Morality and Interest

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I

Among the miscellany of philosophical achievements bequeathed us by the Enlightenment is the account, worked out by Hobbes, Locke, Hume and others, of the conditions for the existence of the kind of civil or commercial association that depends upon contract. The theory of civil association has subsequently exercised the kind of fascination for moral philosophers that a highly successful theory is apt to exercise in any field of enquiry: it has, that is, both inspired later writers and to some extent restricted their horizons.

In particular, while other forms of relationship—friendship, family relationships, the relationships constituted by people's belonging to the same nation or profession or team, for instance—have been quite widely discussed by philosophers, such discussions have remained relatively marginal to moral and political philosophy. The theory of civil association, whether expressed as contractarianism or as utilitarianism, has provided English-speaking intellectual culture for the past three hundred years with a dominating paradigm of moral rationality. By contrast the kinds of relationship I mentioned a moment ago, and which I propose to lump roughly and provisionally together under the heading 'moral relationships'—a terminological move, as we shall see later, not without justification—have seemed to involve not rational commitment to moral principles but rather mere personal feeling: at best warmly natural and instinctive, at worst atavistic. I doubt myself whether the relationships described by the theory of civil association are the exclusive province and breeding ground of moral rationality, and for that matter whether such relationships as friendship or common nationality are wholly the province of warm but irrational feeling; and I shall try in this paper, among other things, to disturb this picture of things a little.

The theory of civil association requires what was in its time a radical shift from a theological to a naturalistic conception of the fundamental nature and function of morality. It requires us to think of a moral code not as an array of divinely sanctioned prohibitions, but as a device, instituted by human societies, for mediating conflicts of interest between individuals, natural or corporate, in such a way as to make for the greatest possible satisfaction of interests on the part of all parties to

an association. The mediation of conflict and the global maximization of interest-satisfaction are not, of course, necessarily compatible objectives in all circumstances, which accounts for the existence of utilitarianism and contractarianism as more or less opposed wings of the tradition. Nevertheless it is clearly possible to summarize the main tenets of the theory of civil association in a way which abstracts from the dispute between utilitarians and contractarians, and which would, I suppose, in part go roughly as follows:

(1) Individuals, natural and corporate, possess interests which are definable without reference to the institutions created by association, though they may not be attainable or securely enjoyable except through the operation of those institutions.

(2) The pursuit by individuals of their separate and diverse interests is inherently productive of conflict.

(3) The object of association is to create institutional means of resolving conflicts of interest which operate ideally in such a way as to provide optimal conditions for the pursuit of interest-satisfaction on the part of each individual party to the association.

(4) The institutional means in question include both law and morality. Law and morality, though their spheres may be distinguished in other ways, do not differ in function. Both constitute systems of restraints upon the free pursuit by individuals of their interests, to be accepted only because without them the pursuit of interest would become more rather than less difficult and uncertain. Law and morality are not ends in themselves, and come to be treated as such (as in the case of what Hume called the *monkish virtues* of asceticism and self-denial) only when superstition and obscurantism lead us to forget the essentially instrumental character of moral principles and to invest them with a rationally unfounded aura of quasi-religious sanctity.

My object in making this partial circuit of familiar ground is merely to remind us of the way in which the theory of civil association treats the relationship between morality and interest. By promoting the idea that moral restraint must be accepted in order to secure the optimal satisfaction of interests, which is the ur-thought of contractarianism, it promotes the idea that what *morally justifies* an act is its tendency to optimize interest-satisfaction, which is the ur-thought of utilitarianism. By making the justification of moral claims relative to the satisfaction of interests it provoked the other major doctrinal schism in the moral philosophy of the Enlightenment, by eliciting from Kant an opposing treatment whose most salient claims are that morality presents us with

an array of non-instrumental, 'categorical' commands which take precedence over all extra-moral considerations, and that considerations of interest are *a fortiori* extra-moral considerations. Another aim of the present paper is to suggest that both these ways of construing the relationship between morality and interest make nonsense of it: though in each case nonsense with that strong admixture of sense without which the appeal of a philosophical position is likely to be limited. I shall begin by examining one or two of the more salient ways in which the relation between morality and interest characteristic of moral relationship differs from that sketched by the theory of civil association.

II

The ultimate goal of entering a civil association, according to the theory, is to protect interests which can in principle be formulated without reference to the institutions constituted through the act of association. It is precisely this radical draining of intrinsic value from association, and the institutions to which it gives rise, into interests specifiable without reference to any legal or moral concept itself requiring reference to association which does most to excavate the gulf separating the outlook bred by the theory of civil association from a Christian or any other religious account of human relationships.

