed in *Being and Nothingness*, namely, that a “we” experience can only be subjective, in his later writings Sartre claimed that such an experience can be genuine. He added, however, that it tends to deteriorate quickly and one must resort to devices which will keep it effective. When common fear no longer cements the group, one must resort to oath, which serves “as an intelligible means of overcoming individual alienation by common freedom.” It seems that short of some external threat or an explicit oath, there cannot be any linking of individuals to one another. But, once again, what is moral about being linked to others either by fear or merely by the force of an oath? It seems that Sartre’s view remained true to his basic contention that “the essence of the relations between consciousnesses is not the Mitsein, it is conflict.”

In the light of this view it should not surprise us that Sartre no longer sees any way of bringing about significant changes in the social structure by the efforts of individuals. In his later writings he insists that a radical restructuring of society must take place before the individual can use his freedom. This view is a far cry from those advocated in *Being and Nothingness*, and indeed in con-
Sartre now seems to believe that it is useless for an individual to try to effect changes in society if that society renders freedom impossible. This, it should be noted, presupposes a picture of the individual as completely isolated and without any means of initiating effective collective action. In the light of this presupposition, it is understandable why Sartre is inclined to say that he no longer thinks ethics possible. He confesses: "From the period when I wrote La Nausee I wanted to create morality. My evolution consists in my no longer dreaming of doing so."

This conclusion is not surprising because from the very outset the moral dimension has been effectively evacuated from Sartre’s account of human experience.

There are other terms in Sartre’s doctrine which look as if they intended to convey a moral meaning. Among them are the notions of “fundamental choice” and of “radical conversion.” Sartre believes that it is possible to connect a person’s decisions to some original choice sometime in the past when the basic character of that person has been chosen by him. (The question could be raised whether in saying this Sartre is not contradicting his doctrine of freedom as “nothingness”—when tied to fundamental choices, freedom ceases being “nothingness.”) When we leave aside Sartre’s metaphysical views about the self, we have on our hands a depressing doctrine (not unlike that of Freud) that a person is forever in the clutches of such an original choice, unless he undergoes a radical conversion. Be this as it may, Sartre does want to say that every subsequent decision is but a reaffirmation of the fundamental choice made in some distant past. In his own case, Sartre tells us, such a decision had been made when he was seven years old. Anthony Manser, a conscientious and sympathetic exponent of Sartre’s philosophy, finds it questionable whether one can talk about such a single “original choice” as a choice at all, and remarks that “for most of us this choice was something that just happened.” Manser also points out that for Sartre “choice is ‘fragile,’ . . . there is no guarantee that it will be maintained, . . . choice is ‘unjustifiable’ or ‘absurd,’ . . . there are no reasons outside the choice by which it can be justified.”

Notice how the very notion of choice has been transformed by Sartre beyond recognition. Choices of human beings, in order to qualify as choices, have to be grounded; they must have a reason behind them. An ungrounded choice is an act out of the blue, and to call it a choice is undeserved courtesy. If a person chooses, it should be in principle possible to ask: Why did you choose X? Sar-
trian analysis indicates a rejection of this question, for to answer it would mean that the choice was not "pure" or "authentic." In an earlier discussion of Sartre’s views Manser found the same difficulty. “Indeed, the separation of authentic decision from any kind of rules or criteria reduces it to something which hardly merits the name of ‘decision.’ Without an accepted framework within which the decision is made, there seems nothing to distinguish it from an arbitrary act.”

A similar criticism applies to what Sartre calls a “radical conversion,” a complete rejection of one’s mode of existence in favor of a radically different one. Manser points out that for Sartre “a person who is undergoing a ‘radical conversion’ cannot rely on reasons, for what he is doing is changing what he is going to count as a reason.” I have italicized the last phrase because it clearly shows that for Sartre reasons never have antecedent validity, which fact is being acknowledged in the act of choice. For him it is the choice that gives validity to a reason, and not the other way around. This inversion of the customary meanings of words accounts for some of the bewilderment a reader of Sartre sometimes experiences.

Although Sartre would probably deny it, there is a similarity of his picture of the human situation to that of Bergson. In some ways the for-itself is like élan vital, a pure unencumbered possibility of action, while reason, like the intellect in Bergson, tends to have an inhibiting, distorting, mechanizing influence. The presence of rational considerations is experienced as an imposition from the outside, a denial of human plasticity and spontaneity. To have a reason seems to mean: something intrudes itself on my consciousness and forces it to respond in a certain way. It is not surprising, therefore, that with this philosophical picture in mind an existentialist feels inclined to say disparaging things about reason and its claims. As Murphy’s theory shows, there are other, more convincing ways of describing what it means to act for a reason.

Before we leave existentialism let us make a brief excursion into its theological camp. Neither the theistic nor the atheistic version of this philosophy is really a newcomer on the human scene. Both versions have something in common: they tend to distrust human reason and human institutions, though, of course, for different reasons. Theologians have often warned us that involvement in the affairs of the world is ultimately disillusioning and unsatisfying and that instead one should lay up one’s treasure in heaven. The first commandment is to love God, not man, because man is essentially unworthy of love. The world, including all its human and nonhuman
relationships, is essentially Maya, an illusion—the only lasting refuge is with the One. All effort of man to live in the light of human norms and ideals is from the very start a dishonest and ineffective stance. Faith in institutions, commitment to humanly arrived at goals, reliance on the soundness of general moral norms, tend to lead mankind away from its real destiny: communion with transcendent God.

The other-worldly note in many religions did not necessarily lead to a rejection of the world, although in some instances, as in the case of some sects of early Christianity, the world was regarded as essentially evil. In most instances religion was insisting on establishing the proper relative positions of the two realms. The world with all its goods and relations has a value, but its value is ephemeral as compared to the value of salvation. Nevertheless, the question of a possible conflict between allegiance to the world and allegiance to God has been persistently troublesome for most believers. It is of interest to us that intense believers, such as St. Augustine and Kierkegaard, tended to solve this conflict in favor of the other-worldly claim. Kierkegaard’s analysis of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is a telling illustration of this solution.

A “suspension of the ethical” is not necessarily a degradation of morality. To reiterate, it may be just a dramatic reminder of the relative position of the two realms. But at a certain point it is bound to affect a person in his practical capacity for it tends to remove reason from the sphere of action. A person is induced to act in violation of his practical moral understanding. Of course, this may be taken as applicable only to very special circumstances under which the will of God is directly pronounced or perceived. Abraham certainly thought that he was responding to God’s will and therefore, in Kierkegaard’s view, demonstrating his faith and righteousness. So far one may see no need to object. Exceptional cases may call for exceptional treatment. But a conclusion may also be drawn that a truly believing person will always act in the way God commands, and if what God commands always calls for the suspension of the ethical and never requires the normal use of practical reason, then the situation is radically different. For then the entire dimension of moral understanding becomes irrelevant and unnecessary.

It is not likely that either Kierkegaard or other like-minded religious believers actually intended to draw this conclusion. But by having advocated a wholehearted giving oneself up into the hands of God they did create the impression that actions proceeding from
the judgments of ordinary understanding are ultimately suspect. A man who would feel confident about the soundness of his moral decisions would only be manifesting his ignorance of human nature, which reeks with sinfulness, arrogance, and pride of reason. Behind this concept there lurks Luther's verdict that reason is indeed a whore. Kierkegaard's general philosophical position shares certain basic assumptions of other existentialist schools, only it replaces the unencumbered will of individual man by the will of God. In this roundabout way, by advocating surrender to God's will, such a view of religion may also undermine a confident use of practical reason. It is difficult to see how a believer of Kierkegaard's persuasion could go on making any decisions with a degree of assurance. Most likely he would claim that all decisions are ambiguous and that he never knows whether his actions are really right or wrong. Whether this will stop him from acting and living resolutely is another question. In theory it should stop him, for, not knowing in his own mind whether a given move is right or not, it should be very difficult for him to go on to the next move, unless of course he consults God's will at every step. In practice the situation is different. True believers do not hesitate to act resolutely. But this is because they probably feel that, in spite of their ignorance, their actions follow the will of God.

Let us return once more to the contrast between the views we have been discussing in this chapter and Murphy's view of morality. Murphy looks at morality as participation in a special mode of life, with its own challenges, difficulties, and rewards, and with conditions peculiar to itself: an interest in and concern for the fulfillment of all kinds of human needs on terms which would be just and fair to all participants. In his theory there is no one single goal toward which this activity must be directed. Indeed, a part of the strength of the theory is that it is open to new, unforeseen possibilities. In contrast, the existentialist view is wedded to one single aim; to the morally-empty notion of freedom in the case of the atheistic version, and to the will of God in the case of the theistic version. In spite of crucial differences, the resemblance between them is underscored by Sartre himself in his contention that man's ultimate desire is to become God, an in-itself, which, alas, is a "useless passion." On the one hand we are led to the mystique of the unique, on the other, toward the Mystery of Being. In either case, however, there is no room for the work of practical reason. Part of Sartre's frustration is due to his either/or demand on man. Either man is completely authentic or he is condemned. Similarly, Sartre is skeptical of the
possibility of a genuine sense of community within any human group because he sets impossibly high standards. “We should hope in vain for a human ‘we’ in which the intersubjective totality would obtain consciousness of itself as a unified subjectivity.” But practical reason needs to express itself in the lives of human beings as they are, not as they ideally might be. To be a moral self is not a matter of identity, of being, but of participating to the best of one’s judgment and ability in humanly desirable pursuits. It is possible for us to act morally without being wholly and constantly moral.

A single-minded, jealous devotion to one transcendent ideal is likely to result in a certain impatience with proximate gains that are being made by human efforts. For the sake of the purity of our freedom or of the total devotion to God we are urged to alienate ourselves from the products of the gradual evolution of the race, such as language, culture, morality, and science. This evolution has, of course, always included dangerous tendencies which were apt to undermine whatever gains were made. For showing us the dangers of civilization we will always owe a debt to thinkers like Rousseau, Voltaire, Tolstoy, Heidegger, Sartre, and Riesman. Indeed what is effective in Sartre and Heidegger is their revealing portrayal of inauthenticity of the saloon or das Man. Human institutions have their aberrations and distortions. Cultures can go sour. But if we become so hypnotized by the negative features of culture as to forget its positive intent and possibility, we are victims of our own impatience, shortsightedness, or vanity. What would human society be without cooperative frameworks and practices? In criticizing a different sort of antirationalist, Edmund Burke, J. H. Plumb asks a question that could be directed to the existentialists as well: “Why should a rationalist, intellectual approach to the problems of human organization seem either wicked or stupid or both, when such problems as man has solved—control of power, the diminution of diseases—have been achieved by their application?” There is an enduring truth in Hobbes’s claim that without social and political organization human life would indeed be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Participation in mutually binding institutional frameworks is the most intelligent device of the human race to satisfy the needs of its members. Most of what we can know, understand, believe, appreciate, and cherish has been made possible for us by the insights, discoveries, and creative contributions transmitted in social experience. No man can be an island and be fully a man. Furthermore, truly important, effective personal decisions do not merely turn on our inwardness—they affect our total setting in the public world,
among other men. Personal initiative and achievement increasingly require mediation by institutional agencies. Our problem is not how to drive the individual into his inwardness but how to help him express his freedom within a moral social framework. Without the values of inwardness and without the opportunity for solitary pursuits human life would be much impoverished, but it is doubtful that these values are best achieved by disparaging the cumulative cultural attainments of the human race. This does not mean that we should become organization men. The answer is not to rail indiscriminately against organized life but to keep a watchful eye over aberrations and abuses which keep it off its intended course: to render men stronger, healthier, and more effective in their many enterprises. As the critics of institutions have abundantly shown, organization can become an enemy of human freedom, and we must remain critical. But not indiscriminately and carelessly, loading our arguments with preconceptions derived from our pet metaphysics.

Our examination of existentialism may alert us to a possibility that any metaphysics or a general theory of human nature may become questionable when scrutinized from a practical point of view. When Nietzsche announced his view that philosophy is a most spiritual will to power he warned us that behind every metaphysics there lurks an ideology. Thus alerted we may want to ask what, if any, practical considerations follow from or are implicit in a given metaphysical doctrine. If the doctrine contains no practical recommendations, then of course no moral appraisal is in order. But if such recommendations are embodied in the doctrine, further questions should be asked.31

It is possible that these practical recommendations would be quite compatible with moral demands and would nowise interfere with the work of practical reason. But it is also possible that the metaphysical doctrine would tend to discredit this use of reason. The question then would be whether metaphysically-grounded beliefs are to break into action even though such action could be condemned on moral grounds. By looking at actual moral ties in the light of some general philosophical theory about the “ultimate” significance of all human experience, we may succeed in trivializing them, in evacuating their moral meaning and obligatory character.

