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VIRTUE AND REASON

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VIRTUE AND REASON

1. Presumably the point of, say, inculcating a moral outlook lies in a concern with how people live. It may seem that the very idea of a moral outlook makes room for, and requires, the existence of moral theory, conceived as a discipline which seeks to formulate acceptable principles of conduct. It is then natural to think of ethics as a branch of philosophy related to moral theory, so conceived, rather as the philosophy of science is related to science. On this view, the primary topic of ethics is the concept of right conduct, and the nature and justification of principles of behaviour. If there is a place for an interest in the concept of virtue, it is a secondary place. Virtue is a disposition (perhaps of a specially rational and self-conscious kind) to behave rightly; the nature of virtue is explained, as it were, from the outside in.

My aim is to sketch the outlines of a different view, to be found in the philosophical tradition which flowers in Aristotle's ethics. According to this different view, although the point of engaging in ethical reflection still lies in the interest of the question "How should one live?",[1] that question is necessarily approached *via* the notion of a virtuous person. A conception of right conduct is grasped, as it were, from the inside out.

2. I shall begin with some considerations which make it attractive to say, with Socrates, that virtue is knowledge.

What is it for someone to possess a virtue? "Knowledge" implies that he gets things right; if we are to go any distance towards finding plausibility in the Socratic thesis, it is necessary to start with examples whose status as virtues, and hence as states of character whose possessor arrives at right answers to a certain range of questions about how to behave, is not likely to be queried. I shall use the example of kindness; anyone who disputes its claim to be a virtue should substitute a better example of his own. (The objectivity which "knowledge" implies will recur later.)

A kind person can be relied on to behave kindly when that is what the situation requires. Moreover, his reliably kind behaviour is not the outcome of a blind, non-rational habit or instinct, like the courageous behaviour—so called only by courtesy—of a lioness defending her cubs.[2] Rather, that the situation requires a certain sort of behaviour is (one way of formulating) his reason for behaving in that way, on each of the relevant occasions. So it must be something of which, on each of the relevant occasions, he is aware. A kind person has a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situa-

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tions impose on behaviour. The deliverances of a reliable sensitivity are cases of knowledge; and there are idioms according to which the sensitivity itself can appropriately be described as knowledge: a kind person knows what it is like to be confronted with a requirement of kindness. The sensitivity is, we might say, a sort of perceptual capacity.[3]

(Of course a kind person need not himself classify the behaviour he sees to be called for, on one of the relevant occasions, as kind. He need not be articulate enough to possess concepts of the particular virtues; and even if he does, the concepts need not enter his reasons for the actions which manifest those particular virtues. It is enough if he thinks of what he does, when—as we put it—he shows himself to be kind, under some such description as "the thing to do." The description need not differ from that under which he thinks of other actions of his, which we regard as manifesting different virtues; the division into actions which manifest kindness and actions which manifest other virtues can be imposed, not by the agent himself, but by a possibly more articulate, and more theoretically oriented, observer.)

The considerations adduced so far suggest that the knowledge constituted by the reliable sensitivity is a necessary condition for possession of the virtue. But they do not show that the knowledge is, as in the Socratic thesis, to be identified with the virtue. A preliminary case for the identification might go as follows. On each of the relevant occasions, the requirement imposed by the situation, and detected by the agent's sensitivity to such requirements, must exhaust his reason for acting as he does. It would disqualify an action from counting as a manifestation of kindness if its agent needed some extraneous incentive to compliance with the requirement—say, the rewards of a good reputation. So the deliverances of his sensitivity constitute, one by one, complete explanations of the actions which manifest the virtue. Hence, since the sensitivity fully accounts for its deliverances, the sensitivity fully accounts for the actions. But the concept of the virtue is the concept of a state whose possession accounts for the actions which manifest it. Since that explanatory role is filled by the sensitivity, the sensitivity turns out to be what the virtue is.[4]

That is a preliminary case for the identification of particular virtues with, as it were, specialized sensitivities to requirements. *Mutatis mutandis*, a similar argument applies to virtue in general. Indeed, in the context of another Socratic thesis, that of the unity of virtue, virtue in general is what the argument for identification with knowledge really concerns; the specialized sensitivities which are to be equated with particular virtues, according to the argument considered so far, are actually not available one by one for a series of separate identifications.

What makes this plausible is the attractive idea that a virtue issues in nothing but right conduct. Suppose the relevant range of behaviour, in the

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case of kindness, is marked out by the notion of proper attentiveness to others' feelings. Now sometimes acting in such a way as to indulge someone's feelings is not acting rightly: the morally important fact about the situation is not that A will be upset by a projected action (though he will), but, say, that B has a right—a consideration of a sort sensitivity to which might be thought of as constituting fairness. In such a case, a straightforward propensity to be gentle to others' feelings would not lead to right conduct. If a genuine virtue is to produce nothing but right conduct, a simple propensity to be gentle cannot be identified with the virtue of kindness. Possession of the virtue must involve not only sensitivity to facts about others' feelings as reasons for acting in certain ways, but also sensitivity to facts about rights as reasons for acting in certain ways; and when circumstances of both sorts obtain, and a circumstance of the second sort is the one that should be acted on, a possessor of the virtue of kindness must be able to tell that that is so.[5] So we cannot disentangle genuine possession of kindness from the sensitivity which constitutes fairness. And since there are obviously no limits on the possibilities for compresence, in the same situation, of circumstances of the sorts proper sensitivities to which constitute all the virtues, the argument can be generalized: no one virtue can be fully possessed except by a possessor of all of them, that is, a possessor of virtue in general. Thus the particular virtues are not a batch of independent sensitivities. Rather, we use the concepts of the particular virtues to mark similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a single sensitivity which is what virtue, in general, is: an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one's behaviour. It is a single complex sensitivity of this sort which we are aiming to instil when we aim to inculcate a moral outlook.