By contrast the most obvious feature of moral relationships is that we treat them rather freely, when not doing philosophy, as potential bearers of intrinsic value. People value their friendships, their relationship with their children, their membership of the Party, the Tolkien Society, the regiment, the College, the Mind Association, their relationship to fellow Scots, to fellow railway enthusiasts, to fellow-workers-in-the-cause-of whatever it may be, not because membership of these relationships is valuable to them in furthering interests fully separable from and extrinsic to the relationships concerned, but because they consider the relationships themselves intrinsically valuable. This thought might seem to suggest some kind of mystical social holism requiring familiar kinds of nominalist exorcism. There is, though, no reason why we should not explain people's everyday attribution of intrinsic value to relationships in terms of the possession by individuals of common interests, provided we are aware of some of the complexities lurking in the latter notion.

There is an evident distinction to be drawn between common interests and interests which one person happens to share with another. If I happen to share with you an interest in wargaming, though it follows from that that we have interests in common it does not follow that we

have common interests.[1] We only have common interests if we have interests which require us to co-operate. Even when we have common interests, however, the interests in question may be specifiable without reference to the relationship which subsists between us in virtue of the co-operative stance which they require each of us to assume towards the other. You and I may need to co-operate in dividing up the area in which we pursue our commercial activities into tacitly understood spheres of influence if we are both to optimize the commercial rewards of our respective labours, but there is nothing whatsoever about the interest in maximizing profits which requires either of us, in specifying it, to mention the co-operative arrangement he has with the other.

The picture changes, however, when we come to deal with certain types of personal interest. Personal interests are, in the first instance, interests which concern my person. I have a personal interest in things which are likely to affect my health, my reputation, my finances, my appearance, my job, my power to attract members of the opposite sex, and so on. By contrast, A's interest in the continued existence of the Californian Redwood forests, which A knows to be very beautiful but which A will in all probability never see, and whose final destruction would carry no personal consequences for A whatsoever, is an impersonal interest. The interest is impersonal because the forests are in no sense *A's* forests: there seems no sense in which A could plausibly say, 'I am interested in the future of these forests because they are mine'. The distinction between personal and impersonal interests depends, evidently enough, upon the distribution of the first person possessive pronoun: I can be personally interested in x just in case x can in some sense be said to belong to me: to be mine. One type of egoism very often held in combination with some variant of the theory of civil association takes it for granted that the sphere of what I can intelligibly regard as mine extends only to my own body and its mental states. In everyday life, however, none of us takes such nominalist parsimony very seriously. We speak with possessive warmth of '*my* Party', '*my* Church', '*my* family', '*our* children', '*my* friend', and so on. This way of speaking derives its legitimacy from the evident fact that we very readily extend the frontiers of our persons beyond the modest perimeter marking off the body and its associated mental states by forming relationships, or entering into ones already formed by others, which have the effect of constituting a collective person, which after a short time we cease in certain contexts and for certain purposes to distinguish from the natural, body-plus-mental-states person we started with, and whose

[1] This is the point of the black joke of Francis I, quoted by Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 'What my brother Charles wants (Milan), I want too'.

interests thus come to be ranked among our personal interests. Personal interests of this type, which I shall label for convenience *extended personal interests*, form a category—a very large one, which moral philosophers, as we shall see, ignore at their peril—intermediate between impersonal interests and personal interests in the narrow, body-plus-mental-states sense of 'personal'. A couple of examples will make this clearer. X, for instance, is interested in the electoral success of the Communist Party only because he believes its first act in office will be to raise his pension. X thus has a personal interest in the success of the Party. Y, on the other hand, would like to see the Party succeed because, although he has no personal connection with the Party (he is not a member, has never worked for it, or anything of that sort), and although the Party's electoral success in Britain would have no effect on any personal interest of his, he believes that the results of the implementation of the Party's policies would on the whole be good ones. Y has an impersonal interest in the success of the Party. Now take Z, who is a lifelong Party member and who, while he would be quite sincere in citing many of the reasons which Y would cite as reasons for wanting the Party to win, at the same time, and perhaps more fundamentally, wants the Party to win because it is *his party*, much as a Leeds supporter wants Leeds to win because it is *his team*. Z has an extended personal interest in the success of the Party. Should we, now, treat this as just one more of Z's personal interests, on all fours with, say, his interest in eating well or earning a better salary? One obstacle to this is that an extended personal interest doesn't seem to be *morally* on all fours with an ordinary or non-extended personal interest. Z in his relationship to the Party seems genuinely to be setting *narrow* personal interest aside in a way in which X, say, is not. Z doesn't just want the Party to win for what he hopes to get out of it. He has no ulterior motive for desiring the Party's success, any more than the Leeds supporter has for desiring that Leeds should win: he just desires it; it just is, in other words, one of his ultimate, non-instrumental goals. Considered as a goal of Z's, moreover, the Party's success is quite clearly not a personal goal in the narrow sense; it isn't, that is, reducible to any bodily or mental state of Z's. Z's support for the Party might therefore be taken to smack of altruism. But if we mean by 'altruism' what philosophers generally have meant by it, then to take an altruistic interest in some goal is to take an impersonal interest in it. In this sense A's interest in the future of the California Redwood forests would be a palmary instance of an altruistic interest, whereas my interest in the continued existence of my back garden would, just because it is a personal interest, *a fortiori* be a non-altruistic one. From this viewpoint it looks as though Z's interest in the success of the Communist Party cannot be altruistic just because Z *cares personally* whether the party wins or loses. But as