“Ultimate” considerations may be believed to provide a “reason” why proximate moral obligations do not really obligate. But this would mean, in effect, that one’s speculative philosophical theory has become the final moral arbiter, entitled to guide action. A speculative use of language replaces the practical-moral. To the extent
that a metaphysical view explicitly recommends or implicitly encourages a certain stance toward experience, it *plays the role* of practical reasoning. This means that the attempted elimination of normative language fails; it comes through the back door in a guise of “higher” metaphysical insights—higher because they are expected to affect our lives in some significant ways. But if so, metaphysical recommendation can and should be either supported or countered in moral language. When we do ask for its moral credentials, the issue is brought back within the compass of practical reason where one must take into account whatever moral claims demand a hearing. To deal with such claims is precisely the point of the language of justification, and if we ignore, distort, or deflate that language, we cannot use it seriously and in good faith; its intent, purpose, and promise are destroyed. No general philosophical theory can authorize us to become blind or indifferent to actual moral demands on us. This is the insight behind the old-fashioned doctrine of the autonomy of ethics, or of the primacy of practical reason over the theoretical. Perhaps we can express it in more fashionable terminology by saying that “ethics precedes metaphysics.”

When one runs into unmistakable and unambiguous moral evils, such as crime, corruption, exploitation, callousness, and cruelty, one is likely to find preoccupation with the “ultimate” destiny of the individual, the puzzlements over the meaning of life and death, over man’s place in the otherworldly scheme of things, somehow out of order. The so-called “human condition,” or “original sinfulness,” or “inauthenticity,” appear irrelevant and irreverent. Situations of real need, immediately translatable into practical moral terms, cannot be disposed of by metaphysical speculations and conclusions. A starving man needs bread, not a theory of human nature; a lonely person needs satisfying human bonds, not the lofty reminder that “ultimately” every man lives and dies alone. “Selber ist der Mann” is a piece of proverbial wisdom, to be pondered in one’s philosophical or poetic moments (which are not likely to come when one has a difficult practical problem on one’s hand), but it cannot be quoted as a substitute for a kindly act when such an act is in order. Preoccupation with private crisis situations seems oddly out of place when palpable moral evils rock the world.
CHAPTER V
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING AGENT

Our discussion in the preceding chapter has been mainly critical; we were trying to show that some of the contemporary modes of thought leave no room for the use of practical reason. Nevertheless, we need to take note of phenomena and forces which are at least partly responsible for the emergence of opinions and attitudes we have discussed. Many observers of the contemporary scene have been impressed by the inexorable march of impersonal forces in all human affairs: science, technology, political collectivization, mass communications, and mass culture. They have found the individual more and more at the mercy of events and processes over which he has no control and which he could hardly affect by his own initiative — be it in the political, scientific, or technological sphere. Consequently, they feel that there is a crying need to rescue the individual from the onslaught of these impersonal, objectifying forces and to reaffirm the primacy, independence, and freedom of the person. As we have seen, this realization of the need to reconsider the status of the individual in the scheme of things has been dramatized—sometimes exaggeratedly and out of all proportion—by the existentialists. Some of them recommend a search for inward “authenticity” and seek inspirations and models in the creative activity of the artist; others urge a return to the religious view of man as having infinite worth in the eyes of transcendent God, regardless of his status in the world of human history or of nature. But in each case the warning is the same: do not submerge your soul in “objective” thinking and “inauthentic” living. Even where the existentialist genres were less popular, there appeared characterological studies of lonely crowds and nations of sheep, and more recently, advocates of “situational moralities.”

How does Murphy’s account of normative discourse see the place of the individual in the scheme of things? Does it allow the individual a significant, effective role in human affairs? To answer this question let us return to our analysis of the components or conditions of moral discourse, as they have been presented in
Chapter II. One of these components is moral selfhood (labeled as condition N3 in our scheme). It can be shown, I believe, that in some important ways this condition is more fundamental than the others. Perhaps we should recognize its special status by calling it not just a condition but an absolute presupposition of moral discourse. The animus of Murphy’s argument comes from his realization that the entire practice of the language of justification can be maintained at its adequate level only if the users of this language are clearly aware of its aims and objectives. The theory is addressed to us as the users of that language in order to elucidate what we are actually doing when we participate in the practices of normative discourse. We are also invited to consider what would be missing from the human scene if the practices of the language of justification were to disappear from it. Obviously, some familiar ways of addressing one another—advising, admonishing, encouraging, persuading, or criticizing by producing reasons for our judgments—would either disappear or would be transformed into something less than this. This would be a severe handicap, eliminating from our daily life countless familiar moral transactions without which our life would surely be impoverished. Morality, as Murphy reminds us again and again, is not the whole of life; it leaves room for pursuits of other sorts. Not all our problems are moral problems. Where no actual obligations exist, it is a mistake to use moral language. Moral diversity is often compatible with mutual forbearance and tolerance. “Moral diversity becomes moral disagreement only when the diversity itself is made a moral issue” (339). But when we do make a moral issue of it, we fall back on a use of language with its own special rules and purposes. Whether we are to participate in this use is not a matter of indifference to us. When moral considerations become relevant, we ignore them only at the risk of damaging a vital part of ourselves. Like the Ten Commandments, if we break them, they break us. Morality as a search for justifiable, common rational grounds for action, is a particular kind of enterprise, but without it, in Murphy’s words, “we literally should not be ourselves” (123).

Part of Murphy’s intent was to impress this fact on us. That he regarded moral selfhood as a necessary condition of the language of justification is clear. “The facts can point a moral only for a man for whom moral communication has a point” (260). “The self of responsible action is a practical reality, and no language has yet been invented, or is likely to be, in which we can understand each other morally without recurrent reference to it” (185). I return to
this point in order to emphasize its importance. A closer analysis will reveal that N3 is indeed the upholding and generating center of practical life. The special status of N3 becomes evident when we realize that the other four conditions cannot be satisfied if an integral moral self is not presupposed: 1) Only a person concerned about proper standards of ascertaining facts can recognize facts and abide by them. 2) This holds for the proper identification and appraisal of the factual nature of attitudes. 3) The crucial transition from attitudes and wants to reasons presupposes the ability of the self to treat some attitudes and wants as deserving universal allegiance. 4) Common goals or community of interest can be upheld only by the commitment of responsible persons. In sum, the language of justification grounded in these conditions will continue to be used only if there are persons who are prepared to fulfill these conditions. As Murphy likes to say, moral problems are always addressed "to whom they may concern." But if so, the requirement N3 occupies a prominent position in the use of the language of justification.

Murphy sees the human self as essentially dynamic and developing. "The self that, if he is a self at all, he can recognize he ought to be, is always to some degree an ideal. The 'choice' to be this self, or to live up to this ideal, in his conduct is not made once for all in a supertemporal world and irrevocable thereafter. It must be made continually, in quite mundane circumstances, in the way that responds to the requirements and opportunities of his situation as a self or agent" (180). To ascribe human actions to the effect of some timelessly espoused character or to "fundamental choices," or to the rigid structures of the physiological, psychological, or sociological background is to misdescribe them. "To be not a disembodied spirit nor a well-behaved animal but a human self is man's predicament, and also his distinction" (183).

The importance of the initiative of responsible agents clearly emerges from Murphy's description of contexts in which practical reason is called upon to do its work. He reminds us that the actual communities of which we are members suffer from tensions and disharmonies which cry out for relief. The groups in which we live "are incomplete, onesided and in many ways parochial in the range and level of their moral understanding. The good reasons we have learned in them are sometimes not good enough for the achievement of an effective moral order in our social relations. The communities in which their moral intent could be adequately fulfilled has still in large measure, and under great difficulties, to be built" (220). We are also told by Murphy that the building of communi-
ties in which their intent is more adequately fulfilled is not an impersonal natural process, scientifically, sociologically, or psychologically determined. It is always the work of men who are concerned to bring about whatever changes appear morally desirable.

The focal position of the self as practical agent is manifest in many ways. We need to go beyond observing, as we have done so far, that the very practice of normative discourse presupposes agents concerned about its effective continuation. In real life it is the actual commitment to common specific goals and norms that provides the currency of practical discourse. The supporting base for such norms is supplied by personal involvement of the members of a given community. Murphy showed us that there is a logical connection between moral selfhood and moral community. We can speak morally for and in the name of those who are prepared to act in the light of shared convictions, and this presupposes the existence of some moral bond among us. This bond of moral obligation is not of an abstract, disembodied sort. Nor does it appear on the human scene automatically, wherever and whenever human beings happen to interact. It is, like moral selfhood, an achievement. It becomes effective only when there is a willingness to govern one's behavior in terms of some mutually binding rules. When no such rules are recognized and respected, moral community does not exist. The practice of the language of justification depends on active support of practical agents who participate in it.

There is a further point to be made. In contrast to the existentialist view, Murphy believes that in facing his practical tasks an agent is expected to come up with reasoned decisions. The context of a practical difficulty calls not just for a choice but also for a judgment. A judgment should lead to a choice, and not the other way around, as Sartre would have it. (It is because of this basic disagreement that Murphy once, in a light mood, proposed the application of what he would call “Murphy’s razor”: “Existentialists are not to be multiplied without necessity.”) In his book Murphy insists throughout that a practical problem requires a judgment. We will never reach a point where we can be relieved of the responsibility of making moral judgments. Theories which suggest that we could transform moral reasons into logical truths or sociological, legal and/or linguistic facts, indulge in wishful thinking. On many occasions we are called upon to do our own thinking, for the rules we have learned do not cover univocally all possible contexts. Murphy’s text on this is unequivocal, but it needs to be assembled from various parts of his book. “Unless the new commandments
were the fulfillment of the old, we could never morally understand them. But when we thus understand them we are launched on a voyage of discovery that no rule book yet devised can adequately chart" (209). "... sound judgment is not learned, or exhibited in the mindless following of general rule" (356). Good moral teaching "prepares us to go beyond our instructions and to solve a problem for ourselves" (195). Here Murphy acknowledges Wittgenstein's reminder that there are different kinds of teaching. "Teaching which is not meant to apply to anything but the examples given is different from that which 'points beyond' them."34 Obviously, moral teaching is of the latter kind. "The world does change, and old principles, however nobly stated, become equivocal in their application to hard cases that the wise men who formulated them could not have anticipated" (245). In the complex, novel, and demanding world that now confronts us we are called upon to do no less than our predecessors who in the past found reasons to put exceptions into received rules. "The process of being reasonable is a continuing and a self-correcting process, and the capacity to change our minds in the light of what it has to teach us is essential to its proper use" (239).

To admit the need for a serious application of one's reasoning capacities to the solution of a practical difficulty is not to surrender the self to alien inauthentic forces. For the result of our strenuous deliberation may be a decision to take a firm personal stand against popular opinion. "We do not choose actions, as we might choose among apples in a dish. We do them, or refuse them, for a reason, and when this reason is manifest, as it often is, the man with a clear commitment may well say that he has no choice" (170). "There are occasions, surely, when we ought to fight for the things we know to be good, and the opposition of willful men to any action that meets hard moral requirements is to be expected" (415; see also 243). Frequently, taking a moral stand may involve a risk (see pps. 406-07). Hence, it would be simply false to say that here we have a theory which rules out the possibility of crucial, dramatic, existentialist crisis decisions. There may well be occasions in every human life for some such challenges to arise, when we shall be brought up against the hard fact that "there are moral limits to any rationally accepted agreement. When these limits have been reached, we must simply take a stand, however potent be the powers that disagree, and defend the right as we see it" (243). Some challenges may come from the outside or from some of our own psychic sources, and the latter situations may often be more difficult to deal with.
than the former. Nevertheless, in each case our response will "lose the name of action" if it is not preceded by a serious effort to find and choose a course which we can support by reasons.

Considerations that have bearing on the applicability of rules to concrete contexts will include all relevant information as well. It will be up to the agent to initiate inquiries which would help lessen the danger of overlooking some facts which do make a difference in the potential outcome of the deliberation. Among the virtues worth cultivating in the search for rational grounds of action should be included sensitivity to facts and concern for knowledge broad enough to do justice to the actual complexities of the case under examination. Another and related matter of potential concern to a person engaged in normative quest is a proper estimate of attitudes which set the stage for deliberation and discourse. Here the need for discrimination is no less complex. For it is important to know not only what attitudes—negative and positive—provide the dynamics for a practical investigation, but also to gauge the normative status of the attitudes brought into play. Are they entitled to the status which is claimed for them? Are they the sorts of attitudes that can also function as reasons? To ask and to answer questions like these will often be a mark of normative leadership, of the ability to initiate inquiries without which practical conclusions cannot be rationally drawn. We see thus in how many different guises the need for judgment enters the practice of justification.