3. There is an apparent obstacle to the identification of virtue with knowledge. The argument for the identification requires that the deliverances of the sensitivity—the particular pieces of knowledge with which it equips its possessor—should fully explain the actions which manifest virtue. But it is plausible that appropriate action need not be elicited by a consideration apprehended as a reason—even a conclusive reason—for acting in a certain way. That may seem to open the following possibility: a person's perception of a situation may precisely match what a virtuous person's perception of it would be, although he does not act as the virtuous person would. But if a perception which corresponds to the virtuous person's does not call forth a virtuous action from this non-virtuous person, then the virtuous person's matching perception—the deliverance of his sensitivity—cannot, after all, fully account for the virtuous action which it does elicit from him. Whatever is missing, in the case of the person who does not act virtuously, must be present as an extra component, over and above the deliverance of the sensitivity,

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in a complete specification of the reason why the virtuous person acts as he does.[6] That destroys the identification of virtue with the sensitivity. According to this line of argument, the sensitivity can be at most an ingredient in a composite state which is what virtue really is.

If we are to retain the identification of virtue with knowledge, then, by contraposition, we are committed to denying that a virtuous person's perception of a situation can be precisely matched in someone who, in that situation, acts otherwise than virtuously. Socrates seems to have supposed that the only way to embrace this commitment is in terms of ignorance, so that, paradoxically, failure to act as a virtuous person would cannot be voluntary, at least under that description. But there is a less extreme possibility, sketched by Aristotle.[7] This is to allow that someone who fails to act virtuously may, in a way, perceive what a virtuous person would, so that his failure to do the right thing is not inadvertent; but to insist that his failure occurs only because his appreciation of what he perceives is clouded, or unfocused, by the impact of a desire to do otherwise. This preserves the identification of virtue with a sensitivity; contrary to the counter-argument, nothing over and above the unclouded deliverances of the sensitivity is needed to explain the actions which manifest virtue. It is not that some extra explanatory factor, over and above the deliverances of the sensitivity, conspires with them to elicit action from the virtuous person, but rather that the other person's failure to act in that way is accounted for by a defectiveness in the approximations to those deliverances which he has.

It would be a mistake to protest that one can fail to act on a reason, and even on a reason judged by oneself to be better than any reason which one has for acting otherwise, without there needing to be any clouding or distortion in one's appreciation of the reason which one flouts.[8] That is true; but to suppose it constitutes an objection to Aristotle is to fail to understand the special nature of the conception of virtue which generates Aristotle's interest in incontinence.

One way to bring out the special nature of the conception is to note that, for Aristotle, continence is distinct from virtue, and just as problematic as incontinence. If someone needs to overcome an inclination to act otherwise, in getting himself to act as, say, temperance or courage demand, then he shows not virtue but (mere) continence. Suppose we take it that a virtuous person's judgment as to what he should do is arrived at by weighing, on the one side, some reason for acting in a way that will in fact manifest, say, courage, and, on the other side, a reason for doing something else (say a risk to life and limb, as a reason for running away), and deciding that on balance the former reason is the better. In that case, the distinction between virtue and continence will seem unintelligible. If the virtuous person allows himself to weigh

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the present danger, as a reason for running away, why should we not picture the weighing as his allowing himself to feel an inclination to run away, of a strength proportional to the weight which he allows to the reason? So long as he keeps the strength of his inclinations in line with the weight which he assigns to the reasons, his actions will conform to his judgment as to where, on balance, the better reason lies; what more can we require for virtue? (Perhaps that the genuinely courageous person simply does not care about his own survival? But Aristotle is rightly anxious to avert this misconception.[9]) The distinction becomes intelligible if we stop assuming that the virtuous person's judgment is a balancing of reasons for and against. The view of a situation which he arrives at by exercising his sensitivity is one in which some aspect of the situation is seen as constituting a reason for acting in some way; this reason is apprehended, not as outweighing or overriding any reasons for acting in other ways which would otherwise be constituted by other aspects of the situation (the present danger, say), but as silencing them. Here and now the risk to life and limb is not seen as any reason for removing himself. Aristotle's problem about incontinence is not "How can one weigh considerations in favour of actions X and Y, decide that on balance the better reasons are in favour of X, but nevertheless perform Y?" (a question which, no doubt, does not require the idea of clouded judgment for its answer); but rather (a problem equally about continence) "How can one have a view of a situation in which considerations which would otherwise appeal to one's will are silenced, but nevertheless allow those considerations to make themselves heard by one's will?"—a question which clearly is answerable, if at all, only by supposing that the incontinent or continent person does not fully share the virtuous person's perception of the situation.[10]

A more pressing objection is directed against the special conception of virtue: in particular, the use of cognitive notions in characterizing it. According to this objection, it must be a misuse of the notion of perception to suppose that an unclouded perception might suffice, on its own, to constitute a reason for acting in a certain way. An exercise of a genuinely cognitive capacity can yield at most part of a reason for acting; something appetitive is needed as well. To talk of virtue—a propensity to act in certain ways for certain reasons—as consisting in a sensitivity, a perceptual capacity, is to amalgamate the required appetitive component into the putative sensitivity. But all that is achieved thereby is a projection of human purposes into the world. (Here it becomes apparent how the objection touches on the issue of objectivity.) How one's will is disposed is a fact about oneself; whereas a genuinely cognitive faculty discloses to one how the world is independently of oneself, and in particular independently of one's will. Cognition and volition are distinct: the world—the proper sphere of cognitive capacities—is in itself

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an object of purely theoretical contemplation, capable of moving one to action only in conjunction with an extra factor—a state of will—contributed by oneself. I shall return to this objection.