we have already seen, Z's interest, although a personal one, is not a *narrowly* personal one; so it doesn't fit easily into the same box as X's interest in his pension, either. Extended personal interests, in short, are not easily assimilable to the standard distinction between the selfish and the altruistic, just because that distinction is normally taken to be more or less equivalent to the distinction between personal and impersonal interests.

The same set of points can be made in connection with friendship. I can have various sorts of interests in the welfare of others. I may, for example, cultivate B's society with the greatest affability and assiduity for no other reason than that B's advice on forthcoming takeover bids has for many years proved so uncannily accurate and so profitable to me that I should not know what to do without him. I take it that in such a case it is evident that although I have a narrow personal interest in B's continued health, and in being on good terms with him, I am not B's friend, but only one of B's hangers-on. Again, I may give money to C, a beggar on the street, for no other reason than that, other things being equal, I would rather he should have some satisfaction in life than that he should have none. Here, it seems to me, I am displaying an impersonal interest in C's welfare. Now take my relationship to D. From the moment I meet D I find myself in *rapport* with him. I find it intrinsically pleasurable to converse with him; we turn out to have the same sense of humour, and so on. Moreover, although we differ quite widely in our tastes, opinions and interests, some of D's turn out, as I explore them, to be more compelling than some of my own. His mind is a revelation; an alien world which I come to enjoy for its enlarging strangeness as one enjoys travel. Soon I come to think of it as *my* world. I am beginning to undergo a blurring of the boundaries of my person analogous to that undergone by Z when he first began to realize that the Communist Party was not just *a* party but *his* party, that he *was* a Communist; and this blurring is accelerated and deepened by the fact that I find that I can trust D, safely open my heart to him, accept his promises knowing that he will keep them, and so on. At this point, it seems to me, I can be said to have acquired an extended personal interest in D's welfare. My preference that no bad thing should happen to him is as directly personal as my preference that no bad thing should happen to me, and it is a direct, though extended, personal preference because the limits of what belongs to my person, of what I take as *mine* and defend as *mine*, have extended to include D. My original, body-and-its-associated-mental-states person, natural to me as an unsocial being, has become the partly collective person characteristic of the Friend. Concern on my part for D's welfare, therefore, although it is not, as in the case of my concern for B's welfare, a narrowly personal concern, stands in no more need of explanation in terms of altruism

than concern on my part for the welfare of my Porsche. Moreover there is an obvious advantage to me in having allowed the frontiers of my person to become porous to the extent of admitting D to the status of one of the things I am prepared to acknowledge mine. Both my person and my array of ultimate interests have become richer in consequence, with the result that the range of possible enjoyments conceptually accessible to me has also become larger. However, this advantage is balanced by a correlative disadvantage. The possibility of my taking an extended personal interest in D and enjoying the correlative pleasures and satisfactions depends conceptually upon my continuing to stand in a relationship of friendship to D. In the same way my taking an extended personal interest in common political struggle in the service of the Revolution depends conceptually upon my continuing to enjoy Party membership, my continuing to be accepted as a comrade among comrades. Extended personal interests are available to me, that is, only through my participation in relationships; and that means that in order to go on having the interests I must keep up the correlative relationships, at whatever cost in inconvenience, or deferral or abandonment of interest-satisfaction, that may involve. Such occasional sacrifices will no doubt be made easier for me, however, by the fact that, since many of the goals which the extended personal interests I have acquired will lead me to pursue will, as is the case with many of the goals suggested by any personal interest, have for me the status of non-instrumental or intrinsic goods, and since the very possibility of formulating these goods to myself depends itself intrinsically upon my being involved in the corresponding relationship, my involvement in that relationship will also appear to me as an intrinsic, non-instrumental good.

