

Projects & Values

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PREFACE

This book puts forward a foundation for our values. The foundation goes beyond what can be derived from the facts of nature, without being supernatural. It is also a foundation that is in tune with human nature, and is therefore easy to adopt. As a result, there is no reason to regard talk in terms of values as somehow inferior to talk in terms of scientific and other facts.

Our values need a foundation if we are to transcend factual accounts of the origins of our values. Evolutionary theory and common-sense observation of what makes societies work can amply explain the fact that we have certain values. But that sort of account does not give us adequate reason to honour our values, once we ask about their status. It is illegitimate to slide from “this is what works” to “this is what we should do”, without an additional premise to the effect that we should do what works.

The foundation which this book puts forward is a version of that additional premise. The foundation is that the serious pursuit of our chosen projects is a central good. The serious pursuit of our projects means their pursuit with a reasonable prospect of their fulfilment. That requires us to do what works. And there is the vital premise in the argument from what works to what we should do.

The central good is spelt out and explored in the last chapter, but it is the end in view throughout the book. As the book works towards this end, many aspects of our lives fall into place. Individualistic values are supported. The value of knowledge, the pursuit of beauty and the concept of the person are explored. A framework for our culturally specific concepts is proposed. The framework recognises degrees of cultural specificity. Moral values find their place within the framework alongside aesthetic and other values, rather than being in a class of their own.

Books may be written in solitude, but ideas flourish in company. My greatest debt is to the many people who have created a tremendously lively philosophical scene in London over the past decade, both inside and outside a university context. Several worthy sparring partners have become firm friends. I am also very grateful

to the staff of the British Library for running one of the world's greatest scholarly resources with outstanding efficiency, and to my publisher for editing and for creating the finished book.

A NOTE ON REFERENCES

References in the text mention both author and title. Full details can be found in the bibliography at the end of the book. Where a book is available in several editions and the reader may well have access to a different edition from the one that I cite, I give chapter, section or paragraph references as well as page numbers. References to Plato and to Aristotle include Stephanus and Bekker numbers respectively. These numbers are printed in most editions. References to Kant include volume and page numbers in the Prussian Academy edition, in the form Ak. 1:234, because several editions show these numbers.

At various points I mention works that survey areas of philosophy. These references are suggestions to help readers who wish to explore topics that I only touch upon. Other books, or the results of Internet searches on the relevant philosophical terms, can be just as good.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Human values

This book offers a firm foundation for human values. The values in question are values of personal morality such as honesty, values associated with our way of life such as friendship and aesthetic values such as beauty.

Factual knowledge does not need a special foundation. It is well-supported by its success. Science is the leading example. The astonishing success of the natural sciences of physics, chemistry and biology in helping us to understand and manipulate the world is proof enough that what they tell us is mostly right, and very often useful. The social sciences and the humanities can also do pretty well. Economics tells us how to run markets efficiently, and historical explanations of events really do make sense of our past. But values have always seemed to lack that validation. If we say that something matters, that appears to be quite different from saying what it is like. Our values need a special type of foundation, an underlying ethic. But which ethic? Can we find an ethic so natural that acceptance of it is not a rash leap in the dark, but an obviously sensible step? This book offers an ethic that fits the bill, and shows in detail how the ethic does its job. I will show how value-based talk can lead us to conclusions that not merely have, but rightly have, just as much force for us as the conclusions of science.

In the face of the contrast between the methods and progress of science and other factual disciplines, and the less glowing record of ethics, a tradition of non-cognitivism has flourished in ethics. Many philosophers have argued that ethical claims are neither true nor false. Some have argued that ethical claims express attitudes of approval or disapproval, while allowing that ethical disagreements involve differences in factual belief as well as differences in attitude (Stevenson, *Ethics and Language*). Others have argued that

ethical claims are universal prescriptions, telling us how to conduct ourselves (Hare, *The Language of Morals*). Such approaches tend to make talk in terms of values appear to be second-rate as compared to talk in factual terms. More recent work has sought to give ethical claims a first-rate status as claims that we can justifiably take to be true or false, even if they do express attitudes (Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*). I propose a different approach to upholding the status of ethical claims, and the status of our value-laden discourse in general.

We can see ourselves in two ways. From the outside, a human being is an object in the world, amenable to scientific study just like a star or an animal. From the inside, we experience our own lives quite differently. We are not objects but subjects, autonomous and responsible persons who steer our own courses through the world. We have our values, our histories and our plans for the future. We matter, and our world is a rich and meaningful one in which beauty and achievement are to be treasured. But there is a constant danger that those who favour the view from outside will persuade us that theirs is the only true view. For them, factual talk says everything that needs to be said. Our values and our aspirations are to be translated into our feelings of value and aspiration, and then perhaps into chemical and electrical states of our brains. If we allowed ourselves to be led down that path, the richness of our lives would evaporate. We would no longer be able to believe that life really had meaning or that values were to be taken seriously. Or if we did go on believing, we would secretly know that we were fooling ourselves, pretending that a feeling of meaning or value was the meaning or value itself.

We do not need to go down that factual path, because we can easily support our values and talk in their terms. The foundation for our values is an ethic which says that it is good to pursue our projects. The ethic recognizes all that is finest about human life, because the pursuit of our projects requires the exercise of our talents. The ethic is a natural one, because it is in tune with our needs and is likely to promote our happiness. The ethic also gives us a reliable way to find meaning in our lives. And as we reflect on values in general, we will see how we have to arrive at the notion of an autonomous and responsible person. That notion is invisible to science, which can only see us as organisms, but our experience of

our lives from the inside clearly tells us that we are autonomous and responsible.

The foundation for values that I set out is independent of scientific or other factual knowledge. And it has two consequences. First, we can be confident that values built on this foundation are well-chosen and are not some random selection. The reason is that the choice of values will follow from an ethic which is exceptionally easy to defend, because of its naturalness. Second, if someone draws conclusions as to what to do on the basis of those values, those conclusions rightly have just as much force for her as the conclusions of a scientific or other factual argument. Conduct in accordance with those conclusions will then be justified.

The proposed foundation for values is not a foundation for too wide a range of values. An ethic which says that it is good to pursue our projects is specific enough to favour values associated with the development of the individual, because individuals need to be allowed to devise and pursue their own projects. Correspondingly, the ethic is opposed to values that would justify the oppression of some people for the good of others, because the oppressed would not be able to pursue their own projects. However, the ethic is not so specific as to lead to a single definitive catalogue of values.

A purely factual view of ourselves could account for someone's belief that her values were soundly based and for the fact that her conclusions about what to do, based on her values, actually had great force for her. The structure of her brain, and the impact of her upbringing in a society in which certain values were widely respected, would give ample explanation. A purely factual view could also account for the evolution of certain values (Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue*). But my position is not that values can appear to be soundly based, or that value-based conclusions about what to do actually have force for people, or that there are explanations for why we have the values that we do have. My position is that values founded on the ethic really are soundly based, and that it is right for corresponding conclusions about what to do to have force for us. This rightness means that if someone does conduct herself in accordance with values that the ethic supports, that provides justification for her conduct. She, from her point of view, is right to see that justification as sufficient. This is so, even though other people may object to what she does because of adverse consequences and may be justified in stopping her.

The search for a foundation for our values is not motivated by a fear that without it we would lose faith in our values, or that we would become unable to appreciate goodness or beauty. We clearly would not do so, at least not in the short term. Rather, the search is motivated by a desire to show that when we do reflect on the foundations of our values, there are answers which support our values. We do not need to reflect on the foundations of our values at all. But as Socrates indicated, the examination of our lives is worth the effort (Plato, *Apology*, 38a).

1.2 The foundation

The foundation for values that I put forward is an ethic which says that the pursuit of human projects is a central element in the good life. That ethic confers merit on the pursuit of our projects. (When there is merit in the pursuit of a project, I will refer to it as a meritorious project.) That merit in turn supports the values which help us to pursue our projects with a reasonable prospect of success, such as values of respect and honesty.

Each of us is committed to a range of projects, to varying degrees. At one extreme are projects that we undertake with little or no internal debate, and often without even articulating them as projects, such as the projects of getting adequate food and shelter. At the other extreme are projects that are entirely optional, and chosen after careful consideration, but to which we can still be very committed. An example would be the project of qualifying as a doctor. In between there are projects, great and small, which we undertake every day and which structure our lives, including projects to bring up children, to develop friendships and to complete tasks at work. Many of these, like some fundamental projects, will not be consciously chosen or even articulated as projects.

Much of what we do can be described in terms of projects, but this does not mean that all the things we do are on the same level. In particular, some projects are much more demanding than others and some projects achieve much more than others. This will matter in chapter 12, when we turn to the details of the ethic. There will be scope to rank the more demanding projects, and those that achieve more, above other projects. Another theme will be the importance

of one person's projects not interfering with another person's projects. A rule that we should not tread on each other's toes will follow naturally from the ethic of projects.

Many of the values that are to be supported are captured in concepts that explicitly embody those values, such as honesty and friendship. But everyday concepts such as the concept of a job or the concept of the family, which carry with them implications as to what we should do, also capture values. I shall refer to all of these concepts as guiding concepts, because we let them guide our lives, and I shall speak of concepts being used as guides. The guiding concepts may guide us directly, by inclining us to certain conduct. Thus the guiding concept of friendship inclines us to be kind to our friends. But guiding concepts can also imply specific rules of conduct. The guiding concept of honesty implies a rule that we should not tell lies. Many of our guiding concepts could equally well be called values. But I will speak in terms of guiding concepts because there are guiding concepts that we would not normally call values, or even think of as value-laden. The concept of gravity, for example, guides our lives by encouraging us to be careful when climbing trees. The concept of gravity enters into our deliberations about what to do, just as much as the concept of honesty enters into those deliberations.

Projects will support values in the following way. The merit of pursuing our projects will imply that the guiding concepts which correspond to values should steer our lives, if that would help us to pursue our projects successfully. The merit will usually have that implication because if we are steered by a given guiding concept, that will facilitate the pursuit of projects in general. Honesty, for example, greatly facilitates the pursuit of all manner of projects. This argument is set out in sections 7.3 and 7.4. Where a guiding concept does not facilitate the pursuit of projects in general, the merit of the pursuit of projects will support the use of a guiding concept because the concept's use will facilitate the pursuit of specific projects that have been chosen. Thus use of the guiding concept of beauty facilitates the pursuit of projects to create beautiful things. In this way, the ethic will support guiding concepts that have no direct connection with the pursuit of projects in general, but only with the pursuit of a narrow range of projects. This argument is set out in section 12.4.

Suppose that a guiding concept is supported by an acceptable ethic, such as the ethic of projects. Then conclusions as to what to do, and conduct in accordance with those conclusions, will be justified if they are based on that guiding concept. Thus someone who was guided by the concept of friendship might help a friend. If she was challenged to justify what she did, she would simply say that the person she helped was her friend. That would be all the justification that was needed. The argument “he is my friend, so I should help him” would be perfectly valid for her. She would believe that no extra premises were needed. And so long as the guiding concept of friendship derived support from an acceptable ethic, she would be right to believe that her argument was complete.

The structure of the book

Chapter 2 explores the notion of a guiding concept, and covers some issues surrounding the ways in which guiding concepts steer us. Then chapters 3 to 6 set out what it is to have a set of guiding concepts, and cover the implications for our views of the world and of ourselves. While these chapters delay engagement with the main argument, they are an essential preliminary. We need to understand what it is that meritorious projects support, before we can see how they do it. These chapters also offer a way of thinking about the relationship between scientific and more subjective views of the world. And they set out a conception of the human subject that will allow the argument to proceed. Chapters 7 to 10 cover meritorious projects, the support that they give to some guiding concepts and the role of projects in defining ourselves. Finally, chapters 11 and 12 show how the ethic of projects lends merit to the pursuit of our projects. This step has to come at the end because we need to understand the concept of a meritorious project thoroughly, before we can grasp the full content of an ethic that advocates the pursuit of projects.

Although the argument digs downwards to the ethic as the source of support, rather than starting with the ethic and building upwards, I will show at each stage how the support that is given is in fact support for what has been covered at the previous stage. Although the sequence of the argument is from guiding concepts to meritorious projects to the ethic, meritorious projects will be shown

to be sufficient support for guiding concepts and the ethic will be shown to be sufficient support for meritorious projects. So if the argument were set out in the reverse order, building upwards from the ethic, we would still end up with guiding concepts.

I will get value into a view of the world quite explicitly, by adopting the ethic that attaches merit to the pursuit of our projects. While I will argue that the ethic is appealing, it will not be a logical consequence of some other premises that do not themselves involve values. I do not claim to be able to deduce values from a purely factual view of the world. A popular philosophical slogan is that you cannot get an ought from an is. This means that facts do not on their own imply values. (The slogan was inspired by David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, book 3, part 1, section 1, page 469, although Hume did not give the slogan in its modern form.) I do not refute the slogan. Instead, my introduction of value will be motivated by the fact that it allows us to buy precious results at a low price. Adoption of the ethic is a modest and natural thing to do, but it provides a base on which a great deal can be built. This book analyses the structure of what can be built on it, and shows how the building can be done.

1.3 Outline of the book

Chapter 2 covers guiding concepts. Section 2.1 identifies guiding concepts as concepts that we not only understand but accept as having a hold over us, as steering our conduct. Along with their hold over us goes a sense that conduct in accordance with them is justified. Section 2.2 relates guiding concepts to rules of conduct. The concept of honesty, for example, implies a rule that we should not tell lies. This section sets out reasons for operating with guiding concepts, rather than simply operating with a set of rules of conduct. Guiding concepts help us to understand fundamental differences between points of view. They also give coherence to our rules of conduct. I defend the use of guiding concepts against the concern that they are dangerously vague, that they could support any one of a range of possible sets of rules of conduct, some of which would be unacceptable. Guiding concepts are flexible, but they naturally generate some rules of conduct and not others. Furthermore, someone's justification for an instance of conduct that

accords with her guiding concepts is not undermined by the fact that someone else, using the same concepts, might have made a different choice. A claim that conduct is justified is not a claim that a conclusion in favour of that conduct is factually correct, so a difference in choices does not indicate an error by one party or the other. Finally, the fact that some guiding concepts are not widely shared across cultures, and may not even be widely shared within a culture, does not undermine justification for conduct in accordance with those concepts.

Chapter 3 is about the different ranges of concepts that we use as guides. Section 3.1 distinguishes between the concepts of science, many of which can only really be used by experts, and everyday concepts such as the concept of beauty or of a job, which we can all use. But if everyone had the necessary technical expertise to use all scientific concepts, different people would still use different concepts as guides. To take the argument to an extreme, Martians would have the same scientific concepts as we do but their everyday guiding concepts would be very different from ours. And the same can be true, although less dramatically, of different human cultures. The concept of a job, for example, could carry very different expectations of degrees of loyalty in different cultures, so different as to make it amount to different concepts in different cultures. Section 3.2 sets out a method of mapping the different ranges of concepts that are used as guides by the members of different cultures. The method uses the analogy of observers spread out along a coastline. They see the world through different ranges of lenses that are borne by vessels close inshore. These lenses correspond to culture-specific guiding concepts. But they see the world through the same range of lenses borne by more distant vessels. These lenses correspond to cross-cultural guiding concepts. Section 3.3 explores the reasons why people use particular ranges of concepts as guides. Human biology, local natural conditions and accidents of history will explain a great deal. But within a culture, there will be people who do not use the standard range of concepts as guides. They will not be guided by some widely used concepts, such as courtesy or compromise, and will be strangers in our midst. Sometimes the limits to their ranges of guiding concepts will be explicable by genetics or upbringing, and sometimes they will be imposed deliberately. I offer reasons why people might deliberately limit their ranges of guiding concepts.

Chapter 4 sets out the notion of an objective view. An objective view is one that could be taken by any rational being, because the only concepts that are used in forming it are ones that are available to everyone. Section 4.1 sets out the importance for science of being able to form views that are independent of culture. Section 4.2 defines rational beings, because an objective view of anything must be available to all rational beings. Section 4.3 identifies the concepts that can be used in forming objective views, starting with the concepts of physics and moving out to chemistry, biology and more specialized sciences such as ecology. Culture-specific guiding concepts cannot be used but detached, anthropological versions of them can be used. The scope to use concepts of emergent properties is uncertain. Section 4.4 considers the consequences of taking an objective view of our own conduct. While the thoughts and feelings of value and justification that we have could be explained, the actual power of our guiding concepts to justify what we do would be invisible.

Chapter 5 sets out the notion of a subjective view. Section 5.1 explains how a full range of concepts can be used in forming a subjective view. Culture-specific guiding concepts can be used, even though that would prevent a subjective view from being available to all rational beings. Someone who takes a subjective view will not merely use culture-specific guiding concepts to contemplate the world. The use of those concepts will bring with it the rules of conduct that they imply. The guiding concepts and rules of conduct call upon us to do certain things, so their use implies that we are autonomous and responsible persons. This is implied because it would make no sense to call upon us to do certain things unless we could choose what to do and were responsible for our choices. Conflicts of value are a sure sign that guiding concepts and rules of conduct make calls upon us. Section 5.2 points out that when we break a rule of conduct, that is not just an unfortunate state of affairs. We regard the violation as the action of a person, so that blame is appropriate. Section 5.3 shows how each of us needs to see our conduct as the actions of a person, rather than as the mere behaviour of an object, in order to use concepts as guides, because their use as guides requires commitment to their use. A view of conduct as the behaviour of an object would be inconsistent with that commitment, because it would make application of the guiding concepts optional. Section 5.4 shows that subjective views can

accommodate the necessary commitment, because we do in fact use the concept of commitment as a guide. Section 5.5 shows that the ease of this demonstration does not mean that there are no controls over the concepts that can be used in forming subjective views. It sets out some controls on our subjective views of ourselves, and considers eccentric subjective views. Section 5.6 explores some implications of taking a subjective view of ourselves. One implication is that we have values. Another is that we have autonomy in a strong sense. We do not merely play a large role in the causal flow of the world. We also have genuine choices, although the sense of having a genuine choice need only be apparent to the person who is choosing, and only at or before the time of making the choice. A third implication is that our choices matter. The best characterization of the view that we have of ourselves in general, independently of specific actions, is the one given by Wittgenstein, that the subject is a boundary of the world. Our view of ourselves as autonomous persons can easily be extended to our view of other people.

Chapter 6 establishes the relationship between the two types of view we can take of things, objective and subjective. Section 6.1 sets out how the analogy of the coastline strongly suggests a continuity, and indeed a single type of view with objective and subjective elements. But the use of culture-specific guiding concepts when forming subjective views breaks the continuity. Section 6.2 establishes a different relationship by showing how the possession of an objective view of anything implies the use of some culture-specific guiding concepts, without specifying which concepts. In order to form an objective view of a part of the world, we must select information ruthlessly. That selection will follow from the project which we are pursuing, and to which we are committed. That commitment implies the use of culture-specific guiding concepts. There is however no guarantee that any particular concepts will be used as guides, so there is still work for an ethic to do in directing our choice of guiding concepts.

Chapter 7 shows how values can be derived from the merit of the pursuit of our projects. Section 7.1 sets out the nature of projects and their use in explaining what we do. The merit of the pursuit of a given project is something that we can only expect to see if we take a subjective view. Section 7.2 explains the essential role of mental privacy in deriving certain values. It prevents us

from evaluating other people's projects and therefore fosters respect for other people. Section 7.3 shows how values in relation to other people can be derived. Individual liberty is the first value, but other values such as honesty follow too. We need to cater for conflicts between projects. I also defend individual liberty against the idea that collective wisdom should rule, and against the idea that we would do better to have our happiness ensured by managers. Section 7.4 shows how values in relation to ourselves can be derived, in particular the values of autonomy and of developing our talents. We may also adopt values that allow us to rank our own projects in order of importance. Section 7.5 considers the extent to which virtue ethics, utilitarianism and deontology would promote the pursuit of our own projects and respect for other people's projects. Section 7.6 outlines some points of contact between my approach and the ideas of Alan Gewirth, Donald Davidson and John McDowell. Gewirth made voluntary and purposive action the centrepiece of his argument for moral obligation. Davidson's anomalous monism might be too monistic for my approach, allowing the reduction of our actions to the mere behaviour of objects. McDowell's idea of the occupation of a specific ethical outlook parallels my notion of the use of a range of culture-specific guiding concepts.

Chapter 8 shows how giving a central role to human projects explains some features of perception and knowledge. Section 8.1 sets out the role of projects in determining the selections we make from all the things that we could perceive and from all the knowledge that we could acquire. Section 8.2 shows how projects justify the acquisition of knowledge, both for use in specific projects and for unspecified future use. Section 8.3 shows how thinking in terms of projects can help to make sense of our experience of the sublime and of the beautiful. Art can give us calm pleasure, it can challenge us and it can inspire us to a particular view. But the merit of the pursuit of projects in general is only a secondary source of the value of art.

Chapter 9 considers the choice of a subjective view. Section 9.1 sets out why the merit of the pursuit of our projects cannot be visible if we only take an objective view. The reason is that at least some rational beings could not see the merit in the pursuit of a given project. Section 9.2 explores the process of acceptance of a set of culture-specific guiding concepts. A choice may ultimately be

justified by the fact that it feels right. This is not such a loose criterion as it might seem. Section 9.3 shows that we have reason to trust our feelings of rightness, although we cannot be absolutely confident that those feelings will not lead us astray.

Chapter 10 sets out the importance of projects in our conceptions of ourselves. Section 10.1 sets out how our history both constrains our current projects, and facilitates our perception of merit in projects that are related to our history. It also sets out how current projects can influence our interpretation of history. Section 10.2 shows how our projects for the future play a central role in expressing our nature. Section 10.3 explores how we can have empathy with each other, given the mental privacy that was covered in section 7.2. How empathy is possible is a scientific question. Empathy may be valued because it facilitates the pursuit of projects, as well as for other reasons. It is difficult to achieve because the language that is needed to achieve empathy constantly shifts as we use it. But when it is achieved, it does not involve the evaluation of other people's projects.

Chapter 11 argues that the pursuit of projects is central to the good life for human beings, where "good" has its common-sense meaning of making us more fulfilled and happier. Section 11.1 sets out our needs, needs that are best fulfilled by being active. Section 11.2 sets out the two components of the autonomy that we need. First, we must have a sense that our choices are really our own. Second, our choices must not be unduly limited. The latter component implies that we should pursue projects which open up opportunities, not projects which close off opportunities. Section 11.3 discusses the nature of challenge and why it is important to us. Section 11.4 sets out the importance of defining our projects by reference to the external world, and not merely by reference to our own thoughts. Section 11.5 considers interactions between the social and the personal. Social attitudes can encourage us to stick to our chosen projects, and they can make some projects appear to be unacceptable. Social projects can enhance the autonomy of some, while limiting the autonomy of others. And the norms of a culture inevitably influence the attitudes of individuals.

Chapter 12 sets out the ethic of projects. Section 12.1 states the ethic. It is that the serious pursuit of our autonomously chosen projects is a central good. Section 12.2 sets out the importance of not interfering with other people's projects, and considers the

legitimate extent of social intervention. Section 12.3 considers priorities among projects. We should take reasonable steps to avoid conflicts between projects. There are arguments for favouring challenging and highly productive projects. And while we may choose to help others with their projects, the sacrifice of our own projects is not obligatory. Section 12.4 traces the support that meritorious projects give to guiding concepts and rules of conduct. Some guiding concepts, such as honesty, are supported because their adoption is conducive to the pursuit of projects in general. Others, such as beauty, are supported because they define specific projects and their adoption as guides facilitates the pursuit of those projects. Section 12.5 draws attention to the flexibility of the ethic, and argues that this gives it an advantage over other, less flexible ethics. The ethic allows each of us to set our own priorities, and recognizes the significance of the individual's own standpoint. Section 12.6 argues that the ethic gives meaning to our lives. It does so in a reliable way by emphasizing the journey, the pursuit of our projects, rather than the destination, their fulfilment.

CHAPTER 2

Guiding concepts

2.1 The nature of guiding concepts

We use a concept as a guide when we not only know what it means, but also accept its continuing hold over us. It both inclines us to certain conduct and, in our view, justifies that conduct. Whenever I refer to the use of concepts as guides, this acceptance of the continuing hold of the concept over us will be implied. So use will mean more than individual occasions of use. It will include a general disposition to conduct ourselves in a certain way.

Thus we use the concept of beauty as a guide when we not only label things as beautiful, but recognize that beauty is valuable. We actually use the concept with feeling, and conduct which is based on the concept does not strike us as needing further justification. This goes beyond observing the use of the concept by others, noticing what they label as beautiful and imitating that use by labelling the same types of thing as beautiful. If someone uses the concept of beauty as a guide, he will automatically accept a rule of conduct that beautiful objects should not be destroyed without good reason. Someone who merely used the concept in a detached way might make no special effort to preserve beautiful objects. If he were confronted with a rule that they should not be destroyed without good reason, he would ask for further justification, perhaps an explanation that other people liked to see beautiful things.

There are therefore two signs that a concept is being used as a guide. First, it inclines us to certain conduct. Second, it is felt to justify certain conduct and sometimes to count against other conduct. The feeling of justification will always be there, but the extent to which it will be accompanied by an inclination to do something will depend on the concept. Some concepts strongly incline us to certain conduct. Thus if the concept of honesty is a guide for someone, he will be strongly inclined to tell the truth. He will not merely invoke the concept to justify an instance of truth-

telling that suits him, and ignore the concept when it would suit him to lie. Other concepts, such as love, are less insistent. If we use the concept of love as a guide, we may feel that it provides a complete justification for any loving conduct, but we do not necessarily feel that we must conduct ourselves lovingly every time that we have an opportunity to do so.

The justification that concepts may lend to conduct will be mentioned often in this book. It can also be described as a justification for choices, because only conduct that is chosen needs to be justified. A mere bodily movement may not be chosen, for example when someone's arm moves because of a malfunctioning nerve, but someone whose arm moves like that does not need to justify the movement. Only a chosen movement need be justified, although the choice may have been made subconsciously and very quickly. Justification may also imply condemnation of alternatives. The concept of honesty justifies instances of telling the truth, and also condemns instances of lying. I will not recite these refinements each time, but will refer to justification for conduct with implicit reference to choices and to condemnations. Sometimes I will refer to choices rather than conduct, particularly in section 5.6 where the focus is on the moment of decision. And where appropriate, I will refer to actions rather than conduct. I will however use "conduct" as a neutral term to refer to what we do. The term "action" will be reserved for conduct viewed from the point of view of the autonomous acting person. That point of view is also accessible to others, if they put themselves in her shoes.

We may go against the guidance that is naturally given by some of our concepts. We may indeed have to do so, for example when we have to choose between devoting resources to the reduction of suffering and devoting them to the creation of beautiful art. But other things being equal, we generally conduct ourselves in accordance with the guidance that is naturally given. If we did not do so, we would not be using the relevant concepts as guides.

It is not only concepts with a distinctively ethical or aesthetic content that are used as guides. The concepts of the natural sciences, used to express facts about the world that we must accept, are also used as guides. Nearly everyone accepts without argument that we must live in accordance with the law of gravity, and must not expect to fly if we jump off high buildings. In that sense, the concept of gravity is used as a guide. We can jump if we like, but

the concept is a guide because it implies that we should not both plan to jump and plan how to spend the subsequent evening.

We must also recognize the guiding role of everyday concepts when they are used in a detached, anthropological way. When anthropologists study a culture, they are guided by concepts such as family and friendship in their interpretations of that culture. That would seem to be a less insistent form of guidance than we are used to when we feel the impulse to care for our own friends and relations. It is tempting to avoid any dilution of the force that such concepts have in our everyday lives. We could do so by saying that when anthropologists used those concepts, the concepts were not used as guides because they only guided the formulation of theories rather than guiding the practical lives of the anthropologists. That temptation should be resisted. The formulation of theories about cultures is a substantial part of the practical life of an anthropologist. It is better to recognize that there are different sorts of guidance. The existence of one sort, guidance to anthropologists on how to interpret observations and construct theories, does not undermine the other sort, the guidance that we feel in everyday life. References in this book to the guidance given by concepts will be to the guidance given in everyday life, rather than to that given in specialized activities such as anthropology, unless otherwise stated. I will also refer to views taken by detached anthropologists because anthropologists can work in a detached way, observing and theorizing. I recognize that many anthropologists actually work in a more engaged way, entering into a dialogue with a culture rather than merely observing it.

This section has been written in terms of the use of concepts as guides and of our acceptance of their power to justify conduct, an acceptance which is part of what is meant by that use. That has kept the discussion at the level of psychology, of felt justification, rather than of actual justification. I have drawn attention to the fact that our thoughts are influenced by concepts. I have not discussed whether or not it is right that we use certain concepts as guides. The merit of the pursuit of projects, stemming from the ethic of projects, will show that it is right. Until that role of merit is demonstrated in chapters 7 and 12, the discussion will largely remain at the level of psychology. Only a thorough exploration of the psychological territory will show us what needs to be supported by the merit of the pursuit of projects, and therefore by the ethic. There will

however be a few early excursions into questions of actual justification.

2.2 Guiding concepts and rules of conduct

Guiding concepts capture our values. A concept like honesty directly expresses a value. Other concepts, such as those of a job and of the family, carry implications as to what we should do. Those concepts imply specific rules of conduct. We should tell the truth, or we should perform the duties of our jobs, or we should support our families. The implication is obvious with honesty, but it also exists with the other examples. The concept of a job implies an arrangement whereby the employee performs certain tasks and the employer pays him. Likewise, we should support our families because that is part of the concept of the family as we ordinarily use it. It might not be part of the concept of the family in the abstract sense of the people with whom someone has connections of ancestry and descent, but we do not ordinarily have such an abstract sense in mind.

The implication of rules of conduct that is meant here is not as strong or as inevitable as logical implication. The concept of a job implies that we should perform the duties of our jobs, but it does not indicate how far we should go in exerting ourselves. The concept of honesty strongly implies that we should not tell lies, but it might allow some lies in special circumstances. And even a clear implication that we should not lie could be defeated by a rule that we should avoid harm to other people, because there are circumstances in which telling the truth would lead to great harm. The fact that a rule of conduct is precise should not mislead us into thinking that its derivation from a guiding concept takes the form of a logical deduction.

The approach of deriving rules of conduct from guiding concepts raises two questions. First, why should we use guiding concepts rather than going straight to the rules of conduct that regulate our lives? Second, is it not dangerous to use guiding concepts? After all, the same concepts may lead to many different sets of rules. If we do not go straight to the rules of conduct, is there a risk of ending up with an unacceptable set of rules? In this

section, I will show why it is both important and safe to use guiding concepts.

Differences between points of view

We need to use guiding concepts, rather than simply considering specific rules of conduct, because differences in the concepts deployed capture much of the difference between points of view. It is one thing for two people who share the same conceptual scheme to disagree about which specific rules should govern our lives. It is quite another thing, and something much more fundamental, for two people to be unable to consider the same rules because they do not use the same concepts.

We might for example be from a society where all the emphasis was on people currently alive, as individuals, with hardly any notice being taken of ancestral ties. We might observe a society in which great respect was paid to deceased ancestors, including those who had died long before the current generation was born, and this respect was paid as a moral duty. We would not then say that people should pay respect to their ancestors, or that they should not, but that it was not the sort of area where moral rules were appropriate. We would not be able to think like the members of the society in which respect was paid to ancestors as a moral duty, in order to agree or disagree with their views on the importance of respect. We might very well understand the conduct by which respect was displayed, such as regular visits to tombs. But the relevant concept of respect for the dead would not be a guide for us. Nor could we arbitrarily make it a guide for ourselves, because it could only be a guide as part of a wider set of concepts that embodied a whole attitude to other people. In that attitude, the boundary between the dead and the living would be less significant than in our own society.

This is one reason for starting with guiding concepts, rather than only considering rules of conduct. If we only considered rules, we would not be able to use the existence of different conceptual schemes to explain our inability to understand why certain things mattered to the members of distant cultures. To continue the example of respect for ancestors, we would not be able to explain why a rule that told people to visit their ancestors' tombs every

month and perform certain rituals made no sense to us. But if we thought in terms of the guiding concepts which implied such rules, we could see that the reason was that we did not have the same framework of concepts. We could see that if we did have that framework, then we would be able to see the point of the rule of conduct. If we had that framework, we could discuss with those who followed the rule whether it was a good rule, and how much respect should be shown to ancestors.

Without such an understanding of the role of guiding concepts, what mattered in different cultures would appear to be a matter of legislative caprice rather than a reflection of broad ways of looking at the world. There is a degree of legislative caprice in the different rules of conduct that are supported by members of one culture, on the basis of the same set of guiding concepts. But the commonality of concepts allows for sensible discussion and an understanding of the sources of our differences. Two people who were both atheists might for example have a shared understanding of the concepts of honesty, of free speech and of respect for other people's opinions. That would allow one, who was in favour of arguing against religious belief at every opportunity, and the other, who was in favour of only raising the matter when religious believers wished to discuss their beliefs, to understand each other's positions and to engage in a sensible debate. In considering a distant culture, we would lack the commonality of concepts that would facilitate such a discussion. We would be left with no explanation of the differences in rules of conduct unless we could connect those differences to different concepts. To make that connection, we would need to locate the origins of rules of conduct in the implications of guiding concepts.

Coherence in our rules of conduct

Another reason for starting with guiding concepts is that a set of concepts can give coherence to our set of rules of conduct. Concepts can fit together, as do friendship, respect and honesty. If we start with them, then we can adjust the way that they fit together in the areas where they might generate conflicts. We can then reach a reasonably stable and coherent overall pattern. A conflict is most likely to come to our notice as a clash of rules of conduct. If for

example someone was a witness in a court case and he could only answer a lawyer's question by betraying a friend's confidence, then a rule that we should respect the confidences of our friends would clash with a rule that we should tell the truth in a court of law. One way to resolve the conflict would be to consider the underlying guiding concepts, in this case the concepts of friendship and of honesty, and to see whether one had greater force than the other. If the witness decided that friendship had greater force except in the most extreme circumstances, then he would respect the confidence and not give a truthful answer to the lawyer's question. Because that decision was taken at the level of guiding concepts rather than at the level of specific rules of conduct, it would have further ramifications that would maintain a reasonably coherent set of rules of conduct. Thus he might decide on a rule not to tell painful truths to friends, except when it was in their own interests to be told. That would reflect his earlier decision, made in court, that friendship was more important than honesty. In this way we can build reasonably coherent sets of rules of conduct on a base of guiding concepts, because the concepts imply the rules of conduct.

Using a concept as a guide means more than being able to define it and discuss it in a detached way. It means feeling the concept's power to guide our lives, including its implications for rules of conduct. Someone who used the concept of friendship as a guide would find it impossible to discuss the rules that were implied by that concept with someone who had no feeling for friendship, who did not use it as a guide and who could only discuss friendship in a detached, anthropological way. The detached person might be able to catalogue the rules that were implied and to note any conflicts, but he could not go on to argue about them. He could not discuss how we should react when faced with conflicts between the claims of our friendships with different people, or between the claims of friendship and the claims of other values. He would not feel the impact of E M Forster's remark, "I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" ("What I Believe", page 18). On the other hand, someone who did use the concept of friendship as a guide, along with the concept of patriotism, would feel the impact. He could then discuss whether Forster was right to claim that it would be better to betray one's country than one's friend. The detached person could recognize

why the concept of friendship had psychological force, by reference to the workings of human brains and human societies. But only someone who used the concept as a guide could feel the rightness of its insistent pull on our conduct. He could then see that there would be a real dilemma when conflicting guiding concepts appeared to be equally right in inclining us to contradictory conduct.

There is no way of telling in advance, from the mere use of the concepts of friendship and of patriotism as guides, whether we should agree with Forster. The guiding concept of friendship might imply any one of a range of different rules that might govern our lives. Some would say that loyalty to friends had to be absolute. Others would say that there should be degrees of loyalty that should be correlated with closeness of friendship, but that loyalty should never be absolute. Similarly, there are several possible degrees of patriotism. This sort of uncertainty gives rise to the second question noted above, the question of whether it might be dangerous to use guiding concepts because we could not be sure which specific rules of conduct they would imply.

The risk of unacceptable rules of conduct

We should not fear that our guiding concepts might imply any one of an arbitrarily wide range of sets of rules, some of them unacceptable, which people would nonetheless be right to use in governing their lives. Concepts do naturally generate certain rules and not others, limiting this danger. Thus the concepts of the natural sciences generate rules which tell us what is physically feasible, and that we should not waste time trying to achieve the impossible. These rules also tell us how best to achieve the things that we do wish to achieve. The methods of science sort the good rules from the useless ones. The concepts of ethics do not lead inevitably to a particular set of rules, but they certainly lead in one broad direction rather than another. It would for example simply be a mistake to use the concept of justice to legitimize cheating in itself, even though cheating might be seen as a legitimate means to some greater end such as obtaining resources to help the poor. It would also be a mistake to use the concept of the good to justify a minor benefit to one person at the cost of huge suffering for others. Anyone who did

use ethical concepts to justify cheating in itself, or to justify a minor benefit at the cost of huge suffering, would not know what the concepts meant. Similarly in aesthetics, if the concept of beauty is a guide for us then we must be in favour of the production and preservation of beautiful objects, other things being equal. We cannot be against their production and preservation on principle. And as mentioned in section 1.1, the ethic that will ultimately support our use of guiding concepts will only support some guiding concepts. It will not support guiding concepts that would incline us to oppression.

A couple of examples from the philosophical literature will illustrate the point. Immanuel Kant remarked that someone who cheats at cards must see himself as worthless (*Critique of Practical Reason*, book 1, chapter 1, section 8, remark 2, Ak. 5:37). The point stands even outside the context of Kant's austere ethic in which ends do not justify means. David Hume remarked that it would not be contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of his finger (*Treatise of Human Nature*, book 2, part 3, section 3, page 416). But this is not a counter-argument to the view that we cannot use the concept of the good to justify a minor benefit at the cost of huge suffering. He was using a narrow concept of reason in order to make his point that the passions operate independently of reason. If we do not use that narrow concept of reason, his remark makes no sense.

The guiding concepts of the natural sciences do tend to lead to only one set of rules. Thus the concepts of physics lead inevitably to the rule that if you live in a cold climate and want to feel warm in winter, you should either insulate your house or install a heating system, or both. In ethics, it is much less likely that we will reach universal agreement on the conclusions to be drawn. Two people from one culture, who are using the same guiding concepts, can disagree strongly about ethical questions. Two people might for example both be strong believers in individual liberty. One might therefore be against all controls on the media. The other might want to ban news stories that violated the privacy of individuals, on the basis that the liberty of the individuals concerned would be reduced by the publication of such stories. The argument would be that if their private lives could be reported, they would have to avoid any conduct that might make them the object of ridicule.

This scope for disagreement might appear to make it difficult to argue that values could be soundly based. A sound basis would justify conclusions as to what to do. But how could that be, if two people with the same values, as captured by their shared guiding concepts, could reach opposite conclusions? How could two opposite conclusions both be justified?

The answer is that the justification is a justification for the person who reasons using her values, and not necessarily for other people. This might seem to be a feeble form of justification. If we were concerned with the correctness of conclusions as to what to do, ethical conclusions would appear to be very poor cousins of scientific conclusions. A correct scientific conclusion is likely to be agreed upon by everyone who considers the matter carefully enough, no matter what their cultural background. Many ethical conclusions do not command anything like that universal assent, even among members of a single culture who have all of the relevant guiding concepts in common. But I do not claim that all ethical conclusions are correct. Rather, I claim that if someone has reached an ethical conclusion on the basis of her guiding concepts, and if the status of those concepts as guides is supported by an acceptable ethic, then she is justified in conducting herself accordingly. She needs no further justification for her conduct, and other people who share the relevant guiding concepts should understand that they have no ground to demand further justification. (They might object to her conduct because of adverse consequences for people other than herself, and they might therefore be justified in stopping her, but that would be another matter.) The justification for her conduct is not undermined by the fact that someone else, faced with the same situation, might have chosen different conduct and that his conduct would have been equally justified. Justification for doing one thing does not exclude justification for doing something different in the same circumstances. Decisions as to what to do are not like the conclusions of the natural sciences. To take an example from physics, justification for a conclusion that objects with mass cannot travel faster than light excludes justification for a conclusion that they can. There may be arguments in the early days of a scientific theory about the correct conclusion on such points. But once the matter has been settled, we recognise that arguments for the rejected conclusion cannot be sufficient to support it.

The personal nature of justification gives rise to another issue. As noted already, someone may be justified in conduct that accords with her guiding concepts while the consequences for other people may be such that they are justified in stopping her. This approach does therefore allow for conflicts that cannot be resolved by reference to the underlying concepts, or by the use of some higher-level ethical thinking about the issue. It might be nicer if that did not happen, if each practical ethical question could be resolved in a way that all who considered the issue carefully enough would agree was correct. Unfortunately, life is not like that. The greater the number of guiding concepts that are common to the parties, the less likely it is that irresolvable disputes will arise. But I cannot offer a satisfactory approach to ethics which would eliminate the problem.

There is another apparent obstacle to an argument that someone's conclusion as to what to do, based on her guiding concepts, is justified. This obstacle is that the conclusion will be based on her own set of guiding concepts. Other people, particularly people in other cultures, will have different sets of guiding concepts. How can a conclusion be justified if the starting point of the argument, the set of guiding concepts, is optional? We normally expect the strength of the conclusion of an argument to reflect the strength of the premises. But if for example someone preserved beautiful things because beauty was a guiding concept for her, it would seem that the justification for her conduct could be undermined by the existence of some cultures where no value was attached to beauty. The existence of such cultures would suggest that there was no particular reason to care about beauty. There would be nothing wrong with caring about beauty. But arguments that sought to weigh beauty in the balance against other values, such as an argument against building a very useful motorway across a beautiful landscape, would make no sense to members of a culture that did not have the concept of beauty as a guide. That possibility might make the argument for conduct to preserve beautiful things look weak, even within a culture that did care about beauty.