4. Presented with an identification of virtue with knowledge, it is natural to ask for a formulation of the knowledge which virtue is. We tend to assume that the knowledge must have a stateable propositional content (perhaps not capable of immediate expression by the knower). Then the virtuous person's reliably right judgments as to what he should do, occasion by occasion, can be explained in terms of interaction between this universal knowledge and some appropriate piece of particular knowledge about the situation at hand; and the explanation can take the form of a "practical syllogism," with the content of the universal knowledge, or some suitable part of it, as major premiss, the relevant particular knowledge as minor premiss, and the judgment about what is to be done as deductive conclusion.

This picture is congenial to the objection mentioned at the end of §3. According to this picture, the problematic concept of a requirement figures only in the major premiss, and the conclusion, of the syllogism which reconstructs the virtuous person's reason for acting. Knowledge of the major premiss, the objector might say, is none other than the disposition of the will which is required, according to the objection, as a further component in the relevant reasons for acting, and hence as a further component in virtue, over and above any strictly cognitive state. (We call it "knowledge" to endorse it, not to indicate that it is genuinely cognitive.) What a virtuous person really perceives is only what is stated in the minor premiss of the syllogism: that is, a straightforward fact about the situation at hand, which—as the objection requires—would be incapable of eliciting action on its own.

This picture fits only if the virtuous person's views about how, in general, one should behave are susceptible of codification, in principles apt for serving as major premisses in syllogisms of the sort envisaged. But to an unprejudiced eye it should seem quite implausible that any reasonably adult moral outlook admits of any such codification. As Aristotle consistently says, the best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part.[11] If one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong—and not necessarily because one had changed one's mind; rather, one's mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula.[12]

A deep-rooted prejudice about rationality blocks ready acceptance of this. A moral outlook is a specific determination of one's practical rationality: it shapes one's views about what reasons one has for acting.

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Rationality requires consistency; a specific conception of rationality in a particular area imposes a specific form on the abstract requirement of consistency—a specific view of what counts as going on doing the same thing here. The prejudice is the idea that acting in the light of a specific conception of rationality must be explicable in terms of being guided by a formulable universal principle. This prejudice comes under radical attack in Wittgenstein's discussion, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, of the concept of following a rule.

Consider an exercise of rationality in which there *is* a formulable rule, of which each successive action can be regarded as an application, appropriate in the circumstances arrived at: say (Wittgenstein's example) the extending of a series of numbers. We tend to picture the understanding of the instruction "Add 2"—command of the rule for extending the series 2,4,6,8, . . .—as a psychological mechanism which, aside from lapses of attention and so forth, churns out the appropriate behaviour with the sort of reliability which a physical mechanism, say a piece of clockwork, might have. If someone is extending the series correctly, and one takes his behaviour to be compliance with the understood instruction, then, according to this picture, one has postulated such a psychological mechanism, underlying his behaviour, by an inference analogous to that whereby one might hypothesize a physical structure underlying the observable motions of some inanimate object. But this picture is profoundly suspect.

What manifests the pictured state of understanding? Suppose the person says, when asked what he is doing, "Look, I'm adding 2 each time." This apparent manifestation of understanding (or any other) will have been accompanied, at any point, by at most a finite fragment of the potentially infinite range of behaviour which we want to say the rule dictates. Thus the evidence for the presence of the pictured state is always compatible with the supposition that, on some future occasion for its exercise, the behaviour elicited by the occasion will diverge from what we would count as correct. Wittgenstein dramatizes this with the example of the man who continues the series, after 1000, with 1004, 1008, . . .[13] If a possibility of the 1004, 1008, . . . type were to be realized (and we could not bring the person to concede that he had simply made a mistake), that would show that the behaviour hitherto was not guided by the psychological conformation which we were picturing as guiding it. The pictured state, then, always transcends the grounds on which it is allegedly postulated.

There may be an inclination to protest: "This is merely inductive scepticism about other minds. After all, one knows in one's own case that one's behaviour will not come adrift like that." But this misses the point of the argument.

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First, if what it is for one's behaviour to come adrift is for it suddenly to seem that everyone else is out of step, then clearly the argument bears on one's own case just as much as on the case of others. (Imagine that the person who goes on with 1004, 1008, . . . had said, in advance, "I know in my own case that my behaviour will not come adrift.")

Second, it is a mistake to interpret the argument as making a sceptical point: that one does not know, in the case of another person (or in one's own case either, once we have made the first correction), that the behaviour will not come adrift. The argument is not meant to suggest that we should be in a state of constant trepidation lest possibilities of the 1004, 1008, . . . type be realized.[14] We are confident that they will not: the argument aims, not at all to undermine this confidence, but to change our conception of its ground and nature. We tend to picture our transition to this confident expectation, from such grounds as we have, as being mediated by the postulated psychological mechanism. But we can no more find the putatively mediating state manifested in the grounds for our expectation than we can find manifested there the very future occurrences we expect. Postulation of the mediating state is an idle intervening step; it does nothing to underwrite the confidence of the expectation.

(The content of the expectation is not purely behavioural. We might have a good scientific argument, mediated by postulation of a physiological mechanism, for not expecting any particular train of behaviour, of the 1004, 1008, . . . type, which we might contemplate. Here postulation of the mediating physiological state would not be an idle intervening step. But the parallel is misleading. We can bring this out by considering a variant of Wittgenstein's example, in which, on reaching 1000, the person goes on as we expect, with 1002, 1004, . . . , but with a sense of dissociation from what he is doing. What he does no longer strikes him as going on in the same way; it feels as if a sheer habit has usurped his reason in controlling his behaviour. We confidently expect that this sort of thing will not happen; once again, postulation of a psychological mechanism does nothing to underwrite this confidence.)