This last point affords the promised explanation of why we attach—of how it is possible for us to attach—intrinsic value to certain sorts of relationship, rather than, say, as a powerful tradition in moral philosophy has maintained, solely to mental states. The explanation proceeds as promised, without benefit of metaphysical realism about social groups, purely in terms of the common interests of individuals. The thought is that what leads friends, say, to attach an intrinsic value to their relationship to one another, unlike the participants in a commercially convenient arrangement, who attach no *intrinsic* value whatsoever to theirs, is the fact that friends possess reciprocal extended personal interests in virtue of standing in that relationship to one another; whereas the participants in a commercial arrangement, while they will certainly have common interests, have relative to the arrangement in question only common impersonal interests or common narrowly personal interests, which in neither case derive intrinsically from the existence of the relationship.

This allows us in turn to keep a promise made still earlier, to justify the lumping together of friendship, the marital bond, family relationships, membership of the same nation, team, regiment or party, and an unspecified number of others, under the heading 'moral relationship'. A moral relationship is simply one through which those who participate in it acquire reciprocal extended personal interests, and with them the possibility of regarding the group or individual involved as one to which, morally speaking, they *belong*, and which, correlatively, *belongs* to them: is *theirs*. Such relationships are of very varied types, extending far beyond the two or three sorts of relationship—connubial affection, friendship, the relation between parents and children—generally categorized as 'personal relationships'. The wider role of extended personal interests in the moral life has been obscured both by the theory of civil association and by its Kantian antitype. Neither theory offers an account of the relationship between morality and interest capable of accommodating extended personal interests, except at the cost of blurring the distinction between them and personal interests in the narrow sense. In the next section I shall try to suggest how an account of the relationship between morality and interest framed with that distinction sharply in mind ought to go.

III

According to the theory of civil association it is rational for all of us to accept the restraints of law and morality because doing so makes it more likely that each of us will succeed in satisfying more of his or her interests.

It is no doubt obvious enough that entering into a moral relationship, like the contract theorist's act of entering civil society, must carry with it some parallel acceptance of moral restraint. What is not perhaps so obvious, however, and what in any event I now propose to argue, is that what makes it rational to accept certain kinds of moral restraint as the price of entering a moral relationship is not that their acceptance will in any way enhance one's chances of *satisfying* one's interests, but rather that accepting such restraints is a necessary precondition for merely *possessing* the extended personal interests which the relationship makes available to me. Defending the rationality of acceptance along these lines, of course, requires that we demonstrate a connection of the required sort between observing moral restraints of the designated kind and possessing extended personal interests. The connection I have in mind is involved enough to require a few pages of explanation, but is not, I think, especially difficult to grasp or especially controversial. It goes roughly as follows.

To acknowledge an extended personal interest is, as we have seen, to acknowledge another, or a group, as *mine*: as *my* friend, *my* child, *my* nation, *my* party, and so on. From the point of view of the self which defines itself in terms of its narrow personal interests, such commitments are of course dangerous. Too strong and personal an interest in the welfare of my country may lead to my losing my life in its defence; too strong and personal an interest in the welfare of my children may make it financially harder to satisfy interests which lie nearer the egoist's home territory of the self and its immediate bodily and mental states; and so on.

From another point of view, however, there is nothing unusual about such risks. Even narrow personal interests may conflict with one another, so that the pursuit of one of them requires the sacrifice of others. We accept such patterns of risk, gain and loss because we have no choice. We all have in the end to decide what we care most about, and then live accordingly.

This answer will not, though, suffice to neutralize a second category of risk which attends the acquisition of extended personal interests, and which belongs to them alone. Extended personal interests are interests in *other selves*, taken singly or in groups; and even though I acknowledge those selves, through the relationship in which I stand to them, as *mine*, dissolving to that extent the barriers which separate their interests from mine, those selves remain ontologically and psychologically Other: remain, that is, the locus of interests potentially separate from, and potentially capable of conflicting with, my interests.

Pursuing this thought, let us for a moment shift the focus from the self who entertains extended personal interests in the Other, singular or plural, to the response of that Other to this fact. One possible way the Other may react is to make what one might call *the colonialist response*. 'Here,' Y may say to himself, 'is someone, X, who is foolish enough to be willing to treat, in her scheme of interests, my interests as continuous with her own, to the extent that she is actually prepared to sacrifice the attainment of narrowly personal interests of her own to the attainment of narrowly personal interests of mine. Why should I not do my best to exploit this situation in my own interests?'