This is the problem of optional guiding concepts. The proposed ethic of projects will support certain guiding concepts rather than others. That will reduce the choice of guiding concepts, as well as ensuring that justification by reference to guiding concepts does not imply a moral free-for-all. The restricted choice of guiding concepts will in turn reduce the number of occasions on which the

justification for a conclusion will appear to be impaired by the optionality of the guiding concepts which lead to that conclusion. The problem will not however be eliminated. The ethic is not specific enough to support only one set of guiding concepts. At least some guiding concepts will remain optional. And in any case, a different basic ethic could be chosen.

If the chosen ethic is the ethic of projects, then there is a solution to the problem of optional guiding concepts. If someone does adopt an optional concept as a guide, the ethic of projects will still support the status of that concept as a guide so long as its adoption does not conflict with the ethic. The ethic will give that support because adoption of the concept as a guide will help in the pursuit of projects. Thus someone who reaches conclusions on the basis of an optional guiding concept will still have justification for her conclusions, because the ethic will support her chosen projects. In the example of the motorway, the ethic would support the pursuit of a project to preserve beautiful things and the use of the guiding concept of beauty would help in the pursuit of that project. This argument is discussed at greater length in section 12.4. The argument can also be used when the optional guiding concept is not a concept like beauty that defines specific projects, but a concept that supports the pursuit of projects in general. If someone finds that adoption of such a concept as a guide supports the pursuit of her projects, and the concept is not ruled out as a guide by the ethic, then the ethic will support adoption of the concept as a guide.

Having covered the notion of a guiding concept, I will now turn to the ranges of concepts that we use and to how different people's ranges may be mapped.

CHAPTER 3

Different ranges of concepts

3.1 The concepts that we use

We use concepts all the time. They include concepts such as those of a job, of beauty and of an electron. In this section I am concerned with identifying the concepts that we use as guides. As mentioned in section 2.1, guidance means guidance in everyday life, rather than guidance in anthropology or other specialized activities. The emphasis is on competent use combined with use of the concepts as guides, rather than on having only a vague understanding (reflecting lack of competence) or only a detached attitude (reflecting lack of use as guides).

Most of us have some idea that an electron is a small particle found within atoms, but only trained physicists can really use the concept, and can do the mathematics to work out how electrons will behave in given circumstances. Most of us cannot make competent use of the concept. On the other hand, most of us can make competent use of the concept of beauty but there are some, even among the competent, who do not use the concept as a guide. Such a person would be one who had no feeling for art but who still understood that beauty was a property which many people attributed to some artefacts. He would also understand that those people thought highly of beautiful artefacts. He might even be good at picking out artefacts likely to be thought beautiful. The concept of beauty would not however be a guide for him, because he would not feel the value of beauty.

For some concepts, such as those deployed in the physics that we only meet in the laboratory and not in everyday life, the notion of a concept's being a guide adds nothing to the notion of competent use. If a physicist makes competent use of the concept of an electron, he will do the right things. He does not need any commitment to regulate his behaviour in accordance with the nature of the electron, beyond a commitment to do his job properly. Once

physics does impinge on our everyday lives, as the law of gravity does, something is added by using the relevant concepts as guides. We use the concept of gravity as a guide when we not only recognize that gravity will pull us down to the ground if we lose our footing, but take care not to lose our footing. Very few people would fail to use the concept of gravity as a guide in this way, so it is easy not to notice that we do use it as a guide.

With everyday concepts, the use of a concept as a guide does add something significant. If someone who uses the concept of beauty as a guide recognizes a work of art as beautiful, then she automatically has some positive feeling towards it, even though that might be outweighed by other, negative feelings (perhaps because she found the work to be overpowering). This is quite different from a detached use of the concept of beauty, in which someone notes that an artefact has the physical characteristics that would lead many people to regard it as beautiful, but does not actually feel the value of beauty.

Similarly, if the concept of a job is used as a guide, that involves an acceptance that employee and employer have certain obligations to one another, in particular to turn up for work and to pay for work done. Someone who used the concept of a job as a guide would accept the relevant obligations if he were an employee or an employer. Again there is a striking contrast with the detached view, in which the concept of a job is used merely as a convenient shorthand for the observed behaviour of people who go to a certain place at regular times, expend energy and receive regular payments.

A complication should be noted here. It is not always right to think of a concept as existing in its full richness without guiding status, and then having that status attached to its outside like a label. Some of the content of a guiding concept may depend on its status as a guide, and may not be reproducible in the non-guiding version of that concept. The guiding concept of a job, for example, includes the notion of obligation to an employer. In the non-guiding version, that notion of obligation must be translated into a mere psychological fact, an expectation of certain continuing conduct. That expectation is not an etiolated type of obligation, but something else altogether. So when I refer to non-guiding versions of guiding concepts, it must be borne in mind that they may be different concepts, even though they may be the closest possible non-guiding analogues of the guiding concepts.

Different people make competent use of, and use as guides, different ranges of concepts. Nearly all of us are competent with the concepts of a job, of the family and of friendship, and also use them as guides. Most of us also appreciate beauty in art or in music. We both display competence with the concept of beauty and use the concept as a guide, although individual tastes differ widely. A fair number of us can work competently with the concepts that economists deploy, such as inflation and the rate of unemployment, although many of us have no occasion to use them as guides except when political elections are being held and we have to decide how to cast our votes. Only a few of us can work competently with the concepts of nuclear physics, where we are confronted with entities that cannot be visualized without distorting the theory and that can only be fully described using advanced mathematics.

Emphasizing the use of concepts as guides

The foregoing way of describing ranges of concepts reflects the fact we have varying degrees of expertise. There is however another way of identifying ranges of concepts and showing who can use which concepts. This is to assume that we all have all the technical expertise that we could acquire, given enough time and intellectual power, but that we are bound by our cultural presuppositions and by our way of life. This approach places all of the emphasis on concepts being used as guides, rather than on competence. It creates a very different set of ranges of concepts.

First, take the assumption that we all have the necessary technical expertise. That would bring even the most abstract concepts of physics within the range of concepts that we could all use. Although most of us cannot in fact grasp the concepts involved, we could do so if we had the right natural talents and if we devoted enough time and effort to the study of physics. If we had devoted that time and effort, we would not need anything more to persuade us to use the concepts as guides. To the extent that the concepts were relevant to daily life, as gravity is, they would be guides anyway. We allow the claims of physics to steer our lives because they are backed by such good evidence, and are so universally agreed among experts. They set out facts that we have to live with. We do not need any further sense of the value of

physics in order to feel justified in accepting what physics tells us, and in living accordingly.

The same could be said of the other natural sciences. Everyone would be able to make competent use of all scientific concepts, and indeed of all non-scientific concepts too. The only question to ask would be, which concepts were guides for a given person? All scientific concepts would be guides automatically, to the extent that they were relevant to daily life. We recognize that science tells us how things are, and we accept that we have to live accordingly.

Now consider an encounter with rational beings from another planet. Rational beings from another planet will make several appearances in this book. I will call them Martians, confident that they are not in fact so close to Earth. They would be just as able to grasp physics as we were. Their theory of physics might be set out differently from ours, using different mathematical formulae. Their physics might be more advanced than ours, and it might use concepts that we did not yet have. But human physicists could, on reflection, recognize the validity of those concepts. Thus after a bit of discussion, we would find that we agreed with Martians about physics. There would be no unbridgeable gulf of incomprehension between human and Martian physicists. The concepts used by each group of physicists would be available to the other group.

The same would be true of chemistry, and even of biology. Although a human biologist and a Martian biologist would have studied different topics, because of the different conditions and types of organism on their different planets, they would be able to understand each other's theories. Some conceptual adjustment might be needed. Organisms on Mars might not reproduce in the same ways as organisms on Earth, or there might not be any significant pressures of natural selection on Mars. Even so, the close connections between biology, chemistry and physics would be enough to give sufficient common ground for a productive sharing of ideas.

We would however expect an unbridgeable gulf of incomprehension between Martians and ourselves when we turned to everyday concepts which we use without any difficulty. Concepts such as those of a job and of the family, which are rooted in our everyday life, might well have nothing at all corresponding to them in the Martian way of life. Martians might also have no concept of art, or of beauty in general. They might even have no

concept of moral responsibility to other individuals. This might be the case because their way of life was such that they never trod on each other's toes anyway, so that they did not need to constrain each other's behaviour. If we tried to explain what we meant by these concepts, and their role in our lives, we would communicate very little. There would also be concepts used in their lives, equally everyday to them, which we would not grasp.

After a long discussion, each side might arrive at some grasp of the other side's everyday concepts, but it would at best be a detached anthropologist's grasp. There would be no prospect of one side's everyday concepts coming to be used as guides by the other side. Martians would have their own guiding concepts. They would therefore understand by analogy what it was for us to have guiding concepts. But they would still not be able to use our concepts as guides. Our concepts would have no place as guides in their way of life. If for example they did not live in families, our concept of the family would have no force for them.

We can compare the position with an Earth-bound example. Someone from a culture in which no notice was taken of dead ancestors would appreciate by analogy the feeling that members of another culture had that there was justification for paying respect to their ancestors, and for condemning anyone who did not pay that respect. He could make an analogy with his own feeling that there was justification for showing respect to other living people. But he would still not himself feel justified in condemning those who showed no respect to their ancestors. He would not use the concept of respect for ancestors as a guide.

Thus we have an inversion of the idea of different ranges of concepts that we might get by considering different people within one culture. Within our culture, we work with different ranges of concepts because of our different levels of expertise. Everyday concepts are guides for nearly everyone, but esoteric concepts are reserved for a few experts. When we imagine an encounter with Martians, we find that the esoteric concepts are likely to be within the grasp of experts on both sides, human and Martian, but that the everyday concepts used on one planet are not at all likely to be usable as guides by beings from the other planet.

I will refer to guiding concepts that are not available as guides in all cultures as culture-specific guiding concepts. Such a concept may be available in several cultures. There is no restriction to

concepts that are only available as guides within a single culture. Thus a culture-specific guiding concept might be available to all human beings, but not to Martians. Or it might only be available within one human culture, or within a few cultures.

Different human cultures

We can refine the emerging picture of concepts that could or could not be used as guides by considering different human cultures. Some concepts are used as guides by practically all human beings. The concept of putting in effort in order to gather food and to provide shelter is an example. Other concepts are very widespread, including concepts of the family and of organized work. But the precise meanings of those concepts, and what behaviour counts as following the guidance that they give, differ from one culture to another.

Let us take jobs as an example. Relationships with an employer differ widely. In one culture, a job may be a self-contained part of life that can be taken up or dropped at will. An employee may view his job merely as a contract for the supply of time and effort in exchange for money, a contract that either side can terminate if that would be economically beneficial. In another culture, it may be expected that an employee will stay with a particular company for his entire working life. Changing jobs for a higher salary, or dismissing employees in order to save money, would be seen as positively immoral. Someone who used the concept of a job in one culture as a guide would not use the corresponding concept from the other culture as a guide, because it would not be the same concept. It would be different because it would imply different expectations of employers and employees. Someone from one culture would make serious mistakes in the other culture if he did not change the concept that he used as a guide. In the culture where great loyalty was expected, someone using the wrong concept would be disgracefully disloyal. In the culture where it was acceptable to change jobs or to dismiss people in pursuit of economic advantage, someone using the wrong concept would be an uncompetitive fool.

Concepts of the family also differ between cultures. Some cultures use a narrow concept, focused on the closest relatives, in

which people feel great loyalty to their children or to their parents but have no strong bond to their second cousins. In other cultures, strong bonds go much wider.

Someone could move from one human culture to another. The new concepts of a job and of the family would eventually take over from the old ones, and other new everyday concepts would replace those from the old culture as guides. While this might be quite hard with radically different cultures, or if the person who moved had already grown to adulthood in the old culture, it would still be possible. A human being might even be able to move to Mars, take on Martian ways and come to use their everyday concepts as guides.

So when I say that we would be incapable of using certain concepts of Martian life as guides, I do not mean that we would be permanently or necessarily incapable. I mean that from our current point of view, given our current way of life, we would be incapable. It would probably not be possible to move to Mars and become a full member of a Martian culture while still hanging on to the way of life that we have on Earth. An emigrant to Mars who really did take on Martian ways would remain a member of the species *homo sapiens*, but he would in a certain sense cease to be human. He would forsake the ways of human beings in exchange for Martian ways. Likewise, someone who moves from one human culture to another, and becomes a full member of the new culture, must forsake his old culture.

We can imagine a being that could simulate membership of any culture, human or alien, and could deploy the appropriate range of concepts as guides. Such a universal simulator would have the resources to live as a human being or as a Martian. It would also have the resources to live as a member of French, Japanese, Nuba or any other human culture. Such a being could transfer from one culture to another very easily, without limiting its ability to revert to its previous culture. Indeed, it would never be entirely captured by any one culture. The ranges of concepts appropriate to other cultures would be put in abeyance, but there would be a top-level control centre within the being, always active, which would turn on the relevant range of concepts for the culture in which the being found itself.

A universal simulator that consciously chose which range of concepts to deploy would not be a full member of any culture,

because full membership would require total commitment to that culture and being limited by its concepts. A universal simulator that could, while continuing to live in a culture, casually withdraw from its range of everyday concepts, ceasing to use them as guides, without being cut adrift and feeling lost, or a universal simulator that could easily think outside the framework given by the culture's everyday concepts, would not be a full member of that culture. (This is a separate point from the need to use the concepts that are normal in a given culture as guides. The universal simulator might do everything required to display that use, and might have all the appropriate feelings of doing the right thing or the wrong thing, while resident in a particular culture.)

A universal simulator would not however need to choose the active range of concepts consciously. Changes in the active range of concepts might instead be triggered by cultural cues of which the being was not conscious. A universal simulator like that would be just like anyone else, able to deploy a new range of concepts given time. It is just that the universal simulator would need much less time than most of us would need.

The same considerations would apply to a simulator with a more restricted range, able to switch easily between the guiding concepts of some cultures but not all cultures. If the switching were under conscious control, the being might never achieve full membership of any one culture. If it were unconscious then the being would be like us, except that it would be a faster learner.

3.2 Mapping the ranges of concepts

Having established the notion of ranges of concepts that we use as guides, I will now propose a way to map those ranges. The ranges in question are the different ranges of concepts that are used as guides by the members of different cultures, such as the concepts of a job and of the family. They are not the different ranges of concepts that are used by individuals with different levels of expertise within a culture, such as the concepts used in economics or in nuclear physics. I wish to map the concepts that would or would not be used by us, assuming that we all had the competence of experts, rather than the concepts that, as a matter of fact, we do or do not use competently.

We need a map that will show the concepts which are specific to the details of our way of life to be used as guides only by us, while the concepts of the natural sciences are used as guides by all rational beings. We should also cater for intermediate concepts, the ones that are used as guides by a wide range of rational beings but not by all. Thus a concept such as family loyalty, meaning loyalty to immediate relatives only, would only be used as a guide by members of a culture in which a narrow view of the family was the norm. But the concept of shelter from the elements would be used by all human beings, except perhaps those who lived in the most benign climates.

Before mapping ranges of concepts, we need to clarify which concepts should be mapped. It might for example seem that while family loyalty, in the sense of loyalty limited to close relatives, was only used in a modest range of cultures, family loyalty in general (whether only to close relatives or to a wider range of relatives) would be an equally good concept to identify, and that it was used much more widely. If we were mapping concepts as such, we would certainly want to show family loyalty in general. We would then show loyalty to a narrow range of relatives and loyalty to a wide range of relatives as sub-concepts. But our interest is in the use of concepts in our lives, not in concepts in the abstract. We do not use the concept of family loyalty in general, except when we are having theoretical discussions. In daily life we use a more specific concept, reflecting the groups of people to whom we actually feel loyalty. Therefore the concepts to map are the specific ones, not the general ones. The specific concepts are the ones that are used as guides.

This approach raises another problem. Given that we all have at least slightly different attitudes to jobs, the family and so on, it might seem impossible for us to share the use of any everyday concept, even within a homogeneous culture. Each member of the culture would use a slightly different concept of family loyalty. If our interest were in the precise concepts used, we would find that no two people used the same concept. While this might strictly be true, it would be a ludicrous extreme. We must strike a balance. We must not be so specific in our definitions of concepts that no two people use the same concepts. At the same time, we must not be so general in our definitions as to give the impression that everyone

uses the same concepts. How we strike the balance will be a matter for judgement in each case.

The use of judgement to strike a balance might appear to risk circularity. Similarities and differences between concepts might be identified in order to generate a range of concepts, some used by everyone and others used only by members of certain cultures. I reject the charge of circularity because the idea that some concepts are common to large groups of people while others are common to smaller groups is founded on evident fact. The concept of shelter from the elements is practically universal. The concept of family loyalty does differ as between cultures, some operating with much more extended notions of the family than others. At the same time there can be considerable homogeneity in the concept of family loyalty within a culture.

Finally, we should not see the range of concepts as fixed. New concepts can be introduced. They can become widely accepted, given enough time. New concepts are obviously introduced in science. But the same thing can happen in everyday life. The relatively new concept of non-discrimination, for example, is increasingly but not universally accepted as a guide to conduct.

With these preliminaries out of the way, we can now see how to map the ranges of concepts that are used as guides.

The analogy of the coastline

Imagine a straight coastline. Along it, there are observers who are looking out to sea. They all look straight ahead, they have poor peripheral vision and they cannot turn their heads or move their eyes. This means that an observer can only see vessels that are within a fairly narrow v-shaped visual field which runs straight out to sea. In the sea there is a long line of dinghies, close to the coast. Further out, there is a long line of yachts. In the distance, there is a long line of freighters. All of the lines of vessels are parallel to the coastline. There are also some patches of fog which hide some vessels. The patches of fog can be much closer inshore than the vessels that they hide. Thus a patch of fog can hide a vessel from some observers but not from others.

Observers spread over a wide stretch of coastline will all be able to see the same freighters, subject to patches of fog not getting in

the way. The freighters are so far away that each freighter will fall within the visual fields of all of the observers. At that distance, the visual fields of the observers will overlap pretty well entirely. But a yacht, being closer in, will not fall within the visual fields of so many observers. And a dinghy, close to the shore, will only be visible to a few observers who are standing very near to one another. All observers will be able to see some dinghies and some yachts, but observers who are far enough apart will see different dinghies and different yachts.

J, K and M are three of the observers. J and K are reasonably close together, but M is further away. J and K are human beings from different cultures. They therefore have points of view that are not very far apart. M is a Martian, so his point of view is more distant from J's and K's points of view.

J, K and M can see different sets of dinghies. None of them can see any of the dinghies that either of the other two can see, because at that short distance from the coast their visual fields do not overlap. When we move out to the yachts, J and K can see some of the same yachts because at that greater distance from the coast, their visual fields do overlap. However, the visual fields of J and K do not overlap with the visual field of M at that distance out from the coast. There is no single yacht that both J and M can see, nor is there one that both K and M can see. Much further out to sea, the visual fields of J, K and M will overlap pretty well entirely. Therefore all of J, K and M will in principle be able to see all of the same freighters. However, patches of fog may obscure any given observer's view of any given vessel.

Each vessel has a mast, and there is a large lens fixed to the top of the mast. Thus an observer who can see a vessel can look through its lens at the sky beyond. If fog hides a vessel, it also hides that vessel's mast and lens. Information about the world is projected onto the sky. It is projected many times, so that all of the information about the world can be viewed through any lens. Any feature of the world can be found on the sky. But this information cannot be viewed directly, without looking through some lens or other. Without the assistance of a lens, it is all a blur. The lenses correspond to the concepts that we use to make sense of the world. The different views of the world that are available to an observer through different lenses correspond to the different interpretations of the world that are obtained by using different concepts. The

world looked at using the concepts of fundamental physics is a seething mass of elementary particles, each behaving in a very limited range of ways in accordance with the laws of physics. The world looked at using the concepts of psychology is a very different place, in which we see human beings conducting themselves in ways that reflect a wide range of motives.

All concepts are sufficiently well-defined to capture the content of the theories that are constructed using them. The concept of an electron, for example, is not just the concept of a negatively charged particle, but of a particle that has certain properties and that will behave in specified ways in given circumstances. When several concepts together are needed to give the content of a theory, we recognize that by using all of the concepts together. We then combine within our heads the views those concepts give of features of the world. Theories will correspond to networks of concepts that we habitually use together. Those theories will give us rules of factual inference, such as the rule that we should infer fire from the sight of smoke. Use of the concept of smoke to identify a feature of the world as smoke will lead us on to use of the concept of fire, in the expectation that it will highlight some actual fire in the world. I do not however mean to claim that causation and the like are all in the mind, as David Hume might be thought to have claimed (*Treatise of Human Nature*, book 1, part 3, *passim*). I am discussing interpretations of the world, which definitely are in the mind, without asserting anything about the status of the things that are ordinarily thought to be out in the world. Likewise, I make no comment on how our theories are developed, whether as single insights which are then broken down into specific concepts or by assembling existing or new concepts into new patterns. My concern is with the use of the concepts that we have, rather than with their origin.

The lenses on the dinghies correspond to everyday concepts, the use of which is limited to reasonably small groups of people such as members of individual cultures. Only someone in the appropriate culture will use those concepts as guides, just as only someone in or very near to J's place will see the world through the dinghy-borne lenses that J uses. The fact that J cannot look through the lenses borne by the dinghies in K's and M's visual fields by turning his head or by moving his eyes corresponds to the fact that someone who is in a particular culture cannot use all of another culture's

guiding concepts, as guides, without moving to that other culture. J would have to move sideways along the coastline in order to start using the dinghy-borne lenses that K used, or the ones that M used.

The lenses on the yachts in the areas where some visual fields overlap correspond to concepts that are used as guides in a wide range of cultures. Remember that J and K are human but that M is a Martian. A lens borne by a yacht that is within the visual fields of both J and K corresponds to a concept, such as that of moral responsibility to other individuals, that is widely used as a guide in human cultures but that, let us suppose, is not used as a guide in Martian cultures. The fact that yacht-borne lenses which M looks through are not available either to J or to K reflects the fact that even some everyday concepts that were widely used in Martian cultures would not be used as guides in human cultures. There might be an extra row of more distant yachts. The lenses that they bore would correspond to concepts used both by human beings and by Martians, but not by all rational beings.

Finally, the lenses on the freighters are available to all three observers. They correspond to the concepts that we would expect to have in common with Martians and with all other rational beings, such as the concepts of the natural sciences. Such concepts are used in making claims that we regard as straightforwardly and universally factual, such as the claim that hydrogen combines with oxygen to make water. The concepts are therefore used as guides by anyone who does not want to live on the basis of self-deception.

The patches of fog

I can now explain the role of the patches of fog. The freighter-borne lenses correspond to scientific concepts and other concepts that are used in constructing straightforwardly factual claims about the world. We can use any such concept, once we have grasped it. But many possible scientific concepts are not currently within our grasp. If and when we meet Martians, we may acquire a new range of concepts that will greatly enhance our understanding of the world. Patches of fog prevent us from seeing the freighters which bear the lenses corresponding to concepts that we do not yet have. Meeting Martians and learning some new scientific concepts would correspond to some of the patches of fog clearing, so that we could

bring the lenses corresponding to those concepts into use without changing our positions on the coastline. We would not have to move to a Martian culture.

Our old scientific concepts would remain available to use following the introduction of new concepts, but we would stop paying attention to what they showed us. Correspondingly, there are still freighter-borne lenses out there for redundant concepts such as the concept of phlogiston. And some concepts remain in widespread use as guides even after they have technically been superseded. The concepts of Newtonian mechanics remain in use a century after the advent of Einstein's relativity theory, and will remain in use for many years to come. We therefore need lenses both for the Newtonian concepts and for the Einsteinian concepts.

Patches of fog can also hide yachts, and even dinghies. As mentioned above, we can introduce new culture-specific guiding concepts such as the concept of non-discrimination. The dinghies and yachts which correspond to the concepts that we could introduce are already out in the water, waiting for us to start using their lenses. When we bring such a concept into use, the fog which hides the corresponding lens from us clears.

The sea is now looking very crowded, with vessels bearing lenses that correspond to all possible concepts, and innumerable patches of fog in place to limit the number of concepts that we actually use. Overcrowding is not a problem. We can assume the sea to be large enough. But two questions do need to be answered here.

The first question is whether the assumption that all possible concepts are represented in front of each observer, albeit with many of them hidden by fog, destroys the point of the analogy. The analogy is designed to reflect the fact that many culture-specific concepts are inaccessible from a given observer's position. If the corresponding lenses were in front of that observer but were hidden by fog which might clear, that would appear to undermine the supposed inaccessibility of the concepts. In fact, the analogy is not undermined. The lenses that are in front of an observer but are hidden by fog do not include all possible lenses. They only include lenses corresponding to concepts which that observer could bring into use, given his way of life. Thus human beings can bring the concept of non-discrimination into use, but Martians would not be able to do so if they did not perceive differences of age, sex, race and so on between other Martians. Then the non-discrimination lens

would not be in front of Martians on the coastline, not even behind a patch of fog.

The second question is whether this formulation of the analogy commits us to a view that concepts exist independently of us and that we discover them, rather than inventing our concepts. It does not, for two reasons. First, the analogy is limited to mapping ranges of concepts. It is only an analogy. It should not be assumed to capture enough features of our concepts to support conclusions as to whether our concepts are discovered or invented. Second, if the lenses corresponding to all possible concepts are out there but we cannot see them because of fog, then discovery when the fog clears is a task that is on a par with invention. If the lenses were already visible and we chose which ones to use, that would be much easier than inventing the corresponding concepts. But lenses corresponding to all of the concepts that we could bring into use are out there, so that there is a huge number of places where we could try to peer through or dispel the fog. This makes the selection of places to look a very difficult task in itself. That is enough to make the clearing of fog just as good an analogy for the invention of concepts as it is for their discovery.

A limitation of the analogy

This way of mapping concepts will not capture every refinement. There might for example be a concept that was used both in some human cultures and in some Martian cultures, while not being used in other human cultures or in other Martian cultures. At the same time there might be concepts used in all human cultures but no Martian cultures, and others used in all Martian cultures but no human cultures. The corresponding pattern of overlaps of visual fields would be complex. It could not be mapped with a straight coastline and a string of observers. But despite this limitation, the analogy of the coastline will still be useful.

Lenses that impart lustre

Seeing features of the world through some of the lenses will amount to using the concepts that correspond to those lenses as guides.

Each such lens will impart a special lustre to relevant features of the world, drawing those features to the observer's attention forcefully. A lens that corresponds to the concept of honesty used as a guide will not only show clearly that an occasion where one could tell the truth or lie is an occasion on which telling the truth would be in accordance with the concept. It will also generate a call upon us to tell the truth. That call will correspond to the special lustre which the lens will impart to the relevant features of the world.

We normally think of a concept as displaying the world to us in a certain way, then leaving it up to us to decide how to respond to the world as thus displayed. But if we use a concept as a guide, then we accept that we should act in accordance with it unless its guidance is outweighed by contradictory guidance from other concepts. The lens will be there, with its property of imparting lustre, in any case. The decision to use the concept as a guide will correspond to a decision to position ourselves where the lens is within our field of view. (See section 3.3 for how someone can choose what is or is not within his field of view.) The decision to use a concept as a guide is made in advance. The concept will then call upon us to conduct ourselves in ways that accord with it every time that it is applicable, without the need to decide each time that we ought to follow its guidance. This corresponds to the fact that the lens will always be within our field of view, forcefully drawing our attention to relevant features of the world. Once we have positioned ourselves appropriately, we cannot avoid noticing what we can see through the lens. (I will return to the essential role of commitment to following a concept's guidance every time that it is applicable in section 5.3.) This commitment does not however mean that we will always follow the guidance. Weakness of the will may mean that instead we defy the guidance and feel bad about doing so. Bad feelings will be a consequence of the way in which guiding concepts are entrenched in our brains, but those who use the relevant concepts as guides will accept the appropriateness of those feelings.

The use of some lenses will be essential to certain ways of life. Only someone who uses a lustre-imparting friendship lens will be able to be a friend, because only someone who uses such a lens will be able to respond appropriately to others, and to accept the expectations that we have of our friends.

Finally, when a concept is a guide either it, or an analogue of it, will also be available to use in a detached way, the non-guiding version of the same concept. Friendship for example is a guiding concept when we use it in considering our own friends, but it is a non-guiding concept when it is used by a detached anthropologist to characterize the conduct of a group of people that she is observing. Correspondingly, there will be an extra lens. The guiding concept will correspond to one lens, which will focus relevant features of the world and will also impart the special lustre that generates a call upon the observers to conduct themselves appropriately. The non-guiding concept will present features of the world just as sharply, but it will not impart the same lustre to them. (It may also present different features, to the extent that the non-guiding version of a concept is only an analogue of the guiding version.) Non-guiding lenses will be borne by freighters because the corresponding concepts will be available for use by all rational beings, even if the corresponding guiding lenses are borne by dinghies or by yachts. These freighter-borne lenses may be obscured by patches of fog where the non-guiding concepts have not yet occurred to the members of a given culture, but they will not be obscured from people who actually use the corresponding guiding concepts. If someone uses a guiding concept, he can strip away its guiding force and use the corresponding non-guiding concept.

The lenses that correspond to some guiding concepts are also borne by freighters, because the concepts of the natural sciences can be used as guides. They counsel us against conduct that would only succeed if the laws of nature were violated. Even these concepts have non-guiding versions, with corresponding extra lenses that do not impart lustre to the relevant features of the world. Those non-guiding concepts are available to those who wish to ignore the laws of nature and to conduct themselves on the basis of self-deception about the world. Chapter 4 will consider precisely which concepts are universally available, and therefore correspond to freighter-borne lenses.

3.3 Reasons why we use given ranges of concepts

Each of us uses a certain range of concepts as guides. As before, I will include in our ranges concepts that are beyond our current

expertise but that we could bring into use if we studied long and hard enough. In terms of the analogy of the coastline, this amounts to having keen eyesight so that we can pick out the freighters in the distance and use the lenses that they bear.

In this section I will explore the reasons for our using the ranges of concepts that we in fact use. As ever, use means competent use as guides. The emphasis is on use as guides because technical competence is assumed.

The most fundamental factor is likely to be our biological nature. We would hardly have the concept of marriage if there were not two sexes, both essential for reproduction, even though not all mixed-sex couples have children and we now recognize same-sex unions, with or without children. The need to care for children over a long period will have been the main influence in forming our concept of the family. The notion of working now to provide for the future may have originated in our need to eat throughout the year, combined with the fact that the seasons prevented us from growing and harvesting crops, or gathering plants and hunting animals, at certain times of year. The very existence of our concept of beauty depends on the capabilities of our senses and of the parts of our brains that interpret sensory inputs. The nature of our senses has shaped our specific ideas of what counts as beautiful. And so on.

Biology is enough to explain why we could expect a great gulf between human and Martian sets of guiding concepts. Martian biology would be likely to involve different arrangements for reproduction, different nutritional requirements in a different environment and different sensory apparatus. There could be other reasons for a gulf between human and Martian concepts, but a gulf would be likely to exist on the strength of biological differences alone.

Biology does not explain everything. Different cultures, which operate with different guiding concepts, are created by human beings with the same biology. Reasons why some cultures are more hierarchical than others, why some are collectivist and some individualist, and so on might be found in local natural conditions or in accidents of history.

Beyond differences between cultures, we need to explain differences between members of the same culture. Some people are strangers in our midst, either amiable eccentrics or disturbing misfits, despite being natives of our culture rather than having been

brought up in other cultures. They may for example lack day-to-day courtesy, not out of deliberate rudeness but because they simply do not use the concept of courtesy as a guide, so that it does not influence their behaviour. Or they may be unable to understand why other people display loyalty to their families, because they do not feel the force of the concept. Strangers in our midst may have no sense of the value of art, not because they lack our ordinary perceptual apparatus but because they cannot see value in beauty. More seriously, they may not be guided by the concept of respect for other people or by the concept of making compromises, renouncing some personal desires so that we can all get along together.

A scientific explanation of such strangers in our midst would look at genetics, general upbringing, unusual incidents in their lives and so on. I will not explore that here. Instead, I will show how to map the positions of these strangers using the analogy of the coastline. I will accommodate both those who are strangers in our midst without having any say in the matter, as where genetic influences predominate, and those who choose to be strangers.

Let us go back to our original three observers, J, K and M. Suppose that J's position on the coastline is roughly that of ourselves. Members of our culture stand clustered around J. We use the same lenses as J, the lenses borne by the same dinghies, yachts and freighters. That gives us a common set of concepts which we use as guides. But a stranger in our midst is not with us. He is not to one side of us, say where K is standing, because that would take him outside our culture. His everyday guiding concepts would then be significantly different from ours, corresponding to the fact that he would use the lenses on a different set of dinghies. (He would however use the lenses on some of the same yachts. He would retain some everyday concepts in common with us.) Rather, the stranger does not have access to some of the dinghy-borne lenses that we use, but he still uses other dinghy-borne lenses that we use. He is out in the water, directly in front of us but still closer inshore than the dinghies. We will give him a lifebuoy so that he can float upright. Like everybody else he looks straight out to sea, he cannot turn his head or move his eyes and he has poor peripheral vision. So as he floats out there, close to the dinghies, he only uses some of the dinghy-borne lenses that we use. Other dinghies, and their lenses, are outside his visual field because he is too close to them.

The stranger may also miss a few of the yachts that we see and be unable to use their lenses, because he is closer to the line of yachts than we are. But he will still see the same freighters as we see, and will therefore use their lenses, because they are so much further away. A serious misfit will be in the water beyond the line of dinghies, unable to use any of the dinghy-borne lenses that we use and also unable to use many of the yacht-borne lenses that we use.

The lenses that the stranger cannot use correspond to the concepts that he does not use as guides. He would have a detached understanding of courtesy, beauty, loyalty or compromise, as if he were an anthropologist noting our behaviour when we lived in accordance with those concepts, but that would be all. That detached understanding would correspond to the fact that he would still use the freighter-borne lenses which corresponded to the non-guiding versions of those guiding concepts.

I am not passing a moral judgement here. Indeed, to the extent that someone's position was determined by genetic factors or by environmental factors that he had not chosen, it would be absurd to censure him for being located out in the water. The point of extending the analogy of the coastline to cover strangers in our midst is that it maps out the choices available to us, while paying due respect to the role of factors that are beyond our control.

We can, subject to genetic and environmental constraints, choose where to stand. A sideways move from the culture in which we live, say from J's position to K's position, may be difficult but not impossible. But we can also choose whether to stay onshore or to move out into the water.

Natural constraints on some people may mean that they are inevitably positioned at least a certain distance out in the water, and cannot choose to be onshore. Some strangers in our midst may be like that, with genes or an early history which prevent them from using some social concepts, like courtesy, loyalty or compromise. They may be able to move closer inshore, and bring more of these concepts into use, with appropriate therapy. But while some people may be unable to move closer inshore than a certain point, we all have a choice as to whether to take up the closest inshore position that we can (actually onshore for most of us), or to position ourselves further out. We might only move a little way out, just to put a few guiding concepts out of use, or we might go further.

It might seem bizarre to choose a position further out in the water than necessary. Why should anyone choose to restrict the range of concepts that he used as guides? If for example someone did not wish to show any loyalty to his employer, would it not be easier for him to retain the concept of loyalty to an employer, using it to judge the conduct of others, but not to apply it to his own life? To have the lens there, available for use, but not to look at his own life through that lens?

There are two reasons why someone might deliberately restrict the range of concepts that he used as guides. The first reason is that if someone uses a concept that is not a concept of natural science as a guide, he accepts that there is more to the world than is described by the natural sciences. The second reason is that someone who uses a concept as a guide must accept that it can make demands on him.

The first reason for deliberately restricting a range of usable concepts is that someone who uses concepts such as loyalty and artistic beauty as guides, attaching value to the conduct or things that exemplify the concepts, is implicitly accepting that there is more to the world than is given by a scientific description. Some people think that this is not so. They say that the real world is merely the world as described by physics, atoms and the void, and probably the world as described by chemistry and biology as well, but with no value. "Loyalty" may be a convenient label for the observed behaviour of some organisms, and "beautiful" may be a convenient label for some physical properties of entities that attract some organisms. But both "loyalty" and "beauty" should ideally disappear from our vocabulary, to be replaced by purely physical descriptions of the world. Someone who uses concepts such as loyalty and artistic beauty in the ordinary human way will not regard them merely as convenient labels for aspects of underlying physical reality. These concepts really are imbued with value and their standard use, which is use as guides, requires a recognition of that value. Therefore the rigid believer that only descriptions of the world in the terms of the natural sciences are ultimately acceptable cannot use these concepts as guides. He will insist on being placed far out to sea, beyond the dinghies and the yachts, where only the freighter-borne lenses are available to use. Those lenses correspond to the concepts of the natural sciences and the non-guiding versions of our everyday guiding concepts.

He will have to be placed far out to sea because a feature of the analogy is that if a lens is usable, it is used. Our eyes are open and if a lens is in front of our eyes, we cannot avoid seeing the world through that lens except when we unconsciously fail to notice features of the world. Correspondingly, if we have a concept that applies to features of the world which are currently presented to us, then we bring the concept into use automatically. Only after the concept has applied, and has indicated certain conclusions, can we decide to disregard those conclusions. (Even selective attention can only operate once the relevant concepts have been applied.) This may not be so with concepts that can only be applied by a deliberate process of reasoning, such as concepts of the natural or the social sciences, but it is so with our everyday concepts. Therefore it is not possible to be placed closer inshore than the yachts and still use only the concepts that correspond to freighter-borne lenses. Someone far out to sea, beyond the yachts, will however find that his position is unsustainable. Use of at least some of our everyday concepts as guides will be reflected in his way of life, even if he denies their validity in theory. So he will need to occupy a position closer inshore than the yachts.

The second reason for deliberately restricting a range of concepts is that some concepts cannot be used as guides and then ignored when it does not suit us to apply them. Take the concept of fair dealing in commerce. If we make the standard use of this concept, and believe that there is value in dealing fairly with other people, it is very hard to claim that we ourselves are exempt. Moral rules are rules for everyone, not for everyone except those arbitrarily named as exempt. The value with which the concept of fair dealing is imbued shows up as a call to deal fairly. And as will be shown in section 5.3, our guiding concepts cannot be regarded as optional, to be used or put out of use from one occasion to the next. Someone who does not wish to feel the claims of morality will therefore have to position himself out to sea, where he cannot use the lenses on some dinghies and yachts. That would be the only way to get round the problem that when lenses are within our visual field, we cannot avoid looking through them, even if looking through them leads us to see things with a force that we would prefer not to experience.

Someone who did not wish to use certain guiding concepts might move to and from the shore, bringing guiding concepts into

and out of use, but he could not, while registering a concept as a guiding concept, use it selectively. (Unconscious selective attention to the world might appear to achieve selective use, but that would not be a deliberate strategy and it would be at risk of failure at any moment. Deliberate selective attention would amount to use of the concept on all occasions, followed by deliberate disregard of the conclusions that it supported, leading to bad feelings.) When he was far enough out to sea for the corresponding lens to be outside his visual field, the non-guiding version would remain in use. He could appreciate that the concept might be a guiding concept for some people, and that it could become a guiding concept for himself, but it would not currently be a guiding concept for him. Furthermore, he could not use this knowledge of the concepts that could become guiding concepts for himself in order to jump towards the coastline when he wanted to use a concept as a guide, then immediately jump back out to sea again. The psychological reason why he could not do so is that our brains have a certain inertia. It takes time to attach imperative force to our concepts, but once we have attached that force it is hard to remove it. The logical reason why he could not do so is that commitment to continued use is a central feature of our guiding concepts, as will be shown in section 5.3. This role of commitment would not slow down the process of bringing a guiding concept into use, but it would slow down the process of putting the guiding concept out of use again.

Someone could operate with a rule that he would appear to deal fairly with others, and would exploit their desire to deal fairly to the extent that it was possible to get away with exploitation. But he would then be guided by the concept of exploitation, rather than by the concept of fair dealing. The concept of fair dealing would have become a mere tool to be used, recognized as binding by others but not accepted as a guide by the exploiter.

Another feature of the analogy of the coastline should be noted here. As noted in section 3.2 in connection with the different concepts used by human beings and by Martians, its geometry is too simple to capture every possible allocation of guiding concepts to different groups of cultures. Likewise, the picture of some people being placed out to sea as an analogy of their not using all of our concepts as guides, and of any of us moving out to sea in order to achieve the same effect, has too simple a geometry to capture every variation. Different people might have different and overlapping

gaps in their sets of guiding concepts, so that no one arrangement of dinghies and yachts could capture the complete picture exactly. This does not however detract from the general picture.

We should also note that while we can be selective about the concepts used in our society that we individually use as guides, by choosing positions onshore or a little way out to sea, none of us has complete freedom to pick and mix guiding concepts. There are two sources of constraint. First, some concepts are closely related to others. If we use the concept of friendship as a guide, its overlap with the concept of loyalty is such that we cannot wholly ignore the claims of loyalty. Second, there are some concepts, like the concept of honesty, that we need to use as guides, otherwise everyday life becomes very difficult. Even the inveterate liar has to tell the truth in most of his day-to-day dealings with others, for example when telling a shopkeeper what he wishes to buy. If he stops to think about why the truth is so important in everyday life, he will find it hard entirely to resist the force of the concept of honesty as a guide. More generally, placing oneself far out to sea and doing without a wide range of everyday guiding concepts would mean debarring oneself from ordinary human interaction. As already noted, only someone who uses the concept of friendship as a guide can be a friend.