This feature of involvement, of being actively engaged in a task of finding a justifiable solution, characterizes all moral problems. The use of normative language presupposes an appreciation of the need to balance and, if possible, to reconcile relevant moral claims. A practical agent is one who is willing to take responsibility for arriving at a decision. He must have a sound, reliable understanding of wants and attitudes that compete for attention, and he must see them in the light of the common good. This is why it is proper to refer to this form of life as exercise in practical reasoning. A moral problem calls for careful thought. It turns on determining a desirability or justifiability of some action, and this usually involves the question of jurisdiction of moral principles. In some circumstances a particular action might be a lie and would constitute a violation of the agreed-upon principle of truth telling—thus morally wrong. But in this instance, under these circumstances, truth telling might also have morally undesirable consequences. What should one do? Obviously the problem here is the applicability of the two valid moral principles, truth telling and promise keeping. They cannot
be instantiated together in the same action; one of them has to yield. This situation allows of an alternative description. We have a problem here because there is no clear-cut primacy of one principle over the other in these circumstances; there is no universal agreement in this moral community as to the jurisdiction of the two conflicting and competing principles. In other words, we have run up against the limits of agreement in moral judgments, and to that extent the agreement falls short of being complete, hence the problem. Seen from the direction of the principles themselves, the problem is that of determining their respective scope. Is this circumstance to be within the jurisdiction of one principle or of the other; should one tell the truth or keep a promise? What is wanted is not just a decision to place the circumstances within the compass of one of the principles, but a justifiable decision, that is, one in which the area of agreement in moral judgments would be extended to cover the problematic case in question. What is aimed at is a solution which would be universally acceptable to the members of the community, one in which the range of agreements in moral judgments would cover the problematic case as well.

This sort of solution—securing universal assent—is, of course, not always achievable in actuality. There are many difficult cases where the justification for allocating a clear-cut jurisdiction to one of the competing principles is not easily reached. In such cases there is likely to remain some hesitancy, some doubt, some moral regret. For they always entail a limitation, if not violation of an important principle, be it truth telling, promise keeping, or life saving. Here we should distinguish between private opinions and public justifiable judgments. A person may have his own view about the way in which conflicting moral principles are to be brought together and yet may not be prepared to make a public commitment to action, a commitment he would be willing to regard as binding to him, on equal terms with others. This is a crucial distinction. It recognizes the difference between beliefs which do not aspire to the level of correctness—in this case, as having practical validity for others as well—and those that do. As long as I do not feel that I may press my own thoughts and opinions as deserving assent from others, i.e., as long as I do not have a justification for regarding them as candidates for agreement in judgments, they are indeed my own private, personal conviction, on a par with a feeling that could be unique to me. But as soon as I am prepared to put forward my private opinions as deserving a publicly shareable status I am making a move intending to affect the form of life in which I am a par-
participant. This means that I no longer treat it as a matter of concern to me alone but to others as well. And when can I put forward such a claim? Only when I can justify it, when I can make a case for the desirability of affecting my community in this way.

I have a right to press my point of view only when I am entitled to treat my view of the matter as universally valid. Where my assurance about what is worth doing falls short of this condition I must be content with treating my opinions as purely personal. This is true about any area of experience where we can confidently appeal to common standards. If I believe I have made a scientific discovery, I will be expected to put it to commonly accepted testing procedures. If I am prepared to claim validity for my solution of a moral problem, I will have to make my case by reference to agreed-upon standards. When I am unable to support my claim by considerations to which universal validity can be ascribed, I must be content with expressing my private opinion without treating it as deserving assent by others. And the attitude appropriate for this situation is tolerance. On the other hand, I can count on having my personal view accepted only when the audience I am addressing is competent, i.e., accepts and understands the appropriate testing procedures. I cannot demonstrate my scientific discovery to people who do not know what the standards of scientific demonstration are, nor can I show that my moral conclusion is right if my hearers accept no principles in terms of which it could be justified.

This division of beliefs into those eligible to affect the public form of life and those which remain within the realm of the private and personal characterizes all human experience. But, it is not always sharp. In forming our opinions—in all arenas of activity—we constantly face the question whether a given judgment is worth propounding, that is, whether we can give it objective support—of course, in terms appropriate to its category. Sometimes we may feel that this point has been reached and we will be anxious to test this by putting it forward. Sometimes we will be inclined to think that a generally valid reason should be available for a conclusion we have reached and we will be anxious to get hold of such a reason. In many situations our attitude is that between tolerance and concern; we will be tolerant of the absence of assent to our opinion and yet will be concerned to bring about consent, by rational persuasion. In any case, however, there will be a need to find our way responsibly among considerations arising from our membership in a moral community.
The need for reflective initiative on the part of the agent is evident in other dimensions of normative discourse as well. We have already noted that while an appeal to moral reasons claims universal validity, the application of these reasons is usually limited to some actual moral community. Murphy illustrates this by drawing on the circumstances of the American Revolution. “The universality of reasons was to be applied within this community and as providing common grounds for concentrated action here” (349). This distinction between the universality and community considerations is of theoretical and normative importance, and it is not difficult to see why Murphy gives greater weight to the requirements of one’s moral community as opposed to those of universality. It is a simple fact that human beings, individually and collectively, frequently do not recognize the validity of some rules recognized by others. This fact, of course, says nothing about the validity of these rules, but it does indicate the limits of existing moral communities. It shows why the appeal to the common good and to the universality of a rule are not the same. A rule may be regarded as universally valid and yet not obligatory in some instances. What makes it not obligatory is precisely the absence of a moral bond (condition N2) between the two persons (or groups), both of whom, in abstract terms, may regard the rule as universally valid.

It should not be difficult to supply examples of this discrepancy between the claims of universality and of moral community. I may believe sincerely that relieving hunger is a universally valid moral principle, yet not be obliged to do anything to relieve the hunger of some starving children in India. As a morally sensitive person I may deplore this fact and even send a Care package, but should I fail to do this, no one, including the children in India, could rightly accuse me of failing to meet my moral obligations. A person who claims that the occurrence of starvation is a moral evil everywhere and anywhere is not a moral hypocrite when he fails to spend all of his resources on Care packages sent all over the world. It is not only that he may have other moral obligations more urgent than the alleged duty to send packages. The point is that it is not his obligation, hence not an obligation for him. (On this point the intuitionist moralists, such as Ross and Pritchard, were quite right, even though they chose to describe the situation in terms of an odd epistemology.) A human need may exist, although it may also be the case that no one actually is obligated to do anything about it. There is no obligation to feed a starving child, if no one knows that he is starving. Where an obligation exists, it should be possible to point
to some actual moral ties existing between the parties involved, e.g., those of parent and child, of two neighbors, of citizen and his local, state, or national community.

In actual life we often subscribe to the universality of a rule without recognizing our obligation to act on it universally, because our de facto moral community happens to be narrower than the territory which we believe, in all sincerity, the rule to cover. But there are circumstances under which we may be morally obligated to extend our moral community. It is not always a matter of supererogation. For instance, is it our duty to extend help to earthquake victims of another nation in a remote territory? It would not be difficult to see that some considerations would be relevant to a possible answer. Is it possible to help the victims? At what cost? This help is much more feasible technically in the age of big cargo planes than it was in the age of sailing ships. Secondly, are we rich enough to afford parting with what it takes to help the victims without causing severe hardships to those for whom we are responsible? If we can help, then we ought to do so, provided that we truly believe that to relieve hunger anywhere in the world is a morally desirable end. When we plead excuses, such as the distance of the victims, or hardships and sacrifices that helping them would entail, it is always possible to ask whether the excuses offered really excuse. This shows that even though the community consideration is more fundamental than that of universality, there can arise a legitimate dispute between their respective claims. Here the initiative of individual agents will be crucial.

In all cases the views of the people to whom the jurisdiction of a norm is to be extended would have to be considered as well. Do they wish to be included in that new, larger community? In the case of earthquake victims the answer appears obvious, although even here exceptions could be found—one may refuse help from those one regards as one's enemies. But there may be more difficult situations. Would the oppressed minority of an authoritarian country welcome outside help for the elimination of oppression? Even if they do regard it as oppression they might prefer other means of freeing themselves of it; they may hope, for instance, for a political change within their own country. And their wishes on that matter cannot and should not be ignored. This restriction on the practical applicability of moral reasons keeps us from becoming moralizing busybodies and from imposing our views on those with whom we are not engaged in a common search for solutions to mutual problems.
There may be many different morally viable ways of life, and the human search for a better one should proceed on a broad front.

In certain situations I may be obliged to act in a particular way as the result of a judgment, knowing perfectly well that the judgment is not shared by those whom my action will affect. All my efforts to establish at least a modicum of mutual understanding have failed. If I were to act, my action would entail a violation of my opponents' will. Am I justified in acting this way? It seems that my action would be justified only if some fundamental moral values were seriously threatened. I must take account of the possibility that, if I no longer address my opponents as moral agents capable of understanding the arguments I put forward, if, perhaps, I am prepared to treat them as physical obstacles, I may foolishly risk losing more than would be gained by attaining my objectives. In either case I would have to decide whether the game is worth the candle. In many situations it would not be wise to try to pursue my objectives by physical pressure because the potential gains would not exceed the potential losses for both sides.

Practical issues which often confront us turn on determining, on the one hand, the nature and the extent of our moral community, and on the other, the possibility of extending it, by mutual accommodation, so as to bring closer to one another the requirements both of community and of universality. This latter issue, it should be added, concerns not only individuals; it may also concern individuals in groups such as corporations, labor unions, states—in other words, any human organization. Most of our serious moral problems involve collective action, and, as our daily editorials clearly demonstrate, they too call for a heavy use of the language of justification. But even large collective bodies move only with the initiative of individuals, hence, in this area of action as well we need to stress the central role of the morally responsible agents.

On the whole Murphy appears to be right when he observes that considerations of community ordinarily outrank those of abstract universality. In many cases it is wiser not to make issue of moral diversity. But it may not always be clear whether it is right to acquiesce in a given moral diversity, or how one should balance the requirements of universality against the obligations to one's community. Only serious thinking on the part of agents involved may provide adequate answers. It is a fact of our modern world that the rapidly increasing contacts among diverse human communities make the tension between the community and universality aspects particularly prominent. The issue of moral diversity is often raised, and
sometimes with justification. More and more people make use of the increasing opportunity to compare local norms and values with those of our neighbors. The growing global interdependence of nations makes this comparison more than just academic, and it is likely that the tension between local moral communities and the requirements of universality will increase.

Here the services of responsible moral agents will be greatly needed. On this point we can learn much from Murphy, who insists that the task of moral reform cannot be accomplished by leaps into the irrational. "The reformer who knows what he is doing does not create ex nihilo or in a moral vacuum. He draws instead on those forces in the accepted moral world which are in this way capable of growth and of expansion" (406) Nevertheless, it is also true that such a reformer is engaged in a search for reasons which would lead to a discovery of a better moral order than the one presently existing. This is where we need the initiative and the good offices of all those who put their energies to the task of enlarging the area of mutual understanding and of reducing potential conflicts among the peoples of the world. Such work may not always be getting the attention it deserves, but if it were not for acts of restraint and of positive good will, the world would be in a much more precarious situation than it is today. Our hope for greater harmony among nations rests on those who are on the lookout for specific possibilities of making harmony prevail and who find themselves with opportunities for action at crucial junctions of potential practical understanding. The scope of moral community can grow toward universality only if there are men for whom this growth is a matter of concern and who are "acting not merely as partisans of one side or the other, whose case is to be defended at all cost, but as spokesmen for a goal which, by a right combination of competing interests, can be practically the good of all" (237).

The responsible role of the individual in the totality of the human moral endeavor emerges with full force when we consider the realities of our modern world. To be effective in this world one must appreciate and understand the forces behind all those rapid and fundamental changes which transform the face of our earth. The task of furthering moral understanding in that world is complex indeed. As Murphy sees it, it will require a new set of character traits.

Among the qualities of mind and character it calls for are constructive imagination in grasping possibilities of accommodation so far missed; tact and ingenuity in bringing diverse interests to a public meeting ground and
persuading them to speak common language; clearheaded firmness in holding to essentials that must not be compromised and good sense in surrendering what comparatively does not matter; courage to hold on to the right as thus determined against the clamor, not only of evil, but of opinionated and self-righteous men; and an enduring commitment to the maintenance of those processes of public order and fair dealing in which this right can be authentically discerned (369).