Y's exploiting the situation will involve Y's attempting to divert more and more of X's energies into the task of satisfying interests of Y's. Since it is possible that X, however strong her commitment to her extended personal interest in Y, might not agree to this if she were fully aware of the narrowly personal character of Y's interest in her, Y's means for effecting this diversion of energies will no doubt include the usual methods of deception, betrayal, lies, cheating, and so on.

Suppose, now, X does become aware of Y's stance and strategies towards her. Two questions arise. The first is the empirical one of

whether X will in fact reassess her extended personal interest in Y. The second is the conceptual question whether in logic she ought to do so. I will take the second first. It is in the nature of extended personal interests to dissolve, wholly or partly, the boundaries separating the systems of interests belonging to different selves. Such a dissolution is inseparable from coming to regard the interests of another, a friend or a child, for instance, as effectively *mine*. But to be intelligible such a dissolution must be reciprocal, for otherwise the claim of *belonging* which is conceptually inseparable from the assertion of an extended personal interest would be without content. For me to say of someone, Z, 'His interests are not indifferent to me because he is *my* friend' there must be something about Z which *makes* him *my* friend, relates him to me as I am related to him; and that can only be a reciprocal weakening of the boundaries which define his sphere of interests. Otherwise, absurdly, I could make another person my friend merely by unilaterally declaring her or him to be so.

Of course, it is notionally possible for me to take an impersonal interest in advancing another person's interests—those of a beggar I meet on the street, for instance. But such a relationship is not friendship. To the extent to which the relationship in which I stand to him is an impersonal one (and in reality even such casual relationships seldom are purely impersonal) he and I do not *belong* to one another, as friends, or spouses or fellow-citizens *belong*. And while a relationship founded purely upon an impersonal interest in advancing another's interests might theoretically be entirely one-sided, no relationship founded upon interests whose description essentially involves a concept of *belonging* can be. To belong I must be accepted as belonging, taken into community with others by a weakening on their part of the boundaries defining their sphere of interests which reciprocates and matches the weakening in the boundaries defining my sphere of interests which results from the acceptance of an extended personal interest. It follows that it is not intelligible for me to profess an extended personal interest in people who, for their part, regard me, wholly and simply, as a fool whose folly makes him a convenient tool.

Reciprocal commitment to a moral relationship requires each party to the relationship to treat the interests of the other as continuous with his own. Each can do this safely precisely because the relation *is* reciprocal: each can work to advance the interests of the other secure in the knowledge that in doing so he is advancing interests which, *because they include his own*, are not inimical to his own. There is no need for either, in other words, to attempt to manipulate or control the actions of the other because the benign direction of those actions from the point of view of each is already ensured by the motivational processes from which they will in the natural order of things issue, given the commit-

ment of the Other to the relationship. It follows that one mark of confident reciprocal commitment to a relationship is respect for the motivational autonomy of those to whom I stand in that relationship. It further follows that a whole range of behaviour which we normally regard as *prima facie* wrong; lying, deceit, betrayal, bullying, manipulation, for instance; must in the ordinary way of things be taken as intrinsically manifesting a failure of the reciprocal commitment conceptually required for moral relationship. (I want to suggest, indeed, that this explains why we in fact take such behaviour to be *prima facie* wrong.) For in the ordinary way of things the purpose of such behaviour is to take control of the actions and energies of another in order to bend them to the service of interests which are not his. The use of such tactics is thus *prima facie* evidence that the user does not regard the interests of the person upon whom he practises as continuous with his own, and thus *prima facie* evidence that the user does not regard himself as morally related to that person, whatever he may pretend. It follows that the use of such tactics by either party to a moral relationship offers in the ordinary way of things sufficient grounds for concluding that no such relationship exists. So the answer to the first of our questions is that, just on conceptual grounds, X ought to conclude from Y's behaviour towards her that Y is not her friend, and that to go on viewing him in that light would be no more than a foolish illusion.