I have introduced two ideas, ranges of guiding concepts and choice as to which concepts we use as guides. I will now set out the role of concepts in forming two different types of view of the world or of parts of the world. Objective views are formed using as guides only the concepts that are universally available as guides. Subjective views are formed using a full range of concepts as guides. Chapter 4 will cover objective views, chapter 5 subjective views and chapter 6 the relationship between the two types of view.

CHAPTER 4

Objective views

An objective view is a view of the world or of some part of the world that is congenial to scientific study. It is formed using only concepts that are available to all rational beings. If we take an objective view, we can undertake a scientific study of how the world works. That is very useful but another, less fortunate, consequence is that culture-specific guiding concepts are not available to justify our conduct. In this chapter I will explore some aspects of objective views, and I will relate objective views to the analogy of the coastline. Initially I will consider objective views of things in general, not specifically of human conduct. Then I will return to human conduct and consider the effects of taking an objective view of it. I will use “conduct” as a neutral term for what we do. I will refer to conduct viewed in a detached way as behaviour. I will refer to conduct viewed from the point of view of the autonomous acting person as action. That point of view is not restricted to the acting person herself. We can also take that point of view by putting ourselves in her shoes.

A view, whether objective or subjective, may be of the world (meaning the whole Universe) or of some part of the world. Normally we only take a view of some small part of the world, but when I refer to views of the world I shall mean views of the whole or of any part. A view of the world will mean a view of the actual world, not a theory about worlds that are of the same type as the actual world. Thus a theory of physics is not a view of the world, even though it may be true throughout the world. Rather, it is a way of looking at the world which could equally well be used to look at different worlds of the same type as ours. A theory of physics corresponds to lenses borne by some of the freighters, the lenses that correspond to the theory’s concepts. The actual world corresponds to what is seen through those lenses.

Objective views are to be contrasted with subjective views. These are views of things which are formed using the full range of

concepts that someone can use. That range includes concepts which are not available as guides to all rational beings, and may indeed be available as guides only within one culture. The term “view” is not meant to imply a picture of the world that is merely contemplated with detachment. A view of something helps us to choose conduct and to justify it. That is why it is important to consider the ranges of guiding concepts that are available when forming views. If for example we take an objective view of someone’s conduct in making a gift, we can see that conduct as a transfer of property which is regarded as an expression of friendship and which leads to feelings of pleasure and gratitude. If we take a subjective view and use friendship as a guiding concept, we can go further and see the giving as justified conduct. Taking an objective view, we can see in one way why the gift was made. We can see how the people involved came to see exchanges of gifts as appropriate. Taking a subjective view, we can see in another way why the gift was made. We can see that making a gift was the right thing to do. If we were in the giver’s shoes, we too would probably have chosen to make a gift.

A view of some part of the world, whether objective or subjective, will be a view of some things, events, people or instances of conduct. Whenever we take a view of something, we use the concepts that are appropriate. We do not use the full range of concepts at our disposal every time we take a view of something. But the full range is always available. The fact that someone takes a view of something using only a limited range of concepts does not mean that he cannot take views of other things, or even of the same thing, using a different range of concepts. In thinking about what someone does, we should see him as first acquiring a range of concepts. Then as a second stage he forms views of specific things, events, people or conduct using a selection from that range. This is so even if, as a matter of psychology, we acquire our concepts by using them rather than first acquiring them and then using them. In terms of the analogy of the coastline, someone’s position on the coastline or out in the water puts certain resources at his disposal. It determines the range of culture-specific concepts that he uses as guides. (Non-guiding concepts and universal guiding concepts correspond to the lenses borne by the freighters, so the range will be the same wherever he is positioned, subject to the presence of patches of fog.) His position is not itself an objective or a subjective

view of anything. Once he has his resources he then, as a separate matter, takes a view of some things, events, people or instances of conduct. That view is objective if he forms it using only concepts that correspond to lenses borne by freighters. If he uses concepts that correspond to lenses borne by yachts or dinghies, then the view taken is a subjective view.

Although someone will form a particular view, whether objective or subjective, using only some of the concepts at his disposal, this does not mean that the other concepts at his disposal will be briefly put out of use in the sense that was ruled out in section 3.3. All concepts remain in use, in the sense that he will apply them whenever they are relevant. He will have to apply them even if they draw his attention to obligations that he would rather not have. That does however allow him to form views without using culture-specific guiding concepts. The reason why this is possible is that a person can have several different views simultaneously, even views of the same part of the world. Thus a doctor who is treating a member of his family both takes a purely scientific view of his patient as suffering from a certain disease, and has all the usual family feelings of affection for the patient. The guiding concept of the family remains in play, influencing the doctor's subjective view of the patient, even though it is not used in forming the objective scientific view which determines the choice of treatment.

4.1 Independence of the observer's culture

An objective view is one that can be taken by anyone who has the necessary expertise. The only concepts that someone must be able to use in order to take a given objective view are the concepts that correspond to the freighter-borne lenses in the analogy of the coastline, the concepts that are available to everyone. (Giving someone the necessary expertise may require clearing away some patches of fog, so that he has access to some freighter-borne lenses that are not yet in use in his culture.) No particular yacht-borne or dinghy-borne lenses need be used. Concepts that are only available as guides in some cultures can however be used in a detached, non-guiding way in forming objective views, because there will be

freighter-borne lenses that correspond to non-guiding versions of those concepts.

This does not mean that those who take objective views are misfits in the everyday human world. Scientists and others who take objective views still use culture-specific guiding concepts whenever appropriate. There is also no implication that an objective view is a view of everything in the world, or that it is the only type of objective view of the entities that it covers, or that it is necessarily correct.

A given objective view can be taken by an observer from any culture. In terms of the analogy of the coastline, it will not matter where he is. He can be anywhere along the coastline or out in the water. An objective view of anything in the world could be taken by any human being, or by a Martian. Such a generally available view is vital to the conduct of science. It means that conclusions can be understood and tested by others, without any fear that meaning will be lost or that ambiguity will be introduced on account of cultural differences.

An objective view is also vital to the proper understanding of scientific conclusions. If we do not leave the value attached to our culture-specific guiding concepts on one side when reading a scientific paper, we can all too easily read more into the conclusions than we should. In particular, we can suppose that the conclusions have ethical implications which they do not have on their own. We may then suppose ourselves to be bound by those ethical conclusions because we think that they follow directly from scientifically established results. If for example research showed that the use of genetically modified crops helped to stabilize food supplies, that might lead us to support the use of genetically modified crops. Alternatively, research showing that their use reduced bio-diversity might lead us to oppose their use. But any justification for support or for opposition would only really follow from the scientific results plus our views on priorities. Those views would be formed using our culture-specific guiding concepts. If we attached great value to security, we would favour the stabilization of food supplies. If we attached great value to not damaging ecosystems, we would favour the maintenance of bio-diversity. But the scientific results alone would not justify either support for genetically modified crops, or opposition to them.

4.2 Rational beings

My criterion for a view's being objective is that any possible rational being could take that view. Whenever I refer to all rational beings, I will mean all actual and possible rational beings. The phrase is not meant to be limited to the beings that happen to have evolved. For all we know, human beings might be the only actual rational beings.

Rational beings are hard to define precisely, but they can be defined well enough. They have two key properties. First, their brains have enough processing power to make sense of the world. Second, they are aware that they are doing so. They know that there is a world, which they conceptualize as such and which they think about.

Adequate processing power should be easy to recognize. We know perfectly well that human beings have it. We could tell whether Martians had it either by observing the subtlety of their responses to their environment, or by more invasive methods such as electrical probes in their brains.

Satisfaction of the requirement that the world be conceptualized and thought about might be harder to recognize. Recognizing it would require us to understand processes of thought which could not be reliably correlated with physically measurable properties of brains. Again, we know that human beings conceptualize the world and think about it. We could also have good evidence that Martians did so, if for example we could discuss physics with them. We might recognize when they were effectively saying: "if you set up a physical system in this initial state, then it will evolve in such and such a manner to that final state". But we might not always be able to tell whether a being met the requirement.

As well as beings that meet the requirement to conceptualize and think about the world, we must consider beings that have adequate processing power and enough awareness to manipulate the world successfully, but somehow do not operate with the idea of the world as an object to be considered. Communication with such beings would probably be impossible. If we could apply the analogy of the coastline, they would not even see the freighters that we saw. But the analogy of the coastline would probably not be appropriate. There would probably be nothing in their minds that would even correspond to concepts as we understood them. Such beings would

simply not be intelligible to human beings. I have no qualms about excluding them from the realm of rational beings, because at that point the very concept of rationality would break down.

4.3 The concepts used in forming objective views

The concepts that are needed to form an objective view are concepts that all rational beings can use. We cannot be certain that we already have such a range of concepts at our disposal. The best we can do is to start with the concepts of physics. The starting point is physics rather than mathematics because we are looking for concepts to use in giving a view of the actual world. Pure mathematics does not in itself refer to the world at all. It is a self-contained structure. Physics is expressed in mathematical terms, but in physics the mathematics has lost its purity and detachment from the world.

We should not however feel that starting with physics and hoping that we will find what we need is a risky approach. The success of physics has been so huge that physics must have a grip on the world as it would be presented to any rational being. Of course our physics has changed. In the twentieth century, relativity and quantum mechanics transformed the most fundamental concepts of physics, the concepts of space, time and energy. And if we ever did sit down to discuss physics with Martians, we or they might hastily revise some concepts of physics in order to catch up. But the catching-up would be a matter of mastering new technical concepts, all of which would be accessible both to us and to Martians while everyone remained within his own culture. Our different cultures would have influenced the extent to which we had developed different areas of physics, but the thumbprints of those cultures would not be on the physics that had been developed.

(There is a lively debate in the philosophy of science between realists and anti-realists, about whether the expressions in scientific theories that correspond to unobservable entities and structures do actually refer to features of the real world. The realist thinks that things like electrons and fields of force are part of reality, although realists differ both on the things chosen and on the sense of “part of reality”. The anti-realist thinks that such things are in some important sense not part of reality. But whatever position we take in

that debate, we can still be sure that science tells us how the world is going to behave as we move around in it. Science is empirically adequate. That is all we need to justify our acceptance that science in general, and physics in particular, have a grip on the world, and to justify conduct in accordance with what science tells us. A convenient introduction to the debate between realists and anti-realists can be found in Leplin, “A Theory’s Predictive Success Can Warrant Belief in the Unobservable Entities it Postulates” and in Kukla and Walmsley, “A Theory’s Predictive Success Does not Warrant Belief in the Unobservable Entities it Postulates”. For the important topic of structural realism see French, “Structure as a Weapon of the Realist”.)

There might appear to be circularity here, with all concepts of physics being held to be usable by everyone so that physics can be made the central form of objective views of the world. If I claimed to be certain that any catching-up with Martians would not require any changes in our culture, the charge of circularity could indeed be made. But I do not make such a rash claim to certainty. I only argue on the basis of our experience to date. The concepts of physics that we currently use are comprehensible in all cultures, and their mathematical formulations show no traces of being culture-specific. If a culture-specific physics were to arise, I would have to change my view.

There is another apparent, but not actual, circularity to consider. Perhaps we only define something as physics if it is independent of culture, and automatically refuse the label of physics to anything that is not independent of culture. Again I can only refute this charge of circularity provisionally, by reference to observation. The observation of a new type of physics that was not independent of culture might lead me to change my view, but the things that currently count as physics show no signs of being culture-dependent. And the things that count as physics can be identified without using a criterion of culture-independence. While there may be no precise, sharp-edged definition of physics, there is a close family resemblance between the things that count as physics, sufficient to exclude most things that are not physics. There is also a tightly-knit web of mathematical connections between the different parts of physics. Those connections are not made between parts of physics and things that are not physics, except where physics shades into the other natural sciences.

While this refutation of the charge of a circular definition of physics is provisional, I do not put it forward hesitantly. The current state of physics is plain enough. If for example someone wanted to attach the name of physics to a body of doctrine about the physical world that reflected the principles of a religion, then he would have a defective idea of physics. It would only make sense to use the name of physics for a theory that showed the influence of a religion if there were first a revolution in the nature of physics. At the moment, there is no reason to think that such a revolution is even a remote prospect. (This does not of course exclude the possibility of developments in physics influencing people's views on religious questions, including influences which encourage views that are favourable to religion.)

Identifying physics as the central form of objective views of the world fits neatly with the need for science to take an objective view. Science has benefited enormously from placing physics at its centre, and from understanding the links between physics and other sciences. Whether or not biology will ever be completely reduced to chemistry, or chemistry to physics, there are certainly very close links between the sciences. The pursuit of those links has been very productive. To take just one example out of thousands, we can come to understand how a cell membrane works in terms of the physical diffusion processes and chemical reactions that allow it to move molecules into and out of cells.

Objectivity in the sense of independence of culture and the specific content of an objective view might seem to be separate matters, so that the fit between science's need for objectivity and the centrality of physics as a way of forming objective views would be a loose fit. Certainly the need for objectivity and the centrality of physics are conceptually separable. But it is no accident that physics should combine the virtue of being conspicuously independent of culture, and therefore suitable to be the central form of objective views, with the virtue of being central to the natural sciences.

Physics is about the natural world as it is everywhere, on Earth and elsewhere, in living beings and in lifeless objects. This helps to explain its independence of culture. If something is the same everywhere, that increases the probability that it will be viewed in the same way, or at least in ways that can easily be reconciled, everywhere. There would be no local variations to motivate

differences in the concepts used, although such differences might still arise for other reasons.

Not only does physics apply everywhere in space, it also applies everywhere in time. The objects that physics deals with, whether elementary particles, atoms or large lumps of matter that can be treated simply as objects with mass and subject to everyday physical forces, were there first. The objects that chemistry deals with, molecules, arose out of them. The objects that biology deals with, living things, arose out of molecules. This history helps to explain the centrality of physics in the sciences. The objects that concern other sciences arose out of the objects that concern physics. Molecules and living things remain, at their core, subject to the laws of physics that govern all objects.

A broad range of concepts

While physics is central, this does not mean that an objective view has to be formed using only a very narrow range of concepts. In particular, the concepts that are available to all, regardless of culture, may include concepts that only apply in specific disciplines or in specific cultures. This can take us beyond the concepts of chemistry and biology, which are obviously available.

It can be perfectly acceptable to use concepts that are only of interest in specific disciplines when forming an objective view. A squirrel will appear as a complex chemical system to a biochemist, as a gatherer of food to a zoologist and as an active element in a naturally balanced eco-system to an ecologist. These three people will all be using different concepts, but so long as they do not start to incorporate culture-specific assumptions it should be possible for each of them to explain their concepts to anyone, including Martians.

Concepts that are only used as guides in specific cultures, such as the concept of a job or the concept of the family, can be used in their non-guiding versions because they can be taken as convenient shorthand expressions for observable behaviour, something that can be described in physical terms. They can be used in the way that a detached anthropologist, who had no fellow-feeling with the people she was observing, might use them. This use is quite different from the use made of the concepts by the members of the relevant

culture, who will use the concepts as guides. But this detached use will still extend the range of concepts that we would have if we stuck rigidly to the natural sciences. Having said that, the extension of the range of concepts may not be as great as one might hope. Descriptions of observable behaviour are only acceptable in an objective view if they do not need the use of culture-specific guiding concepts in order to understand the descriptions. “Smith and Jones agreed a contract for the sale of coal” would only be acceptable in an objective view if the notions of agreement and of a business contract could also be spelt out in objective terms. This would require reference to behaviour of certain types, such as Smith’s conveying coal from his warehouse to Jones’s warehouse and Jones’s giving Smith some banknotes. The concept of a banknote would in turn need to be spelt out in objective terms, as a piece of paper that would be accepted by other people in exchange for other goods.

When concepts that are used as guides in some cultures but not in others are used as a shorthand for observable behaviour, so that they can be used in forming an objective view, we switch from lustre-imparting lenses borne by dinghies and yachts to lenses which are borne by freighters and which do not impart lustre. The corresponding concepts give the resources to describe behaviour, but as we shall see, the mere description of behaviour is not enough to sustain an ability to justify conduct. The guiding force that the concepts have in their everyday use disappears.

We also need to consider concepts of emergent properties, which may or may not be available in the formation of objective views. Emergent properties are properties of complex systems that are in some sense irreducible to properties of simpler systems. Sometimes they are defined as properties that could not have been predicted from the properties of the elements that make up the system and the laws of interaction of those elements. Sometimes they are defined as properties that could not be captured conceptually in the terms that are appropriate to describe the elements and their laws of interaction. We might for example claim that properties of our experiences, such as the property of being exciting, could not be captured in the terms of the natural sciences, even if we accepted that our experiences were the direct consequence of, or were identical with, physical processes in our brains and in the world. More rarely nowadays, emergent properties

are defined as properties that depend on new forces which only emerge at a certain level of complexity, for example a life-force that only arises in living things. (For a survey of emergent properties see Kim, “Supervenience, Emergence, Realization, Reduction”.)

There is debate as to whether there are in fact, or whether there could be, any emergent properties. Indeed once a putative emergent property is found, its status as emergent cannot be conclusively demonstrated because there is always the prospect that we will one day discover a way to predict it from, or to reduce it to, other properties. We cannot however neglect the issue. In particular, the properties of some types of human conduct might turn out to be emergent. There might for example be no satisfactory characterization of playing the piano in terms of the physical movements of fingers, because there was much more to any decent performance than the sequence of depressions of keys with varying degrees of force. If that were so, and if concepts of emergent properties could not be used in forming objective views, then the range of concepts that could be used on the basis that they could be read as shorthand descriptions of observable behaviour would be limited accordingly.

It is not clear whether or not concepts of emergent properties could be used in forming objective views. It is likely to depend on the characteristics of the particular property. If the process of emergence could be set out in terms of a mathematical theory of complexity or some other process that could be captured in concepts which were available to all rational beings, and if the simple elements that made up the complex system could be described using concepts which were available to all rational beings, then the concept of the emergent property could be used in forming objective views. However, if either the process of emergence or the simple elements could not be set out using concepts which were available to all rational beings, then the concept of the emergent property would have to be excluded from use in forming any objective view.

Although the great bulk of the content of the natural sciences at any one time is widely agreed by experts, with debates being confined to the frontiers of knowledge, this does not imply that there can only be one objective view of a given type. It does not for example imply that there can only be one physics. (Objective views

of different types, such as physics and biology, can of course co-exist happily.) The sciences do change, and occasionally their fundamental principles are re-thought. Two different societies could advance the sciences to different extents and in different directions, until they made extensive contact with each other and shared their knowledge. But once two societies had shared their knowledge and had realized that they were talking about the same things in the world, it would be very strange for two separate bodies of science to persist. They would be recognized as equivalent, or one would supplement or supplant the other. Correspondingly, the fact that a view is objective is no guarantee that it is correct. All of our science is at risk of being changed, or even overturned, at some unknown time and in some unknown way.

4.4 Being objective about our conduct

People, like everything else, are amenable to scientific study, so long as we are prepared to take an objective view of people. Such studies have made immense progress in recent decades, not just in understanding our physical make-up but also in understanding the operation of our mental processes. We may soon understand in detail the physical source of the feelings that each of us has of being conscious, of being a self that is distinct from the world, of free choice and of the value of certain things.

However, we who study humanity are human beings ourselves. We are therefore acutely aware of what is not captured by the scientific study of ourselves. It is precisely what we would expect, given the restrictions on the concepts that can be used in forming objective views. Guiding concepts, such as the concept of courtesy or the concept of beauty, cannot be used with the guiding force that they ordinarily have. An objective view can find no place for their power to justify our conduct, because sharing an acceptance of a culture-specific power must not be a prerequisite for understanding an objective view. If it were a prerequisite, then the view given would not be universally available. Martians, and perhaps some human beings from radically different cultures, would not be able to understand it. It would therefore be insufficiently objective for the proper conduct of science.

This does not prevent an objective view from identifying the origins of our feeling that our guiding concepts can justify our conduct. An objective view may well be able to explain why we have come to value certain forms of conduct and not others. Sometimes the explanation will be in evolutionary terms. If for example trustworthy conduct is something that everyone in a group considers they should exhibit, members of the group will be able to co-operate in large-scale projects that will help to secure food supplies or to protect against the elements. Then everyone in the group will benefit. Such groups will flourish and their populations will grow. It would not then be surprising if trustworthiness came to be a guiding concept, so that conduct which repaid other people's trust was automatically felt to be the right thing to do.

Equally, an objective view may very well explain the physiology behind our guiding concepts. Certain states of the brain and of the rest of the body will correspond to certain thoughts or feelings about what we should do. (I include the reference to the rest of the body because the components relevant to what we think and feel are by no means entirely contained in the brain. There is no sharp boundary between a thinking, feeling brain and a merely obedient body.) The correspondence need not be one-to-one. Several different physical states of the brain and the rest of the body might correspond to the same set of thoughts or feelings. But the progress of science in this area strongly suggests that thoughts and feelings do depend entirely on physical states, in the sense that someone's thoughts or feelings can only change if there is a physical change.

Thus an objective view will not lack the resources to explain, in detail, the thoughts and feelings of value and justification that we have. We may also get an explanation of the structure of our thoughts and feelings, with the discovery of physical correlates of the rules of implication that we accept. We may for example come to understand, in purely scientific terms, why it is that someone who considered the value of human life to have overwhelmingly stronger power to justify conduct than the concept of beauty, would choose to rescue one human being rather than rescuing a hundred great works of art when faced with a fire in an art gallery. A general principle that in cases of conflict, guiding concepts should be applied in accordance with a pre-established order of priority, would imply the specific conduct. There might even be specific features of the brain that explained such patterns of inference.

So the fact that we use certain concepts as guides, which includes the fact that we accept their power to justify conduct, could be covered in an objective view. What would be missing would be the actual power to justify our conduct, something over and above the feeling we have of that power.

This point does not depend on the fact that a view gives a description of physical states, only on the fact that the view is objective. Culture-specific power to justify conduct can, by definition, have no place in the formation of an objective view, because rational beings from some other cultures would not grasp that power. The power of the concepts of the natural sciences to justify certain conduct, on the other hand, could find a place in an objective view because all rational beings take those concepts to be guides. All, except the rare eccentric, agree that it makes sense to live in a way that takes account of the facts that are presented to us by the natural sciences. But there is very little else, if anything, that justifies our conduct without being culture-specific.

Although the point about the power to justify conduct does not depend on an objective view's giving a description in terms of physical states, physical states are the obvious terms in which to form an objective view. Indeed if physics and the other natural sciences are the starting point for any objective view, then it may be that all objective views do need to be descriptions of physical states. Reflection on physical descriptions also makes it clear that the power of our everyday guiding concepts to justify conduct is absent from such descriptions. If we only say that there is this electrical current in this neuron, and that tension in that muscle, then we cannot see any power to justify conduct. We can see that power if we recognize the states of neurons as corresponding to beliefs that a piece of porcelain is beautiful and is about to fall, and if we recognize the tensions in muscles as corresponding to rescuing that piece from falling and breaking. At the latter level of description, the justification for the conduct is obvious. No-one for whom the concept of beauty was a guide would ask the saviour of the piece to justify what she did. But at the level of neurons and muscles, there is no justification to be seen.

If an objective view would leave our non-scientific guiding concepts bereft of their power to justify conduct, we may ask how serious that would be. What would happen if we paused before deciding what to do, and decided that no possible choice would be

more justified than any other because our guiding concepts had no power to justify the conduct that they would naturally suggest? It is easy to think that this would be disastrous. If we did not recognize a firmly-grounded justification for decent behaviour, would we not act in a thoroughly irresponsible manner, lying, cheating and killing as it suited us? Actually, that would be an unlikely outcome. Human nature is not like that. Even if human nature were like that, then on purely selfish, prudential grounds we would continue to conduct ourselves in a way that would allow others to think of us as reliable people, so that we could all co-operate. We would also recognize the value to ourselves of maintaining a police force and a judicial system to deal with those who did not conduct themselves as most of us would wish. Our selfish prudence, our desire to make arrangements that would ensure our own safety and comfort, would in turn be sustained by instinctive desires to look after ourselves. There is however one area where the fact that people were taking an objective view, bereft of an acceptance that guiding concepts justified conduct in accordance with them, might make a difference to outcomes. This is where instinct and prudence did not obviously imply just one answer. For example, should someone risk her own life to save others? Or should someone be moderately dishonest in order to secure a valuable business opportunity that would create employment in a deprived area of the country?

In the light of this, we may ask why the absence from an objective view of the power of guiding concepts to justify certain conduct would matter, and indeed whether anything real would be missing. We may wonder whether anything is added by moving from an objective view, in which the physical correlates of our feelings of the justificatory power of our concepts are fully covered but the concepts do not themselves have that power, to a subjective view which is formed using concepts that do justify certain conduct.

In fact the move to a subjective view does make a significant difference. The reason is that we do not merely use concepts and form views. We are aware that we are doing so, and we reflect on the status of the conclusions that we reach. We work out that we are inclined to certain conduct because we see the world in a certain way, using certain concepts. If we choose to use some culture-specific guiding concepts, and allow those concepts to have a hold over us, then we see the resulting conclusions as to what we should do as justified. This may not often make a difference to what we

actually do, but it can make a difference. Examples would be the circumstances mentioned above, risking one's own life to save others or being dishonest in order to create employment. Even when there is no immediate impact on what we actually do, there is much to be said for establishing harmony between our conscious reflections and our way of life. If we can find a satisfactory ground for the power of guiding concepts to justify certain conduct, and a satisfactory basis on which to select the concepts that we accept as guides, we will have a solid and articulable base for our values. The ethic of projects is put forward to fulfil that role. The lack of a solid and articulable base for our values might not matter much in the short term, but over a long period it might lead us to drift far away from where we would have stayed with the benefit of such a base.

CHAPTER 5

Subjective views

5.1 Culture-specific guiding concepts

A subjective view is a view that is not formed using only concepts that are universally available. In forming a subjective view of the world, we can use a full range of concepts. If we form a subjective view, we can draw on much wider resources than are allowed when forming an objective view. In terms of the analogy of the coastline, the lenses borne by the yachts and the dinghies become available. We are not restricted to the lenses borne by the freighters.

A subjective view need not make sense to all rational beings. So it does not matter if it is formed using everyday, culture-specific concepts that will only be properly understood by people who can use them as guides. Someone who takes an objective view can see someone handling works of art with great care, and can see her believing that the works are beautiful and that we should take care not to damage beautiful objects. Those beliefs would reflect the fact that she was using the concept of beauty as a guide. Someone taking a subjective view can see something that has to be invisible if one takes an objective view. This is the actual justification for her taking care, because in forming a subjective view the concept of beauty can actually be a guide. This goes beyond recognizing that some people use it as a guide.

The acceptance of certain guiding concepts as guides is needed to form subjective views. We must use some yacht-borne or dinghy-borne lenses. This acceptance leads on to a view of ourselves as autonomous persons who are responsible for our actions. The argument to this view of ourselves is important to set out, for three reasons. The first reason is that any ethic presupposes that we are autonomous and responsible persons. That notion is an essential foundation for any ethic because an ethic advises us what to do, so we have to be able to choose what to do, and because an ethic holds us responsible for what we in fact do. It is therefore

necessary to show that the notion of an autonomous and responsible person is legitimate. The second reason is that it is good to close the circle, without creating a circular argument, by showing how guiding concepts themselves lead on to the notion of an autonomous and responsible person that all ethics presuppose. The ethic of projects that is given in chapter 12 will make a selection from all the possible guiding concepts. The raw material that the ethic of projects works on, the set of possible guiding concepts, itself brings with it the foundational notion that is needed for any ethic to be possible. The third reason is that we do have a clear sense of ourselves as autonomous and responsible persons, and not as mere objects in the world. It is worth showing how this is not a free-standing notion, but something that is integrated with the notion of values as captured in guiding concepts. As we reflect on how we get to the range of possible values that the ethic of projects will narrow down to acceptable values, we will see how we have to arrive at the notion of an autonomous and responsible person. This notion, which relies on a strong sense of autonomy, is invisible to science. But our experience of our lives from the inside clearly tells us that it applies to ourselves.

In this chapter I will refer to people accepting that certain concepts are guides. The consequence of that acceptance is no more than the use of those concepts as guides, because use is not merely use on specific occasions but an ongoing acceptance of the power of guiding concepts to incline us to certain actions and to justify actions. But I refer to acceptance rather than use because I wish to focus on the process of formation of subjective views. By considering possible guiding concepts for use and accepting or rejecting them, we put ourselves in a position to form some subjective views but not others.

Another reason for referring to the acceptance of guiding concepts is that it is crucial to the argument that the process be at least potentially conscious and deliberate. A conscious and deliberate process is more clearly implied by reference to acceptance than by reference to use. We may as a matter of fact just pick up guiding concepts from the societies in which we live. But we could reflect on those concepts and accept or reject them, at least one by one even if it would be impossible to reject all of them at once. And on each occasion when we may act in accordance with the concepts that we accept as guides, we can consciously decide

whether or not to follow the guidance given by the concepts. (Not following that guidance would not however be a neutral thing to do. It would be a source of bad feelings.) Conscious choice is available even if we mostly follow the guidance unreflectingly. Without the facility to choose consciously, we would not be able to arrive at the notion of an autonomous, responsible person.

Someone who takes a subjective view of something will not only use culture-specific guiding concepts. He will, because he is making use of those concepts, feel called upon to abide by the rules of conduct that are implied by those concepts. Thus someone who took a subjective view of his friends, formed using the guiding concept of friendship, would accept that he had a duty of loyalty to his friends. He could introduce a statement that he had duties of loyalty into deliberations as to what he should do, without any sense that it needed further justification. Similarly, someone who held a subjective view that certain objects were beautiful, using the concept of beauty as a guide, would accept that those objects should normally be preserved, again without any need for further justification. In short, a subjective view could imply the full range of rules that governed someone's conduct. It could do so because it would be built up using guiding concepts with their power to justify certain conduct. To move from an objective view of our friends to a subjective view is to move from saying "I have an urge to be loyal to my friends" to saying "I should be loyal to my friends". And someone who used the concept of friendship as a guide in taking a subjective view of someone else's friendships would not only see that person's loyalty to her friends as justified. He would also feel bound to be loyal to his own friends, because he would have the guiding concept in use. He could not ignore it when viewing his own friendships, at least not without feeling guilty.

The use as guides of concepts that could not be guides for all rational beings would appear to place us on dubious ground. One reason why science has made tremendous progress is that it has stuck rigidly to objective views. Science insists that every conclusion be expressed in terms that can be clearly and unambiguously understood by everyone, and that have the same force for everyone. Those conclusions can then be subjected to rigorous testing. Furthermore, the risk of people making unwarranted deductions from conclusions is greatly reduced by a requirement to express the conclusions in terms that do not imply

any power to justify conduct, beyond a power that would be recognized by all rational beings. We are indeed taking a risk by using culture-specific guiding concepts in forming views of the world. But as this chapter will show, doing so can also bring significant benefits.

Acceptance that culture-specific guiding concepts are guides implies that we are responsible persons. The concepts do not merely indicate that it would be good if we were courteous, or acted honestly, or were loyal to our friends. They are a call to conduct ourselves in the appropriate ways. That only makes sense if we are persons who make choices, who can make correct or incorrect choices and who are responsible for our choices. Thus we move quickly from acceptance that culture-specific guiding concepts are guides to the notion of an autonomous and responsible person. And the person, deciding what to do, does not feel herself to be an object in the world. Rather, she feels that she is at a boundary of the world and has control over some of what goes on in the world. I will now set out in more detail this move from the acceptance that some concepts are guides to the view of ourselves as autonomous and responsible persons.

First, let us consider the guiding concepts that we use. Courtesy is a straightforward example. If we use the concept in a way that recognizes its power to justify courteous conduct, as opposed to using it in the way that a detached anthropologist would use it, we recognize that there is virtue in being courteous. This is not just an assertion that the world will be a better place if people are courteous. It is also a call upon us to be courteous. We cannot entirely neglect this call to courtesy. We might consider courtesy to be relatively unimportant. Then the call to courtesy would easily be over-ridden, for example whenever we were in a hurry or we felt that a bit of rudeness would get someone to respond as we wished. But the call would still be there, and if it were over-ridden there would still be at least some loss in not heeding the call. It would have been better if circumstances had made it easier for us to heed the call.

Other concepts follow the same pattern. If we accept that the concept of the family, or the concept of a job, is a guide, then we accept that we should ideally conduct ourselves in certain ways. The calls upon us to conduct ourselves in those ways may be strong or weak, and they may be over-ridden by other calls upon us, but

they are there. Therefore conflicts of value will sometimes arise. They will be manifest to us either as regretful feelings that compromises have been necessary, or as painful feelings that we have done wrong, even if we did as well as the circumstances allowed.

Conflicts of value are a sure sign that guiding concepts make calls upon us. If for example someone found that his job and his family were making irreconcilable demands on his time, then there would be a real conflict. The conflict would demand a resolution that would at least feel like an unsatisfactory compromise, and might feel painfully wrong. The rules of conduct that were implied by one guiding concept or the other would have to be broken. Either the rule that one should perform the duties of one's job diligently, or the rule that one should devote plenty of time to one's family, would be broken. The breaking of one rule might be seen as justifiable. It would seem perfectly reasonable to plead that it was inevitable in order to keep the other rule, and that no-one can be expected to do better overall than circumstances allow. But a rule would still have been broken.

That breaking of a rule, and indeed moral conflicts generally, could be avoided by only making use of a single rule. This might be an imperative to promote happiness, which would be implied by the single guiding concept of happiness. Courtesy, loyalty and other everyday concepts would not then be independent guiding concepts. Their power to justify conduct would derive from their dependent status, as tools to promote compliance with the supreme rule of conduct. Conflicts would be resolved by identifying the compromise that would best accord with the supreme rule. But even then, there would still be a risk of neglecting that supreme rule when we were too preoccupied with other considerations. And in any case single rules generally strike us as too simplistic to be acceptable, even if they require something as appealing as the promotion of happiness.

Feelings of regret or wrongness could be explained objectively, in terms of the ways that our brains work when they are in states that correspond to our internal debates as to what we should do. However, the fact that the breaking of a particular rule of conduct really was regrettable or worthy of condemnation, as opposed to actually being regretted or condemned by human beings, could not be explained in objective terms. This is because it would spring

from the power of the relevant culture-specific guiding concepts to justify certain conduct, where that power was not visible to all rational beings. Someone who did not use the concepts in question as guides could only note what had happened, without evaluating it in its own terms. Such an observer might evaluate the situation using her own set of guiding concepts, but that would involve a different characterization of the situation. It might well lead her to a different evaluation. She might for example regard the conduct as ethically neutral rather than as worthy of condemnation.

Even a reasoned explanation of how we had got to a situation that was regrettable or worthy of condemnation, based on setting out how a conflict between rules of conduct would inevitably arise in given circumstances and on how our guiding concepts had given rise to those rules, would not explain why regret or condemnation was appropriate. We can construct a system to handle the logic of rules of conduct and guiding concepts. Such a system can reflect conflicts. Where the central idea is that we should perform our duties, the system goes by the name of deontic logic. It sets out the relationships between obligatory, permitted and forbidden conduct. But from an objective point of view, any such logic merely manipulates rules of conduct and shows where they may come into conflict. It notes a conflict and sets out the origins of that conflict. It does not make a conflict into a pressing issue. Only a real sense of the need to respect the rules, based on acceptance that the underlying concepts are guides, can do that.

There are concepts that are guides for all rational beings, the concepts of the natural sciences. All sane rational beings will for example be guided by the concept of gravity. The question arises of why the notion of an autonomous and responsible person should not arise as a consequence of objective views, given that scientific concepts are used in forming objective views. The reason is that where concepts are universal guides, we cannot choose to heed or ignore their call to conduct ourselves in accordance with them. We cannot defy the features of the world which they capture. Gravity is there and will constrain us, whether we like it or not. There is therefore no choosing to be done, unless we are prepared to consider conducting ourselves insanely. We avoid that option instinctively, just as monkeys who climb trees ignore the option to disregard gravity.

5.2 The actions of persons

The next step is to recognize that when we break a rule of conduct, either in favour of another rule of conduct or because of preoccupation with other things, that is not just an unfortunate state of the world. It is something that we have done or failed to do, and we bear responsibility. We might conclude that any blame should be very slight, as for a minor discourtesy, or that overall we should praise rather than blame because there were conflicting rules and the more important rule was chosen over the less important rule. But the fact remains that when a rule that is implied by a guiding concept is broken, we do not just deplore the state of the world. We say instead that we should ideally have acted differently. The same goes for the implications of guiding concepts which are not firmed up in rules of conduct. For example, the concept of high culture may suggest to us that we should take opportunities to go to the opera, without implying rules of conduct to that effect. If we ignore such an opportunity for no reason, we may later feel that we should have taken the opportunity.

On the positive side, when someone does something that we regard as especially praiseworthy, we do not merely celebrate the event. We also recognize that those who do such things are worthy of praise. As with blame, this is founded on our acceptance of certain concepts as guides. We may for example praise someone for having fulfilled the expectations implied by the concept of courage to an exceptional degree, for having gone beyond the level that could reasonably be expected of us or that most of us would achieve.

We do not remark on every morally significant action. Most actions that could be assessed for compliance or non-compliance with the implications of our guiding concepts go unnoticed. But when we do remark on actions, we do so in terms of what we have done or have not done. That is enough to take us on to the notion of the autonomous and responsible person. It is not just better that our behaviour should conform to certain norms. It is better that we should act in certain ways. The implications of our guiding concepts must be read as imperatives or suggestions, addressed to us, and we should decide to respond accordingly.

5.3 The need for commitment

If we use the culture-specific guiding concepts that are needed to form subjective views, that leads us to see ourselves as autonomous and responsible persons. This is part of the value of allowing ourselves to bring culture-specific guiding concepts into use. In this section I will set out a new reason why the use of such concepts has to take us beyond the bounds of objective views, a reason that is distinct from the culture-specificity of the concepts. The reason is that if people are actually to use concepts as guides, accepting their power to justify certain actions, they also need commitment. I will first set out why an objective view of our conduct could allow us to see ourselves as merely behaving, rather than acting. I will then argue that this mere possibility is enough to make it an inadequate basis for our acceptance that certain concepts are guides. It would be inadequate because it would be inconsistent with the commitment that is needed.

In an objective view we do things, but we can be seen as doing things in the same sense that everything else in the world does things. A human being can protect someone from a storm, but so can a cave. A human being can create something that strikes us as beautiful, but so can the sun as it sets. Even the fact of conscious planning does not force us to see our conduct as something special. Conscious planning in order to achieve some preconceived goal is a characteristically human ability. It is also a tremendously important ability. Without it we would not have developed any kind of civilization. But in an objective view, the ability to plan can be seen as the product of the structure of our brains and the workings of our neurons.

Someone who takes an objective view will recognize a given pattern of activity in a brain as corresponding to conscious planning, just as a detached anthropologist can investigate a society and recognize the operation of bonds of loyalty within it. Someone taking an objective view will also recognize that the evolutionary advantages given by certain structures of the brain are only advantages because they do correspond to an ability to plan consciously. But in the end, the whole thing will be explicable in terms of the physical processes that form the subject-matter of the natural sciences. This even applies to the action of evolutionary forces, encouraging certain brain structures because of the

advantages of conscious planning. Those forces only exist because of the physical operation of the world outside the individual. If it were not for storms, fluctuations in food supplies and other physical processes, there would be no evolutionary advantage in conscious planning. Thus while concepts such as conscious planning play key roles in our interpretation of human behaviour, they are ultimately dispensable concepts. We cannot be sure that they are dispensable until we have actually analysed them in terms of physical processes, but that is certainly the way science is going.

The foregoing only indicates how the obvious objective views, the views given by contemporary science, allow us to dispense with the category of the actions of persons and make do with the category of the behaviour of objects. It does not address other possible objective views. I cannot establish that all objective views, all views which would be accessible to all rational beings, would have the same effect, although they might well do so. However, we do not ourselves have access to objective views other than those given by science in its broadest sense. As a precaution, conclusions which rely on the claim that objective views allow actions to be reduced to behaviour may be taken to be conditional on our not discovering some remarkable new type of objective view.

I will now turn to the need for a view that does not allow our actions to be reduced to the behaviour of objects. Such a view is needed in order for us to accept culture-specific guiding concepts as guides. Before going through this argument, it is important to note its limited application. It applies to each of us in respect of our present and future conduct. Each of us must see our own present and future conduct as action and not as behaviour. Each of us must also see our own past conduct, and anyone else's past, present or future conduct, as action when we wish to make ethical comments. These are comments that are based on the implications of culture-specific guiding concepts. The argument does not prevent us from viewing conduct as behaviour when we consider our own past conduct or the past, present or future conduct of others, without any desire to make ethical comments.

The argument has two stages. First, if our actions could be reduced to behaviour, then we would be free simply to ignore the imperatives and suggestions that were implied by our guiding concepts, even though we had adopted the concepts as guides. Second, commitment is an essential component of our acceptance

that certain concepts are guides, and the option to ignore their implications would be inconsistent with that commitment.

As noted in section 5.1, a guiding concept that implies a preference for us to conduct ourselves in a certain way does not merely imply a preference for a certain type of behaviour. It, and the rules of conduct that it implies, call upon us to us to act in a certain way. These calls must be heard as imperatives which should be obeyed unless over-ridden by stronger imperatives, or as suggestions that there is good reason to follow. The danger of our holding a view that would allow us to see our actions as the mere behaviour of objects, is that it would allow the option of ignoring the calls that were made upon us without any feelings of regret. This would be so even if we did not actually see our actions as the mere behaviour of objects. The lack of obligation would undermine the status of concepts as guides.