There is one general point of difference between the picture of the self as it emerges from Murphy’s theory and that made popular by existentialist philosophers. The latter seem to favor a rebel-type personality and to encourage a severance of a person’s ties to the accepted values and norms, be they local or general. The existentialist ideal personality is conceived along Nietzschean lines and advocates a transvaluation of all values. Man is urged to make himself out of his own nothingness, or out of God’s power. In the process of forming himself man is encouraged to take a negative, even hostile attitude toward traditional moral values. His attention is directed to the stagnant, uncreative, conformist, imitative, and repetitive modes of human existence, and he is expected to experience nausea or claustrophobia at the sight of this sick, sick, sick herd morality. Consequently, an existentialist will find the mood of rebellion justified and he may even experience a fascinating attraction in Gide’s portrayal of a crime without a motive. He will tend to admire “rebels without a cause”; they will seem to him heroes, simply because they dare to reject their world resolutely.

It is quite possible that persons who feel exhilarated by this impulse to terrorize the rational and to destroy the established will find Murphy’s theory not to their liking. They may see in it just another version of imprisoning a free individual in a network of various rules, goals, and standards, from which he is desperately trying to liberate himself. They may find in the theory just a subtle attempt to enmesh the individual in the sordid game of conventional claims and counterclaims, aiming to bring dull social harmony and bourgeois contentment. Such a reading of Murphy’s views would be sheer travesty. Nowhere is he suggesting that the task of practical reasoning is to defend the status quo. On the contrary, the whole theory proceeds from the assumption that the world as constituted is not satisfactory in many ways and that fundamental and radical changes are often morally desirable. But Murphy also assumes that a creature endowed with intelligence should be in a position to understand why a given change is desirable. Even Nietzsche, that contradictory thinker, did not afford as much support to a rebel as the latter sometimes supposes. For Nietzsche it
was not enough to break the old tablets; unless a man knows what he is for, he is still a slave.

When we look at the phenomena of actual discontent and struggle in contemporary world, we shall find that they are hardly ever conceived in the spirit of sheer rebellion but are usually grounded in intelligible moral norms. Men feed their spirit of opposition and reform on the sense of moral indignation; they fight for values and rights which, in their view, are unjustly being denied them. This is true about former colonial peoples struggling for political independence and decent living, of minorities all over the world who are resentful of unequal treatment, or of students, in Berkeley or in Berlin, who find paternalism of university authorities oppressive and insulting. Sartre’s well-known willingness to attack the torture practices by French paratroopers in Algeria or the cruelty of war in Vietnam would make no sense unless he were able to justify his attacks in the name of decency, humanity, and justice—old-fashioned moral values though they are.

Murphy is no champion of brave but mindless rebelliousness, and yet he sees the task of practical reason as a rather strenuous and demanding business, much more so than an abstract, existentialist account of desirable human action takes into consideration. He recognizes how difficult it is to find one’s way among the conflicting goals, claims, and counterclaims that converge in any serious practical problem. In a world that is daily growing more complex, that profoundly transforms the range of human possibilities through scientific and social research, that is rapidly becoming totally interdependent in the political and economic sphere, decisions are not likely to become easier than they were in the past. Therefore, any account of human action which would suggest that all that is required is resoluteness and authenticity smacks of escapist romanticism. This is not to say that one must always see one’s personal life and its possibilities in relation to the demands of the world. There are many situations in which one may rightly refuse to be drawn into a framework of action which would interfere with one’s personal aims and purposes. In a world that is increasingly clamoring for our attention it is morally desirable to fight also for the preservation of the values of privacy and independence. To that extent the existentialist revolt is understandable. But this too, when occasion arises, can be defended most effectively by falling back on the language of justification. As Murphy constantly reminds us, morality is but one among many realms of human experience, and it leaves room for endless creativity and pursuits of other kinds. But when
it is a matter of settling a disagreement about a serious practical problem we literally would not be ourselves if we failed to resort to responsible normative discourse.

In many situations the initiative and influence of individuals, in order to be truly effective, need to be exercised through institutionalized channels. People whose decisions significantly affect the lives of others are in a position to make these decisions by virtue of occupying certain key posts in the political, economic, and other social structures. Effectiveness of an individual is due to his command of resources which society, through a particular institution, puts at his disposal. This fact needs to be emphasized because, as we have seen, under the influence of some recent intellectual trends the functional, occupational, or professional side of human existence has increasingly been painted in negative terms. One's position within the framework of social institutions can be seen as essentially a burden, an inauthentic form of living, reducing the human being to a functionary. Some observers, e.g., Erich Fromm, have noted a tendency on the part of modern man to identify himself in terms of his position: I am a waiter, a banker, an engineer, or a civil servant. The suggestion was that this kind of self-identification tended to reduce a person in his own mind to the particular function he happens to be exercising. Whether and to what extent this is actually true would need to be empirically determined, but in this suggestion there is an implication that the exercise of institutionalized functions tends to enslave a person. Instead of furnishing him with more power and opportunity for self-expression, it channels his personal energies and resources into futile, anonymous, predestined behavior.

But consider the following. Some of our recent heroes could demonstrate their individual heroism only because they had the powers of cumulative, institutionalized modes of action at their disposal. Albert Schweitzer translated his reverence for life into a practical commitment by using the skills of medicine for the benefit of the African Blacks to whom, as White, he believed we owe a moral debt. Many other doctors have gained fame and the gratitude of people to whom they extended medical services. Dr. Tom Dooley's dedicated career has attracted more attention, but he is only one among many doctors, engineers, and educators who have put the techniques of their respective professions at the disposal of those who could benefit from it most, regardless of geographical location. Consider how much intricately organized, institutionalized effort underlies the fabulous feats of the astronauts. And there are, of
course, many examples of individual achievement and service which, without necessarily ranking as heroic, command great respect, but none of which would be possible without the logistical support of a body of knowledge institutionally derived and supported.

These illustrations indicate that assumption of a social role or being a part of an institution need not prevent a person from attaining individual fulfillment. The opposite appears to be the case. Decisions which really count, which redirect the course of events, are decisions of people who have been entrusted with the freedom and the power lodged in an institution. The fact is that politics, business, and various professions still attract the most vigorous, active, ambitious individuals, and that dynamic persons seek offices and positions which call for responsible exercise of individual judgment and initiative. Among the most admired and revered persons are those who prove their mettle in the rough and tumble of political action, economic adventure, and professional competition. One of the reasons for the universal admiration of John F. Kennedy was his choice of employing his personal talents in the difficult and challenging arena of national and international politics. As President of the United States, as an individual endowed with the trust of his people and the power of his office, J. F. Kennedy had found fulfillment as a person. In a short time he proved that his capacities were commensurate with the office that he actively and vigorously sought, knowing that he could not get greater fulfillment in any other mode of life. As the son of a millionaire, he could have chosen a mode of life that would open to him all the opportunities for enjoyment, but without the challenges and responsibilities of the most difficult office. This deliberate choice of a harder yet infinitely more significant human road helped to raise him so high in the estimate of countless people of the world, especially the young. The senselessness of his tragic death only underscored the soundness and the validity of his attitude to life.

Kennedy’s life and death are but one illustration of Aristotle’s unrefuted and unrefutable observation that social institutions and individual freedom are not enemies but natural allies. That man is a social animal is not only a biological and sociological truth, it is also a norm. It is a norm because, as we have seen, not only the scope but also the significance of individual decision is enhanced through institutionalized power. Instead of counting for less, decisions proceeding from an organized human source count for much more. This is true not only in the quantitative sense, namely, that the will and energy of the members of an institution enlarge the
powers of the individual representing them, it is also true in the qualitative sense, for the individual charged with making a decision has at his disposal all other human resources which the institution commands: the intelligence, skills, moral and spiritual energy of the members of the group. Hence, in a soundly working human organization the potential resources of people at centers of decision making are enhanced by the guidance, help, and support they can receive from their institution, be that institution a national cabinet, a team of economists, physicists, or engineers. This is why the choice of competent leadership is so vital to the healthy functioning of any human organization and constitutes an important area for the responsible exercise of human freedom.

One result of recognizing the far-reaching effectiveness of decisions proceeding from the background of institutionalized resources would be a greater sense of freedom and responsibility on the part of those who are called upon to make these decisions. Greater power entails greater responsibility, and therefore the judgment of persons entrusted with power is a decisive factor, often leading to momentous consequences. In a recent book, The Springtime of Freedom, William McCord says the following: “Despite over-whelming, freely given support from his people, Nkrumah chose to impose a dictatorial straightjacket on Ghana. History did not force his hand.”36 “In this impersonal age, when we tend to overlook the role of the individual, it is important to recognize again the significance of individual choice as a determinant of history.”37 (Ten years after the Suez War we begin to have eye-witness accounts which clearly show that the entire affair was due to wrong decisions and misguided initiative on the part of individuals in important positions. In a talk to the Second “Peace on Earth” Conference, in May, 1967, U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations, deplored the “selfishness, irresponsibility, and deceptive double-talk” of many political leaders.)

One big problem is how to blend personal initiative with institutionalized vehicles. Novalis believed that the Church of the Middle Ages blended the two successfully. The Communists are trying to engineer such a combination. But the tools of effective change and development were not available in the Middle Ages. And the Communists nowadays are having a hard time in keeping personal initiative and participation in their types of institutions spontaneous and satisfying, probably because they do not allow for enough individual contribution. Societies based on free enterprise must also fight the abuses and aberrations due to organizational power. One of the
remedies may be to call attention to its positive opportunities and responsibilities—as has happened in many professions. There is no reason, for instance, why business should not come under ethical codes which characterize the medical or university community. The profit aspect cannot be eliminated, but it can become an object of public knowledge and scrutiny. It is likely that entrepreneurs would not object to the publication of their profits if it were accompanied by a fair indication for what these profits are likely to be used. No one would begrudge an entrepreneur his affluence, provided he used his power sensibly and productively for the general good. Similarly, it is not inevitable that political organizations lapse into corruption. Scrutinized by the eye of public opinion and checked by appropriate internal control mechanisms, they can remain faithful to their professed reason for being: to enhance the well-being of the people they serve. Those who address the public speak out as moral agents, concerned about the discrepancy between acknowledged obligations and actual practices. Without their voices calling attention to avoidable failings, a society would be bereft of the only effective sources of regeneration and reconstruction. It would be a sad day for humanity if we should refrain from addressing one another and our institutions in moral language.
CHAPTER VI

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

A good theory will also be useful; it will provide clues to the solution of practical problems. One of the reasons why Murphy's theory deserves attention is that it can assist us in finding the focus, the center of gravity, of practical problems. The theory may help us see that some issues center around the lack of requisite information, that others turn on the appropriateness of attitudes, and that still others arise from a faulty understanding of the common good or from an inadequate grasp of the universal character of some practical ends. We shall understand some concrete contemporary issues better when we elicit their central aspects. To identify the focus of a given problem is of course but a beginning; other conditions of normative significance need to be examined before an adequate solution can emerge. But if we are to make a good start we should attempt to identify the troublesome factors which obstruct a rational management of our practical concerns.

In the preceding chapter we have stressed the importance of responsible moral selfhood. An examination of some actual problems will show that this emphasis is indeed sound. If the initiative of practical agents is prerequisite to any improvement in the quality of human life, then in identifying and articulating a desirable change it is also necessary to identify agents who have an obligation to bring this change about. There may be some truth in the existentialist dictum that everyone is responsible for everyone else; nevertheless, this esoteric and farfetched remark provides no guidance to action. When we are prepared to claim that something ought to be done, we should be in a position to indicate, at least in some general way, who ought to do it. The "ought" requires an agent; without such specification the "ought" hangs in the air. This requirement is not at all surprising if we keep in mind that the aim of a practical inquiry is to determine what is to be done. To say that something needs to be done, without indicating in some way who should be charged with doing it, is to stop short of uttering a practical judgment—if a practical judgment calls, as we tried to show,
for a specification of the agency to whom it is addressed. This is not
to say that we may not utter general statements purporting to say
what is desirable, e.g., peace, love, or friendship. The point is that
such statements of general desiderata fall short of being practical
judgments. They do not charge anyone in particular with any obli-
gation to do anything. In examining actual moral problems we
should not be satisfied with stating mere desiderata but also should
try to identify, whenever possible, the persons on whose action the
outcome of these problems depends.