This might seem altogether too austere and demanding a conceptual condition for the existence of moral relationship. Isn't it commonplace, as readers of an earlier draft of this paper objected, that deception and coercion are necessary rather than fatal to the relation between parents and children? That mistrusting an alcoholic friend in circumstances when I stand between him and a drink need not mean mistrusting his friendship in other circumstances? That the discovery that their revolutionary comrades have lied to them does not automatically sever people's commitment to the common cause or their resolve to carry out common actions with them in future? These kinds of cases are what prompted me to add the caveat 'in the ordinary way of things'. What makes these non-ordinary cases is the same thing in each case. In the first case, for instance, one would in normal circumstances expect that the occasional deceit or coercion practised by parents towards their children would be practised by adults who would regard the interests of their children as ultimately continuous with their own. That is why, if I am right, we would not consider such acts appropriate candidates for the kind of moral condemnation we normally visit upon deceit or coercion. And conversely, of course, in a case in which that normal presumption failed to be fulfilled, we should deem ourselves to be dealing with at worst a case of sadism or exploitation and at best with behaviour, however excusable in the light of mitigating circumstances,

ultimately threatening to the parent–child relationship and so deserving of moral condemnation.

In the same way my willingness to continue regarding my alcoholic friend as my friend will be perfectly rational if he has, as he well may have, a genuine extended personal interest in me and in the relationship. What prevents me from concluding from his alcoholic lapses that he has not is, in such a case, the obvious fact that where alcohol is concerned he cannot help himself.

What makes deceit or coercion compatible with the existence of a moral relationship in such cases is in each case that the acts so characterizable occur within the context of or against the background of the reciprocal commitments required as a precondition for the possession of extended personal interests of the appropriate kind. The same is true in political contexts. If a soldier, say, is lied to by his superiors, whether that, if he finds out about it, will weaken his commitment to the cause for which he is fighting will depend on whether he can take the lie as tactically necessary to the furtherance of extended personal interests which he and his superiors share. If he can, well and good; but if the reason for the deception is that the high command has been taken over by a cabal which has war aims of its own which it would not dream of submitting in any way to the judgment of him or his comrades, and which regards him merely as cannon-fodder to be expended ruthlessly in the service of those aims whether he shares them or not; well then, the rational response from his point of view may well be desertion or mutiny against a ruling group in the success of whose projects he cannot intelligibly be said to have an extended personal interest, since there is no sense in which he can intelligibly be said to be a member, as distinct from a tool, of that group.

The conceptual considerations which make such a response rational or otherwise will not necessarily, however, suffice to resolve the first, empirical question about X, which I left hanging a number of paragraphs ago: when she discovers how Y is abusing their relationship, will X break off her relationship with him? Moral relationships in practice can survive, or appear to survive, a good deal of abuse, for two reasons. The first is that the parties to them, though they continually backslide into withdrawal of reciprocity in order to save threatened narrow personal interests, may at the same time continually attempt to re-establish reciprocity in order to patch up and save the relationship. This pattern of alternately betraying and building up confidence can go on for a very long time; indeed indefinitely. The second is that the connection, while it continues to be advertised as a moral relationship, may cease in fact to be any such thing. X may continue to speak of Y as her friend though Y is in fact a sadistic manipulator with whom she happens to be infatuated. Sharers in a political enterprise may continue

to speak of one another as comrades though they are in fact merely opportunists who happen to have a use for one another for the moment, and who would stab one another in the back with the greatest enthusiasm the moment that ceased to be the case.

In any event it is not my business here to attempt a descriptive catalogue of the various responses which people as a matter of fact may make to the abuse of relationship by deceit, betrayal, lying and so forth. My business is to explain why, conceptually speaking, such acts constitute abuse of a moral relationship. The explanation is that they manifest, in the ordinary way of things, a failure of reciprocal merging of interests, and that reciprocity of this kind is conceptually necessary to a moral relationship because without it the assertion of belonging, or membership one of another, implicit in the assertion of an extended personal interest becomes vacuous.

I conclude that the observance of certain moral restraints by the parties to a moral relationship is conceptually essential to the existence of moral relationship. The restraints in question include avoidance of lying, deceit, betrayal, coercion, and in general of strategies designed to divert the energies of another without his consent or without his knowledge, into the pursuit of interests which are not his. For convenience I shall label this collection of restraints 'the morality of respect for persons'. It is quite possible that one may, as English moral philosophers since Butler have frequently argued, by observing such restraints make it more likely that one will satisfy more of one's interests than one would succeed in satisfying otherwise. But if I am right about the conceptual connections between respect for persons and moral relationships there is another and deeper reason for observing such restraints. We have to observe them, irrespective of how far our doing so is likely to make us more successful in *satisfying* our interests, if we merely want to *possess* interests of a certain type; namely, extended personal interests. And people clearly do very much want to possess extended personal interests. They want friendships, successful marriages, successful relationships with their children; they want to have a country, to be respected and involved members of professions, clubs, associations of one sort or another, just because such connections, by extending the frontiers of the self, enlarge the self, make life meaningful and give it point.[2] But if this is so we cannot think, as much moral philosophy and amateur moralizing persistently invites us to think, of morality and the self, or the self's will to power, as intrinsically at odds