What *is* the ground and nature of our confidence? About the competent use of words, Stanley Cavell writes:

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls

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> "forms of life." Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying.[15]

The terror of which Cavell speaks at the end of this marvellous passage is a sort of vertigo, induced by the thought that there is nothing but shared forms of life to keep us, as it were, on the rails. We are inclined to think that that is an insufficient foundation for a conviction that when we, say, extend a number series, we really are, at each stage, doing the same thing as before. In this mood, it seems to us that what Cavell describes cannot be a shared conceptual framework within which something is, given the circumstances, objectively the correct move;[16] it looks, rather, like a congruence of subjectivities, with the congruence not grounded as it would need to be to amount to an objectivity. So we feel we have lost the objectivity of (in our case) mathematics (and similarly in other cases). We recoil from this vertigo into the idea that we are kept on the rails by our grasp of rules. This idea has a pair of twin components: first, the idea (as above) that grasp of the rules is a psychological mechanism which (apart from mechanical failure, which is how we picture mistakes and so forth) guarantees that we stay in the straight and narrow; and, second, the idea that the rails—what we engage our mental wheels with when we come to grasp the rules—are objectively there, in a way which transcends the "mere" sharing of forms of life (hence, for instance, platonism about numbers). This composite idea is not the perception of some truth, but a consoling myth, elicited from us by our inability to endure the vertigo.

Of course, this casts no doubt on the possibility of putting explanations of particular moves, in the extending of a number series, in a syllogistic form: universal knowledge of how to extend the series interacts with particular knowledge of where one is in it, to produce a non-accidentally correct judgment as to what the next number is. In this case we can formulate the explanation so as to confer on the judgment explained the compellingness possessed by the conclusion of a proof. What is wrong is to take that fact to indicate that the explanation lays bare the inexorable workings of a machine: something whose operations, with our understanding of them, would not depend on the deliverances, in particular cases, of (for instance, and centrally) that shared sense of what is similar to what else which Cavell mentions. The truth is that it is only because of our own involvement in our "whirl of organism" that we can understand the words we produce as conferring that special compellingness on the judgment explained.

Now it is only this misconception of the deductive paradigm which leads us to suppose that the operations of any specific conception of rationality in a particular area—any specific conception of what counts as doing the same thing—must be deductively explicable; that is, that there must be a for-

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mulable universal principle suited to serve as major premiss in syllogistic explanations of the sort considered above.

Consider, for instance, a concept whose application gives rise to hard cases, in this sense: there are disagreements which resist resolution by argument, as to whether or not the concept applies. Convinced that one is in the right on a hard case, one will find oneself saying, as one's arguments tail off without securing assent, "You simply aren't seeing it," or "But don't you see?" In such cases the prejudice takes the form of a dilemma. One horn is that the inconclusiveness of one's arguments stems merely from an inability, in principle remediable, to articulate what one knows. It is possible, in principle, to spell out a universal formula which specifies the conditions under which the concept, in that use of it which one has mastered, is correctly applied. That would elevate one's argument to deductiveness. (If one's opponent refused to accept the deductive argument's major premiss, that would show that he had not mastered the same use of the concept, so that there would be, after all, no substantive disagreement.) If this assimilation to the deductive paradigm is not possible, then—this is the other horn of the dilemma—one's conviction that one is genuinely making a correct application of a concept (genuinely going on in the same way as before) must be an illusion. The case is revealed as one which calls, not for finding (seeing) the right answer to a question about how things are, but (perhaps) for a creative decision as to what to say.[17] Thus: either the case is not really a hard case, since sufficient ingenuity in the construction of arguments will resolve it; or, if its hardness is ineliminable, that shows that the issue cannot, after all, be one about whether an application of a concept is correct.

In a hard case, the issue turns on that appreciation of the particular instance whose absence is deplored, in "You simply aren't seeing it," or which is unsuccessfully appealed to, in "But don't you see?" The dilemma reflects the view that a putative judgment which is grounded in nothing firmer than that cannot really be going on in the same way as before. This is an avoidance of vertigo. The thought is: there is not enough there to constitute the rails on which a genuine series of consistent applications of a concept must run. But in fact it is an illusion to suppose that the first horn of the dilemma yields a way of preserving from risk of vertigo the conviction that we are dealing with genuine concept-application. The illusion is the misconception of the deductive paradigm: the idea that deductive explicability characterizes an exercise of reason in which it is, as it were, automatically compelling, without dependence on our partially shared "whirl of organism." The dilemma registers a refusal to accept that when the dependence which induces vertigo is out in the open, in the appeal to appreciation, we can genuinely be going on in the same way; but the paradigm of a genuine case, that with which the re-

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jected case is unfavourably compared, has the same dependence, only less obviously.[18]

Contemplating the dependence should not induce vertigo at all. We cannot be whole-heartedly engaged in the relevant parts of the "whirl of organism," and at the same time achieve the detachment necessary in order to query whether our unreflective view of what we are doing is illusory. The cure for the vertigo, then, is to give up the idea that philosophical thought, about the sorts of practice in question, should be undertaken at some external standpoint, outside our immersion in our familiar forms of life.[19] If this cure works where explanations of exercises of rationality conform to the deductive paradigm, it should be no less efficacious where we explicitly appeal to appreciation of the particular instance in inviting acceptance of our judgments. And its efficacy in cases of the second kind is direct. Only the illusion that the deductive cases are immune can make it seem that, in order to effect the cure in cases of the second kind, we must first eliminate explicit dependence on appreciation, by assimilating them, as the prejudice requires, to the deductive paradigm.