The task of agent identification is, of course, not independent of
locating the focus of a given problem. Obligations for potential
agents will vary depending on the nature of problems. Conversely,
the character of the problems will help to pinpoint those persons
whose obligation it is to contribute suitably to their solution. The
issues discussed below point up a connection which Murphy empha-
-sized from a theoretical point of view: there is a logical connection
between moral selfhood and moral community. This means that the
notion of responsibility also has a double reference. It points in two
directions: 1) to those toward whom the responsibility exists, and
2) to those who, in virtue of their special position, can morally be
expected to initiate appropriate action.

1. Factual Ignorance

One of the key obstacles to practical understanding is a false,
faulty, or inadequate conception of relevant facts. In some areas
this is obvious. As long as an interpretation of physical illness is
based on ignorance of the real causes of diseases—such as bacteria,
viruses, sanitary conditions, or nutritional deficiencies—one can
expect that the practices directed toward prevention or curing of
diseases will be inefficacious. Prescriptions and remedies recom-
manded will be based on superstitious and mythical accounts of
what is actually happening. The way to sounder medical practices
is through dissemination of facts concerning the causes of good or
ill health. This has been abundantly proved where modern medicine
has replaced primitive traditional practices.

Another illustration of how distortion of factual accounts leads
to morally harmful practices is found in recent attempts to justify
claims of racial superiority by false anthropological theories. Many
decent human beings were misled into deeming themselves superior
to all "non-Aryan" races by empirically false accounts of racial dif-
ferences. The still existing racial tensions in the world are also
mainly due to the distorted representation of characteristics, capac-
ilities, and tendencies of different races. These tensions will not disappear unless and until people realize that there is no factual foundation for their beliefs. Unfortunately, discrimination based on the misconception of inherent differences, be they of racial, religious, national, or caste origin, is still prevalent in many parts of the world and results in unfair treatment of countless human beings. Civil rights laws, such as those recently passed in the United States, are likely to do much toward the solution of the racial problem, but the law, by itself, will not solve it completely. It will take patience, accommodation, and compromise on the part of members of both races whenever they face the possibility of disagreement and conflict before the issue completely dies out. It would be unduly pessimistic to dismiss the resources of potentially available good will, but this source of social harmony will become effective only after the unfounded beliefs are replaced by those which correspond to actual facts.

There is also ignorance about the factual possibilities of economic resources: soil, minerals, production techniques, working methods, and management procedures. What is generally referred to as a need for modernization and rationalization of production is essentially a need for spreading the right kind of information about deriving maximum benefits from one's natural environment. The need for it is both general and specific. In broadest terms, it is the need for increased literacy and general education. In specific detail, it calls for sounder methods in agriculture, such as seeds and fertilizer, for manufacture of fundamental goods, such as housing and clothing, and for basic services, such as medicine and transportation. Speaking most generally, we are confronting here the vast territory of human minds in need of being filled with true, useful knowledge about various possibilities of the good life. Too many of these minds at present are either cluttered up with superstitious, mythical, inefficacious, and frustrating beliefs, or operate with information that is much too meager to assure practical success.

There is also a type of ignorance of facts that is deliberately induced by those who control information for their own special ends. This practice, wherever it exists, is at odds with one of the most fundamental requirements of rational action, for if our facts are wrong, our practical decisions are not likely to be right either. So the worry about a possible "management of news" will always be with us, and the fight for free access to correct information will always be necessary. In democratically run societies the actual situation in this area is probably neither white nor black, and the
shades of grayness vary as well. Of course, it is always helpful to know who controls information and whether one could rightly suspect the presence of motives other than the desire to tell the facts. Knowledge of such motives will help the public interpret the news dispensed. The news is no more trustworthy than is its source.

Sometimes information may be known to be false by those who propagate it, yet it is disseminated in order to induce desired attitudes toward those about whom the information is purported to be. When the Communist government in China invariably tells the people that Western democracies are motivated by nothing but imperialist intentions and that there are no alternatives to war against them, they are fomenting feelings of enmity and hatred which can have disastrous consequences for all parties involved. Whenever the Western reporters present distorted accounts of what is happening in communist countries simply on general grounds of opposition to communism as a whole, they are not helping their readers to appraise the situation realistically. In short, politically motivated misinformation is unfair and frequently dangerous, and those who indulge in it run great risks. If as an excuse they invoke the dubious doctrine that the end justifies the means, they forget that a practice which disintegrates the people's capacity for factually correct and honest judgment is a moral offense, the consequences of which in the long run are bound to be undesirable. One does no service to men by violating their fundamental right to know the truth. "Great is information, and she shall prevail." When E. M. Forster used this phrase in *A Passage to India,* his intent was partly ironic. But this statement can also be understood in a straightforward normative way. Information should prevail because, sooner or later, misinformation is bound to frustrate our actions.

The preceding remarks have a bearing on an issue which looms large in contemporary discussion, namely, the population explosion. That there should be more human beings on earth is, in itself, not at all objectionable. Life is a positive good, and the more people who can enjoy it the better. The problem arises only when one considers whether under certain conditions of overpopulation life can be enjoyed. Here one must give due respect to facts. Many things point to the unlikelihood that it will be possible to maintain decent, and even minimum, living conditions for the rapidly increasing number of people—and this is the real cause for concern. Not only those who are alive now, but also those to be born, will be exposed to hardships and privations which will make the value of living questionable. An appraisal of this possibility must seriously
take into account all available facts and likelihoods; one cannot rely upon a naive trust in some unforeseen means of taking care of unlimited populations. To close one’s eyes to actual developments and what they portend for the future is to abdicate one’s responsibility. Our future is to some extent in our hands, for what we shall sow that we shall also reap.

The problem is how to reach effectively those persons who, willingly or unwittingly, keep contributing to the population explosion. They are the immediate source of the problem and must be persuaded to control births. The first and primary difficulty is, however, that in most instances these people are not aware of being a problem for the rest of the world. Looking at their situation in familiar traditional terms, they are convinced not only of their right but also of the desirability of having—or even duty to have—large families. Being dependent on support in old age by their children and seeing in their numerous offspring a large economic asset, they naturally tend to continue the pattern which was the only desirable pattern in the past.

And yet they must somehow be brought to see the other side of the story. This other side will not be easy to present because it has to do with indirect, more remote consequences of family planning. The difficulty of presenting this side is familiar to countries like India, which for years has been trying to encourage birth control. The method of persuasion mostly relied upon is to show the advantages of a small family. Undoubtedly this is a sound and perhaps effective approach. But it should be supplemented by spelling out the real causes for concern. These causes have to do, in India’s case, with the very effort of improving the lot of every Indian. The increase of productivity, absolutely necessary for initiating an economic “take-off” which eventually would set the country on the road toward self-sufficiency and relative growth, is presently nullified by the necessity of feeding new mouths, thus impeding all efforts to increase the income per capita. The result of this is economic stagnation; the country as a whole must suffer, must see its goals endlessly frustrated, simply because all the increases in resources are being spent on a rapidly multiplying number of hungry mouths.40 So the problem of population control is a problem for all Indians, and first of all for those who are charged with the efforts of getting the country on the move, of investing the available margin of surplus in enterprises that would raise the country’s standard of living. All of these efforts will be to no avail, unless the pressure to feed new waves of people subsides. In her first broadcast after having
been elected for the second time as India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi observed that they would have to control the growth of population before they were submerged by the sheer weight of numbers. It should be a matter of all concerned Indians, especially for those directly involved in political, economic, and educational matters, to present the issue with urgency and conviction; somehow they must reach those persons who are directly contributing to the uncontrolled growth of population. To the extent that other nations desire to see India succeed as a viable and a strong nation, a goal which is likely to contribute to the stability and well-being of the whole world, they too have an indirect duty to help India. Needless to say, this goes for any other country in a similar predicament.

2. Destructive Attitudes

Another side of practical problems on which attention needs to be focused is the presence of destructive attitudes—in various forms and guises. To deal with them it is not enough to present the facts. There is an analogy between attitudes and diseases in so far as the former, like the latter, are conditions or states of an organism. A disease needs to be treated; it cannot be cured by correcting the patient's grasp of the facts involved. True, when he understands the nature and the causes of his disease he may be able in the future to avoid it, but first he must be helped to cure the illness.

The most flagrant form of attitudes that cause moral concern is criminality. The notion of criminality connotes a deliberate, ingrained, and persistent antisocial attitude. A person may commit a crime without being a criminal, and the law has a special category for the crimes of passion, of temporary emotional imbalance. Crimes of that sort are not committed out of criminal attitude; this is one of the reasons why the law treats them differently. What rightly causes a deeper moral concern is the deliberate and persistent adoption of criminal stance: repeated murders, thefts, assaults, or acts of vandalism. The criminal no longer thinks that there is anything wrong with his attitude, and this compounds the seriousness of the problem. In order to function as a criminal he will somehow manage to justify to himself that his criminal ways, although condemned by society, are not really wrong for him. (The sophistical subtleties of this kind of rationalization have been tellingly exposed by Murphy; cf. p. 147 of his book.) The fact that the criminal attitude is frequently associated with psychological disorder or derangement provides some warrant for regarding it as literally an illness, and
indeed in many cases criminals are judged to be insane, hence not responsible for their crimes. But there is a large group of criminal actions which seem to proceed from something less than an outright organic or psychological disease—how are they to be classified and understood?

An attitude can be regarded as a practical disposition supported by some beliefs. These beliefs will of course include a factual reference, and on this score they will often rest on false or distorted information. When the falsity of these beliefs dawns on the agent, his attitude may undergo a change as well. But once the attitude becomes hardened, there will be a resistance to consider the facts objectively. This resistance is likely to be supported by some subjective psychological need, conditioned by the personal experience of the agent. People who grow up amidst privation and lack of concern for their needs on the part of their parents and their society are likely to develop a view that the world is essentially unfriendly, indifferent, cold, and even inimical. Their unfulfilled need for love, affection, and interest will continue to direct their attention to instances which support this conclusion. The corollary of this conclusion will be that an unfriendly world deserves unfriendly treatment, that striking back at the world is the “just” and “justifiable” thing to do. This explains the often belligerent and “moralistic” attitude of criminals to their society. They often feel that they are only taking back what is their due or are inflicting punishments that are deserved.

Because the beliefs which support attitudes are anchored in deep psychological needs, a mere verbal persuasion is not likely to change them. Somehow there must occur a shift in the agent’s conviction about the possibility of having his subjective needs satisfied. As long as he sees no likelihood of having these needs satisfied by nonaggressive, normal contacts with his society, he is not likely to abandon his belligerent, antisocial attitude. Only when he begins to experience satisfactions arising from the concern and interest of others is he likely to doubt the rightness of his negative philosophy of life. How to bring about these satisfactions is the central problem of combating antisocial attitudes. As Murphy insisted throughout his book, a person’s commitment to moral ends must be rooted in some of his wants, interests, and needs—morality is not a disembodied sort of affair. To be moral is not to be indifferently neutral; it is to be interested in one’s well-being—but on the right terms. These terms include the willingness to treat one’s own needs and wants on a par with those of others. The criminal hits out at his
society because he believes that his needs are ignored and slighted. To bring him back into the moral community is not to ask him to abandon his needs and wants but to show him that the members of his community are willing to treat his needs on a par with their own, on reciprocal terms.

Correction of antisocial attitudes is a work of reclamation, and reclamation is often more difficult than prevention. The medical profession tends to regard preventive medicine as more fundamental than the curative effort. One ounce of prevention... The same appears to be true about antisocial attitudes; it may be easier to prevent them than to cure them. As of now the preventive measures are not sufficiently explored and require further research. From time immemorial one of the means of preventing the spread of antisocial attitudes was punishment. It is frequently defended on utilitarian grounds as a deterrent of crime. No doubt it has this effect, but it is obviously not sufficient, as the growing rate of crime in many parts of the world indicates. Punishment is essentially a negative means, and positive ones are required. Among such efforts should be included those which help to change the conditions fostering antisocial attitudes. These conditions embrace the entire social framework of opportunities for the normal, healthy development of all members of the society. If we are to come to grips effectively with the basic problems of antisocial behavior, the community must show convincingly that it does care about the needs of the disaffected. This calls for a concentration on the foci of social discontent, be it due to ineffective education, inadequate employment opportunities, or unjust social practices stemming from racial or religious prejudices. To remedy these conditions is to dispel the suspicion that there are no decent and peaceful ways of bringing about a satisfaction of normal human needs and of legitimate expectations.41

One of the serious obstacles to the transformation of negative into positive attitudes is the belief on the part of the disenchanted that their discontents are ignored. This is true not only about the discontents of the economically or socially underprivileged, but also about special groups such as students, or the young generation in general. One of the main complaints during the recent student demonstrations was that professors were too busy with research to pay sufficient attention to their students, relegating main teaching duties to teaching assistants. Teen-agers frequently complain about the lack of any real concern about them on the part of their parents. (In this connection it may be thought provoking to ponder the claim of most Indians that the joint family, still prevalent in India,
offers a kind of continual concern of family members for one another, which makes revolt of the young against their elders much less likely.) The resulting sense of loneliness and alienation may harden into an attitude which leads to a serious moral rift between generations. It may contribute, for instance, to the emergence of a bitter slogan such as: Don’t trust anyone over thirty.