[2] Conversely the thought that one's own acts have put one beyond the possibility of enjoying such interests can be searing: cf. *Macbeth*, V, iii, 'And that which should accompany old age/As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends/I must not look to have . . .'

with one another. Certain kinds of moral impulse have to be thought of as manifesting the self's will to power: its will to extend itself through entering into moral relationship with others, and thus paradoxically to extend itself by mastering itself. I shall devote the rest of this paper to examining one or two of the implications of this thought, first in connection with Kant and then in connection with the old chestnut posed by Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, 'Why ought I to be moral?'

IV

The Kantian objection to 'teleological' theories of morality, including utilitarianism, is that they treat the categorical imperatives of morality as if they were hypothetical ones. A hypothetical imperative is one which has the form 'Do x if you want to achieve y.' It offers a strategy directed towards the satisfaction of an interest, the achievement of an end: the maximization of human happiness, for instance. A categorical imperative, by contrast, is not iffy. It contains no reference to anybody's ends or purposes, but consists simply in a bare command like those of the Decalogue: 'Thou shalt not kill', for instance, or 'Thou shalt not bear false witness.'

In one way the Kantian claim that the commands of morality are categorical is plausible. Intuitively we feel inclined to agree that if anyone *ought morally* to do something, then the issue of whether they should do it cannot depend on what their desires or interests, or for that matter anybody else's, happen to be. Morality is just not, the non-utilitarian side of us feels inclined to say, relative to interest.[3]

In another way the Kantian claim seems highly implausible. For Kant's way of explaining the categorical/hypothetical distinction makes it look, at least on the face of it, as if, in order to be categorical, moral commands must altogether *lack reference to an end*; and that seems just a high-flown and fancy way of saying that morality is pointless.

To be fair to Kant, his position does not quite come to anything as absurd as that. Moral action, on his view, has an end; but that end is simply 'the moral agent as such'. The object of morality, that is to say, is that one should never treat another human being merely as a means to the furtherance of one's own interests; rather, one should always treat her, or him, as an end in himself or herself.

[3] Cf. Philippa Foot, 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,' in *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 159: 'When we say that a man should do something and intend a moral judgement we do not have to back up what we say by considerations about his interests or his desires; if no such connexion can be found the "should" need not be withdrawn'.

This is no doubt very elevating, but it carries with it two consequences for Kant's moral philosophy which are almost as bad as the charge, of having made morality pointless, which it enables him to evade. The first is that it becomes hard to see why, if obedience to the commands of morality transcends by definition all considerations of interest-satisfaction, and thus cannot *a fortiori*, unless by accident, serve any interest of mine, I should take the slightest interest in being moral. Kant's response to this is to distinguish between the natural, phenomenal aspects of human nature and the spiritual, or as he calls it in the terminology of the first Critique the *noumenal* aspect. As natural creatures, compounded of ordinary animal lusts and desires and trying to survive in the natural world, morality *can* have no interest for us. That we manifestly *are* interested in it shows, for Kant, that we are not merely the natural creatures we seem to be: that we have a spiritual side, even though that side of us, being noumenal, is not accessible to the methods of natural science.

The second implausible consequence of Kant's rigid separation of morality and interest is, of course, his moral rigorism. If morality by its nature refers beyond the natural world, then its content cannot vary as a function of circumstances in that world. If a given type of action is wrong it must be wrong *whatever the circumstances*. Hence Kant's notorious claim that it is wrong to lie about the whereabouts of my friend even to a maniac who is looking for him in order to kill him.

Despite the rigorism and anti-naturalism of Kant's moral theory, however, its fundamental thought, that the rightness of right actions is not a function of their tendency to advance anybody's interests, remains plausible. It would be pleasant, therefore, if we could find a way of articulating that thought without falling into the moral rigorism and anti-naturalism which seem inseparable from Kant's way of articulating it.