The point is not that we would in fact ignore the imperatives and suggestions that are implied by our guiding concepts. We break our own rules often enough anyway, and we will continue to do so regardless of what conceptions of our conduct we hold. Rather, the point is a logical one. If we saw our actions as reducible to the mere behaviour of objects, then our conduct could be treated as not subject to the implications of our guiding concepts. The conduct would not need to be subject to the implications because those implications are imperatives or suggestions, addressed to us in relation to our actions. A mere behaviour of objects is not a suitable topic for an imperative or a suggestion. We could distance ourselves from our actions, saying that they were things that happened rather than things for which we were answerable. The fact that our bodies, including the brain cells that are associated with decision-making, were implicated would be neither here nor there. Events in brain cells would also be events that happened, not actions performed by us. If conduct were seen as behaviour, the self who might be responsible and who might merit praise for compliance with norms, or blame for non-compliance, would vanish. That is what would be unacceptable. We can break our rules, but we must recognize that we are doing so. It is not acceptable to pretend that the rules have no purchase.

The reason why it is important not to allow the implications of our guiding concepts to be optional, even if we would not actually opt out of those implications, is that commitment to the

implications of the concepts is central to recognition of their status as guides. We do not see the rules of virtue as being optional. If we did, they would cease to be what they are to us. Immanuel Kant gave a neat demonstration of this in relation to the duty to keep our promises (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, section 1, Ak. 4:403). We do not need to follow him all the way into his theory of the categorical imperative, with its implausible consequence that we should do our duty regardless of any circumstances that might lead to disastrous consequences, in order to extract the point that is relevant here. The very notion of a promise, as something within the moral realm, implies a commitment to keep all of the promises that we make. If we could not be relied upon to keep our promises, the institution of promising would not exist. If “I promise to see you tomorrow” was not underwritten by a commitment to keep all of my promises, then I might as well say “I will see you tomorrow if it suits me”. If we carried on using expressions like “I promise”, then they would soon come to mean things like “if it suits me”. There would no longer be such a thing as a promise, even if the words “I promise” endured with a new meaning.

The point is easily made with promising because of the specific nature of a promise. But the same point can be made with other concepts. Loyalty for example implies a commitment to continuing loyalty, even if it becomes inconvenient. Otherwise the person to whom someone showed loyalty could not rely on that loyalty. The virtue of taking care in our work is counted as a virtue at least partly because of the benefit to others of being able to rely on people who have done good work in the past, to do good work in the future. The virtue requires commitment to its continued practice. Even courtesy is not a virtue to be practised or ignored as we feel inclined. Someone who is only polite when it suits him is not courteous, but manipulative. And guiding concepts that merely issue in suggestions, such as the concept of high culture, follow the same pattern. Someone whose inclination to take advantage of opportunities to partake of high culture can come and go for no reason is a mere dilettante.

We might of course rely on people to carry on as they have always done, continuing to be loyal, diligent or courteous, on the ground that people’s behaviour displays inertia. Sudden and radical changes of personality are rare. That might appear to make commitment redundant as a support for the role of guiding

concepts. From an objective point of view this would be so. Indeed, it is only the inertia of human beings that allows us to rely on someone else's commitment, and not to fear that it may evaporate at a moment's notice. But from the point of view of ourselves when we were deciding what to do, inertia would have no significance. The fact that we had always acted in a particular way in the past would not appear in our decision-making as a constraint on our choice of action now. A prior conscious decision to be committed to the continued use of a concept as a guide, on the other hand, could feature in our decision-making as a constraint on the choice to be made now, so long as the concept of commitment was itself accepted as a guide. If we accept that a concept is a guide, the need for others to be able to rely on our continuing to be guided by it can only be satisfied from our own point of view by a commitment. In that sense, commitment is essential to acceptance that a concept is a guide.

So if we accept that a concept is a guide, we must close off the opportunity to dis-apply that concept in relation to our own conduct by distancing ourselves from specific actions and saying that they were not our actions, but the mere behaviour of objects. We must not be able to turn off the guiding power of certain concepts and turn it on again later. If we considered that to be an option, then we would already not be accepting that the concepts were guides, even if the option was not exercised, because acceptance requires a commitment to continuing use. This does not mean that current acceptance that a concept is a guide depends on never having opted out of the implications of the concept in the past, nor does it depend on not actually opting out in the future. But current acceptance that a concept is a guide does depend on not currently considering that one might legitimately opt out without a good reason, such as conflict with the implications of another guiding concept.

5.4 Making room for commitment

If commitment is essential, we need a view of ourselves that will make room for commitment. It is not enough merely to conclude that an objective view will not do. We must show how a subjective view can do the job. The concept of commitment must be in use as

a guide, so that we can see the rightness of doing what is expected of us.

There is a subtlety here which can be brought out by applying the analogy of the coastline. The commitment that is needed is not just commitment to the specific conduct that we have already started or promised. That specific conduct or the promise of it will be visible as a feature of the world, projected onto the sky and viewed through the lens of commitment. We also need commitment to the continued application of our guiding concepts. We cannot structure this as seeing the lenses that correspond to those guiding concepts through the lens of commitment, because those lenses are themselves transparent. Instead, the facts about the world that are projected onto the sky include facts about ourselves, including the fact that we use certain concepts as guides. We can view those facts about ourselves through the lens of commitment, in order to generate the necessary imperative not to change our guiding concepts without good reason. Commitment of this sort does therefore require reflexive self-consciousness. We need to be able to see our minds as our own, and to be aware of our thoughts. (Commitment to current conduct also requires reflexive self-consciousness. We have to be aware of what we are doing, and aware that it is we who are doing it, in order to resolve to continue doing it.) As noted in section 5.1, at least potential awareness of our relationship to our guiding concepts is essential to the whole argument. Fortunately, we know from experience that we do have that awareness. The fact that we sometimes misunderstand ourselves does not detract from the existence of that awareness, only from its quality.

The proof that a subjective view will make room for commitment is straightforward. We do in fact use the concept of commitment and we accept that it is a guide. We recognize the value of adhering to our values and to our current projects, we feel regret when we fail to do so and we accept that it is right to feel regret. We also accept that a prior commitment can justify current conduct. If someone is asked why he perseveres with a difficult task, he can justify his conduct by saying that he is committed to completing the task. So a subjective view of ourselves can accommodate commitment, because subjective views can be formed using all of the concepts that we in fact use as guides.

5.5 Controlling our subjective views

The rapidity of this proof raises a concern. If any concept that we in fact use can be used in forming a subjective view, it might seem that there would be no controls over the contents of subjective views. Anything that we could say using any concept, however bizarre, should be admissible. But this is not so. There are four controls that apply when we form subjective views of ourselves. These controls will indirectly regulate subjective views of the rest of the world. They will do so because we must see ourselves as located in the world, so our views of the world must be compatible with our views of ourselves.

The first control is that we see ourselves as members of humanity and as members of a particular culture, not as one-offs who are unrelated to anyone else in the Universe. So the concepts that we use in forming our views of ourselves must be concepts that could be used by a wide range of people, not just by one person. To return to the analogy of the coastline, a lens that can only be used by one person is no good. It must be available to a group of people, although not necessarily to the whole of humanity.

The second control, which is related to the first, is that our views of ourselves require validation by others. If someone explains an eccentric view of humanity to other people and they cannot comprehend it, even though they understand the individual concepts that are used, that is a good sign that the view is wrong, although it just might be correct. A view that is intended to be used by us, as subjective views are, needs to be one that we can comprehend. Again, the view need not be one that the whole of humanity can comprehend. It may only be intended for use in a particular culture. But the members of that culture should then find it comprehensible.

The third control is a practical version of the first and second controls. A person does not merely use his guiding concepts to steer his own conduct in a world of objects. He uses them to interact with other people, who are not mere objects and who will also be steered by guiding concepts. For example, it only makes sense to be steered by the concept of friendship in a society in which other people can be friends. The same goes for loyalty, honesty, courage and the rest. They only have roles in steering a person's life because other people will respond appropriately. Guiding concepts that do not work, because other people do not respond appropriately, should be

discarded unless other people can be persuaded to change their ways. Subjective views that could only be formed using the discarded guiding concepts would then need to be discarded too.

The fourth control is that we must build up subjective views of humanity that represent us as reasonably stable over time, in order to fit with our basic understanding of ourselves and of the world as reasonably stable. Concepts that would undermine the notion of a stable person or world are therefore ruled out. One example would be a concept of memory as mere imagination, which was no guide to what had happened in the past. We may note here that use of the concept of commitment does a great deal to promote the consistent character of persons over time. If we are committed to using certain concepts as guides, we will be much more likely to have consistent characters than if we are not committed in that way. In addition, commitment to a specific project will tend to promote a consistent pattern of conduct for the duration of the project.

We can put the point in more general terms than this list of controls by recognizing that there are standards which we use to distinguish good accounts of human conduct from bad accounts. We know when an account of someone's conduct makes sense. We can also tell the difference between a plausible novel and an implausible one. When we hear an account of someone's conduct that does not make sense, or when we read an implausible novel, we think "no, human beings do not work like that". Such standards are not determined by us purely as individuals. They are shared, reflecting the fact that life in society teaches each of us how human beings work, how motives lead to conduct, how motives can sometimes conflict and how such conflicts are resolved. A subjective view of humanity which did not generate explanations that met these standards would be suspect. The possessor of such a subjective view might not notice the difficulty himself. The view might contain its own standards to determine whether an account of human conduct was acceptable. But those standards would themselves need to be eccentric. That would give the rest of us grounds to reject the view. A view that only escapes condemnation by changing the standards which are used to judge it is automatically suspect.

Another perspective is given by folk psychology. "Folk psychology" is the name given to the everyday theory that we appear to have of human practical reasoning and the resulting

conduct. If we do have such a theory, whether explicitly or implicitly, it will include principles like the principle that if a person desires something, and believes that a given action will allow him to get it, then he will be inclined to perform that action. If he does perform the action, then the desire and the belief will explain his doing so. A theory that includes such principles fixes the meanings of terms such as “desire” and “belief”. One issue in folk psychology is how rigorous our presumed theory of human conduct is, how many explanations of human conduct it excludes as being unacceptable. I maintain that while it is not like the natural sciences, it does incorporate some quite sophisticated and rigorous principles. The evidence for this is our ability to tell the difference between plausible and implausible accounts of a given instance of human motivation. (For references on folk psychology see Stich and Rey, “Folk Psychology”. Folk psychology does not have to suppose that we have theories of human practical reasoning and conduct. The simulationist approach argues that instead of using theories, we understand other people by simulating their mental processes. But nothing turns on that for my purposes. The range of simulations that we would be prepared to run could be just as constrained, and in just as sophisticated a way, as the range of principles that we would be prepared to admit to a theory of human practical reasoning.)

Eccentric subjective views

Despite these controls, people do hold eccentric subjective views of humanity. Some people’s views are simply bizarre. Other people, the mystics, are sometimes regarded as being most in touch with the truth.

Those with bizarre views cannot be answered in a way that would convince them. But they cannot convince us that we should accept their views. In the absence of any positive reason to suppose that they have great insights which are unavailable to the rest of us, there does not appear to be any reason to take their views seriously. We may listen politely to what they say as part of the process of building up human relationships with them, but that is a different matter. And occasionally we may realize that someone with a

bizarre view is actually talking sense, and is offering us some important insights. But such occasions are very rare indeed.

The criterion for ignoring bizarre views is essentially a majoritarian one, with a very high threshold for its invocation. 70% of a population would not be entitled to condemn different views held by the other 30% as bizarre. If they did so, the society in question might split into two societies. But 99% might be entitled to condemn the views of the other 1% as bizarre, especially if those minority views varied widely between the members of that 1%. A civilized society would not take any action against the 1% unless they were actually harming other people, but it would have reasonable grounds to ignore the bizarre parts of their views.

I do not suggest that questions which can only be tackled by experts should be decided by a majority of the whole population. A majority opinion among the relevant experts may be significant. For example, a physicist whose theories were rejected by most other physicists would probably be mistaken. Other people would act reasonably in rejecting his theories, even though he just might be right. If he managed to attract a substantial following in the population at large, that would not add any real weight to his theories. The majority that is relevant is the majority of those who can sensibly discuss the view in question. But many eccentric views are social or political views which can sensibly be discussed by most of us.

Mystics are different from those who simply hold bizarre views. It is harder to find an answer to them that justifies, even to our own satisfaction, a decision to ignore their views. Mystics are a small minority of the population, but the majoritarian criterion loses some of its force because mystics, unlike those whose views are simply bizarre, cannot be divided into tiny sub-communities at odds with one another. Even when they come from different cultures, their views appear to have important features in common, such as an emphasis on the unity of everything or on getting in touch with the light rather than with what it illuminates.

Those who seek a naturalistic explanation of mystical experience, as a way of debunking the claims of mystics, can take heart from this. It may be that certain features of the human brain give rise to certain types of experience. As we are all of the same species, it is not surprising that the experiences should be similar across different cultures. Other debunkers can point out that the

features of mystical views which are widespread are only widespread when they are characterized at a very high level of generality, without the specific detail that would make the widespread nature of those features significant. By way of analogy, it is not significant that all clouds are alike in being visible as patches in the sky, because the concept of a patch in the sky is very general. It would however be very significant if all clouds were visible as diamond-shaped patches in the sky, because that would be a specific shape. We would then look for an explanation of the diamond-shaped appearance.

On the other hand, those who think that mystics may have access to something of which we should all take note can also take heart from the similarity of mystical experiences in different cultures. This similarity suggests that mystics have identified things that are important to human beings as such. (Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, pages 422 and 569, explores an intriguing explanation of why some of us think highly of mystics. It is based on the ideas that they may experience the greatest possible organic unity and that organic unity is central to value.)

5.6 Implications of a subjective view of ourselves

If we draw out the implications of using culture-specific concepts as guides, and if we therefore see ourselves as people who act, who are responsible for our actions and who are committed to using certain concepts as guides, we arrive at much else that is important to us.

First of all, we have values in the everyday sense. The possession of values is closely aligned with commitment to guiding concepts. Commitment is necessary because if we have a value, we will not casually put it to one side when that would suit us. The alignment is not perfect because some guiding concepts are too open-ended, able to support too wide a range of rules of conduct, to be equivalent to values. The concept of the family for example has implications for our conduct, but it is not itself a value and it could imply any one of a range of different sets of rules of conduct. Nonetheless, many values do correspond directly to guiding concepts, concepts such as courtesy or loyalty. We can therefore

Projects and values

explore the possession of values in the same terms as we would explore the acceptance that certain concepts are guides.

In an objective view it is possible to remark, in a detached anthropological way, that someone has values, so long as we can translate that possession of values into observed behaviour which is either in compliance with those values or an expression of regret on an occasion of non-compliance. (Alternatively, we might translate it into qualities that implied a disposition to such behaviour.) We can do this in relation to our fellow human beings. We can even do it in relation to ourselves when reviewing our past. It is perfectly possible for someone to consider how he behaved in the past, even the very recent past, and remark in a detached way on the values he had at the time. The detachment can even be sustained if the values he had then were exactly the same as the values he has now. All of that lies on the side of an objective view, whether a view of other people or of our past selves.

In contrast, if we actually have values we will see them as justifiably influencing the choices that we make now. Where the values align with guiding concepts, this is the same as using the concepts as guides, with those concepts steering our actions. In this section I will refer to choices rather than actions, because the focus is on the moment of decision. But there is no real shift, because the actions for which we seek justification are the actions that we choose. This is however subject to the complication that sometimes we choose to do one thing, such as open a window to get some fresh air, and actually do something else, such as let smoke from a bonfire into the house.

Even if we decide to over-ride a value that we have, it will make itself known because its having been over-ridden will be a source of regret. The influence of values on our choices, as seen by someone taking a detached view, differs from that influence from the point of view of the person who is choosing. From a detached point of view, our choices are influenced by states of our brains and of the rest of our bodies. It is convenient to refer to the possession of values rather than to the states of brains and bodies, but even then the values only influence the choices made in a causal way. From the point of view of the person who is choosing, the influence is different. A value as such is a mere abstract entity, with no causal power. It cannot push us from behind, from the past. Rather, it summons us into a future in which we will have acted in

accordance with it, and will therefore have done the right thing. It has its own power, pulling us forward from its standpoint in the future. That power is only visible if we take a subjective view. It is also only visible to those who actually have the value in question. Where a value is aligned with a guiding concept, this power is equivalent to the power of the guiding concept to incline us to certain conduct. The power is a power to make suggestions or to issue orders, the suggestions and imperatives that are implied by the guiding concept, with a force to which we respond. It corresponds to the power of certain lenses to impart lustre to relevant features of the world.

There are links with the notions of projects and of commitment. A project looks to the future. It conceptualizes a future state of some part of the world, and our conduct is oriented towards bringing that state about. A commitment keeps us on track. The brain state that corresponds to commitment pushes us from behind to achieve our projects or to apply our values. Commitment itself pulls us forward towards the achievement of our projects or to the maintenance of our values, persuading us not to stray from the path laid out by our projects or our values. The idea of something that pulls us forward from the future, rather than pushing us from behind, from the past, is alien to the scientific outlook in which change is achieved by causes in the ordinary sense. Those causes all work forwards in time, from the past to the future, and the future can have no causal efficacy because it does not yet exist.

Autonomy

If we see ourselves as steered by guiding concepts as such, rather than by the correlated states of our brains, then we must credit ourselves with autonomy. We must accept that we do actually make choices, rather than that choices are somehow made without their necessarily being made by us as persons. This is because it is we who respond to the guidance that is given by our guiding concepts and to the rules of conduct that they imply. The guidance and the rules are addressed to persons, just like any suggestion or imperative. They cannot operate automatically, in the way that physical causes operate, but only through the intervention of our decisions to abide by them.

There are two senses of autonomy to consider. The first sense is uncontentious. It can perfectly well be accommodated within a purely scientific, and therefore objective, view. In this sense, people are autonomous because they play a significant role in what happens. Even if the world is entirely causally determined, human beings are big enough and complex enough that their contributions matter. A great many of the lines of causal influence flow through human beings, and what happens within their brains has considerable influence on what happens next in the external world. But this uncontentious sense of autonomy is not what is needed to support the effect of guiding concepts on our choices. It might be enough to allow us to applaud or deplore the consequences of conduct, but that would not touch the person. It would instead represent the reduction of the actions of persons to the behaviour of things in the world.

The second sense of autonomy, and the one that is needed here, is autonomy in the sense of having genuine choices that matter. A suggestion or an imperative only makes sense if we to whom it is addressed have a genuine choice to make, which we see as important, so that we can be encouraged to choose one option rather than another. Otherwise the suggestion or the imperative would be otiose, either because there was no genuine choice, or because it did not matter how we chose so that it was not worth consulting any guiding concepts. We do not however regard our guiding concepts as otiose. We regard them as making a real difference to our decisions. We must therefore regard ourselves as having genuine choices. We must also consider it to be important how we choose. At the point of decision, the options must be seen as open and the choice between them as significant. Otherwise we could not congratulate or chastise ourselves for our choices.

We are therefore led to a much stronger sense of autonomy than the sense given by the fact that many lines of causal influence flow through human beings. It is also a sense that cannot be given by a world governed by a mixture of deterministic laws and randomness, for example a randomness that might be credited to quantum effects. A decision that was made in one way rather than another because of some random event would not count as autonomous in the required sense. (It is in any case worth remembering that even individual neurons within the human brain are far too large and warm for random quantum effects to have any significant

influence.) The strength of this sense of autonomy means that the view we require of an autonomous person is not a view that science can share, unless and until science can offer us more than deterministic laws and randomness.

The contrast between the notion of having a genuine choice and a picture of the physical world as determined, random or a mixture of the two, raises the question of free will and determinism. Immanuel Kant's view was that the physical world as it appeared to us had to be law-governed, leaving no room for freedom. The free and morally responsible person therefore had to be thought of as an intelligence that existed, in some inevitably inexplicable way, apart from the physical world (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section 3, Ak. 4:455-463). Gilbert Ryle, on the other hand, dismissed the view that a deterministic world was incompatible with choice (*The Concept of Mind*, chapter 3). His dismissal was based on the fact that the laws of nature only limit possibilities, without determining what will happen. That may be true, but the laws of nature together with some initial state of the world might well determine everything that would happen.

Whether or not Ryle's approach, or the work of the many subsequent compatibilist philosophers who have sought to reconcile free will with determinism, would make room for the strong sense of autonomy that is needed here, we do not need to go down Kant's path. What is needed for the strong sense of autonomy is that at the time of a decision, and in the view of the person who is deciding, it is legitimate to see the decision as a genuine choice. This is vital because the ethic of projects that will be set out in chapter 12 presupposes that we can legitimately see ourselves as autonomous. Any ethic presupposes that much. It would make no sense to advise people what to do if they could not choose what to do.

Consider a man who has to choose between two options, B and C. As it happens, he chooses option B. The behaviour and the brain-states which express the choice could all be captured in an objective view that would only acknowledge determinism and randomness, leaving no place for genuine choice. But an objective account of an actual occasion of choosing could only be given by the chooser after the event. (Others, not involved in making the choice, might give an objective account at the time of the event, or even before it.) Looking back, the chooser might conclude that he had been bound to choose as he did. Even at the time of choosing, he might say that

his objective view of the world in general implied that whatever he was about to choose, that choice would be inevitable. But he could not say “I will inevitably choose option B”. It would only be after he had chosen option B, that he could say “it was inevitable that I chose B”. His inability to identify a specific inevitable choice in advance of his making that choice gives the leeway that is needed for him to see himself as making genuine choices.

Others, in possession of information about him and about the world around him, might be able to predict that he would choose B, but even if that information was conveyed to him before he decided, and even if he adhered to his choice of B having seen the prediction, he would still have the sense of freedom of choice. He could say to himself “they predict B, now shall I confirm their prediction or shall I be contrary by choosing C instead?”. He could validly say that and have a sense of genuine choice, even if others had calculated that he would think about being contrary, but would still in the end choose B. He might of course be unsettled to be shown, after a series of choices, that someone else had accurately predicted all of the options that he would select and had placed her predictions in a sealed envelope before any of the choices were made, but that would come to his attention after the event. It would not disturb his sense, at the time, of having had genuine choices. Nor would it undermine the validity of that sense, because he would still have had no awareness, at the time, that he was inevitably about to choose B, D and G instead of choosing C, E and H.

We can therefore see ourselves as persons who make genuine choices even though our views of ourselves must be entirely consistent with our scientific views, including any elements of determinism that they incorporate. The fact that in retrospect a choice made may be seen to have been inevitable, does not make praise or blame of the person who made the choice inappropriate. And it is the chooser who is praised or blamed. Conduct in itself can only be celebrated or regretted. The reason why praise and blame remain appropriate is that in choosing options, someone reveals himself to be the sort of person who, in those circumstances, would choose those options. That reveals his virtues and vices, which are entirely suitable grounds for praise or blame. Virtues and vices can be appraised even if future choices in accordance with them will be the result of a deterministic working-out of the path of the world. Indeed, the virtues and vices revealed in past conduct

should be a more reliable guide to likely future choices in a deterministic world than they would be in an indeterministic world.

So much for the genuineness of choices. The importance of choices, the fact that they matter, is also something that can only appear if we go beyond the bounds of objective views. The reason is that the importance of choices is intimately bound up with our seeing the world through the lenses of culture-specific guiding concepts. Only those concepts can make something important. A choice between donating money to medical research and spending it on private education for one's own children is only important to someone who uses guiding concepts such as those of health, suffering and the family.

There is a difference between the possession of autonomy and the use of concepts as guides. A guiding concept is something that influences us when we make choices. Autonomy, on the other hand, is not usually something that influences us when we make choices. It is simply there, as a precondition of making choices. Having said that, it is still something that we value. Autonomy does therefore operate as a guiding concept when we accept that we should promote it, for example by promoting political freedom so that we will have a reasonably wide range of options from which to choose. But once we have got it and are not engaged in its promotion, we simply act autonomously.

Because of this, the sense in which we accept autonomy, when it is not operating as a guiding concept, differs from the sense in which we accept that certain concepts are guides. Guiding concepts are accepted in that we do not think of them as mere consequences of the states of our brains, but allow them to influence our reasoning about what to do. Autonomy is accepted in that we accept that it does make sense to reason about what to do, paying due regard to the guidance that is provided by our guiding concepts. We can also note that the possession of autonomy does not conflict with the requirement, set out in section 5.3, for the application of our guiding concepts not to be optional. Autonomy implies that we may choose not to follow their guidance. But as was pointed out in section 5.3, we do in fact break our own rules. What the argument in section 5.3 requires is not that we always keep our rules, but that when we break them, we recognize that we do so and do not pretend that the rules have no purchase.

This still allows that the operation of an imperative or a suggestion in everyday life, a shouted order or a whispered hint for example, can make sense even on an objective view. The state of the addressee's brain may well be changed by the shout or the whisper, leading to a change in conduct. So the utterance of an imperative or a suggestion, being a physical event, can have a straightforward causal effect via the operation of the hearer's brain. But it does not have that effect in the way that guiding concepts and their implications affect us on a subjective view, as logical influences on a decision. Imperatives and suggestions themselves, unlike utterances of them, are not physical objects or events.

Our place in the world

I will now turn to how we see ourselves independently of specific actions. The person who chooses autonomously and then acts is also a natural object, an example of homo sapiens in the world. But when we see our current selves as autonomous persons who choose and act, we do not simultaneously see ourselves as objects in the world. The best characterization of how we do see ourselves is that given by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, paragraph 5.632: "The subject does not belong to the world. Rather, it is a boundary of the world". Thus in choosing what to do and in acting, we are not in the world like objects. But nor are we outside the world in some mysterious place, acting on the world from afar. We are at a boundary, neither in the world nor outside it. (I translate Wittgenstein's word "Grenze" as "boundary". It has also been translated as "limit".)

The spatial metaphor of a boundary need not be taken in the sense that may first occur to us, the sense in which the boundary runs round the whole world. There is no suggestion that a person encompasses the whole world, having control over all of it. Rather, we can think of each person's boundary as the edge of a small hole created for that person in the middle of the world. There is also no need to treat the Universe as bounded, in a sense that cosmologists might find objectionable. We can consider each of us to be at a boundary without suggesting that someone who travels in the Universe will bump up against anybody else, as if a boundary marked the end of the Universe. We avoid this by again taking the

boundary to be the edge of a small hole. Others can go around that hole. Each hole can be so small that there is only an infinitesimal probability of anyone bumping up against the edge that is someone else.

The metaphor of the hole in the world accommodates a picture of ourselves as people who choose and act, as people who are more than natural objects in the world, but as people who are not detached from the world either. The metaphor allows for the idea of the person as a suitable addressee of imperatives and suggestions, and as a bearer of responsibility. The fact that this idea of the person does not correspond to a scientific conception of humanity which sees us simply as parts of the world, not as the edges of holes in the world, does not matter. There is no contradiction with the scientific conception for the same reason as was given earlier in this section, when discussing the relationship between genuine choices and an objective view of the world that only acknowledges determinism and randomness. The view that each of us has of himself or herself as an autonomous person applies at the point when we choose what to do, or when we look forward to our own future decisions. It does not need to apply when we are considering choices that are now in the past or when we are detached observers predicting how other people are about to choose, unless we wish to make ethical comments (see section 5.3). Only at moments of decision, when looking forward to decisions or when making ethical comments, do we need to see ourselves as the edges of holes in the world.

Other people

Once someone acknowledges that a view of himself as an autonomous person is appropriate for how he is living now, he can extend that view to other people in order to establish relationships with others that respect their autonomy. But we do not need to extend our views of ourselves as autonomous persons in a way that would clash with any objective views which only acknowledged determinism and randomness. In order to ground respect for the autonomy of others, and therefore to validate a sense that we are living in a society of people who are like us and not a world in which other people are mere objects, we need only extend our

views of ourselves as autonomous persons to other people, not to their particular decisions or conduct. Each of us can consistently say two different things at the same time. The first is, “if I think of a particular person who is deciding or conducting herself at a particular time, I must think of the decision that she makes or her conduct as governed by deterministic physical laws, possibly plus a bit of randomness”. The second is, “if I think of that same person in general terms then I see her as like myself, living her life with a sense of making genuine choices and with a sense of acting rather than merely behaving”. The second of these is enough to ground respect for the autonomy of others. And it does not clash with the first, because it does not refer to any particular decision or action.

(I am not arguing that, as a matter of psychological development, we first see ourselves as autonomous persons and then extend that status to others. We may very well develop our senses of ourselves and of other people in parallel, or even develop a sense of other people first. I am only analysing the logic of the notions of ourselves and of other people as autonomous persons, given that we do have those notions.)

The extension of our views of ourselves as autonomous persons to other people appears to be psychologically inevitable. Peter Strawson discussed objective attitudes to other people (meaning detached attitudes) and participant attitudes to those same people. He remarked on the difficulty of sustaining objective attitudes to people around us (“Freedom and Resentment”, pages 8-12). We naturally hold a participant attitude, in which we regard others as people like us. We naturally enter into inter-personal relationships, rather than seeing other people as objects in our own worlds.

We have available to us both an objective view of people’s conduct, and the view of people as autonomous persons that is implied by having a subjective view of the world which is formed using culture-specific guiding concepts. But there is more work to be done in reconciling subjective and objective views of the world, including views of ourselves. It is not enough to say that they are simply different views and that they can each go about their separate businesses. The metaphor of the hole in the world sets us the challenge of bringing the two views together, because the holes whose edges represent us are in the world and we have objective views of the world. The holes are not in some mysterious other place, a place that is only visible on a subjective view. I shall now turn to this challenge.

CHAPTER 6

Bringing objective and subjective views together

There are several reasons why it would be good to bring the two types of view, objective and subjective, together. First, we do live in a single world and it would be odd to have to work with two disjoint types of view of that world. Second, if the relationship between the objective and subjective types of view is not settled, they will continue to compete for supremacy. Specifically, objective views would seek to reduce subjective views to objective terms or to dismiss subjective views. Science, representing objective views, would be the victor if there had to be a victor, simply on account of its astonishing success. But it is more likely that the competition would just grind on, with subjective views refusing ever to accept defeat. Third, the metaphor of the coastline strongly suggests a continuity when we consider the range of lenses at our disposal, from those borne by the dinghies and the yachts to those borne by the freighters, from the culture-specific concepts that are only used in forming subjective views to the concepts that are also used in forming objective views.

I will start by exploring this apparent continuity and highlighting a discontinuity. Then I will show how the possession of objective views implies one element that can only appear in subjective views, the element of commitment. The commitment will be to a project, although it will be left open which project.

6.1 The analogy of the coastline

The analogy of the coastline gives us a natural sense of continuity between subjective and objective views. Each of us has a basic position which for most of us is onshore, though for a few of us, the strangers in our midst, it is out in the water. We might choose to move outwards so that we could only use the lenses borne by the freighters. Then we could only form objective views of the world.

We might then choose to move back inshore, gradually bringing the lenses borne by the yachts and then by the dinghies into use, allowing us to build up subjective views of the world. Looked at another way, each of us has access to a single type of view from our basic position, a type that can incorporate both objective and subjective elements. We do not ignore the concepts of the natural sciences when taking a subjective view of something, although those concepts may be more or less relevant. When for example we think about our friends as friends, we know that they are organisms who need to eat and sleep, and we take that into account when we plan days or nights out with them. Correspondingly, when we see the world through lenses borne by dinghies and yachts, we also see it through lenses borne by freighters.

The impression of continuity between the two types of view is reinforced by the thought that there might be no absolutely objective view, no view accessible to every rational being. There might always be a tinge of subjectivity, even about the natural sciences, because there just might be a fundamentally different approach to the natural sciences that would be beyond the comprehension of both human beings and Martians. In that case the freighters would be just like the yachts and the dinghies, their lenses only available to rational beings in the right positions along the coastline. Their lenses would however be available from a very wide range of positions along the coastline, including all positions occupied by human beings or by Martians.

This rosy picture of continuity is however shattered when we ask, by what right do we claim that the lenses borne by the dinghies and the yachts legitimately shape our views of the world? What is our justification for supposing that we are not deluding ourselves when we use the corresponding concepts? The natural sciences, and the use that we make of their concepts, have all the justification we could possibly demand for acceptance of the results that they give us. The natural sciences are so successful in helping us to understand and manipulate the world that they must have a firm grip on reality. (The debate between realists and anti-realists mentioned in section 4.3 matters as little here as it did there, because the empirical adequacy of science is sufficient justification for accepting what science tells us.) The natural sciences will go on evolving, and current theories may look laughably old-fashioned in future centuries, but their concepts cannot be mere figments of our

imagination. By contrast, the use as guides of many of our everyday concepts is admittedly restricted to our species and often to individual cultures. It might seem that the justification for using those concepts as guides, and the status of the conclusions that we reached using those concepts, would be undermined by the existence of every culture which did not use them as guides.

Bringing objective and subjective types of view into a close relationship would require one of two things. The first option would be to find a place within the formation of objective views for the use as guides of culture-specific guiding concepts. The second option would be a demonstration that someone can only hold an objective view if he uses some culture-specific guiding concepts as guides. For completeness, I should also show that holding a subjective view implies holding an objective view, but that will be straightforward.

The first option is not worth pursuing. Culture-specific guiding concepts cannot be used as guides in forming objective views. To do so would be to put a view out of the reach of those who did not share the relevant culture. It would then no longer be an objective view. That leaves the second option, which is to trace the implications of holding objective views.

6.2 The implications of holding objective views

One way to link objective views to subjective views without using culture-specific guiding concepts in forming any given objective view, destroying its claim to be objective, would be to show that the possession of an objective view of any part of the world implied the use of some culture-specific guiding concepts, without specifying which concepts. The possession of a given objective view could imply the use of different guiding concepts by different rational beings. The objective view would then remain available to all rational beings. But all rational beings would have to use some culture-specific guiding concepts or other in order to adopt the objective view. Then each rational being would have a subjective view of himself because he would have accepted certain concepts as guides. He would have to see himself as an autonomous and responsible person, as argued in chapter 5.

Each rational being would adopt concepts that were within his comprehension. In terms of the analogy of the coastline, it would be as if an observer could only use the lenses borne by the freighters if he also used some dinghy-borne or yacht-borne lenses. Positions in the sea further out than the line of yachts would not be available. But the freighter-borne lenses would still be usable from anywhere along the coastline and from anywhere closer inshore than the yachts. A rational being could take up any position on the coastline, or any position closer inshore than the yachts, because any such position would make at least some yacht-borne lenses available.

The implication is not from the content of an objective view to the use of culture-specific guiding concepts. The implication is instead from the fact of possession of an objective view, because that requires selection.

The need for selection

There are many different objective views of any substantial part of the world that each of us could hold. But there is no one master view that could in practice be held and that would be as good as all of the possible views combined. If there were a master view for a given observer, it would be one that gave all the details of everything that might affect her experience, right down to the level of elementary particles. Only that view would allow her to derive all the possible objective views which she could hold. A master view like that would contain far too much information. There are theories in physics which would sharply limit the information that could be contained in a given volume, however sophisticated our technology (Bekenstein, “Information in the Holographic Universe”). Even before reaching such a limit, there would be far too much information in a master view of a substantial part of the world. There would be too much information even if we could in practice stop at some level much higher than the level of elementary particles, for example the level of cells within organisms, and then merely indicate the type of detail that there would be from cell biology down to particle physics by giving the relevant biological, chemical and physical theories. In practice we have to construct our objective views by selecting information ruthlessly. This requirement to select is not going to be removed in the short term

by growth in the power of computers, and it may never be removed. There are just too many raw data in the world.

We respond to this difficulty by using the very efficient approach of devising or learning theories that are of general application, and then applying them as and when required. It might be thought that this would offer us a practically usable master view. We would simply use particle physics as our master view. We would then derive chemistry, biology and all of the other theories we needed from that. But even if we overlook the difficult question of whether all natural sciences will ever be reduced to physics, we have to say that while particle physics might offer us a practical master view in general terms, as a source of all other theories, it would not give us a practical master view of any part of the actual world apart from very small systems containing only a few particles. The views that we hold are views of the world in its actual detail, rather than views of the underlying structure of any world that has the same physical laws as our world. For an analogy, think of the sight of a group of horses. We see a brown horse, a grey horse and two white horses. All of this specific detail needs to be captured, and if another brown horse joins the group we need to note that it has done so. A general theory of horses, even one that listed all of the possible colours of horses, would not capture this detail. Likewise, a general theory of physics does not capture the actual detail of the world. It follows that particle physics as a general theory does not offer us a master view of the actual world.

We also combine general theories so as to handle data more efficiently. Thus we have a theory of geology and a theory of botany. When we consider a particular place, these theories work together. Geology will explain how the rocks and soil at that place came to be as they are. Botany will tell us which plants flourish in those conditions. The theories combine to explain why the plants at that place are as they are. This is much more efficient than starting with a complete map of everything in the world. But it is still a selection of information. Geologists and botanists both work with concepts that they find productive. They disregard other concepts, and they only pay attention to details of the actual world that are captured by the concepts they use. Thus a botanist will pay attention to the needs of different types of plant and to the ability of the ground to hold water. He will ignore the geological processes that have produced the local rocks and soil. Furthermore, there is an

act of selection in the initial step of choosing to see an area in geological and botanical terms. There are alternatives. We could for example explain the current state of a landscape in terms of the history of human intervention, driven by the demands of a growing population and by developments in agricultural methods. The choice of approach is a choice to form one objective view of the given landscape, say a geological or a botanical view, rather than another objective view.

The basis of selection

It may be pointed out that while we have to select, at least we do so on a principled basis. We invoke the theories that will best serve our projects, for example a project to understand a landscape in geological terms or to understand it in economic terms, and we collect only the relevant data. That is true. It is also the ground of the inference from the possession of an objective view to the use of culture-specific guiding concepts.

If someone has an objective view of some part of the world, it will have been chosen from a wide range of possibilities. That choice will not have been random unless the person with the view is like a channel-hopping television viewer, idly scanning the channels in search of nothing in particular. Nor can the view be chosen on the basis that it is the master view, including all data, because such a view is not in practice available. The objective view will instead have been chosen by reference to some project. Even the decision to limit the view of the world to a particular part, for example to a particular geographical region, will follow from some project. And to have a project is to be committed to its pursuit. Someone who claims to be pursuing a project but who sees no reason to stick to that project, does not really have the project. Having a project implies wanting to pursue it. And that want amounts to a commitment, even if the commitment is weak. Thus having an objective view implies some commitment or other. I cannot completely rule out the alternative, picking an objective view at random and then moving on at random like an idle channel-hopper. I can only point out that no-one can realistically live like that. Someone may claim to do so, but there will be purpose in his lifestyle that will belie the claim.

The conclusion that having an objective view implies commitment to some project or other does not in itself take us very far. It will not in itself take us to specific guiding concepts. It also does not guarantee long-lived commitment. A project must have some duration in order to generate a choice of objective view, but someone could change her projects from day to day, and therefore switch between different objective views. If the switch were from seeing a landscape in geological terms to seeing it in terms of economic history, there would be little harm in that. The observer would simply never get far in understanding landscapes, because she would not concentrate on one approach for long enough. If however the switch were from seeing people in everyday terms as members of families, employees and so on to seeing them in academic psychological terms, reflecting a change of project from one of fitting into society to one of understanding everybody's deep motivations, the consequences for the success of her own life might be more serious.

Although the conclusion that a commitment to projects is required in order to hold an objective view does not take us very far, it opens up scope to go much further. Once we have established that we need some commitment to a project, we have the right to explore the whole field of projects. So long as we accept the legitimacy of holding objective views of the world, something that even the greatest devotee of a purely scientific understanding of the world is likely to accept, we cannot be accused of having introduced commitment out of the blue. It should also be noted that the argument for the need for commitment to projects is based on the notion of holding an objective view of anything in the world. It does not need to be an objective view of humanity. This reflects the fact that the argument to the need for commitment to projects is not based on the content of objective views. It is based on the mere fact of our holding objective views.

Commitment and guiding concepts

Commitment to a particular project will require the use of some culture-specific guiding concepts, the ones that motivate the commitment. If someone wishes to understand a landscape in terms of economic history, it will be because she has some particular

concern. She might want to predict the effects of current economic developments in order to help us to avoid ecological disaster, or she might want to give us the feeling of being connected with our past. Any given concern will be culture-specific, in that some rational beings would not see the point of it, although all rational beings would be able to supply some concern or other to motivate some project or other. The motivation will be supported by a sense of justification. A given project will be seen as worth pursuing because it will refer to an underlying guiding concept which has the power to justify actions that are in accordance with it. To continue with the example of the landscape, a project to avoid ecological disaster might be justified by a guiding concept of care for future generations. A project of connecting with our past might be justified by a guiding concept of the cohesion of a community.

The merit of the pursuit of projects will ground the power of guiding concepts to justify conduct that accords with them, as will be elaborated in sections 7.3 and 7.4. There might therefore appear to be circularity in the statement that our guiding concepts motivate and justify our pursuit of particular projects. In fact there is no circularity. Both in the psychology of commitment and in the logic of justification, the starting point is the pursuit of our projects in general rather than the pursuit of specific projects. On the psychological side we wish to be able to pursue our projects in general. On the logical side there is merit in that pursuit, so long as we accept the ethic of projects. The desire motivates, and the merit legitimates, our use of guiding concepts with their power to justify conduct. Those concepts both motivate and legitimate our pursuit of the specific projects that we choose, as well as motivating and legitimating our acceptance of certain rules of conduct. The move from projects in general to specific projects blocks both logical circularity and psychological circularity.