A similar attitude of distrust has equally sad results in the realm of politics. It is demoralizing to see persons in positions of authority, who normally ought to be looked up to as positive examples, indulge in dubious practices. The phenomenon of corruption among officeholders is causing much concern these days in many lands. The term “corruption” is here appropriate since it indicates a betrayal of trust. When an officeholder gets into the habit of perverting, for purely personal gain, the power entrusted to him for the exercise of publicly beneficial functions, he strikes at the very roots of social stability. When we consider that trustworthy, reliable social organization is a prerequisite of well-being in the increasingly complex societies, this sort of behavior appears alarming indeed. Perhaps a rich society, such as that of the United States, may afford more official dishonesty and corruption than can poorer nations such as India, but in either case the very foundation of the social order is threatened. Someone has observed that corruption is like water: it flows from top to bottom. When people lose faith in the integrity of their superiors they are more likely to give in to their own temptation of illicit gain. \(^{42}\) Gradually the whole framework of public dealing will be encumbered and frustrated by the expectation of bribes and “fringe benefits,” sapping not only physical but also moral energies of the nation. The great danger is that the modus vivendi of bribery and corruption will become a pervasive, “normal” attitude, “justified” by the belief that “everyone does it.” For then a drastic renewal may be required to restore public transactions to the realm of honesty and reliability, without which no society can avoid chaos and injustice.

Much thought is being given nowadays to the blight of corruption and to the possible ways of combating it. Since what is at stake is a healthy, efficient operation of public institutions, one possible remedy would be to introduce into the framework of these institutions a built-in watchdog, with appropriate powers, charged with ferreting out and bringing up for legal action actual malpractices. Some countries, particularly the Scandinavian, have successfully experimented with a special post of this nature, e.g., the Justitieom-
budsman in Sweden, and many others proposed the introduction of this office into their political systems.43

Practical organizational measures are more likely to succeed when they are backed by vigorous moral leadership from the top. Unless the political leaders repeatedly demonstrate their determination to combat all signs of socially harmful behavior, and do so by personal example, by exhortation, and by proposing effective practical measures, the country will lack the necessary moral support for maintaining the policy of honesty and public responsibility. Many concerned Indians, in spite of their admiration for Nehru, attribute the increase of corruption in India to his failure to do anything about serious malpractices which had been brought to his attention. According to the critics, Nehru’s failure to act on this problem has encouraged further growth of antipublic behavior, where it now, according to many observers, has reached alarming proportions.

The body politic will not be able to prevent the spirit of cynicism and disillusionment from proliferating as long as there are grounds for suspecting the integrity of the elected guardians of public welfare. When the U. S. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell was charged with illicit use of public funds, his supporters’ strategy was to claim that the types of transgressions attributed to him are normal practices of every congressmen. It seems that in many people’s minds this is quite a normal situation; they feel that persons holding public office are entitled to these special “fringe benefits.”44 Only when these fringe benefits reach incredible proportions does the public seem to get alarmed. What is to be kept in mind, however, is that once an official allows himself to use the public trust (secretly, of course) for personal gain at the expense of the public, his attitude toward his office and the public is not what he officially professes. He is forced to speak two languages—that of public and that of private morality, the former employed in official pronouncements, and the latter reserved for secret deals with like-minded exploiters of public trust. No society can afford to be governed by people with this attitude toward their office; in the long run it is likely to infect the entire body politic and to make it incapable of performing its tasks. If a society is to remain morally healthy, it will have to guard against the emergence and entrenchment of such an attitude among its public officials.

Once more, prevention may be easier than rehabilitation, in this realm of practical action as well. Every society should have at its disposal proper means of ridding itself of public servants who have betrayed the public trust. Perhaps the most effective means to that
end are regular elections and free press. As long as these means exist, society will have repeated opportunity to scrutinize the attitudes of those in whom it is to deposit its power. Appropriate election procedures can reveal the credentials and the capacities of candidates for office, and a free press can provide access to information of interest to the public. The electorate needs to know how the elected officials feel about their tasks if it is to be in a position to take necessary steps toward a renewal and regeneration of its leadership.

One issue dominates much of our thinking about the future: we sense all too painfully that we live under a constant threat of nuclear extermination. Should nuclear arms be used in any future conflict, we know that the destruction wrought would be of catastrophic dimensions, verging on the brink of complete extermination of human life on earth. Who is directly in control of the power to use nuclear weapons? It is too late to raise the question of who is responsible for the existence of atomic weapons. One could perhaps, for the sake of historical interest, speculate about the moral role of the scientists and technicians who have actually produced atomic weapons. One might be concerned here with allocating guilt or blame, but this by now is largely of academic interest. The issue is still practical for those who are engaged, directly and indirectly, in producing larger, more destructive weapons, that is, for those who actually build them or produce scientific knowledge necessary for further perfection of nuclear weaponry. The fact is, however, that nuclear bombs exist, and they exist in sufficient amounts to endanger the life of every single human being on earth.

Obviously, this terrible responsibility is in the hands of political and military leaders of nations that have acquired stockpiles of atomic weapons. Speaking more precisely, this incredible moral burden rests on the heads of governments of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France, and China—and, of course, on their immediate advisers and subordinates. The personal responsibility of these people is undeniably affected by the fact that they act as representatives of their peoples and in their actions are bound to think of themselves as carrying out the wishes and desires of the masses whom they serve. No doubt they will feel, and rightly so, that they are obligated to serve the best interest of the groups they represent and lead. This may contribute toward making them feel justified in going in some instances to the very brink of nuclear war, in order to pressure the opponents into accepting their terms of coexistence. All this no doubt makes the moral responsibility of
political leaders more ambiguous, but it cannot provide an excuse for unleashing nuclear war. There are hopeful signs that this is becoming increasingly clear to the leaders themselves. So far they have restrained themselves from putting nuclear weapons to use, realizing that this move is too close to self-destruction. The risk of retaliation is so great that no one can count on achieving the desired objectives without risking not only the failure of these objectives but also one's very own survival. Hence the healthy instinct for self-preservation has served as a curb on political ambitions and kept the adventuring spirit in check. This realization of "being in the same boat," of not daring to take dangerous risks, seems so clear to everyone that a move to employ nuclear weapons would indeed be the personal responsibility of desperate, morally sick persons, who thereby would reveal themselves as enemies of mankind, no matter what political objective they intended to bring about. No political objective can counterbalance the senseless destruction of life, because this destruction would cancel the objective itself. In other words, a decision to use nuclear weapons could only be the decision of a moral madman. It is only to be hoped that mankind will not be delivered into the hands of men who have become victims of this fateful destructive attitude.

There have been some encouraging signs that the agents who are charged with the responsibility of keeping atomic weapons do know the extent of their obligation. The efforts that brought about the limited test ban seem sincere enough to inspire some hope that sane attitudes may still prevail. But much more needs to be done to manifest the will of all human beings in the world to be safe from the arbitrary power in individual men who would manipulate the awesome Damoclean sword of nuclear fear in order to secure political advantages. No leader has a moral right to do so, and he needs to be constantly reminded of this by his constituency. Here lies primarily the responsibility of those who have some direct or indirect influence over political leadership. Anyone who can help produce a serious pressure of public opinion on men whose decisions will mold the course of political events has a moral obligation to do so. Of course, the influence of concerned citizenry is always limited. Primary responsibility is still in the hands of those who occupy positions of power, and they should refrain from disingenuous claims that the power is not really in their control. This kind of excuse found little hearing during the Nuremberg trials. Why should this be any different on a matter of survival of all mankind?

Some may think that there is a way of winning the nuclear race
by developing a defense system which would make one's side invulnerable to the enemy's attack while leaving intact one's own capacity for delivery of weapons. In fact, this seems to be the main concern of nuclear powers—to develop an effective antimissile missile. Should one power be successful in this enterprise, it could win its political objectives without having to go to war; a mere threat of exterminating the enemy with impunity would be sufficient. But it should be clear how enormous are the risks involved in this policy. Since this kind of race is conducted in absolute secrecy, there is never an absolute certainty that the enemy will be rendered completely helpless against the defense system. Even if he knows that he is weaker, he may still refuse, realistically or unrealistically, to knuckle under to a threat, and as a result nuclear bombs may fall on both sides. This kind of brinkmanship appears no less dangerous than the race for bigger and stronger aggressive weapons, and there are occasional signs that the political and military leaders are aware of this. Let us hope that this awareness will deepen and will lead to genuine practical steps—analogous to the nuclear test ban—to reduce the dangers of miscalculation.

3. The Quest for Common Good

In my theoretical discussion I have distinguished between the condition of universality (N1) and of community (N2). The former is primarily a logical requirement; it demands a consistency in applying practical judgments. If I make a certain evaluative judgment about some persons, then I am logically constrained to make the same judgment about other persons, other things being equal, and—what is even more important—I should accept this judgment when it is applied by others to me in similar circumstances. We needed to include the consideration of moral community because it ties down the purely logical requirement of universality to some actual social group; it calls attention to the presupposed agreement among the members of this group that the given norms are actually shared, or at least are expected to be recognized as binding. In this sense, the notion of community makes the abstract requirement of universality concrete; it draws boundaries within which some moral standards are actually regarded as valid.

We have seen, furthermore, that a moral community, like a moral self, is always in the nature of an ideal; it is never complete but requires further growth and development. To suppose that social problems can be solved once for all is to underestimate the variety, complexity, and the changing character of human needs which clamor for satisfaction and reconciliation. Even when there exists
agreement about the general ends of government, an agreement usually expressed in the acknowledgment of some basic "natural" or "inalienable" rights such as life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, the practical problem for a political and social community is to translate these general notions into more specific laws and regulations which would satisfy the existing needs and interests of all citizens. "The central purpose of laws and government in a free society is to make the world manageable, so that the individual human being may have the maximum amount of freedom to grow and develop. That's what my department is about, and that's what this nation is about." In these words John W. Gardner acknowledged the presence of a moral purpose in the function of government. He echoes here the views of John Locke, who claimed that morality is the foundation of laws and is not brought into existence by the formation of a body politic, as Thomas Hobbes had supposed. The debates which take place in the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches of government usually address themselves to determining the legitimate interests and claims of specific population sections or of special groups, and only seldom are they pushed to the most general level of constitutional rights. Nevertheless, when the farmers, for instance, or labor unions present their case, they treat the considerations they adduce as deserving a normative status, e.g., farmers should be subsidized if their income is not to fall greatly below the level of all other population groups, or labor should receive better wages when manufacturers enjoy higher profits. Every proposal for a new law or a new contract is backed up not only by some relevant facts but also by some normative considerations; in other words, it makes use of the language of justification.

The positive task of the government is to encourage those developments which would benefit the country as a whole. It has become increasingly evident that the coordination of the multiple tasks of production, distribution, and trade calls for an active role on the part of governments. Even in countries that have had a long tradition of free enterprise, the government is now playing an increasingly important role in regulating, controlling, and stimulating economic processes. They have come to realize that government control is compatible with keeping open all possible avenues for private initiative and that maximum economic benefits can be secured through adequate coordination of governmental control and stimulus with the productive initiative and energy of individual enterprise. There is a reciprocal relation between the private and the public interests. Each can reinforce and contribute to the other.
But at times they are bound to conflict, hence the constant need to keep a proper balance between them. This has become the practice of most Western democracies and is, with variations on the theme, the official philosophy of many newly emerged national states. Furthermore, recent developments in the Soviet Union and in most East European countries point to the conclusion that these countries too begin to see the soundness of this approach. Their problem, understandably, is to loosen bureaucratic governmental control over the economic process so as to encourage more local independence and initiative on the part of regional planners and even individual factory managers. What we seem to have, then, is a convergence of two contrasting economic philosophies, one stressing spontaneous growth, and the other systematic planned operations. That there exists this convergence is a testimony to the fact that men are able to learn from experience when they clearly keep in mind the goals of their enterprise. In this case the goal is to secure maximum economic benefits for a maximum number of people. One of the encouraging signs of our times is that this goal is being taken seriously and that the search for a common good is recognized as a moral obligation incumbent on those charged with mankind’s practical affairs.