If we make the assimilation, we adopt a position in which it is especially clear that our picture of a psychological mechanism, underlying a series of exercises of rationality, is a picture of something which transcends the grounds on which it is ascribed to anyone. In the cases in question, no one can express the envisaged universal formula. This transcendence poses difficulties about the acquisition of the pictured state. We are inclined to be impressed by the sparseness of the teaching which leaves someone capable of autonomously going on in the same way. All that happens is that the pupil is told, or shown, what to do in a few instances, with some surrounding talk about why that is the thing to do; the surrounding talk, *ex hypothesi* given that we are dealing with a case of the second kind, falls short of including actual enunciation of a universal principle, mechanical application of which would constitute correct behaviour in the practice in question. Yet pupils do acquire a capacity to go on, without further advice, to novel instances. Impressed by the sparseness of the teaching, we find this remarkable. But assimilation to the deductive paradigm leaves it no less remarkable. The assimilation replaces the question "How is it that the pupil, given that sparse instruction, goes on to new instances in the right way?" with the question "How is it that the pupil, given that sparse instruction, divines from it a universal formula with the right deductive powers?" The second question is, if anything, less tractable. Addressing the first, we can say: it is a fact (no doubt a remarkable fact) that, against a background of common human nature and shared forms of life, one's sensitivities to kinds of similarities between situations can be altered and enriched by just this sort of instruction. This attributes no guess-

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work to the learner; whereas no amount of appealing to common human nature and shared forms of life will free the second question from its presupposition—inevitably imported by assimilation to the deductive—that the learner is required to make a leap of divination.[20]

It is not to be supposed that the appreciation of the particular instance, explicitly appealed to in the second kind of case, is a straightforward or easy attainment on the part of those who have it; that either, on casual contemplation of an instance, one sees it in the right light, or else one does not, and is then unreachable by argument. First, "Don't you see?" can often be supplemented with words aimed at persuasion. A skilfully presented characterization of an instance will sometimes bring someone to see it as one wants; or one can adduce general considerations, for instance about the point of the concept a particular application of which is in dispute. Given that the case is one of the second kind, any such arguments will fall short of rationally necessitating acceptance of their conclusion in the way a proof does.[21] But it is only the prejudice I am attacking which makes this seem to cast doubt on their status as arguments: that is, appeals to reason. Second, if effort can induce the needed appreciation in someone else, it can also take effort to acquire it oneself. Admitting the dependence on appreciation does not imply that, if someone has the sort of specific determination of rationality we are considering, the right way to handle a given situation will always be clear to him on unreflective inspection of it.

5. If we resist the prejudice, and respect Aristotle's belief that a view of how one should live is not codifiable, what happens to our explanations of a virtuous person's reliably right judgments as to what he should do on particular occasions? Aristotle's notion of the practical syllogism is obviously meant to apply here; we need to consider how.

The explanations, so far treated as explanations of judgments about what to do, are equally explanations of actions. The point of analogy which motivates the quasi-logical label "practical syllogism" is this. If something might serve as an argument for a theoretical conclusion, then it can equally figure in an account of someone's reasons for believing that conclusion, with the premisses of the argument giving the content of the psychological states—beliefs, in the theoretical case—which we cite in the reason-giving explanation. Now actions too are explained by reasons; that is, by citing psychological states in the light of which we can see how acting in the way explained would have struck the agent as in some way rational. The idea of a practical syllogism is the idea of an argument-like schema for explanations of actions, with the "premisses," as in the theoretical case, giving the content of the psychological states cited in the explanation.[22]

David Wiggins has given this account of the general shape of a practical syllogism:

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> The first or major premiss mentions something of which there could be a desire, *orexis*, transmissible to some practical conclusion (i.e., a desire convertible *via* some available minor premiss into an action). The second premiss pertains to the feasibility in the particular situation to which the syllogism is applied of what must be done if the claim of the major premiss is to be heeded.[23]

This schema fits most straightforwardly when reasons are (in a broad sense) technical: the major premiss specifies a determinate goal, and the minor premiss marks out some action as a means to it.[24]

The role played by the major premiss, in these straightforward applications of the schema, is to give the content of an orectic psychological state: something we might conceive as providing the motivating energy for the actions explained. Aristotle's idea seems to be that what fills an analogous role in the explanation of virtuous actions is the virtuous person's conception of the sort of life a human being should lead.[25] If that conception were codifiable in universal principles, the explanations would take the deductive shape insisted on by the prejudice discussed in §4. But the thesis of uncodifiability means that the envisaged major premiss, in a virtue syllogism, cannot be definitively written down.[26] Any attempt to capture it in words will recapitulate the character of the teaching whereby it might be instilled: generalizations will be approximate at best, and examples will need to be taken with the sort of "and so on" which appeals to the cooperation of a hearer who has cottoned on.[27]

If someone guides his life by a certain conception of how to live, then he acts, on particular occasions, so as to fulfil suitable concerns.[28] A concern can mesh with a noticed fact about a situation, so as to account for an action: as, for instance, a concern for the welfare of one's friends, together with awareness that a friend is in trouble and open to being comforted, can explain missing a pleasant party in order to talk to the friend. On a suitable occasion, that pair of psychological states might constitute the core of a satisfying explanation of an action which is in fact virtuous. Nothing more need be mentioned for the action to have been given a completely intelligible motivation. In Aristotle's view, the orectic state cited in an explanation of a virtuous action is the agent's entire conception of how to live, rather than just whatever concern it happened to be; and this may now seem mysterious. But the core explanation, as so far envisaged, lacks any indication that the action explained conformed to the agent's conception of how to live. The core explanation would apply equally to a case of helping one's friend because one thought it was, in the circumstances, the thing to do, and to a case of helping one's friend in spite of thinking it was not, in the circumstances, the thing to do.