Even when a guiding concept is not motivated or legitimated by its role in facilitating the pursuit of our projects in general, logical circularity is avoided. The reason is that the logical starting point is the free adoption of the ethic of projects. The logical independence of that free adoption from psychological considerations means that the special case of concepts such as beauty can be dealt with using the argument in section 12.4. Concepts such as beauty are legitimated as guides primarily by the fact that their adoption facilitates the pursuit of specific projects defined in terms of those

concepts, rather than by their role in facilitating the pursuit of projects in general. There might be circularity on the psychological side, for example when a desire to create beautiful things motivates our use as a guide of the concept of beauty, which in turn makes us want to create beautiful things because we accept it as a guide. But that will not spill over into circularity on the logical side, because the logical starting point is the free adoption of the ethic.

Someone might consistently pursue specific projects without a motivation that was supported by a sense of justification. Such a person would be like a television channel-hopper whose attention was snared by one channel, calling a halt to his channel-hopping for no particular reason. But while that possibility does mean that the implication from having an objective view to using culture-specific guiding concepts lacks the inevitability of a logical implication, the use of culture-specific guiding concepts is still the most natural support for an objective view. The snared channel-hopper's consistent pursuit of a given project would also be very unstable, and would be liable to end at any moment. It is not likely that a life of consistent pursuit of selected projects could be built on such a flimsy foundation.

I must also acknowledge that the concepts needed to generate commitment to some projects might be concepts that were available to all rational beings, so that there would be no need to hold a subjective view in order to hold an objective view. But that is very unlikely except for the most fundamental projects. I consider this point again in section 9.1.

Subjective views imply objective views

I should complete the picture by showing that holding a subjective view implies holding an objective view. This is straightforward. The subjective views with which we work still regard us as beings in the world, beings who are governed by normal physical constraints, in addition to regarding us as autonomous and responsible persons. We are not free-floating spirits. Even if the choosing and acting subject is not part of the world because she is at an internal boundary of the world, the edge of a small hole, that hole needs to be located in the world. We need to have a map of the world as it exists independently of ourselves, in order to be able to

locate ourselves in the world and to feel that others will be able to locate us in it. We expect to be locatable by Martians just as much as by human beings, so the map must be built using concepts that are available when forming objective views of parts of the world. We must also be able to locate ourselves relative to inanimate objects that we wish to use, otherwise we will not be able to do anything. All this implies an objective view of ourselves. Specifically it implies a view of objects, including our bodies, distributed in space and interacting in conformity with scientific laws.

This need for an objective view incidentally addresses the objection that because the argument for commitment to projects is only based on the fact of our holding objective views, that argument could be answered by supposing that there could be potential objective views, none of which we actually held. It is true that if we did not hold any objective views, there would be no need for us to commit to projects. But it is clear that in order to be able to do anything, we do need an objective view of ourselves and of the world around us. It is also clear that we must do things. A life in which we did nothing would be even less practical than a life of idly drifting between different projects like a channel-hopper.

Chapter 7 will take human projects as its theme. It will go beyond the inferences made so far and will take us to a position that is not implied by the mere fact of holding objective views of the world. That new position is one in which what we do is actually justified by the fact that there is merit in the pursuit of our projects, the fact that the projects are meritorious. While we are not forced to that position, it is worth taking up that position because the benefits far outweigh the costs. In particular, an acceptance that projects are meritorious gives us a support for values, an approach to perception and knowledge and a way to understand how we are constituted as persons. These results will be set out in chapters 7 to 10.

CHAPTER 7

Projects and values

7.1 The nature of projects

The notion of a project is straightforward and we use it constantly. If for example we ask why someone got on a particular train, we may be told that it was because he wanted to go to Paris and the train was going there. It was his project to go to Paris, and that explains his getting on the train. We may go further, and ask why he wanted to go to Paris. We would expect another answer in terms of projects, for example that he wanted to see the Mona Lisa. We may not notice this constant reference to projects because we use the idea without using the word. “He got on the train because he wanted to go to Paris” is a more natural expression than “he got on the train in order to fulfil his project of going to Paris”. But the idea of projects is certainly present, even if it is hidden. Our projects set out our goals. If we act in a way that will fulfil our projects, then we act in a goal-directed manner.

Explanations in terms of projects make essential reference to the subject. They are in the form of “he did X in order to fulfil project Y”. The centrality of the subject is even more obvious when we are talking about ourselves at the time of acting, and say “I am doing X in order to fulfil my project Y”. The notion of a project is intimately linked to the notion of a person carrying out an action, as distinct from an organism engaging in behaviour. (The notion of a project implies intentional action, which is often treated as just one kind of action. But my use of the term “action” is effectively restricted to intentional action. The element that takes us beyond the objective view of conscious planning that was set out at the start of section 5.3 is indicated by the words “in order to”. The subject does something in order to achieve some state of the world which does not yet exist, rather than doing it as a result of the current state of his brain.) If we were to think in terms of the behaviour of organisms, we would re-phrase our descriptions along the lines of

“that human being showed behaviour X, and did so in accordance with plans embodied in states of his brain that corresponded to some part of the world coming to be in state Y”. Two things would have vanished from this description, both of which were manifest in the description in terms of projects, “he did X in order to fulfil project Y”. One is a sense of personal engagement, a sense that might ground a commitment to the project and might make regret appropriate if the plan did not come to fruition. The other is a sense of autonomy, a sense that the goal and the means have been chosen by a decision-making person rather than merely having occurred.

If we explain someone’s actions in terms of his projects, we imply that he knew what he was doing. He had formed a plan to achieve a certain goal and his actions were intended to execute that plan. Success would make elation appropriate. If on the other hand he abandoned his plan for lack of commitment to it, or if something went wrong and his actions did not have the expected results, it would make sense for him to feel regret. It is not just that he would in fact feel elation or regret, a feeling that could be triggered by electro-chemical activity in his brain. Nor is it simply that we would understand because we had felt elation or regret in similar circumstances. We would go further than that, and agree that it was right for him to feel elation or regret. We would not say that feelings of elation or regret were a mere accident of the design of the brain, or that feelings of regret should ideally be avoided if they made the regretful person unenthusiastic about moving forward. The feeling that elation or regret would be appropriate reflects the merit of the pursuit of projects through to their fulfilment. They are worth fulfilling, so success makes elation appropriate and failure makes regret appropriate.

The notions of elation and regret are linked to the notion of commitment. If someone is committed to an objective, then it matters to him whether or not he achieves that objective. So long as we accept commitment as a guiding concept, we will accept the rationality of feeling elation at achievement of the objective or regret at failure. It would be possible for someone to feel commitment without any risk that he would feel elation or regret. Some people apply themselves to tasks while remaining completely unemotional about the outcome. Conversely, we can feel happy or sad about the outcomes of our actions even when we considered our goals to have been quite inconsequential, so that we would have

abandoned the tasks in question at the slightest difficulty or distraction. There is therefore no relationship of logical implication between commitment on the one hand, and feelings of elation or regret on the other. But there is a relationship of perceived justification. Commitment is taken to justify the feelings, so long as we accept commitment as a guiding concept.

The notion of a project can feature in an objective view of the world. States of human brains correspond to projects. It would be perfectly acceptable for someone studying human behaviour to talk in terms of projects rather than in terms of states of human brains. He could talk in terms of someone's project of going to Paris, rather than in terms of the corresponding states of his brain. Even a Martian who was viewing human beings in a completely detached way could do this. A Martian would not however be able to see many of our projects as meritorious, even if he chose to abandon his detached standpoint. The Martian would grasp the general idea of a meritorious project, by analogy with projects that Martians had. But only observation would be a guide to which projects were taken by human beings to be meritorious. The Martian would have no empathetic understanding of why we saw those projects as meritorious, rather than others. Nor would he understand why some projects had much greater merit for us than others, leading to the former projects being given priority when choices had to be made, except in the most obvious cases.

A Martian might understand why we worked hard to ensure a stable supply of food, so long as Martians also valued the preservation of individual lives or of the species. On the same basis, a Martian might see why many human beings were strongly committed to the project of raising a family. But a Martian might very well be bemused by projects to increase material wealth to the extent that we could afford not merely reasonable comfort, but luxuries. And we could not expect a Martian to be able to see why we attached merit to climbing mountains because they were there, or to running faster than other people when there were quicker means of transport, or to deciphering ancient texts left to us by long-dead civilizations. We, on the other hand, applaud the pursuit of these challenging projects. We regard their pursuit as manifesting the best in humanity. For us, these projects wear the merit of their pursuit on their sleeves. A Martian could explain in a scientific way why we attached great merit to some projects, by

working out what would excite the value-centres in our brains, but that would not amount to any fellow-feeling with our choice of projects. Our projects would not, for the Martian, wear the merit of their pursuit on their sleeves. That merit is therefore something that we can only expect to feature in a subjective view of what we do, a view that is formed using culture-specific guiding concepts, not in an objective view. I will return to this topic in section 9.1.

In terms of the analogy of the coastline, the perception of specific projects as meritorious would arise in the following way. Some features of the world would be seen through a lens that corresponded to a guiding concept. The resulting view of the world would reveal opportunities to change the world in order to meet the demands of the guiding concept. For example, a view of part of the world through the lens that corresponded to beauty would reveal where there was ugliness that could be replaced by beauty. And the lens would add lustre to what was revealed, so as to call upon us to replace ugliness with beauty. That would be enough to make the project of beautifying that part of the world meritorious in the eyes of anyone who accepted beauty as a guiding concept.

The argument of this chapter is that if we accept that the pursuit of our projects in general has merit, a merit that rightly engages our commitment and draws us on to fulfil our projects, then we can explain and legitimate the power of many of our guiding concepts to justify certain conduct. If there is merit in the pursuit of our projects, then several values can be derived. The derivation will rely on the support that the merit of the pursuit of our projects gives to the status as guides that some of our concepts have. But first I will set out the key role of mental privacy in allowing derivation of two of the most important values, namely respect and liberty.

7.2 Mental privacy

It is a biological fact that each of us only has a full appreciation of his or her own mind, not of anyone else's mind. If Rupert spends a long time with Sam, he may get to know Sam very well. He may then be able to predict Sam's reactions in given circumstances, as well as having considerable empathy with Sam's values and projects. But there will always be a gap. Rupert will never become Sam, and he will never know what it is like to be Sam.

Mental privacy is important because it means that we cannot properly evaluate another person's projects. We cannot assess their merit, although we can assess the extent to which another person's pursuit of his projects would suit us by helping us in the pursuit of our own projects. Sometimes one person's projects will make perfect sense to another person, because he has similar projects. An athlete can understand a mountaineer, because they both want to stretch the capabilities of their bodies to the limit. A poet can understand a painter, because they both want to capture life perfectly in their art. Sometimes understanding is more distant, when one person accepts another person's projects without any fellow-feeling. Thus a forester may not understand why anyone would want to qualify as an accountant so as to be able to work indoors all day, but the forester may nonetheless be happy that some people do want to do that. Sometimes one person may see another person's projects as counter-productive, and positively wish that the other person had chosen differently. Parents may feel this when their children refuse to pursue professional careers, but instead choose unskilled and undemanding jobs so as to have more leisure time. But while we may have attitudes of enthusiasm, indifference or concern towards other people's projects, we cannot evaluate those projects. We have no standpoint that entitles us to say, in relation to someone else's projects, that one project is worthwhile and another is not, because a project can only be properly evaluated by its owner. Its value depends on his preferences and on the precise make-up of his subjective view of the project. His subjective view may differ from those of other people in the same culture, even if most of the guiding concepts are the same. In particular, the relative weights that are attached to different guiding concepts can differ markedly between people in the same culture. Given mental privacy, the value of a project to an individual can never be completely shared. We may ask others to consider whether their projects are wise ones, but if they hear us out and then carry on as before, we have no sound basis on which to stop them for their own benefit.

Only in extreme cases, such as insanity, might we feel entitled to force people to change their ways, and then the justification would be that they were no longer under their own control. They would have lost their autonomy. We might therefore compulsorily treat an insane person who was a danger to himself. By contrast, if someone

who was sane freely chose to endanger himself, it would not be for the rest of us to force him to change his ways except to the extent that other people were adversely affected. We might not even feel entitled to force an insane person to change his ways unless he was a danger to others.

On the other occasions when we feel that forcible intervention is justified, cases of criminal behaviour, the justification has little to do with the criminals and much to do with the protection of the rest of us. Even the reform of criminals is largely directed towards protecting the rest of us from future criminal behaviour. We can pass judgement on another person's projects by reference to their consequences, when those consequences impinge on the rest of us. We are entitled to say that a thief is in the wrong, and we can certainly say that it would have been better if he had not had the project of increasing his own wealth by taking other people's property without permission. Recognition of the merit of projects gives us a specific argument for such adverse judgements. The argument is that criminals, in pursuit of their own projects, obstruct the projects of others. They may for example take goods that other people would have used in pursuing their own projects. But even then, we are not evaluating the criminal's projects from the criminal's point of view.

Mental privacy is not something that could be overcome by technical advances. Even if Rupert could read off the entire state of the brain of Sam and could interpret what he read in terms of projects, values and feelings, and even if Rupert had enough in common with Sam to be able to comprehend all that he discovered in this way, Rupert would still not be able to evaluate Sam's projects. The reason is that Rupert would have no valid criteria by which to do so. Rupert could imagine himself to be in Sam's position and could decide how he, Rupert, would feel, but in doing so Rupert would be using his own criteria. Rupert would effectively be placing the contents of Sam's brain within Rupert's own brain as a simulated person, and would be evaluating the projects of that simulated person from Rupert's own point of view. Alternatively, Rupert could look inside Sam's brain for Sam's own criteria and use them to evaluate Sam's projects. But in that case, the answers would always be the same as those which Sam would have given anyway. Rupert would not have achieved any independent evaluation.

If we cannot evaluate another person's projects, we certainly cannot weigh up the value of their projects against the value of our own projects, or against the value of any other person's projects. We can derive libertarian values from this limit on our abilities. We should strictly limit our interference with other people's lives, because we would have inadequate support for any decisions on how to interfere.

Our inability to evaluate other people's projects does not mean that we cannot recognize those projects as meritorious. We can take the view that all human projects which do not trespass on other people's projects are intrinsically meritorious, even if we do not ourselves have any feeling for their merit. That might be the view of a forester who was unable to empathize with the project of pursuing a career in an office. And when we do regard other people's projects as meritorious, we can recognize that fact without having an urge to pursue those projects ourselves, even if we do have the skills and resources. We have our own priorities among the projects that we could pursue. We do not try to do everything that we could do.

7.3 Values in relation to other people

If we cannot evaluate someone else's projects, then we cannot rank his projects against our own projects or against the projects of other people. This implies that we should respect each person's choice of projects. Respect at the individual level translates into individualistic liberty at the political level. That is, not only should we as individuals allow the people around us to pursue their own projects. As a collective body, we should not try to tell the individuals within that body what to do, or at least not to more than a very modest extent. I will touch on the legitimate extent of social intervention later in this section, and return to the topic in more detail in sections 11.5 and 12.2. Both here and in chapters 11 and 12, I will advocate the pursuit of projects and the development of talents. That does not however fall foul of the constraint on society telling individuals what to do, because I am only offering an argument for individuals to consider and to accept or reject. I do not propose that my conclusions should be legislated, or even that there should be any social pressure to accept them. I do argue that

legislation which would constrain individuals should be strictly limited. But that argument is addressed to a society as a whole, not to individuals within that society.

More values can be derived from the merit of the pursuit of projects. Honesty, reliability, a willingness to co-operate with others and a willingness to compromise all help us to live and work together. They also help us to pursue our individual projects, because that pursuit often requires others to be content to stay out of our way, and to be co-operative when we do need to involve them. The absence of such values would not hinder the hopeless pursuit of our projects, but it would hinder their successful pursuit. I take it that the pursuit which is meritorious is pursuit with a reasonable prospect of success. I will address this point when setting out the ethic of projects in section 12.1.

We can go further and derive more specific values. For example, we can all do more if we live in a flourishing economy than if we live in a stagnant one. In order to have a flourishing economy, we need to create and maintain a legal system within which business can be carried on effectively. That legal system will embody certain values, such as the value of not breaking contracts and the value of not stealing. An environment in which people carry out their contracts and in which people do not take other people's property without permission is not only one in which the resources to pursue projects are likely to be available. It is also one in which people can pursue projects of building up their businesses.

Other values can be derived. Some, such as the value of toleration, command non-interference by others, thereby maintaining a society in which people can pursue their own projects and follow their own preferences. Values that call for some positive action can also be derived. For example, acceptance of the value of helping those who are in real need helps to maintain a society in which people are not debarred from pursuing their own projects by abject poverty.

This derivation of values needs to be supplemented in several ways. First, we need to cover conflicts between projects. These conflicts may be between individuals or between an individual and a larger group, up to and including a whole society. Second, we need to deal with the objection to individual liberty that there may be a collective wisdom which is lacking in individuals, particularly a collective wisdom embodied in tradition. Third, we need to deal

with the objection to individual liberty that while people's projects cannot be ranked against those of other people, the happiness of people might be measurable, at least roughly, and a social organization that directed people in the selection and pursuit of their own projects might give us the best chance of maximizing total happiness. Fourth, we must face up to the amoralist who claims that values are a figment of our imagination and are not binding on anyone.

Conflicts between projects

Conflicts between values correspond to conflicts between projects. If there is a specific occasion on which values come into conflict, as distinct from a general conflict of principle, it arises because people have different projects in play. Those projects may themselves be founded on a desire to abide by the conflicting values. This can happen within one person, for example when she has some upsetting truth to tell to a friend. She may wish to be honest at all times, but also wish to avoid hurting people's feelings. The two values, to be an honest person and not to be hurtful, will actually come into conflict when she has to choose between carrying out the project of informing her friend and carrying out the project of keeping her friend happy. Conflicts can also arise between two people. One person may have the project of getting another to live in accordance with certain values, but the second person may have the project of living in a different way. An example would be a father who wished to force a traditional lifestyle on his unwilling child. A similar conflict could arise at the level of a whole society. Legislators might have the project of creating a society that embodied certain values, and might create a mechanism to enforce those values. That project could very easily conflict with the projects of some individuals who did not want to live by the values in question.

We also need to recognize conflicts between projects that spring merely from commitment to the projects concerned, with no obvious conflict that is directly between values. One person may for example have a project of doing well at his job, which requires his getting a good night's sleep so as to be alert when at work. His neighbour may have a project of becoming a good trumpeter, which requires practice every night because she has another job during the day.

The resolution of conflicts

Conflicts between two projects of one person must be handled by that person. If she chooses to do one thing, that may prevent her from doing something else. Each of us must cope with the limitations that the world imposes on us.

A conflict between individuals is more difficult. The fact that we cannot evaluate each other's projects means that this type of conflict is likely to be irresolvable where there are no background general opinions to invoke. Take the conflict between someone who needs a good night's sleep and a neighbour who wants to become a good trumpeter and needs to practise every night. This conflict will be irresolvable unless there is a general opinion that allowing people to sleep well is more important than encouraging musical talent, or alternatively a general opinion that musical talent matters more than sleep. An opinion that sleep mattered more would probably reflect a belief that non-interference with other people's projects was a good thing, combined with a belief that playing the trumpet was active interference while sleeping was not. We would focus on what the people involved would be doing, disregarding any attempted interference from other people, and we would ask which activity had the greatest intrinsic potential to interfere with other activities. Someone asleep would not be noticed by others, but someone playing the trumpet would be noticed. So we would be likely to favour the sleeper over the trumpeter. We would then be basing our approach on a belief that people should not interfere with other people's pursuit of their projects. That basis would be in line with a belief in respect for each other's projects. The use of that basis would be the closest we could reasonably get to avoiding the evaluation of other people's projects, given that the dispute between the sleeper and the trumpeter would have to be resolved somehow.

If we take individuals' projects to be central, then a conflict between an individual and society can be handled by asking whether a social project that interferes with one individual's projects can be justified by its removal of obstructions to other individuals' projects, or by the positive promotion of those other individuals' projects. An example would be the provision of taxpayer-funded schools, giving children the possibilities that come with education but taking resources away from taxpayers. As with a conflict between the projects of two individuals, there is no easy

resolution because no-one can legitimately evaluate another person's projects. We are however quite likely to accept a restriction of one individual's pursuit of his projects where that pursuit would actively obstruct other people's pursuit of their projects. For example, we happily accept rules to block some people's projects of increasing their wealth by breaking business contracts, because if business contracts could be broken freely that would obstruct other people's projects to build up their businesses. We are less likely to accept the conscription of one person into an activity that would promote the projects of others. Placing the emphasis on individuals' projects, and insisting that we have no right to evaluate each other's projects, will restrict the extent to which it is acceptable for society, through its legislators, to impose its will on individuals. We do not however need to reduce the scope of acceptable imposition to zero. We may choose to provide public services in order to facilitate some people's pursuit of their projects, even though other people are obstructed in the pursuit of their projects by the corresponding burden of taxation.

Collective wisdom

The second concern is that there may be a collective wisdom that is lacking in individuals, particularly a collective wisdom embodied in tradition. If individuals' projects are central, any collective wisdom will have little authority. If an individual chooses to reject collective wisdom, there will be no firm ground for challenging that rejection. We might try to persuade an individual to reconsider his chosen projects in the light of collective wisdom, but if he decided not to change his mind then we would have no further ground for argument. I see this as a positive thing. Living individuals should not be constrained by the dead hand of the past. If a supposed collective wisdom cannot be justified in terms of the pursuit of the current or future projects of individuals, perhaps including future generations, then it should carry no weight. But even someone who accepted that could say that it was his project to uphold tradition, to live in a traditional society. At that point, we would have to draw a boundary between the acceptable restraint of others who wished to obstruct his own traditional conduct, and the unacceptable

conscripted of others into continuing the traditional way of life themselves.

The pursuit of happiness

The third concern is that while people's projects cannot be ranked against those of other people, the happiness of people might be measurable, at least roughly, and a social organization that directed people in the selection and pursuit of their own projects might give us the best chance of maximizing total happiness. The answer to this is John Stuart Mill's, that each of us is best placed to assess what is for our own benefit (*On Liberty*, chapter 4, pages 84-85). Mill wrote of each person's special knowledge of his own feelings and circumstances, but the point applies equally to our happiness. Just as no-one can assess the true importance of another individual's projects to that individual, no-one can assess what makes another person happy.

The amoralist

The fourth concern is one that affects any ethic. What can we say to the resolute amoralist, someone who claims that values are a figment of our imagination and are not binding on anyone? No ethic has yet come up with an answer that would convince all amoralists, and making human projects central will not solve the problem. It will however change the problem, and this change may make it easier to persuade some amoralists to abandon their position. A resolute amoralist is likely to observe ethical norms in his conduct, although if challenged he may say that this is merely a matter of convenience and that he would not hesitate to violate those norms if it suited him. He is even more likely to conduct his life purposefully, pursuing identifiable projects with a degree of commitment. If challenged he can agree that he does so, but he can still deny that this fact requires him to show any respect for other people's projects. He is however then taking it upon himself to value others' projects at nothing compared to his own. He would have no right to complain if others did the same to him, and happily obstructed his projects whenever it suited them. (This is not a

version of the argument put forward by Alan Gewirth that I discuss and reject in section 7.6. Gewirth argued that people had rights, merely on the basis of the logic of purposive action. I only assert that the amoralist would have no right to complain.)

The same thing could happen to the amoralist in a society that thought primarily in terms of values rather than projects. He could be declared an outlaw, either explicitly or by tacit agreement. He would then not be entitled to decent treatment, because he could not be relied upon to treat others decently. If however we think in terms of projects, that brings the consequences of a rejection of the value of others' wishes closer to everyday life. Many social interactions do not test our values. We simply act in a certain way, displaying courtesy or not stealing despite having the opportunity, without thinking about whether to apply our normal values. The same is true of our attitude to other people's pursuit of their projects, when there is no reason for us to notice what they are doing. But the moment someone else's activities do impinge on us, in any way that is not so everyday that we barely notice, we have a choice. We can obstruct the other person or we can ignore the matter. These points of decision are likely to occur more often than the points of decision that are generated by an action which strikes us as a significant violation of values. Every occasion when someone undertakes a noisy activity, or pollutes the atmosphere, will give rise to such a point of decision. The potential outlaw who obstructs others whenever it suits him, rather than showing some willingness to accommodate others' projects, may find that others will make his pursuit of many of his own projects difficult. This may happen to him far more often than he would experience adverse consequences from people considering, and then deciding against, the application of their normal values in their dealings with him, because we rarely stop to consider whether to apply our normal values. Thus if we think in terms of projects, the amoralist's position may be more uncomfortable than if we think in terms of values.

7.4 Values in relation to ourselves

If we value our projects, then we will be motivated to pursue them. As mentioned in section 7.1, we will feel elation at our successes and regret at our failures. We can go further. If we give a central

position to projects, that generates specific values in relation to ourselves. There is the value of autonomy, of being in a position to choose our own projects. There is also the value of developing our talents, so as to widen the range of projects from which we can choose. Finally, we may introduce values that will enable us to rank our own projects and decide which ones should have first call on our resources.

Autonomy

The value of autonomy is linked to the merit of the pursuit of our projects in both directions. On the one hand, our projects are not our own, and worth pursuing, unless we choose them ourselves. On the other hand, autonomy is pointless unless we use it to choose our projects. Autonomy and the pursuit of our projects need each other.

A project cannot justifiably engage a person and absorb his energy unless it was his own choice to pursue that project. If the answer to the question “why are you doing that?” is only “because he told me to”, not supplemented by anything like “and I have chosen to accept his orders”, that is no justification. Why should we do what other people tell us to do? Others have no claim on our energies unless we choose to allow them that claim. (There may be exceptions, such as alleged automatic duties to family or to country, but such examples are very much the exception. Other apparent exceptions, such as a duty to pay taxes, reflect the individual’s choice to live in a particular country and consume its public services, so they are not really exceptions.) This does not mean that every little thing we do has to be our own choice. We may diligently perform all of the tasks set by our employers, without even thinking of choosing which tasks to perform. We must however have exercised our own choice at the highest level, for example by deciding that we wanted to do our jobs well. It also does not mean that people cannot in fact enthusiastically pursue projects that are not of their own choosing. It is possible for someone born into domestic slavery, who has no means of escape, to become totally engrossed in his tasks. The fact that such a slave would in theory have chosen to accept slavery, rather than choosing to rebel and be beaten or killed, would not mean that he had really

chosen slavery. The alternatives would be psychologically impossible choices for many people.

A domestic slave's unchosen project of carrying out his tasks would not however be meritorious. It would make perfect sense for the slave to give every sign of devotion to his tasks, so as to avoid punishment. It would also make sense for the slave to say, sincerely, that if he is devoted to his tasks then the world will be a better place. This might for example be because his master would then be free to run a big corporation, without worrying about the running of his household. (The world would be an even better place if the master hired willing domestic staff who received decent wages and were free to terminate their employment, but the slave could not bring that about.) The slave's devotion to his tasks would actually be justified if the slave had freely chosen, as his project, to use whatever opportunities presented themselves to make the world a better place, and had gone on to reason that devotion to his tasks was such an opportunity. But then the slave would have chosen his project at the highest level, so we would not have an example of the merit of an unchosen project. (We would of course want to ask whether the slave's apparent choice of the project of improving the world was in fact a rationalization so as to make his position bearable. Let us assume that we had made those enquiries and that the slave did not appear to be rationalizing.)

The need for autonomous choice in order to justify seeing a project as meritorious comes down to the need to be able to answer the question "why do you care about that project?". If someone gives a reason like "I do my job well so that I will get promoted", that refers to a further project and invites another question, "why do you want to get promoted?". The answer may be a further project, for example "to earn more money", inviting the question "why do you want to earn more money?". The chain of question and answer will go on until it is brought to a halt. The stopping point may be something so obviously worthwhile that we would doubt the sanity of anyone who questioned its worth, such as "so that I can have adequate food and shelter". But that will not be the usual stopping point in a wealthy society where it is easy to obtain the basic necessities. An alternative stopping point is "because that is the project which matters to me, that is what I value". This is a perfectly good response, but only so long as the respondent has freely chosen the project that matters to him.

Not only do we need autonomy in order to make sense of our regarding our projects as meritorious. Autonomy is pointless unless we use it to choose our projects. Autonomy is something that most of us value, and we would certainly feel the lack of it if it were taken away. But we would feel the lack because of the choices that we could no longer make. If we were not able to choose our careers, or whether to have children, or which social or political causes to promote, that would matter a great deal. It does in fact matter greatly to people who actually face those restrictions.

If we did not have choices to make that were important to us, we would feel the lack of autonomy much less keenly. We can be irritated by having trivial decisions taken out of our hands, such as whether we would like tea or coffee when only one pot is available to make hot drinks for a meeting. But if that happened all the time, we would become accustomed to it and we would soon cease to care.

Developing our talents

The value of developing our talents fits well with giving a central role to projects, although it does not follow by logical necessity. Development enhances our autonomy by widening the range of projects from which we can choose. It also enables us to pursue more effectively the projects that we do choose. We cannot always tell in advance what skills we will need in order to fulfil our projects. Unexpected difficulties may call for skills that we did not expect to need.

Ranking our projects

If we have a range of projects, as is normal, we need some way of ranking them so as to decide which ones are most deserving of our resources. This is not merely a matter of attaching numerical weights to our projects. We can also structure them in a way that makes sense, using values that we apply broadly. We might for example think that the advancement of political causes was more important than the indulgence of personal whims. Then we would rank our own political projects ahead of any interest we might have

in shopping or dining out. We would also approve of someone else who put her political causes ahead of her personal whims, even if her political causes were diametrically opposed to ours and we might wish that she was a less effective campaigner.

The adoption of a set of values to rank our projects in some sensible way is not logically implied by giving a central role to projects, but it is a natural concomitant. It makes sense to us, and if other people adopted such sets of values we would not challenge the principle of their doing so. Both the value of developing our talents, and the adoption of a set of values to rank our projects, can receive a firmer foundation if we identify the pursuit of our projects as a primary human good. I will return to these themes in sections 11.3 and 12.3 respectively.

7.5 Types of ethic

Ethics may be classified in several different ways. I will use a division into two types, which between them cover many, but not all, ethics. The first type comprises virtue ethics, which focus on what it is to be a good person. The second type comprises what I will call specific-acts ethics. These focus on the right thing to do in given circumstances. The main types of specific-acts ethic are consequentialism (which includes utilitarianism) and deontology. This section considers how these types of ethic stand in relation to an approach that gives a central role to human projects. To what extent do these types of ethic promote the pursuit of our own projects and respect for other people's projects? The ethic of projects that I shall put forward in chapter 12 is not exactly of either type.

The descriptions of the different types of ethic that I give here are only sketches. I pick out some of the central features of the types of ethic, and limit myself to features that are relevant to my argument. These approaches to ethical questions are much richer than my sketches would suggest. And while I have presented the approaches as contrasting, they may yet come together in a new synthesis. Convenient starting points for further exploration of the subject are Chappell and Crisp, "Utilitarianism"; Crisp, "Virtue Ethics"; McNaughton, "Consequentialism" and McNaughton, "Deontological Ethics" (all in Craig, *Routledge Encyclopedia of*

Philosophy). Alternative outlines, which draw out structural features of the different types of ethic, are Annas, “Virtue Ethics”; Brink, “Some Forms and Limits of Consequentialism” and McNaughton and Rawling, “Deontology” (all in Copp, *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*).

Virtue ethics and our own projects

A virtue ethic of the right kind could fit very well with seeing our own projects as meritorious, and with the associated values in relation to ourselves. Such a virtue ethic would encourage us to develop our talents. It would also encourage us to make our choices autonomously and in accordance with a stable set of values. The classic virtue ethic is given by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. In books 3 to 5 he works his way through a catalogue of moral virtues including courage, temperance, amiability and truthfulness. In book 6 he covers intellectual virtues including prudence, intelligence, wisdom and judgement. He also defines happiness (eudaimonia in Greek) as a virtuous activity of the soul (*Nicomachean Ethics*, book 1, section 7, 1097b22-1098a20). This happiness is different from mere pleasure. Aristotle’s ethic is an ethic of human flourishing, of goal-directed activity. It is very well-suited to the promotion of our own projects. (Virtue ethics have of course moved on since Aristotle, and are currently an exciting field of research. For examples of recent work see Gardiner, *Virtue Ethics Old and New* and Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*.)

When Aristotle defined the good life, he homed in on contemplation and enjoined us to pursue that activity (*Nicomachean Ethics*, book 10, section 7, 1177a12-1177a18). If we were to take this to be an essential part of his virtue ethic more generally, it would make that ethic narrower than would be needed to see the full range of our projects as meritorious. Many of our projects do not involve contemplation, or do so only as an incidental part. But we do not need to take that step with Aristotle. We can consider the rest of his virtue ethic without narrowing it down to the point where the highest life is one of contemplation. Aristotle based his argument for the life of contemplation on the facts that it gave pure and permanent pleasure, that it was desirable in itself rather than for

some other end, that it was associated with our intellect which was our highest faculty, that contemplation had to be the activity of God and that contemplation was associated with leisure, which was thought to be important to happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics*, book 10, sections 7 and 8, 1177a18-1179a32). We are not forced to accept any of these arguments. Other things may afford enduring pleasure or may be desirable in themselves. Our intellect may be our highest faculty, but it plays an essential role in most human activities because they require planning and decision-making. As to God, it now seems more appropriate to construct an ethic that is independent of any conception of the supernatural. Finally, contemplation is not the only source of leisure, nor is it the only way to make use of leisure.

Ethics that emphasize virtues do not however have to fit well with seeing our own projects as meritorious, nor need they promote associated values. A religion that identified humility or submission as a virtue would be likely to be hostile to the pursuit of projects that we had devised. It would instead be likely to identify a project that was already laid down for us, to live in a given way and ultimately to achieve some specified goal such as union with God. If we accepted that humility and submission were virtues (and I do not), then we would be likely simply to accept the prescribed project and not to give serious consideration to alternatives. We might be encouraged to choose the prescribed project freely, but we would not be invited to make other choices. Autonomy is negated when it is reduced to the opportunity to make a free choice from a list that contains only one item.

Virtue ethics and other people's projects

Turning to the extent to which a virtue ethic is sufficiently individualistic to promote respect for other people's chosen projects, including projects that we would not choose ourselves, we again find that it depends on the particular ethic. A virtue of respect for others' liberty could certainly find a place in an ethic like Aristotle's. He not only made a close connection between virtue and choice, meaning the choice of the person acting rather than the choice of someone else giving orders (*Nicomachean Ethics*, book 3, section 2, 1111b4-6). His whole approach was clearly based on the

idea of an autonomous moral agent who made his own decisions and took responsibility for them.

On the other hand, a religious ethic that identified a particular way of life as the most desirable way of life could support the withdrawal of autonomy from others, and could use claims that humility and submission were virtues to support that withdrawal. Forcing people to accept external authority would make them display these supposed virtues. That would itself seem to lend justification to the withdrawal of autonomy, because it could easily seem to be a good thing to force others to be virtuous.

Specific-acts ethics and our own projects

Specific-acts ethics, which try to tell us the right thing to do on each occasion, might be worse than some virtue ethics at promoting the pursuit of our own freely-chosen projects. But they might be better at promoting respect for other people's projects. The two types of specific-acts ethic that I shall consider here are utilitarianism and deontology. Utilitarianism is the leading form of consequentialism, the general class of ethics that focus on the consequences of actions. The consequence that matters to utilitarians is happiness. They tell us to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. Deontology, on the other hand, tells us to perform certain duties, such as a duty to preserve life, a duty to tell the truth or a duty to keep our promises. The consequences are at best of secondary importance, and may not matter at all.

The reason why specific-acts ethics can be worse than virtue ethics at actively promoting the pursuit of our own freely-chosen projects is that they tend to focus on what is obligatory or forbidden, rather than on what is recommended. Thus it may be obligatory to save someone from drowning, and forbidden to steal. Obligation and prohibition are naturally, although not necessarily, associated with acts that directly affect other people rather than oneself. We are reluctant to tell an individual what to do when only she will benefit or suffer. It is part of our conception of freedom that people should make their own decisions where others will not be affected, or will only be affected if they choose to be. (Virtue ethics that promote humility or submission side-step this conception of freedom by promoting specific attitudes rather than specific

acts.) In addition, if a project is freely chosen it seems to be primarily up to the chooser to decide how much energy to devote to its pursuit. The amount of energy to devote is not an obvious topic for obligations or prohibitions. So a specific-acts ethic may have nothing to say about how we pursue our own projects when other people are unaffected. Specific-acts ethics may not stand in the way of our own projects, but they may not encourage them either.

It is however possible for a specific-acts ethic to be good at promoting the pursuit of our own freely-chosen projects, overcoming the limitations set out in the previous paragraph. Such an ethic could not specify which projects we should choose without taking away our freedom. But it could enjoin us to develop our talents, or to stick to our projects once we had chosen them rather than flitting from one project to another and achieving very little. Such injunctions could be translated into specific-acts terms, for example by saying that when we have opportunities to develop our talents we should take those opportunities, or that we should resist any inclinations to abandon projects on account of trivial difficulties.

The injunctions could be justified on utilitarian grounds. If people develop their talents and achieve things, it will be better not just for them but for other people who can share in the fruits of their labours. The injunctions might also be justified on deontological grounds, although that would be harder. The argument would be that we had a duty to do the best that we could. This would most easily be justified as a duty against the background of a belief that life was a gift from God, and that we should show our gratitude to the donor by making the best possible use of that gift. Without such beliefs, it would be harder to justify a duty to do the best that we could. Immanuel Kant, the leading exponent of deontology, did put forward two arguments that we have a duty not to commit suicide, which would put a stop to all of our projects, but neither argument has an obvious link to the idea of doing the best that we can. Neither argument directly requires belief in God, although an ethic of the same type as Kant's would be hard and arguably impossible to sustain without that belief. The first argument is that nature would contradict itself if self-love, the principle that leads to the furtherance of life, could also ground the ending of life. The second argument is that we must not use people, including ourselves, merely as means to our ends. We must regard people as ends in

themselves. To commit suicide would be to use yourself merely as a means to ensuring that your life remained tolerable up to its last moment. (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, section 2, Ak. 4:421-422 for the first argument and Ak. 4:429 for the second.)

If we were to add injunctions to develop our talents or to stick to our projects to the normal injunctions of specific-acts ethics, that would increase the risk of ethical conflicts. Someone could for example be engaged in the pursuit of her own projects when an opportunity to help someone in need arose. A specific-acts ethic that did not include injunctions regarding one's own projects might automatically require her to break off from her own projects and help the other person. A specific-acts ethic that did include injunctions regarding one's own projects would force her to decide between the injunction to stick to her own projects and the injunction to help the other person. This increased risk of conflict would be a natural consequence of extending the realm of an ethic to cover actions that affected only ourselves, as well as actions that affected other people. If an ethic has to juggle more considerations, it will generate conflicts more often.

Specific-acts ethics and other people's projects

Specific-acts ethics could be very good, or very bad, at promoting respect for other people's projects.

Immanuel Kant put forward a deontological ethic which gave a central role to the idea that we should treat people as ends in themselves rather than as means to an end. Such an ethic should be very good at promoting respect because it would deter the manipulation of other people to suit ourselves. In Kant's words, humanity has dignity rather than the worth that goods have in the marketplace. Humanity has that dignity in association with its role as legislator of the moral law for itself. The market worths of different goods can be compared, allowing goods to be traded. But there can be no market in human dignity, and we cannot weigh one person in the balance against another. (On the treatment of people as ends in themselves, see *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, section 2, Ak. 4:428-429. On the contrast between human dignity and market worth, see section 2, Ak. 4:434-435.) On the other hand, a deontological ethic that gave each of us a duty to

make everyone conform to a certain pattern of conduct, such as a pattern of conduct prescribed by a religious text, would be very bad at promoting respect for other people's projects.

A utilitarian ethic could also go either way. If the goal was the greatest happiness of the greatest number, then it might in theory be possible to achieve that in an entirely managed society, with everyone being told what to do in order to maximize total happiness. Such an approach would imply no respect for other people's projects. Even the managers of the society would have no freedom. They would be required to manage in such a way as to maximize total happiness, regardless of their individual happiness. Everyone else would be obliged to accept the managers' instructions, and to ensure that people around them also accepted those instructions. Such a proposal could however be attacked on two grounds, both of which would argue strongly for respect for other people's projects as part of a utilitarian ethic.

The first ground is one mentioned in section 7.3, that each person is the best judge of his or her own happiness. Managers of society simply could not know what to prescribe in order to maximize happiness. This would argue for something like the free market, in which we all make our own decisions about what to buy and market forces ensure a good result overall. I do not claim that a pure free-market economy is necessarily the best economy, but there is an analogy between our individual purchasing decisions and our individual choices of projects.

The second ground is that if the means to happiness could be arranged by managers of society on behalf of the rest of us, the conception of happiness that was in play would have to be a very narrow one. Managers could arrange for the provision of material goods. They could also arrange for the provision of facilities that would allow us to develop our talents, such as libraries and sports centres. They could provide a legal framework, such as the law of contract, that facilitated the pursuit of co-operative projects. They could not however provide the sense of fulfilment that comes from achieving a goal oneself. Only the individual can gain that fulfilment, although he may do so by voluntary co-operation with others. Likewise, only the individual can exercise his own choice of projects, allowing him the satisfaction of doing so. The provision of the means to choose and to achieve would be pointless unless the individual freely took advantage of those means. In order for that to

happen, we would need to respect people's choices of their own projects. Mere material provision is only a part of happiness. Once material provision has reached a satisfactory level, any increments have only a small effect on total happiness. It must however be acknowledged that a pattern of steadily improving material provision may make a substantial contribution to happiness because it encourages a feeling of security, a feeling that things do not tend to get worse.