The chief practical task is to reconcile and, when possible, to harmonize the frequently diverging and conflicting aims and interests of various groups. This task is complex and requires a coordination of processes and operations which, in a modern state, can be adequately gauged and evaluated only by an army of statesmen, economists, businessmen, and labor leaders. In this multiple effort by special groups to satisfy standing needs and to secure new benefits, the role of the state is to keep an eye on the way these activities affect the citizenry as a whole. The moral function of the state is essentially that of guardian of the common good. This function is both negative and positive. When the pursuit of some group interests threatens to be detrimental to national interest, it is desirable for the state to have some power of intervention. For instance, the government of a state may have the power to interfere when a strike or an increase in steel prices is likely to have damaging repercussions on the economic health of the country. In such cases the government should not merely exercise its power of sanctions; this use of power needs to be justified by reference to the common good in question. The task of the government is not only to prevent special interests from selfishly pursuing their own aims, but also to show that these special aims would undermine the com-
mon good which the group in question is also obligated to respect. To a great extent the task of the government is to inform and to educate. It may often be the case that a special interest group is simply unaware that in the long run its policies will be harmful to the society as a whole. It should not be surprising, therefore, that disputes on such issues are frequently couched in moral language.

The quest for common good is guided by the principle of justice: to make the available benefits equally accessible to all members of society. But the quest for justice need not stop at national boundaries; it may press toward true, global universality. There is something contingent about the limits of any actual moral community; it is capable of indefinite extension toward greater, ultimately universal, inclusiveness. Any actual moral community is in part circumscribed by its confinement to a geographical area, by a common history, and by the ways of life developed within these local historical circumstances. Should a society open itself to greater interaction with neighboring societies, should it become more sensitized to other ways of thinking and of doing things, its form of life would undergo a corresponding change. Thus we are told that the Greek classical culture emerged partly as a result of contacts with Mediterranean neighbors, that the Renaissance spirit in Europe followed the discoveries of new lands and continents and of ancient classical literature, and that modern Japan was transformed by consciously adopting Western science and technology. However the new modes of managing life or of understanding and explaining material and social phenomena come to the attention of a people, they are likely to affect the traditional beliefs and standards. This is even more true when, in addition to the interchange of the products of human invention, personal interaction is intensified as well. One of the results of such interaction may be an extension of the boundaries of one's moral community. Judgments that up to now were meant to apply only within a local group begin to be applied to those who are partly outside it. A most conspicuous development of this sort is found in the "melting pot" phenomenon in the United States, where people of varied ethnic and racial background have come to regard themselves as Americans while retaining many of their former customs, habits, and rules in family and community life.

The causes which bring groups of people into a more intensive interaction are varied. They may be mainly political, as in the case of a drive for unity among countries which have embraced identical or very similar political structures. The communist countries, be-
cause they share basic philosophical, political, and economic beliefs, tend to develop similar modes of living. The impetus toward unification may also be prompted by racial or religious considerations, as appears to be the case in Africa and Asia, and, in a more deliberately conscious way, among those seeking to achieve a unified Arab world. Military considerations with a limited objective of mutual self-defense have created the NATO Alliance and the Warsaw Pact. A mixture of economic and political considerations has helped to bring into existence the Organization of American States and the European Common Market. The Common Market is an especially interesting development of our times because it illustrates most dramatically how limited communities may grow in the direction of universality when they realize the disadvantages of isolation and the advantages of wider interaction and cooperation. The builders of the Common Market have realized that more inclusive economic structures are more efficient and more rational. They also see that economic cooperation requires a greater political unity, and they welcome it. This means a gradual disappearance of the narrow nationalism which has been the bane of Europe for many centuries.

In addition to these various organizational groupings which help to break down barriers among peoples there are also less formal and yet in some ways more radical phenomena of global integration. The easy, almost instantaneous accessibility of news and the rapid interchange of objects and people result in a virtual shrinking of our globe. We are affected by what happens in remote corners of the world—be it a new medical cure, a new piece of machinery, new style of painting or of music, new fashions or new fads. Teams of experts visit foreign countries to glean newest production and management techniques, to learn new ways of handling traffic or combating crime, of controlling floods or the weather. Because of rapid transportation, famines can be avoided and sudden disasters mitigated or alleviated.

These multifarious contacts among the people of the world carry in their wake the emergence of situations in which the language of justification receives new employment. It is important to stress the order in which these phenomena occur. First comes the actual contact, however caused; then, the presence of this contact calls for a way of defining and articulating the shared aims which are to govern practical relations. Interaction creates a need for moral dealing, or at least it provides the factual setting within which normative discourse may develop. If interaction continues, some
forms of mutual adjustment and accommodation are likely to emerge. Sometimes, of course, they do not emerge. But then it is unlikely that the interaction will continue. We need to call attention to this order of events in order not to congratulate ourselves unduly for an increase of moral sensitivity. It is not that we have become more moral than were our predecessors and have decided to enlarge our moral communities out of sheer good will. Rather, the situation is more likely as follows: we have found ourselves in situations which demand a recognition of some mutually binding norms.

Furthermore, the greater interchange of information, ideas, and practices contributes to the possibility that moral pressure will be exerted by those who experience their position as unfair, in comparison with what they see around them. The position of underprivileged is likely to attract attention. Nowadays it is expected that famines in remote corners of the earth be prevented and that victims of disasters anywhere be assisted. It is no longer possible to point to distance or lack of the means of transportation as an excuse. A nation refusing help in such circumstances would be an object of moral criticism. Again, this is not necessarily because men have become morally better; it may be simply that the presence of misfortune can now be vividly and instantaneously communicated, and that modern economy and technology make the storage and the transportation of life's necessities possible. As a result of all these developments the moral bond between distant peoples is becoming more concrete. This bond cannot remain one-sided, for the aided people do not usually expect the aid as a matter of course; the sense of reciprocal dependence contributes to a cementing of more formidable ties between the parties involved in a transaction. Whatever the origin of mutual transactions among peoples, sooner or later there is likely to emerge a code of reciprocal expectations and rules in which the use of normative language is inescapable.

In short, the burdens and problems facing the world as a whole can no longer be hidden under a bushel. The United States has been supplying grain to India for years, but now that its grain reserves are dwindling and the balance of payments begins to be seriously affected, the U. S. government is raising the question whether there should not be a more inclusive international commitment to help India solve its food problems. The argument is not: “We are not as well off as before, therefore, India should not be helped,” but “India ought to be helped, but the burden should be distributed more fairly among all nations that can help.” In this
and in many other areas of international intercourse more and more obligations which in the past had been limited to particularistic arrangements among individual national communities begin to take on a truly universal, global scope. The movement is away from limited to all-inclusive moral communities, beginning, as seems natural, with a concern for basic necessities of life and safety. The continued, though regrettably enfeebled, operations of the United Nations also testify to the awareness on the part of participating nations that they cannot be indifferent to important developments in any part of the world.

Slowly but surely it begins to dawn on us that international cooperation is no longer a free option but a morally sanctioned necessity. For the first time in human history we need a truly universal ethic. The days are gone when the famines in India, China, or in Biafra could be ignored by the rest of the world. The young nations of Asia and Africa will insist on their right to develop their economic institutions so as to secure decent conditions for their people. On the other hand, the highly developed industrial countries continue to be dependent for raw materials and markets on the poorer nations. It is to their advantage as well to increase the productivity and the level of education among peoples with whom they are bound to increase their contacts in the future. In this respect a farsighted self-interest happens to coincide with a moral objective of mutual support, and the sooner this is realized, the better for all.

Adlai Stevenson's phrase, "the revolution of rising expectations," directs our attention to forces which make the contemporary world seethe with impatience. Only recently has there been an almost complete abandonment of colonialism, when the task of running a people's affairs was not in their own hands. This is a blatant form of injustice, and it was so experienced by most of the peoples under colonial rule. Now most of them have achieved independence. Political independence, however, does not necessarily mean social and economic well-being. On that score, many of the new nations do not regard their accounts with former colonial powers as settled. There still exists the old division into "haves" and "have-nots." The older, highly industrialized powers enjoy considerable economic advantages over the newly emerged national states. This may generate a sense of injustice, and in many cases it does. The moral issue is this: the colonial powers have used the resources of former colonies in order to get their own economies going, and in this sense are indebted to the descendants of the exploited peoples. This argument
is used not only by the "have-nots"; many Western scholars acknowledge the legitimacy of the claim.

If the advanced nations retreat from their obligations, it will be the greatest, and maybe the last, moral abdication in history. Surely, we can have the vision to recognize the debt which rich nations owe to the poor. . . . For centuries, Europe bled its colonies of resources and capital, in financing its own development. Some American companies have taken 500 per cent profits annually, leaving in their wake ruined land which once fed people adequately. And the ironic fact that underdeveloped countries subsidized Europe, Russia, and America in World War II should give rise to feelings of atonement even among hardened isolationists. The most elementary concept of justice dictates that the rich should pay back in some meager measure the gold they have extracted from the poor, and, what is ironic, this could be done without any suffering at all. Atomic reality and simple ethics require that advanced areas must become their "brother's keeper."46

These are the words not of a moralizing journalist but of an honest sociologist who has studied the situation objectively and has seen its moral implications. Another side of this moral obligation is exposed by a well-known economist. "Yet there is no human failure greater than to launch a profoundly important endeavor and then leave it half done. This is what the West has done with its colonial system. It shook all the societies in the world loose from their old moorings. But it seems indifferent whether or not they reach safe harbour in the end."47

Yet the issue is not that clear cut. The claim falls back on the extended version of the principle of collective responsibility. The sons of the colonists are expected to redress the grievances attributed to their deceased fathers. It is questionable whether present generations should be held responsible for the errors of past generations. Nevertheless, they may rightly feel a sense of responsibility since they still enjoy the fruits of their fathers' often questionable exploits. This context of guilt and responsibility is complex and is frequently expressed in ambivalent feelings that representatives of "haves" frequently voice in their public pronouncements. Nor are the present "have-nots" sure that they have a positive right to redress of injustices committed against their peoples in the past. Consequently, they are much more comfortable in preferring "trade to aid."

Whatever the estimate of the appropriate moral claims and counterclaims, one point is clear: there is a conviction abroad that the continued economic handicap from which underdeveloped nations are suffering is unfair, and that it should be a matter of concern to all, especially those more affluent, that hunger, disease, privation,
and lack of opportunity for decent living disappear from the face of the earth. The encouraging sign of our times is that this conclusion seems generally subscribed to by all peoples—poor or rich. More prosperous nations are not washing their hands of the whole business—considerable amounts of aid have flown from the richer nations to the poorer ones during the last few decades. But it seems that the whole notion of economic aid is undergoing a significant change in connotation. It is losing its one-sided, patronizing flavor. Aid is now regarded as a natural economic method of bringing about a state of affairs the desirability of which no one questions—an improvement in the conditions of those who desperately need to be lifted from the depths of poverty. Even in the United States the condition of poverty is now being recognized not as an accidental misfortune due to personal moral defects, to be merely commiserated with or deplored, but as a state of affairs that simply cannot be tolerated; a war on poverty need not be justified, because poverty so obviously does not fit into the American context—it is inexcusable.

Who are the agents whose initiative counts most of all on this front of eliminating inequality and injustice? They are those who control the opportunities for mutual aid: ambassadors, legislators, governmental economists, bankers, industrialists, and businessmen. They have of course a right to expect that the recipients of aid are motivated by a desire to introduce worthwhile improvement. Legitimate complaints arise when the money, instead of being spent on real needs, is squandered on personal advancement or luxuries. But there are ways of checking whether the game, the value of which no one questions, is correctly played by all parties concerned. Whenever a suspicion is justified that it is not being played honestly, a trust in the efficacy of this new, healthy ethos of mutual help is undermined. We hear many stories of such a violation of trust, but so far they do not seem to have destroyed the conviction that the real needs of people anywhere in the world cannot be ignored. Contributions to the maintenance and growth of this ethos may and should come from the entire body of citizens embarked on the road to justice and equality, through the means available to them—public and personal communication and example. But the front line of the task is primarily under control of those who initiate and guide actual political, economic, and business transactions. The future of global justice is in their hands.

All societies face the problem of adjusting the conflicting interests to one another and all of them to the common good. This is
especially true of those countries that are just beginning to set up new political, economic, and social structures. Leaders of these countries need to be clear about the nature and the difficulties of this task. Inspired by recently gained political independence, they eagerly project a vision into the future that will bring their people all the good things of life, without leading them into the blind alleys and frustrations experienced by others in the course of history. When these aspirations reach further than sober realism can warrant, bitterness and disillusionment result. Nevertheless, one cannot help being impressed by these new efforts to build good societies on earth, in spite of the fact that young nations are often innocent of the difficulties of the task. The important thing is that there is this desire to devise frameworks which are able to secure the well-being of all citizens and to produce a genuine moral community. This spirit deserves respect and encouragement.