A conception of how one should live is not simply an unorganized collection of propensities to act, on this or that occasion, in pursuit of this or that concern. Sometimes there are several concerns, fulfilment of any one of which might, on a suitable occasion, constitute acting as a certain conception

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of how to live would dictate, and each of which, on the occasion at hand, is capable of engaging with a known fact about the situation and issuing in action. Acting in the light of a conception of how to live requires selecting and acting on the right concern. (Compare the end of §1, on the unity of virtue.) So if an action whose motivation is spelled out in our core explanation is a manifestation of virtue, more must be true of its agent than just that on this occasion he acted with that motivation. The core explanation must at least be seen against the background of the agent's conception of how to live; and if the situation is one of those on which any of several concerns might impinge, the conception of how to live must be capable of actually entering our understanding of the action, explaining why it was this concern rather than any other which was drawn into operation.

How does it enter? If the conception of how to live involved a ranking of concerns, or perhaps a set of rankings each relativized to some type of situation, the explanation of why one concern was operative rather than another would be straightforward. But uncodifiability rules out laying down such general rankings in advance of all the predicaments with which life may confront one.

What I have described as selecting the right concern might equally be described in terms of the minor premiss of the core explanation. If there is more than one concern which might impinge on the situation, there is more than one fact about the situation which the agent might, say, dwell on, in such a way as to summon an appropriate concern into operation. It is by virtue of his seeing this particular fact rather than that one as the salient fact about the situation that he is moved to act by this concern rather than that one.[29] This perception of saliences is the shape taken here by the appreciation of particular cases which I discussed in §5: something to which the uncodifiability of an exercise of rationality sometimes compels explicit appeal when we aim to represent actions as instances of it. A conception of how to live shows itself, when more than one concern might issue in action, in one's seeing, or being able to be brought to see, one fact rather than another as salient. And our understanding of such a conception enters into our understanding of actions—the supplementation which the core explanation needs—by enabling us to share, or at least comprehend, the agent's perception of saliences.[30]

It is not wrong to think of the virtuous person's judgments about what to do, or his actions, as explicable by interaction between knowledge of how to live and particular knowledge about the situation at hand. (Compare the beginning of §4.) But the thought needs a more subtle construal than the deductive paradigm allows. With the core explanations and their supplementations, I have in effect been treating the complete explanations as coming in two stages. It is at the first stage—hitherto the supplementation—that knowledge of how to live interacts with particular knowledge: knowledge,

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namely, of all the particular facts capable of engaging with concerns whose fulfilment would, on occasion, be virtuous. This interaction yields, in a way essentially dependent on appreciation of the particular case, a view of the situation with one such fact, as it were, in the foreground. Seen as salient, that fact serves, at the second stage, as minor premiss in a core explanation.[31]

6. We can go back now to the non-cognitivist objection outlined at the end of §3. Awareness that one's friend is in trouble and open to being comforted—the psychological state whose content is the minor premiss of our core explanation—can perhaps, for the sake of argument, be conceded to be the sort of thing which the objection insists cognitive states must be: something capable of eliciting action only in conjunction with a non-cognitive state, namely, in our example, a concern for one's friends.[32] But if someone takes that fact to be the salient fact about the situation, he is in a psychological state which is essentially practical. The relevant notion of salience cannot be understood except in terms of seeing something as a reason for acting which silences all others (compare §3). So classifying that state as a cognitive state is just the sort of thing which the objection attacks.

The most natural way to press the objection is to insist on purifying the content of what is genuinely known down to something which is, in itself, motivationally inert (namely, given the concession above, that one's friend is in trouble and open to being comforted); and then to represent the "perception" of a salience as an amalgam of the purified awareness with an additional appetitive state. But what appetitive state? Concern for one's friends yields only the core explanation, not the explanation in which the "perception" of salience was to figure. Perhaps the conception of how to live? That is certainly an orectic state. But, given the thesis of uncodifiability, it is not intelligible independently of just such appreciation of particular situations as is involved in the present "perception" of a salience; so it is not suitable to serve as an element into which, together with some genuine awareness, the "perception" could be regarded as analysable. (This non-cognitivist strategy is reflected in assimilation to the deductive paradigm: that the assimilation is congenial to the non-cognitivist objection was noted early in §4. The failure of the strategy is reflected in the failure of the assimilation, given the thesis of uncodifiability.)

If we feel the vertigo discussed in §4, it is out of distaste for the idea that a manifestation of reason might be recognizable as such only from within the practice whose status is in question. We are inclined to think there ought to be a neutral external standpoint from which the rationality of any genuine exercise of reason could be demonstrated. Now we might understand the objection to be demanding a non-cognitive extra which would be analogous to hunger: an appetitive state whose possession by anyone is intelligible in its

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own right, not itself open to assessment as rational or irrational, but conferring an obvious rationality, recognizable from outside, on behaviour engaged in with a view to its gratification. In that case it is clear how the objection is an expression of the craving for a kind of rationality independently demonstrable as such. However, it is highly implausible that all the concerns which motivate virtuous actions are intelligible, one by one, independently of appreciating a virtuous person's distinctive way of seeing situations. And even if they were, the various particular concerns figure only in the core explanations. We do not fully understand a virtuous person's actions—we do not see the consistency in them—unless we can supplement the core explanations with a grasp of his conception of how to live. And though this is to credit him with an orectic state, it is not to credit him with an externally intelligible over-arching desire; for we cannot understand the content of the orectic state from the envisaged external standpoint. It is, rather, to comprehend, essentially from within, the virtuous person's distinctive way of viewing particular situations.[33]

The rationality of virtue, then, is not demonstrable from an external standpoint. But to suppose that it ought to be is only a version of the prejudice discussed in §4. It is only an illusion that our paradigm of reason, deductive argument, has its rationality discernible from a standpoint not necessarily located within the practice itself.