7.6 Gewirth, Davidson and McDowell

In this section I will outline some points of contact between my approach and the ideas of three others, Alan Gewirth, Donald Davidson and John McDowell.

Gewirth

Alan Gewirth had a similar general approach to my approach of giving the pursuit of projects a central role. He made voluntary and purposive action the centrepiece of his argument for moral obligation in his book *Reason and Morality*. He identified freedom and basic well-being as preconditions of the fulfilment of our purposes, and as things that someone who has purposes to fulfil must claim as rights. But his strategy was different from mine. He argued that someone who claimed rights to freedom and basic well-being for herself could not consistently refuse those rights to others. His argument proceeded within the logic of his theory of voluntary and purposive action, supplemented by a principle of generic consistency. This principle was that we should act in accordance with the rights of others as well as the rights of ourselves. (I paraphrase in order not to use some of Gewirth's technical terms.) Gewirth argued that no-one could deny this principle without contradicting herself (*Reason and Morality*, page 135).

Gewirth later gave a detailed analysis of the notion of self-fulfilment, in his book *Self-Fulfillment*. He argued that it is attained by the dedicated pursuit of our purposes. He also emphasized the centrality of our choosing our purposes, without advocating wild and unconstrained choices. I agree with him on these points. But as

in *Reason and Morality*, Gewirth supported his position by an argument that sat within the logic of action, supplemented by his principle of generic consistency (*Self-Fulfillment*, section 3.4, pages 77-87, and see also the use that he made of the principle of generic consistency in deriving duties to oneself in section 4.6, pages 134-140). I do not think that his argument is enough to support his conclusion. Specifically, he moved from a person's recognizing that she must have freedom and well-being in order to fulfil her purposes, to her claiming rights to freedom and well-being. I have no difficulty with Gewirth's merely claiming dialectical necessity for his argument. This is necessity from the point of view of a participant in the world who wishes to act purposively and who is claiming the things that she must have in order to do so, rather than necessity from the point of view of a detached observer (*Self-Fulfillment*, section 5.8, pages 218-223). Indeed, much of my own argument is dialectical in the same sense. Rather, I regard the step from a recognition of requisites to the claim that those requisites are a right as an illegitimate step, even in a dialectical argument. I do so notwithstanding Gewirth's remarks on this point (*Self-Fulfillment*, page 82, footnote 23).

Unlike Gewirth, I think that we need an external commitment in order to support our values. We need to go beyond the logic of a theory of action, even if that logic is supplemented by an apparently inescapable principle such as the principle of generic consistency. My chosen commitment is to the ethic of projects.

In considering the relationship between Gewirth's approach and my own, it is important to bear in mind that for Gewirth, "purposive" did not mean the same thing as "purposeful", where the latter connoted "a deliberate, resolute design and its determined pursuit". If the two words had meant the same thing for Gewirth, then purposive action would have meant something very similar to the pursuit of our projects. But they did not mean the same thing. See *Reason and Morality*, page 38.

Davidson

Donald Davidson argued that when we give the reason for which an action was performed, we give a causal explanation ("Actions, Reasons, and Causes"). If someone flips a light switch because she

wants to see in her house at night, her reason for doing so, her desire for light so that she can see, is also the cause of her flipping the switch. Davidson went on to provide essential context for this position with his theory of anomalous monism (“Mental Events”). On this theory, actions and the events that lead up to them can be described in mental, reason-based terms or in physical terms. There may be strict causal laws determining the sequence of events under their physical descriptions, but there are no such laws for events under their mental descriptions. Therefore there can be no strict laws linking events as described mentally to events as described physically. If there were strict linking laws, then the strict causal laws that applied to events under physical descriptions would be mirrored by strict causal laws that applied to events under mental descriptions.

On my approach, anything that allowed our own present and future actions to be seen as the mere behaviour of objects would be unacceptable. This follows from the argument in section 5.3. If anomalous monism could make the mental sufficiently anomalous that our actions could not be seen as the mere behaviour of objects, Davidson’s approach would be consistent with mine. (The question of consistency would however only arise when we were viewing conduct as the action of a person. As explained in section 5.3, we only need to take this view of two classes of conduct. One is our own present and future conduct. The other is any conduct, of ourselves or of others, past, present or future, when we wish to make ethical comments. If we did not wish to apply Davidson’s approach in these circumstances, no question of consistency would arise.) But it is not clear that anomalous monism could make the mental sufficiently anomalous. On Davidson’s theory, events are individuals and we can only ask whether they come under causal laws when they are described in some way, whether mental or physical (“Mental Events”, part 1, page 215). This strategy of identifying two descriptions of only one event supports the claim to monism. But it also puts at risk the claim that there are no strict linking laws. And even lax linking laws might be enough to allow our actions to be seen as the mere behaviour of objects. In order to avoid the possibility of seeing actions in that way, Davidson’s theory might need to be modified to the point where it was no longer possible to take events as basic, and thereby sustain the monism. Dualism would then loom.

Davidson did give reasons why we should not expect to be able to reduce mental descriptions of events to physical descriptions. In particular, whenever a purported physical substitute for a mental description is proposed, we always find that we need to add qualifications which are mental in character, unless we are to lose some important content of the description. If for example we try to reduce someone's expressions of his beliefs to the sounds that he makes, we have to add that he is making the sounds intentionally, that he is speaking a given language and so on ("Mental Events", part 2, pages 215-223). But it is not clear that the bars to reducing mental descriptions to physical descriptions which Davidson cited would create the necessary bar to seeing our own actions as mere behaviour. One reason why it might not create the necessary bar is that mere behaviour can be described in the same high-level, loose-fitting terms as actions. A second reason is that the content of a mental description that would be lost on moving to a physical description might not be essential to make the physical description a good enough characterization of the conduct in question. Even if reduction to a physical description were impossible, that might not make reduction to a description in terms of the mere behaviour of objects impossible. It would only make that reduction impossible if the only descriptions of conduct that allowed us to distance ourselves from our conduct were physical descriptions. It is not clear whether or not that is so, although it may very well be so.

This does not mean that my approach should be regarded as dualist. Dualism as standardly conceived is a theory that the world comprises two fundamentally different substances, or that there are two fundamentally different types of property. The different substances or properties are typically identified as mental and physical. Such a theory could be applied in taking a detached view of the world because dualism is a claim about how the world is, for everyone. My approach distinguishes objective and subjective views, locating any dualism in the ranges of concepts that are deployed in forming those views rather than in the contents of the world. This might make it appear to be similar to the type of dualism that would result if the basic position of events that sustained Davidson's monism could no longer be maintained. The result would be a dualism of mental and physical descriptions, rather than a dualism of mental and physical objects. But the appearance of similarity is deceptive.

Davidson's theory gives an account of how the world is, from a detached point of view. If its monism were to fail, then the mental and physical descriptions would need to be seen as applying to different aspects of the world. That would amount to a genuinely dualist position. On my approach, there is no claim that the distinctively subjective element in someone's subjective view, the element that could not be captured within an objective view, represents how the world is from a detached point of view. The distinctively subjective element amounts to taking a value-imbued view of things that is only available if certain concepts are used as guides. None of that will give the person taking the view reasons to agree or disagree with particular propositions that could find places within his objective views. It is true that his subjective views will give him reasons to form some objective views rather than others, and therefore to consider only certain propositions to decide whether he agrees or disagrees with them. This is the point that was made in section 6.2. His choice of projects that he sees as worth pursuing, the projects to which he is committed, will lead him to select specific objective views. And his emotions could easily affect his willingness to review the evidence for and against particular propositions, but that would not amount to a giving of reasons to agree or disagree with those propositions. It is also true that his subjective views should be consistent with his objective views, but the objective views should take priority. Subjective views must fit in with objective views, rather than the other way round. Thus there is no implication from the distinctively subjective element in a subjective view to how the world is, considered from a detached point of view.

McDowell

There are parallels between my approach and John McDowell's reading of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Mind and World*, Lecture 4, Section 7, pages 78-84). On McDowell's reading, someone occupies a specific ethical outlook. Only from that outlook can she consider apparent reasons for acting and decide whether those reasons are genuine. Our upbringing can lead us to an outlook from which we can be aware of ethical reasons for acting in certain ways. It can become our second nature to think in an ethical way, responsive to ethical demands.

My notion of the use of a range of culture-specific guiding concepts parallels McDowell's notion of an ethical outlook. The fact that we usually work with a socially accepted range of guiding concepts, taking them as given and committing ourselves to life within the conceptual framework of our society, corresponds to McDowell's notion of ethical thinking becoming our second nature. It is however a delicate point to decide whether McDowell would agree that we would still need an independent support for our values, such as commitment to an ethic that attributed merit to the pursuit of our projects. On the one hand he says that "the ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them" (*Mind and World*, page 82). Those words suggest that he would not agree that an independent support was needed. On the other hand he comments on the idea of ethical demandingness, saying that "it is not supposed that we could explain the relevant idea of demandingness in terms of independently intelligible facts about human beings" (page 83). Those words suggest that an independent support might be needed, at least if one were to accept that a demand could not be made unless the underlying notion of demandingness were understood by the person making the demand, the person of whom it was made or both. My view is that independent support is in fact needed, and that no reading of Aristotle would eliminate the need.

McDowell discusses other themes which overlap with my approach in his paper "Virtue and Reason". He argues that we should "comprehend, essentially from within, the virtuous person's distinctive way of viewing particular situations" (page 159). And he says that "the rationality of virtue is not demonstrable from an external standpoint" (page 160). These thoughts correspond to the point that if Sheila is acting in accordance with her guiding concepts and Tom is observing Sheila, he will only see Sheila's conduct as justified if he too uses those concepts as guides. The positions that Sheila and Tom occupy along the coastline, or out in the water, must be close enough together. McDowell also explores the role of psychological states, described in terms such as concern for one's friends, in making actions intelligible (page 156). This corresponds to the point that if someone is asked to explain why she helped someone else, the answer "because he is my friend" is a complete answer that will satisfy anyone who uses the concept of friendship as a guide.

CHAPTER 8

Projects, perception and knowledge

If we give a central role to human projects, we can explain some features of perception and knowledge. Even if we only consider our projects objectively, ignoring any merit in their pursuit, that will be enough to show the influence of projects on what we perceive and on what we know. If we go further and see our projects as meritorious, that will justify our acquisition of knowledge. “Perception” will include aesthetic perception, perception of something as beautiful or as sublime.

8.1 What we perceive and what we know

When we perceive, we do not just perceive a patchwork of colour or a sequence of sounds. We perceive a patchwork as a row of houses or a range of mountains or a page with words printed on it. Likewise, we perceive sounds as music or as the sound of the wind. We do this even if we do not articulate any description of what we are perceiving.

There are good reasons for this. At the most general level, we need to impose some interpretation on the data that the world throws at us, so as to give ourselves a principle of selection and impose a structure. We cannot handle all of the data, nor can we do anything with the data in an unstructured form. Once we see a patchwork as a row of houses, we can home in on the main features such as doors and windows. We automatically ignore the precise shading of the brickwork unless we choose to concentrate on that. Similarly, if we hear birdsong we may concentrate on a very limited range of features of the sounds, so as to determine what type of bird is singing. On the other hand, if we perceive a sequence of sounds as music, we may pay a great deal of attention to the precise quality of the sounds, rather than just recognizing that the note C is sounded followed by the note E.

At a more specific level, it makes sense for us to impose a particular selection because of our current concerns. We may look at a row of houses and pay attention to the obvious main features, such as doors and windows, because we are interested in styles of domestic architecture. If we were interested in how different building materials changed over time, we would look on the houses as surfaces of bricks that had been exposed to the weather. We would then pay attention to the patterns of shading. Likewise, when listening to music we may pay attention to the precise qualities of the sounds if our interest is in which instruments play which parts, or we may pay attention to the notes if our interest is in the construction of harmony.

Selection is essential and the principle of selection is given by our projects, whether they be projects to enlarge our knowledge of architecture, to identify birds or to explore music in particular ways. When someone who is listening to music says “that is the sound of the oboe”, there is an unspoken reference to the speaker and to his projects. There might be an implication of “I pay attention to the sound of the oboe, because I have a particular interest in the way in which this composer used the oboe in orchestral works”. We must not over-state the point. We cannot create the world as it currently is by our choice of projects. We cannot make an oboe part more conspicuous than it actually is, merely because we would like to do so. Nonetheless, what we perceive is closely linked to our projects. These projects need not have an obvious connection to action that is intended to change anything in the world. Our project may be simply to enjoy a piece of music or a mountain range. But even that is a project, an intention to achieve something.

I will now consider the acquisition of knowledge. The knowledge that we take the trouble to acquire reflects our projects. Someone who wishes to become a doctor must acquire a particular body of knowledge and a particular range of skills. She must learn how the human body works. She must also learn how to recognize symptoms and how to administer treatments. We may also acquire knowledge for no immediate purpose beyond the fact that we enjoy acquiring certain types of knowledge. Even then, the particular types of knowledge that we acquire will reflect some principle of selection that can be characterized in terms of projects. Someone may acquire a knowledge of history from an economic perspective because that is what interests him. He will pay particular attention

to the history of population movements, of trade and of industrial technology. Someone else may see history much more in political terms. She will select information about political leaders, their policies and their meetings, rather than information about population, trade and technology. The first person has the project of understanding history in economic terms, while the second has the project of understanding history in political terms.

8.2 Justifying our acquisition of knowledge

Projects not only guide our acquisition of knowledge. If the projects are meritorious, they also justify that acquisition. They may do so on either of two levels.

The first level is when the knowledge to be acquired has direct relevance to an existing project. Thus someone who wants to become a doctor has a clear reason to acquire medical knowledge. The project need not be so practical. Someone who wants to understand history in economic terms has just as clear a reason to learn about past changes in population, trade and technology. The merit in the pursuit of the project will justify conduct that supports or is part of that pursuit, including the acquisition of relevant knowledge.

The second level is when there is no obvious existing project. Many of us acquire new knowledge for no particular reason, but simply out of curiosity. To the extent that we take pleasure in doing so, that is itself a project, the project of obtaining pleasure. There is however a higher-level project. This is the project of widening our range of opportunities by increasing our ability to pursue an indefinite range of projects. If we acquire new knowledge, we will be able to do new things. We will also have a better chance of succeeding at the things we can already do. If our projects are meritorious, that is adequate justification for our spending at least some time acquiring knowledge that is of no obvious relevance to specific projects.

This does not mean that the acquisition of knowledge can only be justified when the knowledge promises to be crudely useful. If that were so, it would be right to divert to the study of science and engineering most of the resources that are currently devoted to the understanding of history and literature. That conclusion does not

follow at all. The projects that are worth pursuing as ends in themselves, rather than as means to the accomplishment of other ends, include the improvement of our understanding of history, literature and the subject matter of the other humanities.

8.3 Aesthetic perception

We perceive some things, both in nature and in art, as beautiful or as sublime. We value those things. We also have a wide variety of tastes, although some things will strike a large proportion of humanity as beautiful or as sublime. If we think in terms of projects, that will help to make sense of this area of our experience. I will focus on our specific projects, considered in a straightforward way. I will not follow Immanuel Kant, who found the basis of the judgement of taste in the form of fitness for purpose (*Critique of the Power of Judgement*, section 11, Ak. 5:221).

One project we may have is that of putting ourselves in a certain mental state. Contemplation of beauty can generate calm pleasure. Contemplation of the sublime, for example a wild and rocky landscape in a storm or a picture of such a scene, can lead us to a state of safe excitement. This state may put us in mind of the terror that we would feel if we were caught out in the storm, but because we are not actually in danger we can relish the feeling. (Arthur Schopenhauer gave an exquisite account of how the sublime and the beautiful bring us to a state of detached contemplation, against the background of his metaphysic of the will as an all-pervading force. See *The World as Will and Representation*, volume 1, sections 38 and 39, pages 195-207.) The similarity of human bodies, particularly our sense-organs and our brains, explains why tastes in art that is valued for its beauty or its sublimity are reasonably consistent across different people. Some people who strongly favour the more aggressive forms of contemporary art may have no interest in traditionally beautiful works, but they are not likely to describe those works as ugly.

Another project that we may have is to be challenged, to have our assumptions about art, about the natural world and about society shaken up. Much contemporary art does this. But a challenge can only be made to pre-existing views in the minds of the people perceiving the work of art. The challenge may for

example be to our sense of the beauty or the ugliness of parts of the natural world, or to our views on historical events, or to our sense of the basic structure of the world. We will all come to such works with different existing views. Someone who has already seen in the flesh that nature is red in tooth and claw will be less taken aback by a picture of a polar bear attacking a seal than someone who has always thought of bears as simply cuddly. A soldier will be moved by a picture of the aftermath of a battle in a different way from someone who has had no experience of such things. And someone who has reflected deeply on representations of space, time, harmony and dissonance in artistic traditions will respond to abstract art very differently from someone who has paid no attention to such things.

The fact that we bring a wide variety of preconceptions to a work of art that seeks to challenge us may explain the wide range of reactions to art of that nature, a range far wider than the range of reactions to art that simply seeks to be beautiful, or that may once have been challenging but that is now only seen as beautiful. Some people dismiss contemporary art as rubbish, while others say that it is the only art worth our attention. The project of the artist in challenging us, and our projects in laying our varied preconceptions open to challenge, interact to produce such strong reactions. This is not just a point about art of the past hundred years. Whenever someone has done something radically new in art, any beauty that the work might possess has not been immediately and universally recognized. The element of challenge has come to the fore instead. This has led some to react strongly against new work, while others have praised it extravagantly. Only in time can the element of challenge fade, as the original context of the work recedes into the past. Then if the work possesses beauty or sublimity, it will be remembered. Otherwise it will become a mere footnote in the history of art.

If our projects in contemplating works of art are to enjoy calm pleasure and safe excitement, and to have our preconceptions challenged, then we can seek to explain the value that we place on art by reference to the value that we attach to the pursuit of these projects. The value that we attach to art, and to our aesthetic experiences, will be justified if we can justify that pursuit. We might refuse to go down that route and instead simply assert that art is an end in itself, claiming that the projects of the production and

appreciation of art have their own, independent value. That would be the noblest justification. If we were to say that beauty could only be justified as a means to some other end, that might be thought to degrade beauty. Indeed, I will argue in section 12.4 that the status of beauty as a guiding concept can be defended without any reliance on its usefulness in the promotion of projects other than those of the creation and appreciation of beautiful objects. Or we might value truly great art for its power to transform us, regardless of the effect on the pursuit of our projects. But it is still instructive to explore how our projects in contemplating works of art can be interwoven with other projects.

Calm pleasure allows us rest and recuperation. It is a biological fact that we need rest if we are to pursue our projects effectively. More positively, contemplation of the beautiful and of the sublime develops the skill of detachment. In contemplating a portrait of a person, or in contemplating a real mountain from a safe position, we can notice things that we would not notice if we were busy talking to someone or if we were out on the mountain, cold, wet and in danger. We can then reflect calmly on the possibilities that are opened up by the things we have noticed. The truly beautiful or sublime will draw us in and hold our attention, even though we know that the work of art or the natural scene demands no immediate response from us. It creates a deeply satisfying playground for the mind. When we return to the everyday world where immediate responses are demanded, we will be better prepared to cope with the world. We will be more able to take a step back and notice important details before acting.

Challenge will also prepare us to be more effective in the world. If our preconceptions survive some severe challenges, this suggests that they are reasonably robust. Preconceptions that do not survive probably needed to be weeded out anyway. We can therefore become more effective in the pursuit of our projects. We may also find that new projects are opened up. If for example we had a preconception that nothing much could be done to save some natural environment, but a work of art had drawn the problem to our attention very effectively, we might think again and realize that the project of saving that environment could be fulfilled with the right publicity. Beauty and sublimity may have important roles here. A work that is beautiful or sublime can speak to us far more

insistently than a work that is ugly or ridiculous. It will therefore mount a challenge that is hard to ignore.

Finally, art may be valued because it inspires us to a particular view, not by challenging opposing views but by giving an engaging and exciting form to the view being promoted. Art in the service of religious or political causes, or in the service of commerce, can be like this. The project of the artist or of his paymaster is to recruit people to a cause, to increase their dedication to a cause or to get them to buy something. While this is certainly a human project, it is also one that subverts the autonomy of the audience. We may well consider this to be an abuse of art. Art that has been devised as propaganda, or to sell products, often has little artistic merit and is only preserved as a historical curiosity. This sort of art is different from the art that seeks to challenge us, because challenging art poses a question and then leaves us to reach our own conclusions. Manipulative art, whether propaganda or advertising, seeks to push us towards one conclusion.

CHAPTER 9

Merit and guiding concepts

9.1 Merit and subjective views

The merit of the pursuit of our projects is enough to answer the demand to explain why we should devote resources to pursuing them. Not all projects need to answer such a demand by reference to themselves. Many are justified by their contribution to wider projects. A project of exposing political corruption can for example be justified by reference to a wider project of improving standards of government. But many projects are not pursued for the sake of other projects. We see them as worthwhile in themselves.

While the merit of the pursuit of the projects that are worthwhile in themselves may satisfy us, it would not satisfy all rational beings. As noted in section 7.1, Martians would probably not be able to see the point of climbing mountains because they were there. So we cannot expect to capture the merit of the pursuit of projects in terms that could form part of an objective view of ourselves or of those projects.

I cannot decisively prove the claim that some rational beings would be unable to see merit in the pursuit of our projects, because I have no stock of strange rational beings to produce as evidence. There are however differences in the projects to which we attach importance, even between different human cultures. There is also vastly greater scope for variation between human beings and other rational beings, than there is scope for variation between human beings from different cultures. The claim is therefore plausible. And if the claim is correct, that will be enough to establish that the merit of the pursuit of a given project cannot be captured in the terms of an objective view. If the merit could be so captured, then all rational beings would be able to see it because all rational beings would be able to form that objective view. At least they would be able to form it once any fog that blocked access to the relevant concepts had cleared, and the concepts had been made available to

them. But even if all fog had cleared, it is still likely that some rational beings would not be able to see the merit in a given project. (It is important to consider ability to see a project as meritorious rather than actually seeing it as meritorious. If a being merely did not see a project as meritorious, that could be because the merit of its pursuit was only visible as part of an objective view which the being considered to be a mistaken view.)

While the claim may be plausible, it must not be over-stated. It would be going too far to claim that a rational being could live without seeing the justification for the devotion of resources to the pursuit of any projects. Given the importance of the steady pursuit of selected projects in order to navigate through life, it might well be essential for any rational being to accept that there was justification for devoting resources to the pursuit of some specific projects.

It would also be wrong to claim that a given rational being might be unable to see the justification that we see for the devotion of resources to the pursuit of any of our own projects. The projects which we think worthy of our resources might relate to a wide enough range of concerns that any rational being would share some of those concerns, or would at least have concerns sufficiently analogous to allow him to appreciate our point of view. Rather, the claim is of the following form. Suppose that we have six meritorious human projects, named B to G, and there are three non-human rational beings who are called X, Y and Z. X might be able to see merit in projects B, C and D. Y might be able to see merit in projects C, D and E. Z might be able to see merit in projects F and G. Then each project would be capable of being seen as meritorious by at least one other rational being, but for each project there would be at least one rational being who could not see it as meritorious. For example, project D would not be capable of being seen as meritorious by Z. A conclusion of this relatively weak form, that for a given project at least some rational beings would not be able to see it as meritorious, would still be enough to show that the merit of the pursuit of any given project could not be captured in the terms of an objective view.

One very eccentric rational being would not lend satisfactory support to this conclusion. For any given thing that we did, it would not be difficult to find a few human beings who could see no merit in it. In order to support the conclusion, we would need to find

rational beings who were fully capable of forming sophisticated objective views, who were operating with guiding concepts that were widely accepted within their own cultures, and who did understand the general notion of a meritorious project. But the wide scope for variation between rational beings is enough to allow me to argue that we could find non-eccentric rational beings to support the conclusion.

We cannot be quite sure that even this relatively weak conclusion is true of all of our projects. There may be a few exceptions to this conclusion, a few fundamental projects that are genuinely universal and that any rational being would be able to see as worth pursuing. The project of arriving at a view of the world that respected empirical evidence might be one such project. Anyone who did not respect empirical evidence would form a dangerously distorted view of the world and would find that life was very difficult. But any such universal projects would be at a very high level of generality.

9.2 Acceptance of a set of guiding concepts

No one set of culture-specific guiding concepts is inevitable. It may be necessary to have some set or other, but the specific set that someone has is freely accepted by him. It is not forced upon him. There are two distinguishable stages. The first stage is to choose an ethic, a basic approach, such as the ethic of projects. The chosen ethic will itself imply some guiding concepts. The second stage is to choose some guiding concepts that are left optional by the ethic, so as to fill out the set of guiding concepts. An ethic may in practice be stated at the final stage, as a way of summarizing and ordering a set of guiding concepts. Furthermore, there will usually be no conscious choice at all. Most of us simply take on the values of the culture in which we grow up. But it is useful to analyse the process into the acceptance of an ethic followed by the addition of optional guiding concepts. This reminds us that changes to some guiding concepts, the ones that are implied by the ethic, would require more drastic changes than changes to others, the optional guiding concepts.

The choice of an ethic will settle many of the choices of guiding concepts that would otherwise need to be made individually. The

ethic of projects, for example, will select guiding concepts which are conducive to the successful pursuit of projects and will rule out guiding concepts which would obstruct that pursuit. But an ethic is unlikely to settle all choices of guiding concepts, and the ethic of projects certainly does not do so. This is not necessarily a problem. As explained in section 2.2, the fact that some of a person's guiding concepts may be optional does not undermine their ability to justify conduct that accords with them. But we can still examine the reasons that might be given for the choice of guiding concepts that remained optional even after an ethic had been chosen. We are here considering someone who has a full set of guiding concepts. Some of them are not optional, in that they are a consequence of his choice of ethic. Others are optional, but they are added to the non-optional concepts to fill out the set. We are only considering reasons for adding the optional guiding concepts. The choice of an ethic is taken as given. Choices of ethics should not go unchallenged, and some ethics are unacceptable by any decent standard of humanity. I am not proposing extreme moral relativism. But we need to assume that someone has an ethic, in order to give him a moral platform from which he can evaluate possible guiding concepts.

Although the choice of guiding concepts will normally be unconscious, conscious decisions can be made. They may be prompted by particular ethical dilemmas that put rules of conduct under pressure and force the subject to challenge, or even abandon, some of those rules. Conscious decisions may also be prompted by a move to another culture, where the guiding concepts and rules of conduct of that culture are very noticeable to the migrant simply because they seem so strange. Then the migrant may consciously accept or reject the guiding concepts and rules of conduct of the new culture. Even without dilemmas or moves to other cultures, it is always open to someone to challenge some of the guiding concepts and rules of conduct that he has come to accept. He can imagine dilemmas, or imagine himself living in other cultures, and ask himself how he would respond. There might come a point where he had put his optional guiding concepts under so much strain that he was pushed to re-visit his non-optional concepts, and to consider changing his underlying ethic. We are not considering that drastic step here. It is however allowed for in the overall scheme presented in this book.

The reasons for a choice of optional guiding concepts could not be given solely by reference to the contents of objective views. If that were possible, then anyone holding the appropriate objective view could be led to the culture-specific guiding concepts in question. But any rational being could hold any objective view. By contrast, for any given culture-specific guiding concept, there would be some rational beings who could not adopt it because it would make no sense in the context of their way of life. They might understand the concept in theory, but they could not live by it and therefore could not adopt it as a guide. An objective view can in itself take us to the things that it implies, whether by logical implication or by some more relaxed standard, but its implications cannot stretch beyond the scope of objective views.

This does not mean that objective views have no role in giving reasons for a choice of culture-specific guiding concepts. Such concepts are for use by beings in the real world. For example, a set of culture-specific guiding concepts that led human beings to attach no urgency to the important projects of someone aged 80 would have to be rejected, because of the conflict between that conclusion and observed facts about human lifespans. We could not justify a set of culture-specific guiding concepts if its implications were inconsistent with the facts that were visible within our objective views.

The reasons for a choice of optional culture-specific guiding concepts must go wider than the contents of objective views. One surprisingly promising type of reason is to say that a set of culture-specific guiding concepts, including the optional ones, feels right. This is not such a vague and liberal criterion as it might seem. A set of culture-specific guiding concepts will only feel right if it is internally consistent, if it fits with our objective views of the world, and if we are happy with the implications that it has for how we conduct ourselves and for how we see people and their conduct.

The disciplines that apply the most rigorous tests to proposed sets of concepts, and to the theories which they embody, are the natural sciences. It is instructive to compare the testing of sets of culture-specific guiding concepts with the testing of sets of scientific concepts and the associated theories. Two main differences emerge.

The first difference is a qualitative one. This is that the consequences of a scientific theory are set out in an objective way,

allowing them to be tested by any rational being. This is not possible when we are testing the consequences of adopting a set of culture-specific guiding concepts. It is not possible partly because not all rational beings can try out a given set of culture-specific guiding concepts, and partly because the standards used in evaluating the consequences of the set will themselves be culture-relative. The impossibility of universal testing of our guiding concepts has been brilliantly illustrated by the experience of an American trying to explain the story of Hamlet to the Tiv tribe in West Africa. All sorts of things, including Hamlet's right to avenge the murder of his father and the presumed suicide of Ophelia, simply made no sense in a different culture. (See Bohannon, "Shakespeare in the Bush".)

The second difference is one of degree. Scientific conclusions are subject to very thorough examination before they are accepted. The design of experiments, the computations made and the interpretation of the results are all analysed in detail by independent scientists according to recognized standards. Exceptions, where the standards have not been applied properly, have led to acute embarrassment when important and interesting conclusions have turned out to be mistaken. The analysis of a set of culture-specific guiding concepts to see whether it feels right is never going to be as rigorous as the analysis of a scientific theory. One reason is that there is no wholly independent check. Just as no-one can properly evaluate the projects of another, no-one can fully check someone else's appraisal of her own set of culture-specific guiding concepts. Furthermore, while we can discuss the qualities of sets of culture-specific guiding concepts at length, and can try to agree on the standards by which a set should be deemed to feel right, we can never be quite sure that we have agreed or that we are all applying the standards in the same way. This does not mean that there are no standards. Ever since Plato, we have known that our ideas about how to live can be subjected to a thorough examination, and that we can be made to re-think those ideas. We should not claim that a set of culture-specific guiding concepts feels right until we have examined it thoroughly. But we should not assume that such an examination would be worthless, just because it did not meet the exacting standards of science.

We should also not despise our feeling that a set of guiding concepts is right or wrong, merely because it is a feeling. Our views

about everyday reality are based on the evidence of our senses, evidence that no reasonable person can deny. Our feelings of autonomy and responsibility come from within, but they are just as strong as the deliverances of our senses and it would be equally strange to deny their validity. We might find a scientific explanation of the origin of these feelings in terms of the interaction of parts of the brain, but that would not detract from the evident reality of the autonomy and responsibility themselves. When we accept or reject a set of culture-specific guiding concepts, we are very largely driven by our feelings of autonomy and responsibility. We ask whether the set would lead us to respect ourselves, and whether it would lead us to respect other people.

In conclusion, the choice of a set of culture-specific guiding concepts can be subject to examination. The choice can be made on the basis of a feeling of the set's rightness that cannot be ignored. This is enough to support a claim that there can be good reasons for the choice of optional guiding concepts that have been added to the non-optional concepts to create the set, even though different optional concepts might have been chosen. But we should still give careful consideration to the scope for error and to how it might be detected. The next section covers this topic.

9.3 The reliability of our feelings of rightness

If we are to rely on our sense of what feels right, we must examine the extent to which we might be misled into accepting sets of guiding concepts that we should not accept. The focus of this chapter is on optional guiding concepts. But a set of guiding concepts as a whole, the optional plus the non-optional, would be tested to see whether it felt right. If our feeling of the rightness of sets of guiding concepts can be relied upon, the correct response to a feeling that a set was not right might be to reject the underlying ethic and to try a different ethic. It might be that no optional additions to the non-optional guiding concepts that were implied by the first ethic would make the whole set acceptable. So feelings of rightness could be used to test underlying ethics, as well as when selecting optional guiding concepts. The need for a platform from which to evaluate possible guiding concepts would however mean that an underlying ethic could only be tested to destruction. The

outcome of the test would not be a proposed change to the ethic, but merely the return of the subject to square one. He would then have to pick another ethic without reliable guidance as to which one to pick, and try it to see how well it worked.

I said in the last section that a set of guiding concepts will feel right only if it is internally consistent, if it fits with our objective views of the world and if we are happy with the implications that it has for how we conduct ourselves and for how we see people and their conduct. The question is, will those criteria reliably sort acceptable from unacceptable sets of guiding concepts, or will they leave us open to being led astray? We can examine how the criteria might work and get a reasonable sense of the risk of being led astray. My view, based on the considerations set out in the rest of this section, is that we can have some confidence but that it falls short of our being certain that we will not be led astray. (The idea that we might be led astray presupposes some independent criterion of acceptability, which might or might not be available to us. While I cannot define any such criterion, we can still consider the risk of being led astray on the assumption that one exists.)

Internal consistency should be easy to test. The role of guiding concepts in steering our conduct means that consistency of conduct is required, as well as consistency of theoretical view. A set of guiding concepts that generated obvious and easily avoidable conflicts of value, with some guiding concepts calling upon people to do things that were plainly in conflict with the requirements of other guiding concepts, would be condemned as inconsistent. We do experience conflicts of value, and a certain level of conflict is probably unavoidable. But obvious, large-scale and easily avoidable conflicts would show that there was something wrong with the set of guiding concepts.

Consistency with objective views should also be relatively straightforward. As an example of inconsistency, I mentioned attaching no urgency to the important projects of someone aged 80. Similarly, a set of guiding concepts which implied that we should all be hermits would fly in the face of the natural sociability of most of us, although a view that a few of us should be hermits could be perfectly reasonable. And a set of guiding concepts which implied that babies should not be cared for would ignore the biological fact that babies cannot fend for themselves. But while a clash with our

objective views might be plain enough, there are ways to be led astray without clashing with objective views.

Implications for how we conduct ourselves are also relatively straightforward. If we think through the implications of a set of guiding concepts and they include conduct from which we recoil in horror, we re-examine the guiding concepts. We certainly can examine ethical positions and find that they produce manifestly unacceptable results. If an extreme utilitarian were to conclude that it would be acceptable to kill a healthy and innocent person in order to extract his organs and save half a dozen people who were in urgent need of organ transplants, we would be clear that there was something wrong with extreme utilitarianism. But we might be led astray in ways that did not generate such manifestly unacceptable results.

The implications for how we see people and their conduct were effectively covered in section 5.5. A set of culture-specific guiding concepts allows us to form subjective views of people. A given set of guiding concepts might lead us to a subjective view of people that was unacceptable, for example because it led to implausible accounts of human conduct. That would indicate a problem with the set of guiding concepts. The mere possibility of forming an unacceptable subjective view would not be enough to make the set of guiding concepts unacceptable. Likely, rather than merely possible, formation of an unacceptable view would be needed. However, a set of guiding concepts would not be unacceptable only if it inevitably led to an unacceptable view. The set would be unacceptable if an unacceptable view was the natural consequence of the set, even if it was not the logically inescapable consequence.

A special difficulty afflicts this last criterion. We judge the acceptability of views of people and their conduct by our own standards, and those standards are culture-relative. A whole culture could have a view of people and their conduct that we would regard as unacceptable, if only we could understand it. But we might not understand the view because we could not grasp the culture-specific guiding concepts that were used in forming it. We could only grasp those concepts by immersing ourselves in the culture. Then we would conclude that the view of people and their conduct was perfectly acceptable because in judging the view, we would be steered by the culture's guiding concepts.

One response would be to say that there would be no error to worry about. All who understood the view would agree that it was acceptable, and those who did not understand it would be in no position to comment. But that would not be the ideal response. It is doubtful whether we are really debarred from telling the members of a culture that they are mistaken, merely because we do not enter into their mental world. But in order to tell them that they were mistaken, we would probably need to use criteria other than the acceptability of an implied view of people and their conduct. That criterion is too vulnerable to the problem of culture-relative methods of judging whether or not a view is acceptable. We can however still make some checks on other cultures, because even the most distant human cultures have some guiding concepts in common. Neighbouring cultures often have many guiding concepts in common, with each culture shading into its neighbour. There may be sharp discontinuities on some matters, but human cultures are not completely isolated from one another. We can find ways to open a dialogue with another culture, to comprehend at least some of the main features of that culture's view of the world quickly, and to build on that foundation long before fully entering into the culture. By way of illustration, I will show how the criterion of internal consistency might be used.

In the following example, members of culture X will check culture Y. I will assume that most members of each culture have most of their guiding concepts in common, so that I can refer to each culture's set of guiding concepts. Culture X would have some elements in its set of guiding concepts in common with the set of guiding concepts of culture Y, and perhaps quite a large number of elements if the cultures were close together. That would be enough for members of culture X to appraise all or most of culture Y's set of guiding concepts, because the set of guiding concepts of a culture, and the rules of conduct that the set implied, should generate consistent prescriptions for conduct. If for example culture Y attached supreme importance to the preservation of all human life, it could not consistently believe that people who suffered from diseases which were treatable, but which would be fatal without treatment, should not be treated. The guiding concept of acceptance of the natural effects of disease could not consistently sit alongside the guiding concept of the supreme importance of the preservation of all human life. If culture Y did use both of these concepts, then

members of culture X could grasp the meanings of both concepts and could point out the inconsistency.

There are difficulties with this approach. Even the guiding concepts that cultures X and Y did have in common might be subtly different. They might however be similar enough for that not to matter, just as the slight differences in significance that guiding concepts have for individuals within the same culture do not normally impede understanding. In addition, the process of investigation of culture Y's set of guiding concepts that exposed an apparent inconsistency might not issue in a condemnation of the set as inconsistent. An alternative conclusion would be that the elements in the set were not quite what they appeared to be. What appeared to be the supreme importance of the preservation of all human life might in fact be the supreme importance of the preservation of human life except for the lives of unworthy people. If someone suffered from a potentially fatal disease, that might be taken as a sign that he was an unworthy person. That would restore consistency to culture Y's set of guiding concepts.

If members of culture X did point out to members of culture Y that their set of guiding concepts generated inconsistency of conduct, it would be up to the members of culture Y whether to take any notice. They might not attach much importance to consistency. Alternatively, they might consider that it was better to retain an inconsistent but generally well-functioning approach to the world than to risk the social disruption that might follow from the elimination of inconsistency. Perhaps the restoration to health of people with potentially fatal diseases would upset the demographic balance of the population in culture Y, because there would come to be too many elderly people who would otherwise have died of disease. In conclusion, the overlap of sets of guiding concepts between cultures that are not too far apart does allow some difficulties with other cultures' sets of guiding concepts to be detected, but it offers no guarantee that a culture with a problematic set of guiding concepts will be persuaded to change.

There is also scope to judge another culture on the basis of our own guiding concepts. But this takes us beyond the criteria set out in this section, except perhaps the criterion of the acceptability of implications for how we conduct ourselves (or rather, for how we would conduct ourselves if we were members of the other culture). Judgement would be based on the effects of a culture's set of

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guiding concepts on individuals. A set of guiding concepts that led some people to oppress others on the grounds of race, sex or creed would deserve condemnation. The grounds for condemnation might not be visible from within the set of guiding concepts itself, but those of us who did not share those guiding concepts would have good grounds for condemnation. Those grounds would be derived from our own sets of guiding concepts. We could not claim that our condemnation was objectively grounded, because we would be using culture-specific guiding concepts to support our condemnation. But our act of condemnation would be just as fully justified as any other conduct that accorded with our own guiding concepts.

CHAPTER 10

Projects and the person

I argued in section 7.4 that projects must be the freely chosen projects of an autonomous person in order for their pursuit to have merit. But projects do more than imply the autonomous person. Projects also make a large contribution to the nature of the person.

We are very largely constituted as persons by where we have come from and where we are going. A person's past fixes his nature at the present time, while his intended future expresses that nature. The connection between his projects and his future is obvious, although there are aspects to explore and I will return to these in section 10.2. The connection with the past is different, and less direct.

10.1 Projects and our past

Each of us is rooted in a particular past, which stretches much further back than birth. We are affected by, and may be more or less aware of, our biological ancestry and our cultural forebears. Moving into our own lives, we will be aware of and affected by our biographies to date. All of these past events, both in our own lives and earlier, matter to us. Furthermore, they matter in a different way from events that have no relationship to us. We may be intensely interested in some ancient civilization that has long since vanished, having had no influence on the line of development that led up to our own culture. But that sort of interest is different from our interest in the history that does culminate in ourselves and our own culture. Our interest in the latter history, including our personal biographies to date, reflects the fact that the history is our own. We care about it in a way that we do not care about the history of vanished civilizations which have no direct connection with us. This personal concern calls for explanation. Why should any

history matter to us, when it is a mere collection of facts that reflect the past and will therefore never change?

The relationship of a person's history to his projects is not that he can have the project of changing his history. We simply cannot change the past. Rather, there are two influences from history to projects. There are also two influences in the other direction that do not involve changing history.