It is a tragic handicap of our times that when the conditions for gradual emergence of a global community appear propitious, the world is split along ideological lines into two camps. How much better off the world would be if every power would refrain from using or encouraging forcible ways of maintaining and enlarging their respective "sphere of influence" and instead would direct its resources to the economic development of new countries while allowing them to unobstructedly seek their own political modus vivendi. Such an attitude would not only prevent a continued waste of human lives and desperately needed material goods but would also contribute to the growth of a universal moral community on earth. The circumstances in which we live today make the steps in this direction not just a visionary desideratum but a straightforward moral responsibility to the present and future generations.

It is important to note that the division into communist and non-communist states also has its roots in the quest for justice, namely, in the two different conceptions of it. The communist movement came into being in order, as its proponents insist, to end the exploitation of man by man, or class by class, and to introduce a social order in which everyone's needs would be recognized and satisfied. The supporters of democratic political systems do not quarrel with this goal—for them too the welfare of the whole society is the end of government. But they disagree with the means to be used to that end. For the means employed in communist states tend to violate the professed goal. All citizens are subordinated to the views and the will of a small group of people wielding political power. The state not only dictates and regulates all modes of economic produc-
tion and distribution, it also lays down what every citizen has to think about all questions: political, economic, social, aesthetic, religious, or philosophical. Any sign of deviation or "revisionism" is ruthlessly suppressed.

The opponents of communism find this price too high. In allegedly improving a people's lot (and there is no denial that such improvement often occurs), the system not only introduces a new social hierarchy but also denies the fundamental freedoms of movement, thought, and speech. This path appears senseless and inhuman, especially if it is true that social and economic injustices can be abolished by means which do not subordinate the whole people to the group-think of one political party. And it is true, claim the defenders of free societies. Social welfare and social justice have been secured by socialist means in some Scandinavian countries, and is being secured in most Western democracies, by blending free organic economic growth with a strong dose of effective governmental control. This is not to say that liberal methods have succeeded in eliminating all injustice or that there is no further need of extending controls over exploitation or unfair practices. But there is no denying that the level of general well-being for most citizens has been spectacularly raised in Western democracies, and what is just as important, this has been done without abolishing the basic human freedoms and individual initiative. Indeed, it is by keeping the avenues of personal initiative free that much economic progress has been made. Seeing that the goals of social justice are achievable by liberal means, the peoples of free democracies are not willing to accept the dictatorship of a party which demands rigid obedience in all matters to a line laid down by political masters. This—the method—is what divides the world today into two camps, not the disagreement on the principle that everyone's needs ought to be satisfied.

In facing the present-day ideological split in the world, we must keep in mind that the motivation behind the communist drive for power usually includes a genuine concern for justice and for improving the lot of the downtrodden. It is the presence of this concern that should provide a bridge for understanding and reconciliation between East and West. One aspect of the conflict turns on the issue we have encountered on the theoretical plane, namely, how to reconcile the claims of universality with those of community. Because communists believe that their method deserves universal application they wish to enlarge the scope of the communist community. But some of them, by trying to impose their wishes on
others by force, are arousing a determined opposition in those who do not agree that the desired goals can be best reached within a communist political and social framework. Hence the struggle. Like all serious human conflicts, this struggle may often harden into a bitter, relentless opposition in which the means used tend to destroy all traces of good will and mutual respect. When the struggle reaches the proportions of an all-out war—as is now the case in Vietnam—the prospects of accommodation and reconciliation appear remote.

What should not be lost sight of, by either side, is that behind this struggle there are moral considerations on which both sides must agree, namely, that in the rapidly shrinking world legitimate claims on decent living, in any part of the world, cannot be ignored and that those in a position to help cannot morally refuse to respond to these claims. Those who oppose the violent means of imposing communist regimes on unwilling populations must also show a genuine willingness to respond to the needs of that population. This positive willingness and the eventual possibility of a response to this willingness on the part of the communists constitute a ground on which a future understanding can be reached. While standing firm against aggression and subversion, the free world should not limit itself to mere negative opposition; it must show good will, both in word and in action. It must continue to explain why it is opposed to violent measures, what values it is defending, and for whose sake. It must put the language of justification to its intended use, namely, to show that some values constitute a common good, good for communists and noncommunists alike. Among these values will be, of course, a rejection of violence as a means of securing desired goals—and this explains the determination to oppose such violence. But, in addition, these values will also include a respect for the convinced communists' desire to see injustices eliminated. This desire, in so far as it stems from a justifiable moral conviction, constitutes a potential bridge of understanding between the opponents, and this is why the West should never cease to address the East, and to expect being addressed by it, in moral terms. On the other hand, the leaders of the communist movements should not see in the opposition to their aims a malevolent conspiracy of benighted men. If we were to abandon all moral respect for one another, we would treat each other as physical obstacles and act accordingly. This would be a black day for humanity, and we must do all we can to avoid it.

There is no going back. In the rapidly contracting world our rela-
tions to other human beings will become more concrete and more demanding, whether we like it or not. We must see to it that the practical ties and transactions which will come into being in the process of solving the problems of the world do include a moral dimension as well and that we preserve the conditions which enable us to address each other in moral language. Those who oppose one another today will have somehow to live together tomorrow. Therefore, those who make crucial decisions about the continuation of armed conflicts are morally obligated to replace violence by mutual accommodation and compromise—for the sake of all men, and especially those whose lives will be lost or maimed if the struggle continues. But the willingness to cooperate should not be limited to the negative task of leaving each other alone. The time has passed when the richer sections of mankind could ignore the misery of the poor majority or offer mere tokens of concern from the distant position of an aloof or condescending bystander. Unless the leaders of richer nations take strong initiative toward involving their countries in a conscientious long-term project of helping to equalize the widely disparate standards of living, the resentment of the poor and neglected will continue to keep the world in turmoil. The requirements of justice are sometimes harsh; nonetheless, by enlarging the scope of the common good, they also afford an opportunity for living up to what is best in us.
NOTES


2. This and all subsequent numbers after quotations refer to pages in Murphy's book.

3. Some paragraphs making up this chapter were first printed in my review of Murphy's book, which appeared in the first issue of *Man and World*, I, No 1 (February, 1968), 151-56. I wish to thank the editors of that journal for their permission to use these paragraphs.

4. "The connection between reasons and value is, in this use, a logically intrinsic connection" (67; see also p. 280).

5. Charles A. Bayliss, in his review of Murphy's book (*The Philosophical Review*, LXXVI, No. 4 [October, 1967], 511-15) finds his answer to the question "Who is to judge?" question-begging. Bayliss would like to see a statement of some criteria for judgment and knowledge in moral matters. To this one can reply that Murphy's entire book is an effort to show what is involved in acquiring moral competence and knowledge. He also points to the uselessness of appealing to "final" principle and "ultimate" values. Such an appeal, to be relevant and convincing, must presuppose the moral agents' ability to understand the facts of the case and to appreciate the normative cogency of recommended action.

6. In the review cited above Bayliss finds Murphy's account of the relation between value and obligation "crucially vague" (p. 513). Murphy, I believe, leaves the relation vague for the reasons just discussed. It is of interest to note what Bayliss (p. 513) would regard as a helpful move in the direction of removing the vagueness: "... there should be no objection to the statement that the best possible state of affairs is preferable to a state that is worse than that." Murphy's estimate of such moves in ethical theory is given in detail in his treatment of Utilitarianism (203 ff., 225 ff., 310-28), which we shall also discuss in the following chapter.

7. A list of works relevant to the discussions of this chapter is given in the Selected Bibliography at the end of this paper.

8. This, of course, should not be taken as disparagement of science. "The point of noting these varieties of scientific moralizing is by no means to disparage science—what should or could we do without it?—but to indicate that the remedial formulations of reforming scientists of the issues of social policy are colored by their personal and professional preferences and vocational commitments, and would make no practical sense without them. In this scientists do not differ from the rest of us" (262).

9. I take the "will-conditioned" in the text to be a misprint.

10. "What, then, is moral training? Before the use of justifying reasons can be taught, there must be such a use. The 'game' in which they have a normative cogency must be played. A society that offers effective training in such use must practice what it preaches, for it is in this practice that the preaching makes practical sense. And if the training is to be moral, this practice must be of a community in which a going concern for right action is an effective factor in the way of life in which the learner is called upon responsibly to share. It is in such
sharing that a child can learn what it is to have good reasons for what it does, and to do an action for such reasons" (192).


12. This is not to say that having appropriate feelings is not important. The point is that having some feelings is not enough. "... feelings are the raw material with which practical reason works and if we did not have them we should not be moral agents" (114).


16. A charge to this effect has also been made in a widely discussed BBC broadcast by G. E. M. Anscombe, "Does Oxford Philosophy Corrupt Youth?" subsequently printed in *The Listener*, LVII, No. 1455 (February 14, 1957), 266-71: "Oxford moral philosophy is perfectly in tune with the highest and best ideals of the country at large" (p. 267). "... the famous imputation of 'corrupting the youth' is undeserved. This philosophy is conceived in the spirit of the time and might be called the flattery of that spirit" (p. 271).

17. "Who Are 'We'?" p. 270.

18. I have argued a similar point in my article "Professor Ebbinghaus' Interpretation of the Categorical Imperative," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, V, No. 18 (January, 1955), 74-77.

19. "The selection of Utilitarianism as a target for this kind of criticism is not meant as an invidious attack upon this venerable doctrine. On the contrary, it is a moral philosophy worth examining because the Utilitarians have tried to be clear-headed about what they were doing and to apply their principle consistently to issues of practical importance. It is not at its worst but at its best that the appeal to 'final' good can most adequately be judged. And Utilitarianism, so far, has been, for our purposes, just about its best" (328).


26. Ibid., p. 128.


31. In her book *Existentialist Ethics* (London, 1967) Mary Warnock raises such questions about Heidegger's philosophy: “Heidegger tells us that there are two possible modes of existence, the ‘authentic’ and the ‘inauthentic.’ It is these terms which he claims, un-plausibly, are entirely without evaluative connotation; they are, he says, simply descriptive of two ways of living. But if so, then he should have found some better words to describe them. And in fact the whole tenor of his thought, in so far as it is intelligible at all, is to present the inauthentic as something from which one can be helped by philosophy to escape” (p. 13).

32. This point is discussed in greater detail in my article, “The Crisis of the Self,” *The Personalist*, XLVIII (1967), 129-43.

33. To show the philosophical significance of this fact was the main purpose of my book *The Freedom of Reason* (San Antonio, Texas, 1964).


35. “Chinese troops guarding a Soviet ship, detained at the Chinese port of Darien, went hungry rather than accept food from the Russian crew, the ship’s captain said today. . . . Captain Grigory Naumov told Pravda that Chinese soldiers aboard the ship were cut off from food supplies for two days because of a storm in the harbor. The ‘Zagorsk’ crew invited the Chinese to eat with them, but the soldiers refused and stayed hungry for two days” (*The Times of India*, January 6, 1967).


37. Ibid., p. 265.

38. Cf. especially pp. 12 and 62 of this paper.


40. An Indian newspaper publishes on its front page each day an estimate of the number of children born in India on the previous day. During 1967 the average daily increase was in excess of 38,000.

41. John W. Gardner, former Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, conceived of this task in the following way: “The idea of individual fulfillment within a framework of moral purpose must become our deepest concern, our national preoccupation, our passion, our obsession.” He also thought of his job as “a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems” (*Time*, January 20, 1967).

42. “The relationship between political leaders and the people is a reciprocal one. The standards of the people influence those of public officials and it is hard to develop honest officials in a corrupt society. But it is equally true that high standards on the part of the officials and public leaders raise the level of the whole community” (Paul H. Douglas, *Ethics in Government*, The Godkin Lectures at Harvard University [Cambridge, Mass., 1952], pp. 69-70).

43. See, for example, Walter Gellhorn, *Ombudsmen and Others* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966).

44. According to a political scientist there is another side to the issue of corruption. “It should be noted however that not all corruption is dysfunctional to the goals of economic development nor does corruption necessarily destroy confidence in government. A certain amount of corruption simply involves mak-
ing payment to local administrators to do those things which they ought to be doing and which the rules permit them to do, but which they would ordinarily do through 'channels' and after extraordinary delays. . . . One might view some of this corruption as simply a way that citizens have found of building rewards into the administrative structure in the absence of any other appropriate incentive systems” (Myron Weiner, *Political Change in South Asia* [Calcutta, 1963], p. 122).

45. Gardner, loc. cit.
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