7. Although perceptions of saliences resist decomposition into "pure" awareness together with appetitive states, there is an inclination to insist, nevertheless, that they cannot be genuinely cognitive states. We can be got into a cast of mind in which—as it seems to us—we have these problematic perceptions, only because we can be brought to care about certain things; hence, ultimately, only because of certain antecedent facts about our emotional and appetitive make-up. This can seem to justify a more subtle non-cognitivism: one which abandons the claim that the problematic perceptions can be analysed into cognitive and appetitive components, but insists that, because of the anthropocentricity of the conceptual apparatus involved, they are not judgments, true or false, as to how things are in an independent reality; and that is what cognitive states are.[34]

I cannot tackle this subtle non-cognitivism properly now. I suspect that its origin is a philistine scientism, probably based on the misleading idea that the right of scientific method to rational acceptance is discernible from a more objective standpoint than that from which we seem to perceive the saliences. A scientistic conception of reality is eminently open to dispute. When we ask the metaphysical question whether reality is what science can find out about, we cannot, without begging the question, restrict the materials for an answer to those which science can countenance. Let the question be an

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empirical question, by all means; but the empirical data which would be collected by a careful and sensitive moral phenomenology—no doubt not a scientific enterprise—are handled quite unsatisfyingly by non-cognitivism.[35]

It would be a mistake to object that stress on appreciation of the particular, and the absence of a decision procedure, encourages everyone to pontificate about particular cases. In fact resistance to non-cognitivism, about the perception of saliences, recommends humility. If we resist non-cognitivism, we can equate the conceptual equipment which forms the framework of anything recognizable as a moral outlook with a capacity to be impressed by certain aspects of reality. But ethical reality is immensely difficult to see clearly. (Compare the end of §4.) If we are aware of how, for instance, selfish fantasy distorts our vision, we shall not be inclined to be confident that we have got things right.[36]

It seems plausible that Plato's ethical Forms are, in part at least, a response to uncodifiability: if one cannot formulate what someone has come to know when he cottons on to a practice, say one of concept-application, it is natural to say that he has seen something. Now in the passage quoted in §4, Cavell mentions two ways of avoiding vertigo: "the grasping of universals" as well as what we have been concerned with so far, "the grasping of books of rules." But though Plato's Forms are a myth, they are not a consolation, a mere avoidance of vertigo; vision of them is portrayed as too difficult an attainment for that to be so. The remoteness of the Form of the Good is a metaphorical version of the thesis that value is not in the world, utterly distinct from the dreary literal version which has obsessed recent moral philosophy. The point of the metaphor is the colossal difficulty of attaining a capacity to cope clear-sightedly with the ethical reality which *is* part of our world. Unlike other philosophical responses to uncodifiability, this one may actually work towards moral improvement; negatively, by inducing humility, and positively, by an inspiring effect akin to that of a religious conversion.[37]

8. If the question "How should one live?" could be given a direct answer in universal terms, the concept of virtue would have only a secondary place in moral philosophy. But the thesis of uncodifiability excludes a head-on approach to the question whose urgency gives ethics its interest. Occasion by occasion, one knows what to do, if one does, not by applying universal principles but by being a certain kind of person: one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way. And there is no dislodging, from the central position they occupy in the ethical reflection of Plato and Aristotle, questions about the nature and (hardly discussed in this paper) the acquisition of virtue.

It is sometimes complained that Aristotle does not attempt to outline a decision procedure for questions about how to behave. But we have good reason to be suspicious of the assumption that there must be something to be

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found along the route he does not follow.[38] And there is plenty for us to do in the area of philosophy of mind where his different approach locates ethics.

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NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth cited as *NE*), e.g., 1103b 26–31; cf. Plato, *Republic* 352d 5–6.

2. Cf. *NE* VI. 13 on the distinction between "natural virtue" and "virtue strictly so called."

3. Non-cognitivist objections to this sort of talk will be considered later.

4. There is a gap here. Even if it is conceded that the virtuous person has no further *reason* for what he does than the deliverance of his sensitivity, still, it may be said, two people can have the same reason for acting in a certain way, but only one of them act in that way. There must then be some further *explanation* of this difference between them: if not that the one who acts has a further reason, then perhaps that the one who does not is in some state, standing or temporary, which undermines the efficacy of reasons, or perhaps of reasons of the particular kind in question, in producing action. This suggests that if we are to think of virtue as guaranteeing action, virtue must consist not in the sensitivity alone but in the sensitivity together with freedom from such obstructive states. These issues recur in §3 below.

5. I do not mean to suggest that there is always a way of acting satisfactorily (as opposed to making the best of a bad job); nor that there is always one right answer to the question what one should do. But when there is a right answer, a virtuous person should be able to tell what it is.

6. If we distinguish the reason why he acts from his reason for acting, this is the objection of n4 above.

7. *NE* VII. 3.

8. Cf. Donald Davidson, "How is Weakness of Will Possible?," in Joel Feinberg, ed., *Moral Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 93–113, at pp. 99–100.

9. *NE* III. 9.

10. On this view, genuine deliverances of the sensitivity involved in virtue would necessitate action. It is not that action requires not only a deliverance of the sensitivity but also, say, freedom from possibly obstructive factors, for instance distracting desires. An obstructive factor would not interfere with the efficacy of a deliverance of the sensitivity, but rather preclude genuine achievement of that view of the situation. This fills the gap mentioned in n4 above. (My discussion of incontinence here is meant to do no more than suggest that the identification of virtue with knowledge should not be dismissed out of hand, on the ground that it poses a problem about incontinence. I have said a little more in §§9, 10 of my "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 52 (1978), pp. 13–29; but a great deal more would be needed in a full treatment.)