The first influence of history on projects is straightforward. What has happened to us and to the world that we inhabit will open up some opportunities, while closing off others. On the positive side, our personal histories put talents at our disposal and the histories of our cultures make resources available. A physicist can have the project of unifying relativity and quantum theory, only because history to date has given us those two theories and because the physicist's own natural talents and education make that a reasonable goal at which to aim. Likewise, a novelist needs to write within a literary tradition. She also needs a background of everyday life and of world events to provide locations and content for her novels. On the negative side, history will constrain both what someone can do next and what he will think it desirable to do next. It is true that history will not constrain what he could in theory take on as his projects. Anyone could decide to fly to Jupiter. And someone who had always enjoyed a comfortable European way of life could in theory decide to take on the life of a landless labourer in an undeveloped country. But projects like that would only occur to the people concerned as idle fantasies. Flying to Jupiter would be ruled out by the limits of the technology produced by our history to date. A transition to a radically different way of life would not strike someone who was deeply attached to his current way of life as a serious possibility.

The second influence of history on projects is that history makes it very easy to see merit in the pursuit of projects which have a close link to history. History sets an agenda, and projects which are an obvious response to that agenda make sense to us. We may for example have projects of carrying on projects started by previous generations, out of a sense that we should achieve what they wanted. Thus the current owner of an inherited family business might resolve to preserve it as a family business for future generations, whether or not he had any personal interest in the

business. We would mostly understand that choice of project, regarding its merit as self-evident.

A resolve to respond to the agenda set by history is not always beneficial. Sometimes people from one ethnic or religious group will attack members of another group, in response to wrongs perpetrated by the second group on the first group in previous generations. Therefore a current project's being clearly related to the agenda set by history is sometimes not enough to make the pursuit of the project appear to have merit. Sometimes it would be better to abandon the historical agenda and change direction, for example by ending a feud between two groups. The historical agenda does however very often explain the perceived merit in the pursuit of a current project. History can also be cited when explaining a project that would involve a change of direction. History might show that it would be bad to continue to pursue the old agenda.

The first influence that works in the other direction, from projects to history, is one of interpretation. While we cannot change the past, we can change our interpretation of it. Like the present, the past contains far too much detail for there to be a master view of it that would encompass all other views, or even all objective views. We must always approach the past from some particular angle that reflects our present projects. Thus if our present project is to carry on the great achievements of our ancestors, we will seek out those achievements and disregard the humdrum details of our ancestors' lives. Less nobly, we may bolster our commitment to our current projects by seeking to interpret history so as to make it appear to have led up to current projects. Our projects may then appear to be more of a response to the agenda that is set by history than they really are. Those who are committed to a political cause are very prone to see history in a way that emphasizes the significance of their cause, and minimizes the significance of competing causes.

The second influence that works from projects to history is a particular form of the first influence. If we have, up to now, been pursuing a project but have not yet completed it, then its completion would increase the perceived value of what had been done so far. It would mean that the work in the past would not have been wasted. Such an approach can be seen as irrational. In rational business decision-making, all costs that have already been incurred are ignored. They should have no bearing on decisions being taken

now, because nothing can be done to change them. But that approach only makes sense when the one thing that matters is some carefully defined and future-oriented goal, such as the maximization of profit. That is too narrow an approach to accommodate our attitudes to our lives. We do value our past work more highly if we complete the projects that we have started. (See Hurka, *Perfectionism*, chapter 8, particularly section 8.4.3 on pages 110-111.)

All of these four influences give projects a central role in explaining our concern with our own history, a concern that is much stronger than our concern with histories that are entirely detached from our own. History creates our opportunities and also limits what we can do, so we care about history as a major source of our scope for action. History gives us an agenda that we can choose to take forward or to reject. That can be seen as a source of the merit of pursuing the projects that respond to the agenda. There is either the merit of being true to our past or the merit of striking out in a new direction. Finally, if we see history in the light of our current projects, that gives projects a direct role in the interpretation of our history. It also gives the completion of our projects a role in increasing the value of what we have already done.

10.2 Projects and our future

A scientific description can give someone's nature in an objective way. It may include not only a description of her body, but also a psychologist's description of her personality, to be read as a shorthand description of the dispositions to behaviour that follow from the states of her brain and body. But she is most unlikely to see her current self in that way. She will be very aware of her actions to date and her plans. She will see herself as a person who has done certain things and who is about to do others, for example as someone who has brought up a family and who is about to travel the world. Her projects for the future will play a central role in expressing her nature. They will also play a role in defining her nature, as the sort of person who has the plans that she in fact has. If she plans to travel the world, she may see herself as adventurous. And while this view of herself as someone who is constituted by her past and by her intended future will primarily be a view of her

current self, she will be able to extend it by analogy to other people or to herself in the past. (We can compare this with seeing others as autonomous persons, as discussed in section 5.6.) She will understand that others think about themselves in this way, and she will remember that she has always thought about herself in the same way. For some purposes, she must make an extension to other people. She would not be able to see herself as someone who had brought up a family, as opposed to rearing some members of the species *homo sapiens*, unless she saw her children as persons in their own right, with their own histories and projects. A physiological description of her, by contrast, would not incorporate the representations of the past and of the future that were essential to her conception of herself. It would incorporate descriptions of the brain-states that corresponded to those representations of the past and of the future, but that would be all. From a physiological point of view, a description of the current dispositions of the molecules in a body says all that needs to be said about someone. Even a scientific description that was given in psychological terms rather than in physiological terms would fail to capture the personal significance of past history and of future plans. Memories and plans would appear in the brain as images. Bringing those images to consciousness might well stimulate feelings of their importance. But those feelings would not amount to the actual importance of the past and of the planned future, as felt by the person.

It does not follow that future actions constitute part of the nature of a person. As Jean-Paul Sartre pointed out, we cannot lay claim to actions that we have not performed. No-one can claim to be courageous merely on the strength of having planned courageous deeds, and each of us is only as courageous as our next deed (*Huis Clos*, pages 220-223, starting with Garcin's words "Listen! Each man has an aim in life"). But plans for the future, as distinct from the future actions themselves, certainly do constitute part of a person's nature, whether they are spelt out as plans or merely indicated in personality traits. They show his direction in the world, enabling him to chart a course. They also allow the rest of us to predict his course, within limits and assuming that no untoward events intervene.

Furthermore, the fact that the past is fixed, while from the point of view of someone who is choosing and acting the future is open, means that it is only by having plans for the future that we can

express and affirm our nature. Someone can only passively possess his past, although he can actively re-interpret it. His autonomous creation of his own future, on the other hand, constantly presents him with the opportunity to break with his past. It also means that if he does continue in his current nature, as indicated by his past, he does so as an autonomous affirmation of that nature.

Thus in having projects, a person takes possession of his life and forges his identity. While projects are not needed to express our physical nature, they are essential to our nature as persons. Someone without any coherent projects would have no sense of what kind of person he was. He could only think of himself as drifting about in the world like a piece of flotsam.

10.3 Projects and empathy

The full context of our projects, which allows us to evaluate the merit of their pursuit, is private. It follows that no-one can properly weigh the projects of another person (see section 7.2). But we must then ask how it is that we can discuss each other's projects and reach a common understanding at all.

We can praise or condemn someone else's projects by reference to the effects of his conduct on other people, or by reference to the likely effects of his planned conduct if his plans are clear enough. We often agree on praise or on condemnation because we use the same or similar guiding concepts in the relevant areas. We can have guiding concepts in common, without necessarily being able to see the world through each other's eyes. We can for example see that a given piece of conduct would distress someone, without knowing how distress feels to that person. We can then condemn the conduct because we use guiding concepts such as happiness, which imply that we should not distress people unnecessarily.

But we know from experience that we can do more than judge conduct by reference to its consequences. We do have a real sense of being in touch with another person's feelings about the world, a sense of empathy. We can have this sense to different degrees, but with those very close to us it can be very strong. This gives rise to three questions. How is such empathy possible, given mental privacy? What can be the language in which it is expressed, given that it cannot be a language which renders the empathy between

two people open to others, even others in the same culture? And does such empathy give any entitlement to evaluate the projects of others? I argued in section 7.2 that such an entitlement does not exist.

How is empathy possible?

The question of how empathy is possible is one for scientists to answer. It is however not surprising that we should be able to empathize with those close to us. We usually share a culture and many of its presuppositions. We certainly share a brain structure and a general biological make-up. We also have a wealth of channels of communication at our disposal, not just words but tone of voice, facial expressions, our posture and so on. And when two people have known each other for a long time, they have a shared history on which they can draw to support communication. Given all that, one person should sometimes be able to put herself in another person's shoes.

We can however also expect empathy to fall short of a perfect understanding of the other person. So long as the empathizer remains herself while taking on board the other person's feelings, those feelings will be set in the context of the empathizer's own psyche. That will be enough to leave the empathizer and the other person with feelings that still differ. Only a complete, if temporary, take-over of the empathizer's brain, putting out of action all traces of the empathizer's own feelings and experiences of life to date, and replacing them with traces of the other person's feelings and experiences, could give total empathy.

The empathizer herself will not think in such scientific terms, at least not while empathizing. Empathy is a personal feeling that we value. It is good to be able to get close to another human being. We can therefore ask what justifies our attachment of value to empathy.

Empathy can be valued simply as something good in itself. That may be the highest view, just as the noblest view of the value of works of art may be that they are simply valuable in themselves. But as with works of art, there are other reasons to value empathy, and those reasons are bound up with our projects.

If we can empathize with others, we can live with them more effectively. In particular, we can know how to make room for other

people, and they in turn can know how to make room for us. If someone had no understanding of another person's feelings, the only way he could avoid interfering with that other person's projects would be to stay well out of the way. That would create a distance which was unnecessary, and which was harmful because it would impede both intimacy and co-operation. Those who empathize with each other know how to steer round each other, giving each person freedom to pursue his projects without leaving him in a vacuum. People who empathize with each other can also co-operate in a spirit of trust and understanding, to achieve things that could not be achieved by individuals acting alone. While co-operation might also be achieved by the use of mechanisms such as contracts that were visible to all, that would be much less efficient. If everything had to be set out explicitly, most co-operative enterprises would grind to a halt very quickly. This would be so even in a purely business context, where explicit contracts are normal. A shared understanding of how people will behave, and of where there will be give and take, is needed in business just as much as in the rest of life. It is not the sort of thing that can be captured explicitly. In the context of friendship, an attempt to capture the rules of life as friends in a publicly comprehensible form would be wholly ineffective. It would also be completely out of place. A friendship would be something quite different, and much less satisfying, if its mechanisms were captured in an explicit agreement.

Another reason to value empathy is that it affirms the merit of the pursuit of our projects. It is easy to be a dreamer, to imagine all sorts of projects that are appealing at first sight but that would in fact be silly projects. But if another person recognizes our projects as sensible, as worthy, as projects that she too might pursue (although she does not actually pursue them), that gives comfort. If another human being understands how we can devote resources to the pursuit of our own projects, it is unlikely that our projects are pointless or that they form a hopelessly incoherent set. If the empathizer knows a fair amount of our personal history, we also get confirmation that our projects make sense in the light of that history, either as a continuation of it or as a deliberate and justified break with it. And if the empathizer knows our talents and predispositions, empathy is some confirmation that our choice of projects is reasonable, given those talents and predispositions.

The language of empathy

A language that is used to describe the physical world can operate in a straightforward way. The language is detached from the world. It describes the world, but once the language has been made adequate to that task it does not itself routinely change in response to changes in the world, or in response to the act of description. Everyone understands the expressions of the language in much the same way, or if they do not, that merely reflects some people's lack of technical expertise. There is a simple structure of people using language to describe the objects in the world, with no confusion of roles. In the early stages of formulation of a new type of description, for example in the early stages of a new scientific theory, language may still shift as the necessary concepts become better-defined. But once that phase is over, language becomes stable until a new theory takes over from the old one. There may be latent ambiguities to clear up, even in the most everyday terms that have been in use for centuries. For example, we all know what a house is, but we might come across a dwelling that could be either a house or a hut. Our decision on what to call the dwelling would slightly refine the meaning of the word "house", so long as our decision became generally known and accepted. Our experience of the world can act on language to that extent. But such incidents are very rare as a proportion of the number of occasions on which we use the word "house". When we discover such an ambiguity we stop and think, and remark on the incident. Normally, language is ready to hand as a tool that we can rely on when we want to describe the world. The tool does not bend in our hands as we use it.

The language of empathy is not like that. It is easy to suppose that when two people talk, and are fathoming each other's feelings, the process is long and uncertain simply because of mental privacy. Feelings, unlike tables and chairs in a room, are not publicly visible, so one person must spell them out to another. But that is not the whole picture. We do not have a language for our feelings that is just as ready to hand and stable as the language that we use to describe everyday objects. If there were a shared language that could describe feelings just as easily, and just as surely, as language can describe the disposition of tables and chairs in a room, the establishment of empathy could be almost as rapid a process as the

description of furniture. There would still be some delay because people are reluctant to disclose all of their feelings until a high level of trust has been established, and that can certainly take time. But the nature of the language of empathy also has an important role to play.

What distinguishes the language of empathy from the language that we use to describe the physical world is that it is constantly being re-made. There is no perfectly fixed language for us to pick up and use. This is reflected in the common experience of difficulty in finding the right words for our own feelings, even when we are only describing them to ourselves. It is not that feelings are intrinsically hard to pin down, as if they were clouds of smoke floating around behind a pane of frosted glass. Feelings in themselves can be very clear. They can steer our conduct perfectly well. After the event, we can be quite clear about whether or not we acted in accordance with our feelings. The problem is that we cannot always find the precise words, or be sure that the words we use will be understood by another in the same way that we understand them ourselves.

It is not that we have no shared language in which to express our feelings. We have plenty of words for feelings. But the language that we use to express feelings is an imperfect tool that bends in our hands as we use it. Establishing the correct language to communicate with another takes time and experimentation, as one person discovers how her words are being understood by the other. We may for example think that we know what the word “passion” means, but if we use that word in conversation we find that it has subtly different meanings for different people, even beyond the unsubtle differences between sexual, intellectual and religious passion. Communication will gradually improve, and may even become almost as reliable as everyday communication about tables and chairs, but it is never perfected. And the existence of a good channel of communication between two people does not mean that either of them could use the same channel to communicate with a third person.

The problem is not that there is a single, clear and stable vocabulary for feelings that we all discover, but only imperfectly. If there were such a single vocabulary, then if Anne had learnt that vocabulary to a high degree in communicating with Barbara and Chloe had learnt it to the same degree in communicating with

Deborah, Anne would immediately be able to communicate with Chloe just as well as she could communicate with Barbara. Experience tells us that life is not like that, even though some people are better than others at empathizing with recent acquaintances.

Rather than there being a single, clear and stable vocabulary that is hard to discover, the necessary language is refined as we go along. The language is not made anew from scratch. Within each culture, there is a common stock of terms for feelings: cheerful, sad, intimate, isolated and so on. We learn what the terms mean by example. The examples will come both from the lives of ourselves and the people around us, and from stories. But when one person encounters another, the pre-existing language does not quite fit. It always needs refinement, and neither person can rely on the other having exactly the same understanding of the common language.

It is worth returning to the analogy of the coastline to consider our guiding concepts, because that analogy can help us to understand the operation of the language of empathy. The common stock of guiding concepts in a given culture corresponds to the dinghy-borne and the yacht-borne lenses that are available from the short stretch of coastline which is occupied by members of that culture, plus some of the freighter-borne lenses that are available to all rational beings. But even two neighbours on the coastline will stand in slightly different positions. Their lines of sight through a given dinghy-borne lens will therefore pass through the lens at slightly different angles. The same will be true of each yacht-borne lens, although the difference in angles will be smaller because yacht-borne lenses are further out to sea than dinghy-borne lenses. These different angles correspond to the slightly different ways in which the same concepts shape different people's understanding of the world. The fact that the differences in angle are smaller with yacht-borne lenses than with dinghy-borne lenses makes sense, because the yacht-borne lenses correspond to concepts that are widely shared. They are available to members of a range of different cultures, not just to members of one culture. The more widely a concept is shared, the less difference there should be between the ways in which it shapes the understandings of two people who are a given distance apart. Members of different cultures would be much more prone than members of the same culture to have their understanding shaped in different ways by the

same concept. If there were too much variation, the concept would not be a single concept but two different concepts. But because the yacht-borne lenses that correspond to cross-cultural concepts are further out to sea than the dinghy-borne lenses, people would need to be further apart along the coastline in order for their lines of sight to pass through those lenses at significantly different angles, corresponding to too much variation. Going further out, to the freighter-borne lenses, we can envisage their being so far out that there would only be very small differences in the angles at which lines of sight would pass through them. This too is correct because concepts that are used in forming objective views must be usable by rational beings from any culture, with pretty much the same effects on their understanding of the world.

We can analyse the process of arriving at a language for empathy in the same terms. The analogy of the coastline can be misleading in one respect. It makes the goal of empathy seem easier to achieve than it actually is. To perfect the language needed for empathy with another person, it would be necessary to stand in their position on the coastline, so that the empathizer was using exactly the same concepts with exactly the same effects on her understanding of the world. If we look at an actual coastline, we can tell exactly where people are standing and when someone moves on, we can choose to adopt exactly his position. When it comes to achieving empathy, the current position of the person with whom we wish to empathize is not so obvious. That is why it takes time to exchange thoughts and feelings, so that each party can gradually come to use the relevant concepts with exactly the same effects on her understanding of the world as they have for the other party. In effect, each party is discovering exactly where on the coastline the other party stands. If two people did manage to stand in exactly the same place, then their views of the world projected onto the sky would be identical, because they would use the same lenses from the same angles. (Hans-Georg Gadamer's image of a fusion of horizons can be used to capture this point. He was however concerned with how we could understand our history and traditions, rather than with individual empathy. See *Truth and Method*, part 2, division 2, chapter 1, section (B)(4), "The Principle of History of Effect", pages 300-307.)

In addition, the constraint that prevents perfect empathy is different from the constraint that might be suggested by the analogy

of the coastline. On a real coastline, the physical presence of one person at a given spot prevents another person from occupying the same spot until the first person moves. (If the second person, being taller, stood directly behind the first person, that would still not achieve a perfect match of views because the two people would look through any lens that was not directly in front of them at very slightly different angles.) In the range of ways of understanding the world, as captured in the range of concepts and the precise effects that they have on our understanding of the world, there is no physical constraint on two people standing in exactly the same position. There is instead the constraint that we are all to some extent products of our past, tied to it and influenced by it in determining where we will go next. An empathizing person knows that she is not the other person, and that she has her own history and her own plans for the future. It would not be possible to get rid of that difference between the two parties except by making the contents of their brains identical. Even then, they would soon start to lead different lives again. Furthermore, the empathy that would come from a twin who was mentally identical would not be the empathy that most of us would want. The value of empathy lies in the fact that it comes from someone who is different, and who despite those differences can appreciate our projects and our feelings. No-one apart from the Wicked Queen in *Snow White* feels that a mere mirror can make any worthwhile comment on her. It is important that the other person should remain distinct, that she should empathize from her own point of view. Empathy can never reach 100% without collapsing into mirroring, which would give no affirmation of our own value. The facts that each person does have her own history and that people do not submit to having the contents of their brains made identical, mean that we will never fall into mere mirroring. No two people will ever adopt identical ways of understanding the world.

Empathy and the evaluation of projects

Empathy is valued at least partly because it affirms the merit of the pursuit of our projects. It confirms that someone else can see that our projects are sensible, having entered into a deeper appreciation of them than would come from a merely objective description of

our conduct and of the states of our brains. But this strongly suggests that empathy entitles the empathizer to evaluate the merit of the pursuit of the other person's projects, as distinct from evaluating conduct by reference to the effects that it has on people. This is not in fact so. Empathy does not violate the principle that no-one can evaluate the merit of another person's pursuit of his projects.

The reason why there is no violation is that it is not the empathizer who affirms the merit of the pursuit of the projects. It is the person with those projects. If George empathizes with Hugh and makes clear his view that Hugh's projects make sense, perhaps by indicating that George could see himself having those same projects if his circumstances had been different, then it is Hugh who takes comfort from George's view and affirms that his own projects make sense. George does not pass judgement on Hugh. Rather, he gives Hugh a way to pass judgement on himself.

Empathy is essentially non-judgemental. Empathetic friends are not people who tell us what to do, but people who allow us to take up new perspectives on ourselves. Friends may of course draw our attention to consequences of our proposed conduct that we have not noticed. They may offer us advice. But it is always up to each of us to accept or reject the advice that is offered. A friend who goes one step further and says "you should not even want to do that, that is a wrong project for you to pursue", is no longer speaking from within an empathetic role. Such a friend is either passing judgement on envisaged conduct, considered from the point of view of those who will be affected, or over-stepping the bounds of legitimate evaluation by attempting to evaluate another person's projects considered as such.

There is one very limited form of judgement implied by empathy, but it is always positive and it does not rank projects in order of priority. To return to the example of George and Hugh, George as empathizer will see Hugh's projects as meritorious, given George's own attitudes. This will lead George to be supportive, and at the very least to take care not to obstruct Hugh's pursuit of his projects. That is the limited form of judgement. But it will not allow George to prescribe an order of priority of projects to Hugh. George cannot do that because he is not Hugh, and he does not know what it is like to be Hugh. Still less does it mean that George himself will feel an urge to pursue the same projects as Hugh. George will have his own priorities.

CHAPTER 11

Projects and the good life

In this chapter I will argue that the pursuit of projects is central to the good life for human beings. The argument is naturalistic. It is that human beings get on better if they are deeply involved in the pursuit of their projects. The meanings of “good” and of “better” that are intended here are common-sense meanings. It is not just that if people exercise their talents in the pursuit of their projects, more of the external needs that inspire some of those projects will be satisfied. They also tend to be happier, although it would be rash to presume that this was true of everyone. Where this chapter recommends a course of action, it does so on the basis that the recommended course will be good for us in line with this common-sense meaning. This chapter does not deal with the question of whether, or why, we should want to act in ways that are good for us in this sense. It does not offer a defence to the challenge that the common-sense meaning of “good” might not be the right meaning when we are taking moral decisions. To respond to that challenge, we would need to commit to an ethic. I will do so in chapter 12.

While the pursuit of projects may be central, I do not argue that it is the only element in a good life. Beauty, empathy and love are all good things that are best valued in their own right, rather than because they might facilitate the pursuit of our projects in general. If they happened to derive some support for their place in the good life from the centrality of projects, that would be beneficial but incidental. Beauty, empathy and love can make their claims to be valued without that support. It would certainly be worrying if the centrality of the pursuit of projects threatened to displace beauty, empathy or love. Fortunately, it does not. The case made here is that the pursuit of projects is just one of the central elements in a good life. I do not assert that it has any exclusive claim or that a pause for beauty, empathy or love should be avoided if it would delay the pursuit of projects.

The claim of the pursuit of projects to a central place in the good life not only needs to take its place alongside the claims of other

elements. The contribution of the pursuit is also a matter of degree. Lives can be made better as more, more challenging and more productive projects are pursued, but a life that incorporates only a modest pursuit of projects can still be a good life.

11.1 Our needs

We observe that human beings are happy when they are pursuing specific projects. Otherwise they tend to be bored and listless. Another important contributor to our happiness is a sense of autonomy. We need to feel that our projects have been chosen by us, although that choice may be limited to the free acceptance of projects prescribed by someone else, for example when we accept instructions from our employers. If we have to do things that we have not chosen and do not want to do, resentment follows. We also need to feel that our projects present real challenges. They must be things that need doing for good reason and that demand our concentration and effort. They must not be artificial games that have been devised merely to keep us amused, and they must not be too easy.

I will explore these aspects in more detail in sections 11.3 and 11.4. But the territory has already been mapped out by Abraham Maslow with his hierarchy of needs. He identified five levels of need. The first level covers physiological needs such as food and water. The second level covers safety needs such as the need to be confident that we will not suddenly be placed in danger. The third level covers needs for love and for a sense of belonging, satisfied through families and communities. The fourth level covers the esteem needs. These needs can be met by respect given by others, ranging from informal recognition by colleagues to great fame in the world. A more reliable satisfier of esteem needs is self-respect, including feelings of confidence and competence. The fifth level is the self-actualization need, the drive to become all that we can be, to fulfil our potential as completely as possible. (For Maslow's hierarchy in the form presented here, see his *Motivation and Personality*, chapter 5. Later versions by other writers elaborated the hierarchy, effectively dividing the fifth level into several levels.)

One can debate Maslow's methodology and the details of his hierarchy. But the fifth level is closely linked to the pursuit of

projects that really challenge us and that have been autonomously selected by us. The self-respect aspect of the fourth level is also linked to the pursuit of projects. The more, and the more challenging, projects that we pursue, the greater will be our skills, giving us competence and confidence. We will also have a wider choice of what to do next. Finally, needs at all levels, but particularly at the lower levels, can make insistent demands for satisfaction. These demands motivate projects to satisfy those needs.

11.2 Autonomy

There are two aspects to autonomy. One is that our choices are really our own. The other is that our choices are not unduly limited. These two aspects are closely related, because if someone else limits our choices then it is no longer our choice even to avoid the options that the other person has already forbidden. If we only have a free choice between two options, because another ten options have already been taken away from us, then the extent to which the choice is really our own is diminished, even if we would in any case have chosen one of the two remaining options out of the twelve. But it is still useful to consider the two aspects of autonomy separately. Both aspects are needed in order to satisfy our psychological need for autonomy.

The first aspect, that our choices are really our own, requires us to see the act of choosing as something that is not merely an event such as might be conceived by natural science. A scientific view of the world can only offer us determinism and randomness, not freedom. It is no solution to say that our size and complexity would give us a significant role in the world even if the world were entirely determined, because many lines of causal influence would flow through us and because their course would be strongly influenced by our individual characters. The reason why this is not a solution is that a complex event is still an event, a mere piece of behaviour of the world, and not a choice considered as the action of a person. Immanuel Kant made the point that the concept of freedom was incompatible with a scientific view of the world, because the world as viewed by science had to be governed by laws if it was to be intelligible at all (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of*

Morals, section 3, Ak. 4:455). More recently, Eric Hoffer commented that “Freedom means freedom from forces and circumstances which would turn man into a thing, which would impose on man the passivity and predictability of matter” (*Working and Thinking on the Waterfront*, entry for March 28, 1959, page 146). Both of these thinkers made their comments in different contexts from mine. Kant wrote in the context of a distinctive metaphysic that separated the perceived world from the world of freely acting persons. Hoffer wrote in the context of political concerns about liberty and totalitarianism. But they both made the point that free choice was not a concept that belonged to a scientific view of the world. In section 5.6 I argued that we must see choices as actions which cannot be fully characterized in the deterministic terms of the natural sciences, with or without a dose of randomness, in order to see ourselves as being steered by our guiding concepts. Now we can see that the same need to place the act of choice beyond the reach of the natural sciences arises for psychological reasons. We simply are not satisfied with an autonomy that amounts to giving us a mechanical role in the working out of nature’s course, however complex and significant that role might be.

The second aspect of autonomy, the need not to have our choices unduly limited, has implications for our choice of projects, both as individuals who wish to look after our own autonomy and as social beings who wish to respect the autonomy of others.

If we wish to look after our own autonomy then we should not pursue projects that would destroy our autonomy, for example the project of becoming addicted to drugs or the project of becoming someone else’s slave. This does not mean that we cannot accept a temporary loss of autonomy in order to achieve some goal that we have freely chosen. We often have to submit to other people’s instructions, in order to carry out some project that can only be carried out collaboratively. Having a job is usually like that. But it does mean that we should never lose our grip on our freedom. We should always be in a position to withdraw, for example to leave our jobs.

We can enhance our own autonomy by selecting projects that will open up new choices. We can do this by selecting challenging projects that will improve our skills. We can also select projects that will give us the resources to devote ourselves to future projects. Someone may for example take a well-paid job, not just in order to

do the job but in order to accumulate the funds to pursue a project of sailing round the world. On the negative side, projects that reduce our skills or energy, or that destroy resources, will limit our future autonomy. We should of course consume energy and resources in the pursuit of our projects, and we may neglect and therefore lose some of our skills because our projects leave no time for their exercise. We have to do that in order to achieve anything. There is no point in accumulating resources and never expending them. But the wanton destruction of resources or neglect of skills would be a pointless limitation of our future autonomy.

If we respect the autonomy of others then we should likewise avoid projects that would enslave others, that would limit their opportunities or that would destroy their resources. One ground of respect for other people's projects is mental privacy, as discussed in section 7.2. We are in no position to evaluate other people's projects, although we can evaluate the consequences of those projects for ourselves or for third parties. If we accept that point, then it should affect our choice of projects. The projects of a conqueror to enslave and destroy would not be appropriate choices, because of their effect on the autonomy of others. Those choices would not be appropriate even if the conqueror believed, on good evidence, that his projects had great merit. He might for example believe that slave labour could greatly improve a country's roads and other public facilities, to the benefit of everyone. If he imposed slavery on those grounds then he would be weighing the merit of his own projects, and the projects of those who would use the improved facilities, against the merit of the slaves' projects. That is something he would not be entitled to do. If the slaves chose to work on the conqueror's projects and had the right to leave their jobs, that would be perfectly acceptable, but then they would not be slaves. Most of us face less dramatic options than the projects of a conqueror. But we can still be aware of, and refuse to play any part in, projects that would use threats or financial muscle to take over the lives of other people.

Thus the psychological value to us of our own autonomy should steer us towards certain projects and away from others, provided only that we stop and think about our choice of projects. And respect for other people's autonomy should likewise influence our choice of projects. The constraint imposed by respect for other people's autonomy may have greater psychological force than one

would expect on the basis of the abstract argument from our inability to judge the merit of other people's projects. If we live in a society where respect for other people and their projects is the norm, that feels good not only because it allows us to be confident that our own projects will be respected, but also because we will be part of a flourishing society that is made up of flourishing individuals. Autonomous people are good people to be with. They are also more likely than slaves to develop new opportunities for all of us, for example by making new discoveries or by developing activities that we can all enjoy. (For a discussion of the nature and importance of individual autonomy in a political context, see Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, chapters 14 and 15.)

11.3 Challenge

The need for challenge can steer us towards some projects and away from others, just as effectively as the call of autonomy. There are two reasons to seek challenge. One is that in meeting challenges, we enhance our skills and therefore increase our range of choices for the future. The other is that for projects to engage us, we must feel that they are real and important, not idle diversions. The existence of a challenge does not itself make a project into something more than an idle diversion, but it is a sign that a project is not an idle diversion. This is because the existence of a challenge indicates that the project is defined by reference to the external world, not merely by reference to our thoughts. I return to this point in the next section.

A project is challenging if there is genuine uncertainty about whether its pursuit will result in its fulfilment, even when we have appropriate skills and devote adequate resources to it. There must be a reasonable risk of failure. There must also be a reasonable prospect of success. A project that is almost bound to fail is not challenging, but merely hopeless. Challenge may reflect the fact that we cannot tell in advance exactly what we will need to do in order to succeed, or the fact that we are not quite sure of the level of our skills or of our resources. The main source of challenge is that our projects involve our interaction with an external world that is always at least partly outside our control.

If we meet challenges we develop our skills, and therefore our range of choices for the future. We can do so even if we fail. If we succeed, we also increase our confidence and therefore our psychological fitness to take on new challenges, again increasing the range of choices open to us. We therefore have a virtuous circle. The more we do, the more we can do.

Not all worthwhile projects enlarge our future sphere of action. Some consume such great resources that they will leave little space for anything else within the same lifetime. Some will shorten a lifespan, perhaps drastically. This does not mean that such projects cannot be worthwhile. If the prize is big enough, the price may be worth paying.

11.4 External definition

If a challenge is to be real, there must be a reasonable prospect of success and also a reasonable risk of failure. And if a project is to justify the use of significant resources, then it must have substance rather than being an idle diversion. A major contributor to meeting both of these requirements is the definition of our projects by reference to the external world, and not merely by reference to our own thoughts.

Standards

Suppose that an Englishman decided to learn Italian to a satisfactory standard. He could define that project by reference to an external standard, for example passing a given public examination. Alternatively, he could define it by reference to his internal feeling of whether he spoke Italian satisfactorily. If his standard was the external examination, then he would have both a reasonable prospect of success and a reasonable risk of failure. If his standard was his internal feeling, then he could eliminate the risk of failure. If Italian proved to be harder to learn than expected, he could just lower the standard in his head. He could easily be unaware that he was doing so, because there would be no external standard with which to compare his internal standard. He could not think of a purely internal standard in January, and know that it had

not shifted when he next consulted his memory of it in July. Only a standard defined by reference to the external world could be relied upon to set a real challenge. Even an external standard might only be recorded in the student's own mind. He might be the only person who knew that his goal was to pass a given public examination in Italian, and he might not have written that down anywhere. Then he would be able to cheat by changing his goal to that of passing an easier examination, without anyone else knowing. But he would have to know that he was cheating.

Substance

The external world also gives substance to our projects. Learning Italian is worthwhile because many people speak it, and because there is a great literature in the language. Learning Italian therefore opens up valuable new possibilities. It is not an idle diversion.

The demands of the external world are in fact the main source of our projects. If there was no need to do much, if we could comfortably drift through life, then we might well do so. But the pressure to meet our needs for shelter, food and health drive us to undertake demanding projects. Once we have satisfied our basic needs, we can turn to projects that are less pressing. But we can still recognize the benefits of fulfilling those projects, even if we recognize that not fulfilling them would not be disastrous. And continual change in the external world, for example as existing energy supplies run out or new diseases appear, presents a stream of new challenges to be met. Our non-essential projects also generate streams of new challenges. As science advances, new questions are posed. As new artistic techniques evolve, artists seek to take them as far as they will go. As new athletic records are set, other athletes strive to break those records. And so on.

This does not mean that projects which do not respond immediately to some external pressure, or are not defined in external terms, are pointless. There is a place for play. We may use play simply as recreation, which we all need. Or it may allow us to explore ideas and talents in a way that might be very useful, in some as yet unknown way. A child who plays is building up a rich range of talents for an unknown future. Whatever the future might hold, a child who had not played would be ill-prepared to meet it.

Adults can also benefit from taking a break from their projects and allowing new possibilities to open up.

11.5 The social and the personal

The definition of our projects by reference to the external world gives other people an opportunity to understand, and comment on, our projects. As explained in section 7.2, they should refrain from evaluating the merit of our projects, though they may well evaluate the consequences of our projects for others. Definition by reference to the external world provides an additional motive for us to stick to our projects, even when they turn out to be more difficult than expected. This is the shame that we may feel if people know that we have failed or given up. If they know about a project then because it is defined in external terms, not merely in terms of internal feelings of success, they will know when we have failed or given up. The shame may not be great. We are prone to exaggerate the extent to which people are keeping an eye on us, when in fact they are more interested in themselves. Most of us do not care, and often do not notice, if someone who is not close to us abandons some cherished project. If that person is close to us, we are more likely to be sympathetic than to criticize. But still the threat of shame can motivate, whether that threat be real or imagined. The shame can also be justified. Someone may for example have devoted extensive resources to a project that she then abandoned, and may be ashamed because those resources could have been put to better use. They could have been devoted to a project that she would have been more likely to fulfil, bringing benefits to herself and to others.

There are other interactions between the social and the personal. Some personal projects may be more acceptable to society than others. There may also be social projects, with everyone being invited or expected to contribute to their pursuit.

Social attitudes can set limits to the personal projects that are considered to be acceptable. These go beyond the limits on acceptable projects that have already been identified, the limits imposed by respect for other people's autonomy. The imposition of social standards may needlessly limit the autonomy of all of the individuals in a given society. For example, in a very puritanical

society it might be deemed unacceptable to learn how to dance. Even in a free society, conduct that does no harm and does not limit anyone else's freedom may be condemned by others. It may even be prevented by law enforcers. If the conduct is not specified to be illegal, vague laws may be used. Examples include laws to control anti-social behaviour and laws against threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, to quote section 5 of the British *Public Order Act 1986*.

Social projects can enhance the autonomy of the members of a society, but at the cost of limiting individuals' autonomy in order to fulfil those projects. For example, a public education system that imparts knowledge and skills to all children will greatly increase their range of choice in adult life. But schools need to be paid for, and the taxation needed to do this will reduce the autonomy of taxpayers. They will have resources taken from them, for a socially agreed project, when they might have preferred to use those resources for their own projects. The concern cannot be dismissed by saying that they are merely paying, after the event, for the education that they received. That is only a partial answer because the individual taxpayer did not choose the education that he received, and might have preferred a very different education. Nor is it a complete answer to say that a taxpayer is paying for the education of his own children, even if he has children. He might have chosen a different form of education for his children if the money had been left in his own hands. I do not claim that the social provision of schools and other services is wrong, but we must recognize that social provision leads to real reductions in the autonomy of individuals. Those reductions need to be justified. Even if the benefits are clear, we must still ask whether social provision via taxation is the best way. There might be some alternative that was just as good at providing the benefits, but at a lower cost to individual autonomy.

The question of what balance should be struck between individual projects and social projects is a political one. It cannot be answered in general terms. Each society must reach its own decision in the light of its own circumstances. I will return to this topic in section 12.2. The one thing that we can say in general terms is that the extremes are to be avoided. A society in which social projects were so significant that few resources were left available for individual projects would be an oppressive society, with little

individual autonomy. A society in which there were no social projects would probably miss out on opportunities to enhance the autonomy of many people very greatly, at a perfectly acceptable cost to the autonomy of others. The provision of basic education for all would represent such an opportunity. (The arguments here are distinct from economic arguments about the effects of tax levels on enterprise, about whether reductions in rates of tax can make everyone better off and about whether it is better for public services to be provided by public-sector organizations or for them to be contracted out to the private sector. Those arguments are equally important in practice.)

Another aspect of the interaction between individuals and societies is that the culture in which we are brought up inevitably, and strongly, influences our individual attitudes and the choices that we are inclined to make. Our culture influences both our choices of individual projects, and our willingness to devote resources to social projects. Some people do rebel against some of the norms of their culture, but even they are likely to observe the majority of those norms. We are therefore already inclined, although not compelled, to make the choices that are socially accepted. We can view this in two ways. We can say that our autonomy is already undermined by social pressures before we even start to make choices. Or we can say that if we were not formed by the culture in which we grew up, we would have no characters that would allow us to make autonomous choices reflecting those characters. We would be reduced to random or instinctive conduct, of which no human being could be proud. Both views are correct. Autonomous action must be based on an individual character, but a character can only be formed by developing some preferences and excluding others. Early in life, we have little or no control over the preferences that are inculcated. We could not possibly have that control because we would have no foundation, no character, that could give us a basis for deciding which preferences to accept and which to reject.

The fact that all societies impose the norms of their cultures on those who have no choice does not mean that all societies are on a par. Societies can be identified as relatively libertarian or as relatively authoritarian. Authority is most obvious when we consider limits on individual choices, when the pursuit of certain projects is made illegal or when social pressures are such that

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anyone pursuing those projects would be ostracized. Authority can however work more subtly, when social projects are of great importance and absorb substantial resources. That may significantly constrain the ability of individuals to pursue their own projects.

When we consider limits on individual autonomy that are imposed by laws or social norms, with no justification in terms of the need to respect the autonomy of others or in terms of social projects, we can be clearer as to what is desirable if we base our view of what is desirable on the common-sense meaning of “good”, or if we base our view on the ethic that is set out in the next chapter. Such limits on individual autonomy are to be condemned, unless some very good alternative justification can be produced. The justification that some people, even the vast majority, do not like the idea of other people doing whatever it is that is forbidden, or that they consider the conduct in question to be sinful, is not strong enough. This does not mean that people cannot frown on other people’s conduct. There is space for moral disapproval that does not, and should not, lead to legislation and that does not really limit the people who are disapproved of, because it does not make their lives too difficult.

CHAPTER 12

The ethic of projects

12.1 A statement of the ethic

It is time to propose an ethic, a guide to living. This ethic does not follow by logical necessity from what has been said so far. It is not the only ethic that we could reach on the basis of what has been said. We are not forced to adopt an ethic at all. It is however an ethic that follows naturally, given our human nature.

The ethic is as follows. A central good is the serious pursuit of our autonomously chosen projects. It is also good to promote the pursuit of projects by creating opportunities for their pursuit, by developing our talents so that we can pursue them, and by avoiding conduct that would pointlessly reduce opportunities to pursue projects.

The ethic specifies that the pursuit of our projects should be their serious pursuit. This means their pursuit in such a way as to give a reasonable prospect of our carrying them through to fulfilment. It does not mean a dilettante pursuit that could stop short of fulfilment for trivial reasons. I shall speak simply of the pursuit of our projects, but the intended meaning of serious pursuit should be borne in mind. The reference to a reasonable prospect of fulfilment is vital, if the ethic is to support the values discussed in section 7.3. Rejection of those values would not prevent us from pursuing our projects in a hopeless kind of way. But rejection of those values would severely impair the prospects for the successful pursuit of our projects.

There are three other points to note about this ethic. First, it is not an aggressively individualistic ethic. Although my own projects are the ones that I pursue, it is also good to promote the pursuit of projects by others. Second, there is no duty to maximize the pursuit of projects. The ethic identifies a central good that we can use to steer our lives. It is not a commandment. I explore the flexibility of the ethic in section 12.5. And third, the ethic encourages the pursuit

of our projects without specifying which ones. The requirement of serious pursuit does impose one constraint on the choice of projects. We should choose projects for which we have or can acquire the appropriate talents. For example, only people with musical talent should pursue projects of making beautiful music. Only they have much chance of succeeding, so only they can pursue those projects seriously. Beyond that, there are few constraints. Sections 12.2 and 12.3 discuss the choice of projects, but the ethic does not give us a list of projects. So long as we seriously pursue some autonomously chosen projects, and they are not ruled out as unacceptable by the considerations in section 12.2, that will satisfy the terms of the ethic.

The ethic does not mention the goods of beauty, empathy and love for their own sake, although it may favour them to the extent that they help us in the pursuit of projects (see section 12.4). That might lead one to think that the ethic was radically incomplete, because it had nothing to say about some very important goods. This is however not as significant an omission as it might seem. An ethic recommends a way of life. It recommends certain conduct. We need no recommendation to pursue beauty, empathy or love. They attract us naturally. The ethic proposed here does not prescribe particular projects, so it leaves us free to select our projects in the light of the things that attract us. The ethic also allows for the existence of other elements in the good life. It does not require us to maximize the pursuit of projects, so it allows us to take time for empathy, love and the enjoyment of beauty. This does not mean that the ethic makes a life of passive contentment acceptable. It does make a clear call upon us to do things, to devise and pursue some projects. But it does not call for maniacal fervour in the pursuit of projects.

The ethic might be thought defective in another respect. It manifestly does not answer all of our moral questions. It is not even guaranteed to answer any specific moral question that we might pose. If we expect an ethic to tell us precisely what to do in particular situations, then the ethic proposed here will not even seem to count as an ethic. There are ethics that tell us what to do. Lists of commandments are like that. But this is an ethic of a different type. It is a general guide to living. I shall argue in section 12.5 that this lack of detailed prescription is in fact an advantage.

12.2 Non-interference and social intervention

While the ethic does not prescribe specific projects, it does steer us towards some projects and away from others. Here I will cover the projects that we should avoid, and outline the role of society. In section 12.3, I will consider an order of priority among the projects that are encouraged.

Non-interference with others

Projects to oppress others and projects of wanton destruction are ruled out by the ethic. Such projects were considered in section 11.2. The ethic calls upon us to promote the pursuit of projects, not to limit their pursuit by ourselves or by others. The pursuit of any project may be meritorious in the eyes of the person who wishes to pursue it, and the considerations of mental privacy set out in section 7.2 may deny us any basis on which to challenge that perception of merit. But we are free to condemn projects on account of their consequences for others. The ethic would certainly counsel condemnation of oppressive and destructive projects.

There is a bias in favour of our own species here. A project to build a dam for example, securing water supplies for many people but displacing much wildlife and perhaps destroying some unique habitats, would not automatically be condemned, despite the clear obstruction of any projects that the affected wildlife might have had. (In order to allow this argument against the ethic free rein, I will not press the point that it may be a mistake to think of the other species that exist on Earth as having projects, in anything like the human sense, at all.) While this is so, and I acknowledge the bias in favour of our own species, this does not mean that the ethic would favour the wanton destruction of the natural environment in pursuit of the goals of a limited group of people. Destruction of the natural environment limits the projects of other human beings. The affected projects are not just the obvious ones of enjoying and exploring nature. Destruction can have significant and widespread effects, such as making inhabited areas uninhabitable. Pollution can do this very directly. Climate change, which might be induced by human activity, could also do it. Climate change could do it less directly than pollution but on a far wider scale, leading to large areas

becoming flooded or turning to desert. Such effects would require people to devote extensive resources to relocation and to the construction of new buildings, diverting them from the pursuit of their other projects. That would provide ample arguments against projects which would lead to extensive environmental destruction. But the arguments would be based on the interests of human beings, not on the interests of other species. The ethic would not in itself lead to deep ecology, in which the richness and diversity of all forms of life are valued for their own sake, and human beings have no right to reduce that richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs. (For a survey of deep ecology see Mathews, “Deep Ecology”.)

Another challenge to the primacy of human projects could come from an encounter with other rational beings, who were as sophisticated as ourselves. Our projects and theirs might well clash. The ethic as it stands would not provide a well-grounded way to resolve such clashes. It is put forward for human beings, living in a world in which they do not encounter other rational beings. If the problem were ever to arise, and if it were possible to discuss these matters with the other rational beings, then we might have to accept that the other beings had just as good a claim to pursue their projects without obstruction as we had. We might however find that we could not have a discussion. We might be reduced to simply fighting our corner, because our set of guiding concepts and theirs did not overlap enough to allow a discussion of ethical questions.

A clash between the different projects of human beings is more likely than clashes with aliens. The issue was discussed in section 7.3. The ethic does not offer any more than the most general guidance. Some method of resolving conflicts is clearly needed, and people have generally devised suitable methods. All that the ethic itself can recommend is that we should have methods of resolving conflicts that are quick and that do not waste resources. Once a conflict is resolved, we can all get back to pursuing our projects.

Social intervention

The ethic does not merely recommend that we keep out of each other’s way. It also encourages us to do things that will promote the pursuit of projects by everyone. The central good that it identifies is

the pursuit of our projects, not the pursuit of my projects. There is a clear case for voluntary co-operation, for example when a large number of people choose to work together in a company to make and distribute products that no one person could make on his own. Participation in such projects is however up to the individuals, and their autonomy is therefore preserved. Beyond that, we can consider the social provision of resources to all, funded by mandatory contributions. We can also consider a role for society as a whole in the choices of projects that are made by individuals.

On the social provision of resources, there is a balance to be struck. Some social provision may be very beneficial, but the provision must be limited because of the cost to the pursuit of projects that we choose individually. While the ethic might at first sight appear to encourage large-scale state provision, to ensure that everyone had the skills and resources to pursue their projects, the cost of that provision would itself reduce the opportunities that people had to pursue their own projects. Taxation would divert resources that would otherwise have been available to individuals. Taxation would not only impinge on an individual's initial stock of resources. It would also impinge on the fruits of projects, where those fruits would otherwise have been entirely devoted to the pursuit of future projects. This would apply even when the fruits of projects were in the form of new skills, because any financial return on the exercise of those skills would be taxed in due course. But this concern would not apply to fruits in the form of personal satisfaction, which is beyond the reach of taxation.

On a possible role for society in the choices of projects that are made by individuals, there is again a balance to be struck, but before striking it we can safely say that one type of interference would be unacceptable. This is the interference of directing people to certain choices where their failure to make those choices would not amount to positive obstruction of other people's projects, even though it might indirectly reduce other people's opportunities to pursue their own projects. It would not for example be acceptable to identify people with the skills to become good engineers and require them to train as engineers, so that the rest of us could benefit from improved roads, bridges and machines. Quite apart from the fact that someone who had been forced into a career would be unlikely to work with enthusiasm, such a degree of direction of people would be a gross violation of their autonomy.

Having ruled out that degree of prescription, we must consider legislation to forbid, or to charge for, certain activities. The obvious activities are those that interfere with other people's pursuit of their projects. Thus motoring might be taxed, because the pollution and congestion that it caused would interfere with other people's pursuit of their projects. Activities that seriously damaged the environment might be entirely forbidden. And the usual provisions that we see in the criminal law of a free society, forbidding murder, theft and so on, could be justified on this basis.

Laws that forbade activities because those activities would directly limit the freedom of others to do things might be acceptable, or even required, on the basis of the ethic. We must also consider laws that would require conformity of opinion, for example laws forbidding the practice of certain religions or laws controlling public comment on current affairs. Such laws might facilitate the pursuit of some people's projects, for example a project to make one religion prevail or a project to keep a government in power. There might be extreme circumstances that would make such laws acceptable on the basis of the ethic. If for example a country was fighting a dictatorial enemy who would destroy individual autonomy if he won, censorship might be justifiable for the duration of the war if it would make victory significantly more likely. But in general the ethic would be firmly against such laws. One reason is that the dissemination of inconvenient or unorthodox facts or opinions is itself a perfectly legitimate project for anyone to pursue. Another reason is that censorship would work against the free formation of our opinions, which is vital to autonomy. We cannot exercise our autonomy without first thinking about what to do. We cannot do that effectively without considering a range of options in the light of a range of arguments, using a range of concepts. While we can generate some options, concepts and arguments internally, our mental life is vastly enriched by contact with other people's ideas. That requires the free expression of ideas. Laws that would limit such free expression would be enormously damaging to autonomy. They would therefore run directly counter to the ethic, except in the most extreme circumstances.

A war to preserve freedom might be such a circumstance. A more likely extreme circumstance would be inflammatory utterances that amounted to aggression against other individuals.

Aggression that led to physical attacks would directly limit the freedom of the victims to pursue their own projects. When legislating against aggressive speech, each society must decide for itself where to draw the line. But the ethic would recommend forbidding as little as possible, in the interests of autonomy. This does not exclude moral disapproval of utterances that offend people. But that disapproval should not be converted into legislation that would punish such utterances, when they were merely insulting or offensive.

12.3 Priorities among projects

An ethic that exhorts us to pursue projects leaves us with a wide choice. We could pursue many different projects, and we must choose between them. I will now set out some criteria that we could use in making those choices, criteria which would be a natural accompaniment to the ethic.

An ethic should promote a good life. Having recognized that the pursuit of projects is a central element in a good life, we would not want to see that good life tarnished by unnecessary conflicts between the projects that were chosen by a given person. There might be logical conflict. Someone might for example have a project to raise a family, but also a project to devote himself entirely to the pursuit of a spiritual understanding that he believed could only come to hermits. More likely is practical conflict, when someone commits to too many projects and does not have the resources to pursue all of them properly. The result can be paralysis, when all of the competing claims on resources are equally plausible and it is impossible to decide which claim to satisfy first.

Neither logical conflict nor practical conflict would be conducive to a good life. But it would be a mistake to take extreme measures to avoid the risk of their arising. Someone who spent a lot of time examining each prospective project in detail for any risk of logical conflict with existing projects would get little done. He would have little of the good of the pursuit of projects in his life. It is more efficient to accept some risk of logical conflict, and to sort out conflicts if they arise. Likewise, the surest way to avoid practical conflict is to do very little so that resources are bound to be adequate. But that too would severely limit the quantity of the

good of the pursuit of projects. It is better to stretch ourselves, and to deal with over-stretch if it happens.

This does not mean that we should abstain from planning, plunge in and see what happens. A reasonable degree of forethought, so as to make a selection of projects that are not blatantly in logical conflict and are together likely to be stretching but achievable, is a good investment of time. It is just that we should not over-do the planning, leading to more planning than action or to a lack of ambition.

These counsels of common sense, which flow pretty directly from the ethic because they promote the central good that the ethic identifies, still leave the field wide open. Many different approaches to the choice of projects would abide by these counsels. Another principle, which does not flow so directly from the ethic, is that we should prefer a few challenging and highly productive projects to a large number of easy and trivial projects. There is a place in life for the easy and the trivial. If life were always serious, it would be much less fun than it is. But the great sense of achievement that comes from the fulfilment of a challenging project, and the sense of a project's worth that comes from recognition of the great value of its fruits, cannot be supplied by the fulfilment of easy and trivial projects.

The principle that we should prefer challenging and highly productive projects only follows from the ethic if we accept that the pursuit of a few of them will generate more of the central good than the pursuit of many easy and trivial projects. That is, it follows if we accept that the pursuit of challenging and highly productive projects generates disproportionately high returns of the good per unit of effort or other resource invested. It is up to each individual to decide whether he or she accepts this. I can only remark that those who have tried both types of project are likely to favour challenging and highly productive projects. This is not a logically watertight argument, but it may be convincing in practice. It is on a par with John Stuart Mill's observation that someone who has tried both the higher and the lower pleasures, and who has exercised both our higher and our lower faculties, will prefer the higher pleasures and faculties, despite the difficulties and pains that may attend the higher form of life but not the lower. If we have known both the intellectual pleasures of intelligent conversation and the sensory pleasures of chocolate, we will not forgo the former for the sake of

the latter. Put in terms of faculties, we would not give up our intelligence in exchange for more sophisticated tastebuds. As Mill put it, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied". (For Mill's arguments, see his *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2, pages 139-140). The same may be said of the special merit of projects to create or appreciate works of art and scientific theories. Those who have tried these projects are very likely to recognize their special value and the disproportionately great contribution that their pursuit makes to the good life.

If we do accept that we should prefer challenging and highly productive projects, that suggests another principle. It is that we should identify our talents and should largely devote ourselves to the pursuit of projects that will make the best use of those talents. Someone with a great talent for mathematics, for example, could be much more productive in that field than in any other. So he would have good reason to devote himself to mathematics. But this principle is loosely inferred from the debatable starting point that challenging and highly productive projects should be preferred. Many of us may agree with it, but it can hardly aspire to the status of a moral imperative.

Another issue in the establishment of priorities is the relative weights that should be given to our own projects (including those in which we have chosen to co-operate with other people) and to the projects of others. In a sense, all projects that we choose autonomously are our own. If Patricia resolves to help Quentin in the pursuit of some of his projects, then she makes it her project to help Quentin. There is however still a distinction between the projects that originate with Patricia, and those that amount to support for projects that originate with Quentin. Patricia might pursue projects in the first set even if Quentin did not exist, or if he had no projects with which Patricia could help. She can only pursue projects in the second set because Quentin exists and has the projects that he does have. Given that the ethic identifies the pursuit of projects as a central good, should it be applied in the spirit of a society-wide utilitarian calculation? If Patricia could increase the total amount of this central good in the world by abandoning most of her own projects and devoting herself to helping Quentin, should she do so? The same question can arise where it is not a question of one person's sacrifice to another individual. If for example co-operative projects achieved much more per person involved than individual projects, and if we accepted that highly productive

projects were to be preferred to less productive projects, would the ethic imply that we should abandon our individual projects in order to devote ourselves to co-operative projects?

In fact, the ethic's reference to autonomously chosen projects prevents any slide into obligatory self-sacrifice or into obligatory collectivism. If someone freely chooses to concentrate on supporting other people's projects, or to concentrate on co-operative projects, that is up to her. But autonomous choice cannot be forced by the ethic, any more than it can be forced by other factors. If a choice to support other people's projects, or to concentrate on co-operative projects, were forced, then it would not be an autonomous choice. The pursuit of the projects in question would therefore not have the value that was recognized by the ethic.

This opposition to forced choices coheres with the fact that the ethic does not advocate that people using it should occupy a neutral standpoint. It advocates the freedom of the individual to make her own choices, by her lights, from her standpoint. It does not suggest that she should take up a neutral position, from which she could decide priorities in a way that would accord equal weight to each affected person. Some may object to this, on the basis that an ethic should be applied without any bias. But the ethic of projects cannot require such a neutral approach, because it attaches great importance to the autonomy of the individual. An ethic that required a dispassionate administrator's calculation of what to do in the public interest, would reduce individuals to ciphers in the calculation. A prescription to them that they should make their decisions in such a dispassionate way, or that their overall goal should be the public interest, would massively violate their autonomy. This would be so even if, using such uniform methods, they might still choose different projects because of their different circumstances. An individual's freedom to decide how to weigh up her options and her freedom to choose an overall goal, if indeed she has one, are just as important as freedom in the selection of her options and in deciding how to pursue her chosen projects. The ethic does not even force itself upon anyone.

12.4 From projects to guiding concepts and rules of conduct

The links between meritorious projects, guiding concepts and rules of conduct have been covered in earlier chapters. Specific rules that

govern our lives are justified by the guiding concepts that underlie them. Those guiding concepts derive their power to justify conduct from the fact that they promote the pursuit of our projects with a reasonable prospect of their fulfilment, where that pursuit itself has merit. The ethic of projects at last puts the foundation in place, by identifying the serious pursuit of our projects as a central element in the good life. If the pursuit is accepted as a central good, then the pursuit has merit. It follows that we should be guided by the concepts that will, if used as guides, promote that good.

We might not wish to be guided by the concepts that promoted the pursuit of our projects, if that would lead us away from other goods. Fortunately, there is no sign that most of our guiding concepts would do so. Some of them will actively promote other goods. Loyalty, honesty and co-operativeness, for example, promote both the pursuit of projects and improved human relations. A few concepts might lead us away from other goods. If for example we were to be guided by a concept of utter single-mindedness, and therefore latched on to one project to the exclusion of everything else in life, we would have no time for beauty, empathy or love. Having said that, utter single-mindedness and the consequent loss of some important goods will sometimes be the price that must be paid for exceptional achievement. Some might therefore wish to be single-minded, and it would not be for the rest of us to tell them that they were wrong. (For an exploration of trade-offs between single-mindedness and a balanced life, see Hurka, *Perfectionism*, chapter 7.)

We can trace how the merit of the pursuit of projects supports the acceptance of some concepts as guides, and how they go on to support rules of conduct. Where guiding concepts derive their status as guides primarily from their role in facilitating the pursuit of projects in general, I will reprise and expand on what was said in sections 7.3 and 7.4. We must also consider some concepts that do not derive their status as guides primarily from their facilitation of the pursuit of projects in general.

Status derived primarily from projects in general

Honesty and reliability are clearly conducive to the pursuit of our projects. This is not only so in relation to co-operative projects. It is

also true in relation to the projects that each of us pursues alone. The world is an unpredictable place, in which accidents can disrupt our plans. The most unpredictable entities in the world are our fellow human beings, who may decide at any moment to behave differently from hitherto. But if they can mostly be relied upon to convey accurate information and to act in accordance with any plans that they have announced, then it will be much easier to fulfil our own projects than it would otherwise have been.

Respect for the autonomy of others also helps in the pursuit of projects. It may not help directly in the pursuit of our own projects, but the ethic is not an aggressively individualistic one. It is good to promote the pursuit of the projects of others as well as the pursuit of our own projects, and respect for the autonomy of others certainly does that. There is also an indirect benefit to ourselves and to our own projects. Other people are much more likely to respect our autonomy if we respect theirs, than if we do not.

Respect for ourselves and respect for our own autonomy also help. Such guiding concepts will greatly increase the probability that we will pursue our own projects seriously, giving a reasonable prospect of their fulfilment. We will not be easily distracted, nor will we always subordinate our projects to the projects of others. A belief in our own worth matters just as much as a belief in the worth of others.

Friendship, loyalty and recognition of the temporary authority of a leader all facilitate the pursuit of co-operative projects, which can often achieve much more than the projects of individuals. But friendship and loyalty may also be seen as having independent worth. I will therefore return to them later in this section.

My final examples are the virtues of courage and temperance. Courage allows us to continue to pursue our projects, even in the face of serious threats to our well-being. Temperance, controlling but not ignoring or eliminating our sensual desires, allows us to have enough energy for the pursuit of our projects.

Many guiding concepts, most of which have traditionally been identified as virtues, can therefore derive their status as guides from the ethic of projects. Acceptance of these concepts as guides promotes the serious pursuit of our projects, which the ethic identifies as a central good.

Having got these guiding concepts in place, we can go on to derive rules of conduct. We should derive rules of conduct that

advocate behaviour which would be in line with the guidance given by the concepts. Thus if honesty is a guiding concept, there is a rule of conduct that we should tell the truth. If respect is a guiding concept, then we should show respect. If temperance is a guiding concept, then we should not over-indulge our passions for food or anything else. And so on.

The rules of conduct may appear to be redundant if their derivation from the guiding concepts is so obvious. It is true that we often think purely in terms of guiding concepts, without stating specific rules of conduct. Rules of conduct may however be needed, for several reasons. First, they give us a way to articulate conflicts of value, for example when the guiding concept of honesty would lead us to tell the truth but the guiding concept of loyalty would lead us to keep our friends' secrets. The two rules of conduct, that we should answer questions honestly and that we should keep our friends' secrets, make the conflict obvious in a way that the guiding concepts do not. Second, rules of conduct are needed when we wish to state principles that everyone needs to obey. A law that was worded in terms of guiding concepts, such as a traffic law calling upon motorists to respect pedestrians, would be too vague to be enforceable. Specific rules of conduct, such as the rule that motorists should stop at red traffic lights, are essential. And third, rules of conduct have an essential role in education. An adult may think in terms of guiding concepts, but he is only likely to understand what those concepts mean if he had rules of conduct prescribed to him as a child.

Status not derived primarily from projects in general

As well as the concepts that derive their status as guides primarily from the facilitation of the pursuit of projects in general, we accept concepts such as beauty, empathy and love as guides. If we are guided by these concepts, that may well facilitate the pursuit of our projects in general. If we produce and seek out beautiful things, that will both stimulate and relax us. If we have empathy with others, that not only helps us to pursue shared projects effectively. It also makes it easier for us to make space for each other's personal projects, without creating an artificial distance. And if we love and are loved, that makes us stronger and more effective in the world.

The usefulness of these concepts in promoting the pursuit of projects in general is not however the primary justification for accepting them as guides. It is very much a secondary justification. If we took it to be primary, we would insult both the concepts and ourselves.

I claimed in section 12.1 that the ethic's apparent lack of justification for the pursuit of these goods did not matter, because they would attract us naturally. But while adoption of the ethic would not drive us away from these goods, the ethic might still appear to leave them in a vulnerable position. All it appears to be able to say about them is that they may contribute to the one good that the ethic does identify as central. That is their weak, secondary, justification. What if our nature were to change, so that some or all of these goods no longer did anything to promote the pursuit of our projects in general, or even worse, started to be counter-productive?

If that were to happen, then we would want to re-visit our ethic. Ethics devised by human beings are meant for human beings. If human nature were to change, then our ethic might also need to change. But that does not make the worry about the precarious status of beauty, empathy and love go away. We are, after all, faced with some people for whom the adoption of these concepts as guides is already counter-productive, impeding the pursuit of their projects. Some people find that any distraction, whether of family, friendship or beauty, is fatal to the pursuit of their projects. Does this mean that the status of beauty, empathy and love as guides rests solely on the happenstance that most of us do find time for them? Would a different majority vote, which could easily have come about, have deprived these concepts of their status as guides?

In a sense it would. The value of beauty, empathy and love does depend on the fact that we care about these things. If however we did not care about them, we would not feel outraged at their not being valued. We are only unnerved by the apparent vulnerability of these things because our current nature is to care about them. Given that current nature, they are not in fact vulnerable. We may take comfort from that fact, unless we believe that something is only valued as it should be so long as it would continue to be valued even if our attitudes changed radically.

We can also take comfort from the fact that there is no need for the majority to rule the minority in this respect. Take beauty as an example. If few people valued beauty, it would still be open to

those few to value it, even if the many thought that they were strange so to do. Equally, it is open to a few to be unmoved by beauty, even though most people do in fact value it. The ethic implies that we should not obstruct the projects of others without good reason. Thus in a culture in which beauty was widely valued, the ethic would disapprove of the wanton destruction of beautiful things by people who had no sense of beauty, because that would obstruct the project of the majority to enjoy beautiful things. In a culture in which few appreciated beauty, the preservation of beautiful things would usually do no harm to the unappreciative majority. So they too should not wantonly destroy beautiful things, because that would be a pointless frustration of the minority's project to enjoy them. It is however true that in such a culture, the cause of beauty might well lose out when there was a conflict of projects. If for example the majority strongly desired a new motorway that would cut through a beautiful landscape, they would probably get their way.

The primary place for the pursuit of beauty, empathy and love in the framework set by the ethic is as concepts that define specific projects. I noted in section 12.1 that the ethic leaves us free to select our projects in the light of the things that attract us. Beauty, empathy and love do attract us. That steers us towards projects to create and appreciate beautiful things, and to form close human relationships. Friendship and loyalty, the two guiding concepts mentioned earlier in this section as having a clear role in facilitating the pursuit of projects but also as having independent worth, can be placed here too. Like beauty, empathy and love, their pursuit can be a project in itself. It is good to be a friend, to have friends and to forge bonds of loyalty. Other concepts that do not derive their status as guides primarily from their role in facilitating the pursuit of projects in general can also be placed here.

Beauty, empathy, love, friendship and loyalty therefore have a dual justification. They are guiding concepts for most of us, steering our actions. Their status as guides is justified partly by the fact that if they are adopted as guides, that facilitates the pursuit of projects in general. But their status as guides is also, and more importantly, justified by the fact that they define many specific projects. In this respect, their status derives not from their ability to facilitate the pursuit of projects in general, but from the fact that if we adopt them as guides, that will lead us to the effective pursuit of

the particular projects which they define. If we have a project of producing beautiful things, we need to value beauty in order to notice and take advantage of opportunities to pursue that project. Likewise, we need to value love if we are to form loving relationships. And so on for the others. There is no logical circularity here because the concepts can, before they become guides and before they acquire any motivating or justificatory force, define projects such as the creation of beautiful things. We then freely choose to pursue those projects, because of their natural attraction for us. That then justifies our adoption of the concepts as guides.

There is an alternative point of view in relation to empathy, love and friendship. This is that the concept of a project is inappropriate to them. These goods may be thought to be so much about being in certain states, rather than about doing certain things, that they do not fit into the ethic of projects at all. Intuitions will differ on this point. But those who feel that these goods do not fit into the ethic of projects need not reject the ethic. They can take advantage of the fact that the ethic leaves room for goods other than the pursuit of our projects.

I considered earlier in this section, and argued against, the thought that rules of conduct might be redundant and that we could simply make do with guiding concepts. Now the reverse possibility arises. It might seem that guiding concepts were redundant, at least to the extent that their acceptance as guides promoted the pursuit of specific projects rather than promoting the pursuit of projects in general. If we start with specific projects to create beautiful things, loving relationships and so on, why not go directly to the rules of conduct that would, if we complied with them, promote the pursuit of those projects? And if we can do that, are we not back to having only a feeble, secondary justification for the value that we attach to beauty, empathy and love? Are we not left with only a justification based on their role in facilitating the pursuit of projects in general, rather than on their link to some specific projects? There are in fact two reasons why we need not fear that conclusion, a minor one and a major one.

The minor reason is that it is only practical to formulate the relevant projects using broad concepts such as beauty and love. How those projects are put into effect will depend on circumstances. We cannot make our projects to create beautiful

things or loving relationships precise enough to generate specific rules of conduct, until we have encountered those circumstances and started to live within them. Broad guiding concepts play an essential role as navigational aids. They only set a general course, but for that reason they allow us to navigate round obstacles as we encounter them.

The major reason is that to the extent that it is appropriate to set beauty, empathy and love within the framework of the ethic of projects, the primary justification for the value that we attach to beauty, empathy and love is that we choose projects which are defined in their terms. We need these concepts in order to have the projects at all. This goes beyond the mere practical convenience of formulating our projects using broad concepts. The projects just would not be the same projects if they were not defined using the concepts of beauty, empathy and love.

In chapter 1, I promised to give a firm foundation for our values. This should include a foundation for values such as beauty, empathy and love. If the foundation for these values derives primarily from a free choice of projects, and if we could equally well have made a different choice, the foundation might appear to be anything but firm. But it is firm, so long as we accept the ethic. The ethic identifies the serious pursuit of our autonomously chosen projects as a central good. If we in fact choose projects that are defined in terms of beauty, empathy and love, then the ethic identifies the pursuit of those projects as good. If it is good to pursue those projects, then it is right to value beauty, empathy and love. It is right because if we value them, then we will be inspired to pursue projects that are defined in their terms. We will therefore generate more of the central good that is identified by the ethic. The ethic gives a firm foundation for the values that we in fact have. I did not promise a foundation so firm that it would prevent us from changing our values.

There is a worry to consider. The pattern of argument used here might seem to allow that we would be justified in using, as a guide, any concept that characterized things which we found attractive. Someone might for example find sadism, practised on non-consenting victims, attractive. He might claim that he was therefore justified in using the concept of cruelty as a guide. That does not in fact follow. As G E Moore pointed out, wanting something is not enough to make it good (*Principia Ethica*, chapter 4, sections 77-

84). Our selection of guiding concepts which acquire their status as guides by the same route as beauty, empathy and love must be subjected to critical review, just like our selection of concepts which we are justified in using as guides because they promote the pursuit of our projects in general. Do the concepts comply with the ethic of projects by steering us towards respect for others, and away from obstruction of their projects? Will the projects that are promoted by the concepts really deserve priority over other projects? Such reflection may take time and require experience, initially the experience of those who educate us and later on our own experience. A fine example of such reflection was given by G E Moore, when he argued that personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments are the greatest goods we know (*Principia Ethica*, chapter 6, sections 110-123). His arguments for those goods are not logically compelling against all possible alternative views about the greatest goods, but they do illustrate the sort of detailed reflection that is appropriate.

Finally, there is an alternative approach to conferring value on love and friendship which I cannot accept. This is Thomas Hurka's suggestion that love and friendship might be regarded as intrinsic goods because they represent the best realizations of co-operation and beneficence, which are themselves intrinsic goods (*Perfectionism*, chapter 10, particularly section 10.3 on pages 134-136). Beneficence might well be an intrinsic good, but its status as an intrinsic good would require support comparable to the support that I have offered for the status of beauty, empathy and love. Co-operation is for me an instrumental good rather than an intrinsic good. It is useful because it enables us to pursue many projects that we could not pursue without co-operating. My view that it is an instrumental good reflects the fact that I attach value to individuals and not to collectives. I reject the attachment of intrinsic value to an organic society, rather than to its members (compare Hurka, *Perfectionism*, page 133).

12.5 The flexibility of the ethic

The ethic of projects starts by identifying a central good. We are encouraged to promote that good, simply because that which is good ought to be promoted. The ethic does therefore fulfil the

proper function of an ethic, which is to advise us how to live. But it does not follow the model of a specific-acts ethic such as utilitarianism or deontology. Those ethics, unlike the ethic of projects, issue instructions on how to act in given circumstances. They were discussed in section 7.5.

The ethic of projects is flexible in its application to individual lives and to specific circumstances. We can all promote the pursuit of projects in our own ways, as our resources allow. The ethic does not try to be more prescriptive. There is no need for that. Detailed prescriptions would not work in any case, because there would be morally relevant details in actual circumstances that were not foreseen by anyone who had laid down prescriptions. This does not mean that the ethic cannot generate any specific rules of conduct that apply practically universally. Wanton destruction, and the pointless oppression and injury of others, are clearly ruled out by the ethic because they impede the pursuit of autonomously chosen projects. But such practically universal rules are few and obvious. The terms “wanton” and “pointless” also build in the flexibility that might be needed to accommodate exceptional circumstances, for example when injuring one person would save several others from being killed.

Such rules are not as numerous or as absolute as the prescriptions of a typical deontology, for example a rule that we should never lie. Truth-telling generally promotes the pursuit of projects but there are times when we should lie, for example when a murderer demands to know where his intended victim is hiding. Nor are the prescriptions as specific as those of utilitarianism, the doctrine that we should promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Utilitarianism calls upon us to identify the courses of action that would maximize happiness. All other courses of action would be unsatisfactory, even if we should not actually be condemned for failing to maximize happiness. Utilitarians do not suppose that they have access to a formula which would in practice compute the effects of different courses of action on total happiness. Nonetheless, the basic idea is that there is a specific correct choice to be made, a given course of action or perhaps a range of equally good courses of action that utilitarianism would prescribe. (However, John Broome, in *Weighing Lives*, chapters 10 and 12, sets out a case where utilitarianism might do better by not having a precise measure of the extent to which one outcome was

better than another.) The ethic of projects is not nearly so specific. It does set us an overall objective, the pursuit of projects. But it does not imply that there is one correct course to choose, in order to achieve that objective to the greatest possible extent. Nor does it imply that the pursuit of our projects is the only good that we should pursue. It does not even imply that the pursuit of our projects should always over-ride the claims of other goods when we have to choose between goods.

Another feature of the ethic is that it is grounded in human nature. The importance of the pursuit of projects to our well-being, set out in chapter 11, reflects contingent facts about humanity. The ethic does not try to be an ethic for all rational beings. By contrast deontology, at least in some of its forms, does so. Immanuel Kant, for example, derived his deontology from such general considerations that it really would apply to all rational beings. (See the recurrent references to all rational beings in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.) Utilitarianism could have comparable ambitions. It could claim to extend to all rational beings, with a requirement to maximize happiness in human beings and the closest analogue of happiness in non-humans. The close connection between the ethic of projects and the human condition makes it more appealing than an ethic based on cold, universal logic. It might not seem important that an ethic should appeal to us. But an ethic that we find appealing has the advantage that it is more likely to be taken up by us than an unappealing ethic. And an ethic that is taken up by many people will work better for those who do take it up than one that is only taken up by a few people, because more people will understand and respect the conduct of a given person who does take it up. They will then respond appropriately to that person's conduct.

In addition to reflecting human nature, the ethic of projects leaves space for each of us to set our own priorities. As explained in section 12.3, the importance of autonomy means that the ethic advocates the freedom of the individual to make her own choices, by her lights, from her standpoint. This is another contrast with deontology and with utilitarianism. A deontology will give us a list of duties to perform that we must accept, regardless of our points of view. Utilitarianism defines, in an impersonal way, the consequences that our actions should promote. The ethic of projects has an advantage because it does not take that approach. By

recognizing a place for the individual's standpoint, it allows for individual approaches to ethical decision-making. (To be fair to utilitarianism, there are arguments to the effect that consequentialist ethics, including utilitarianism, can make room for the standpoint of the individual. See Broome, *Weighing Goods*, chapters 1 and 6, on the scope for agent-relativity in teleological ethics, which is John Broome's preferred name for consequentialism. However, the agent-relativity for which he makes room does not appear to be as broad as we would need in order to do full justice to the individual's standpoint.)

Suppose for example that Albert would have to betray the confidence of his friend Bernard in order to tell the police that Charlie, Bernard's friend, had committed a crime. The ethic of projects would give Albert space to feel that it would be both right and wrong for him to tell the police, even though it would simply be right for someone who was not Bernard's friend. Utilitarianism would not see the dilemma. It would merely invite Albert to compute the consequences of betraying and of not betraying, including both the consequences for law and order and the consequences for friendship, and then to choose the course of action that would maximize happiness, all things considered. A deontology might recognize the dilemma by identifying Albert's two conflicting duties, to Bernard and to society, but it would note the clash of duties without relating that clash to the personal view of Albert, the one who had to decide. The ethic of projects, on the other hand, would accord a central place to Albert's personal view. Autonomy matters, and it is up to each of us to decide what to do. In addition, by identifying the pursuit of projects as one central good rather than as the only central good, the ethic leaves it open to each of us to say, in a particular case, that some other good is more important. In this example, Albert might evaluate the available courses of action in terms of their effects on the pursuit of projects. Friendship would be valuable in facilitating their pursuit, but the prevention of future crime through the capture of criminals would also be valuable. But Albert might equally well decide on different grounds. Other considerations, such as the intrinsic value of Albert's friendship with Bernard, might come into play. The choice of criteria to apply in making the decision would be a choice to be made by Albert himself, just as much as Albert's decision as to what to do.

Another feature of the ethic of projects is that by identifying a central good which we can pursue at any time, it can influence our everyday conduct. This tends to make life one continuous moral whole. Specific-acts ethics could also do this, but the ones that lay down rules in advance of particular moral decisions tend to come into play only when there is a serious moral decision to be made. That divides life into two parts, the everyday and the morally serious. This is particularly true of deontology. Most of our daily activities are neither required nor forbidden by codes of duty. Deontology only pays attention to the morally serious moments when we have major decisions to take, and concepts of right and wrong loom large. It is also true of rule-utilitarianism, which lays down rules based on the likely consequences of always following those rules, rather than computing the consequences of each possible action individually. A rule-utilitarian starts by working out that always following a given rule, such as not stealing, would on the whole promote happiness. The rule is then always followed, even though there will be rare occasions when breaking the rule would actually increase happiness. An ethic like that is rarely in play for the same reason that a deontology is rarely in play. The rules only cover the serious issues.

Act-utilitarianism, which does not lay down rules in advance but calls upon us to compute the consequences of possible actions on each occasion, has more scope to be in play in everyday life. Although a serious issue needs to arise in order for it to be worth devoting much effort to calculating the consequences of actions, we do have a rough sense of whether a given action is likely to increase or decrease happiness. We can apply that sense in choosing our everyday actions. That puts this type of utilitarianism in a comparable position to the ethic of projects. The ethic of projects encourages us to pursue projects and to promote the pursuit of projects. We may have opportunities to do so at any time, so the ethic can influence our choices of everyday actions as well as our serious moral decisions. It is however a looser ethic than act-utilitarianism, in two respects. First, it does not call upon us to pursue projects or to promote the pursuit of projects at every opportunity. The ethic only identifies one central good, and allows that there are others which should sometimes take priority. Utilitarianism on the other hand identifies a single good, happiness, and makes it the only criterion by which to judge our actions. It

therefore tends to call upon us to promote that good at every opportunity. Second, the ethic of projects is looser than utilitarianism because there is no supposition that there is, even in theory, a method of calculation that would tell us exactly how far a given action would promote the good that the ethic identifies. For a utilitarian, the everyday use of his ethic on the strength of a rough sense of the extent to which a given action would promote happiness is a compromise. It would be better to make precise calculations, if that could be done quickly enough. For the follower of the ethic of projects, everyday use of the ethic on the basis of a rough sense of what will promote the pursuit of projects does not fall short of anything higher. That absence of some higher, more refined, calculation does not matter because the good identified by the ethic is not the only good for which it allows. We do not have to maximize the good identified. That gives us room to pay attention to other goods. It also means that we do not need a precise measure of the good which is identified by the ethic. We do not need to be able to tell, each time we have to take a decision, which option would most increase the quantity of that good.

I have shown how the ethic of projects is more flexible than specific-acts ethics, and I have noted some advantages of flexibility. We could make a similar comparison with virtue ethics, but we would find that virtue ethics were just as flexible as the ethic of projects. A virtue ethic asks us to have certain virtues, and leaves it up to us to exercise those virtues as best we can in specific circumstances.

12.6 The meaning of life

A popular picture of the philosopher gives him or her the task of telling us the meaning of life. I will not be so ambitious. But I claim that the ethic of projects does, if adopted, give meaning to our lives.

An assertion that life has no meaning is a claim that the question “why bother doing things?” has no answer that must be accepted. We should however specify who would have to accept an answer in order for it to give meaning to life. Whatever answer we gave, there would always be someone who would reject that answer. It is possible that nearly everyone would accept some answer or other, although no single answer would satisfy everyone, but we cannot

even be sure of that. A more modest task than that of convincing nearly everyone is to find an answer that will give meaning to the lives of those who accept the answer, that will do so without relying on factual claims which lack evidence, and that will have wide appeal, even if the appeal is not universal.

The ethic of projects fulfils the first criterion. It gives meaning to the lives of those who accept it because it tells us that in pursuing our projects, we are doing something worthwhile. The ethic gives us a direct reason to do things, because it identifies the serious pursuit of our autonomously chosen projects as a central good. The only additional support that is required is acceptance that one should promote the good, but that will follow for anyone who accepts the logic of the word “good”. Those who do not accept that logic are unlikely to be interested in any ethic. (“Acceptance” here means acceptance to a sufficient extent to motivate conduct. There is philosophical debate about the correctness of internalism in ethics. Internalism is the view that if someone accepts an ethical claim, that is enough to motivate conduct in accordance with it. I take the view that internalism is correct for anyone who does actually adopt an ethic. If someone is not motivated to conduct himself in accordance with an ethic, then he has not adopted it.)

The ethic also fulfils the other two criteria. No dubious factual claims, such as claims about supernatural beings, are needed to support the ethic. And the ethic will have wide appeal because it is human nature to want to have tasks to complete. We obtain satisfaction from working on tasks and from their completion.

The ethic of projects is not forced upon us by logical necessity. Its adoption is a free choice. Its own terms imply that its adoption must be a free choice. It attaches such importance to autonomy that if it forced itself upon us, it would run a risk of self-contradiction. This does make any meaning to life that is founded on the ethic vulnerable to evaporation on a mere change of mind about whether to accept the ethic. But it also gives the ethic an important advantage over ethics founded on some religions. The ethic does not repel us by assaulting our autonomy.

Several religions treat the rules of conduct that they support as binding on everyone. If God decrees that certain conduct is right then its rightness is a simple fact, although that rightness may either be a consequence of God’s decree or be independent of that decree. Even in religions without personal gods, the reality of spiritual

forces can have the same consequence. Moral truths about how to live become statements of objective fact about the Universe. They should be visible to everyone, even if some people do not actually see them. This means that an alternative view, in which those moral truths did not feature, would simply be a mistake. Once we were all appropriately educated, we would all subscribe to the same view. If our conduct still fell short of what was required on that view, that would be explained by weakness of the will. And any exercise of autonomy to choose, or to live by, a different view would be deplorable. In contrast, the ethic of projects upholds autonomy all the way. Its central good is the pursuit of our autonomously chosen projects, not the pursuit of projects that have been forced upon us by other people or by God. It also makes no claim that it has to be chosen as our ethic.

One other point of contrast with some religions can be noted. They tend to emphasize a desirable state at the end of the road, such as union with God in Paradise. The state need not be desirable in a crudely hedonistic sense. It may very well be desired because it is seen as right, rather than because it is seen as pleasant. But the emphasis is on the destination. The ethic of projects, on the other hand, places the emphasis on the journey, on the pursuit of our projects. The emphasis is on the journey even though it is on the serious pursuit of projects, their pursuit with a reasonable prospect of fulfilment. (Robert Nozick also explored the idea of finding meaning in a process rather than in a destination. But he suggested that value should be seen in the pattern formed by an ongoing process of creating and transcending works of art, scientific theories and comparable creations, rather than in the activity itself. See *Philosophical Explanations*, pages 613-617.)

The fact that the ethic of projects emphasizes the journey rather than the destination makes the meaning that it confers on life more robust than it would otherwise be, unless we were to believe in a supernatural destination which had the advantage of permanence or timelessness. Our achievements will be surpassed by those who come after us. There is a very good chance that eventually they will all turn to dust, perhaps when the Sun swells up and destroys all life on Earth or perhaps much sooner. If the source of meaning in our lives were our achievements, the prospect of our achievements being surpassed or of turning to dust would undermine that meaning. But if the source of meaning is the process of achieving,

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the journey, then the meaning in our lives can survive unscathed. A journey that we undertake will always have been undertaken, even if the destination is wiped out. The meaning of life is to be found in being fully alive while we can. The finitude of our individual lives, and of the life of our species, are irrelevant.

The last words belong to Nietzsche: “The formula of my happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a goal”. (*Twilight of the Idols*, Maxims and Arrows 44, page 473.)

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