11. See, e.g., *NE* I. 3.

12. See *NE* V. 10, especially 1137b 19–24.

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13. *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), §185.

14. Nor even that we really *understand* the supposition that such a thing might happen. See Barry Stroud, "Wittgenstein and Logical Necessity," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965), pp. 504–518.

15. *Must We Mean What We Say*? (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 52.

16. Locating the desired objectivity *within* the conceptual framework is intended to leave open, here, the possibility of querying whether the conceptual framework itself is objectively the right one. If someone wants to reject the question whether this rather than that moral outlook is objectively correct, he will still want it to be an objective matter whether one has, say, succeeded in inculcating a particular moral outlook in someone else; so he will still be susceptible to the vertigo I am describing.

17. Why not abandon the whole practice as fraudulent? In some cases something may need to be said: for instance by a judge, in a lawsuit. Against the view that in legal hard cases judges are free to *make* the law, see Ronald Dworkin, "Hard Cases," in *Taking Rights Seriously* (London: Duckworth, 1977), pp. 81–130.

18. In the rejected case, the dependence is out in the open in an especially perturbing form, in that the occasional failure of the appeal to appreciation brings out how the "whirl of organism" is only partly shared; whereas there are no hard cases in mathematics. This is indeed a significant fact about mathematics. But its significance is not that mathematics is immune from the dependence.

19. I am not suggesting that effecting this cure is a simple matter.

20. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, e.g., §210.

21. If general considerations recommend a universal formula, it will employ terms which themselves give rise to hard cases.

22. I distinguish practical reason from practical reasoning. From *NE* 1105a 28–33, with 1111a 15–16, it might seem that virtuous action, in Aristotle's view, must be the outcome of reasoning. But this doctrine is both incredible in itself and inconsistent with 1117a 17–22. So I construe Aristotle's discussion of deliberation as aimed at the reconstruction of reasons for action not necessarily thought out in advance; where they were not thought out in advance, the concept of deliberation applies in an "as if" style. See John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1975) pp. 5–10. (It will be apparent that what I say about Aristotle's views on practical reason runs counter to Cooper's interpretation at many points. I am less concerned here with what Aristotle actually thought than with certain philosophical issues; so I have not encumbered this paper with scholarly controversy.)

23. David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76 (1975–76): 29–51, at p. 40. The quoted passage is an explanation of Aristotle, *De Motu Animalium* 701a 9ff. My debt to Wiggins's paper will be apparent.

24. There is an inclination to insist on the only, or best, means. But this is the outcome of a suspect desire to have instances of the schema which *prove* that the action explained is the thing to do.

25. *NE* 1144a 31–33.

26. This is distinct from the claim that a person may at any stage be prone to change his mind (cf. §3 above). Wiggins (cited in n23 above) appears at some points to run the two claims together, no doubt because he is concerned with practical reason generally, and not, as I am, with the expression in action of a specific conception of how to live. The line between realizing that one's antecedent conception of how to live

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requires something which one had not previously seen it to require, on the one hand, and modifying one's conception of how to live, on the other, is not a sharp one. But I do not want to exploit cases most happily described in the second way.

27. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §208.

28. I borrow this excellent term from Wiggins (cited in n23 above), p. 43ff.

29. This use of "salient" follows Wiggins, p. 45.

30. On the importance of the appreciation of the particular case, see *NE* 1142a 23–30, 1143a 25–b5; discussed by Wiggins, cited in n23, pp. 46–49. (For the point of "or at least comprehend", see n33 below.)

31. That the interaction, at the first stage, is with *all* the potentially reason-yielding facts about the situation allows us to register that, in the case of, say, courage, the gravity of the risk, in comparison to the importance of the end to be achieved by facing it, makes a difference to whether virtue really does require facing the risk; even though at the second stage, if the risk is not seen as salient, it is seen as no reason at all for running away. I am indebted here to a version of Wiggin's (f) (cited in n23 above, p. 45), importantly modified for a revised excerpt from his paper in Joseph Raz, ed., *Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978).

32. Actually this is open to question, because of special properties of the concept of a friend.

33. The qualification "essentially" is to allow for the possibility of appreciating what it is like to be inside a way of thinking without actually being inside it, on the basis of a sufficient affinity between it and a way of thinking of one's own. These considerations about externally intelligible desires bear on Philippa Foot's thesis, in "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *Philosophical Review* 81 (1972), pp. 305–16, that morality should be construed, or recast, in terms of hypothetical imperatives, on pain of being fraudulent. Her negative arguments seem to me to be analogous to an exposé of the emptiness of platonism, as affording a foundation for mathematical practice external to the practice itself. In the mathematical case it is not a correct response to look for another external guarantee of the rationality of the practice, but that seems to me just what Mrs Foot's positive suggestion amounts to in the moral case. (If the desires are not externally intelligible the label "hypothetical imperative" loses its point.) See, further, my "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" cited in n10 above.

34. On anthropocentricity, see David Wiggins, "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 (1976), 331–78, at pp. 348–49, 360–63.

35. See Wiggins, cited in n34, above; and Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

36. Cf. Iris Murdoch, cited n35, above. I am indebted here to Mark Platts.

37. This view of Plato is beautifully elaborated by Iris Murdoch.

38. The idea, for instance, that something like utilitarianism *must* be right looks like a double avoidance of vertigo: first, in the thought that there must be a decision procedure; and second, in the reduction of practical rationality to the pursuit of neutrally intelligible desires.

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