This is precisely what is offered by the account of the relationship between interest and morality which we have developed here. For according to that account, such commands of morality as 'Tell the truth,' 'Do not betray those who trust in you', 'Do not manipulate others', and so on, are not, or not except occasionally and accidentally, strategies for increasing the likelihood that those who adopt them, or for that matter those towards whom they are adopted, will succeed in satisfying their interests, but measures designed to ensure that those who practise them continue barely to possess certain categories of interest. They are thus best regarded, not as *strategies*, in the ordinary sense of the word, at all; but rather as limiting principles *governing choice of strategies*: principles which state restrictions upon the range of strategies to be adopted in the pursuit of any interest whatsoever. They are not, however, *heuristic* principles of strategy selection. Their func-

tion is not to make it more likely that the agent who adopts them will succeed in selecting *the best strategy for his purposes*. They are purely negative principles, operating antecedently to any heuristic criteria of strategy-selection to exclude certain types of strategies from the domain of possible strategies over which any such criteria are to be allowed to range. It is thus a merely logical feature of such a principle that, to use Kant's phrase, 'without being based on, and conditioned by, any further purpose to be attained by a certain line of conduct, [it] enjoins this conduct immediately'.[4] It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that we feel intuitively that no one could be acting morally 'unless he accepted such considerations as in themselves sufficient reason for action':[5] someone who did not accept that would just have failed to grasp the function, the logical character, of such a principle.

On the other hand, if we have argued correctly, the morality of respect for persons has a purpose, and a purpose of a perfectly 'natural' kind; one, that is, which can be made perfectly intelligible to natural creatures like ourselves without any need to invoke the Kantian noumenal. The purpose of such a morality is simply to ensure, by protecting the volitional autonomy of all parties to a moral relationship, that the reciprocity conceptually required by such a relationship is preserved, in order that the parties to it can go on possessing the extended personal interests which the relationship makes available to them. This, of course, is very reminiscent of Kant's doctrine that the goal of moral action is that moral agents should be treated as ends rather than as means. But because we have found a way of making morality relative to interest without making it relative to interest-*satisfaction*, we can offer both a clearer account than Kant's of what is involved in treating people as ends, and one which, because it is entirely naturalistic in character, enables us to dispense with the moral transcendentalism which frames the docrine in Kant's version.

By dispensing with Kant's transcendentalism we dispense also with his rigorism. Thinking of moral claims as categorical, if we are correct, need only involve thinking of them as holding where they hold and with whatever force they hold, irrespective of whether obeying them will help the one who obeys them, or anybody else for that matter, to satisfy any interest. It need not involve thinking of them as holding, or as holding with undiminished force, whatever the circumstances. If the purpose of adhering to the morality of respect for persons is to preserve moral relationships by preserving the volitional autonomy of all parties to them, then, for instance, we are not called upon to refrain from types

[4] H. J. Paton (ed., trans.), *The Moral Law, or, Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), 83.

[5] Cf. Foot, op. cit., 164.

of action which would normally constitute a threat to the volitional autonomy of others in circumstances where they constitute no such threat. We need not think it wrong, for instance, to preserve the legitimate privacy of a third party by lying to someone about a matter which is no legitimate concern of his. *Types* of action, in other words, are not right or wrong *irrespective of the consequences*, and reference to 'the consequences' may include reference to people's interests; only (and this is where the view differs from any version of utilitarianism) reference to people's interests is not required automatically, in virtue of its being the case that the ultimate concern of moral thinking *per se* just is the maximization of general interest-satisfaction, but is guided in specific cases by moral principles—those of the morality of respect for persons—which are categorical in the sense of not having as their general aim the enhancement of anybody's chances of *satisfying* his or her interests.

Someone might, though, query why making morality relative to the purpose of preserving moral relationships does not turn it into a fabric of hypothetical imperatives after all. It fails to do so for two connected reasons. The first is that the goal of preserving one's moral relationships, like the goal of treating others as ends rather than as means, is *internal to the moral life*. To be non-hypothetical in Kant's sense, as we noted earlier, an imperative does not have to lack all relationship to any end; it just has not to be conditioned by a *phenomenal* end. One way of construing Kant's distinction between a phenomenal and a non-phenomenal end would be to take the former category as including all the ends dictated by a person's needs and desires so far as these can be specified without essential reference to the moral life, and the latter as including just those aims which cannot be specified without essential reference to the moral life, and this is the move I have in mind here. In this sense the end pursued by Kant's shopkeeper who is honest because he believes that to be the best policy for maximizing profits is a phenomenal end, whereas the end of treating others as ends rather than as means is non-phenomenal. Equally clearly the end of preserving one's moral relationships to others is also, in the sense defined, a non-phenomenal one. Another way of construing Kant's distinction between a phenomenal and a non-phenomenal end would be to say that a phenomenal end is one having to do with the satisfaction of the agent's interests: Kant's honest tradesman has an interest in maximizing his profits and sees honesty as a good strategy for satisfying that interest. This leads us to the second reason why adopting the morality of respect for persons as a means of preserving one's moral relationships to others does not turn that morality into a fabric of hypothetical imperatives. Obeying the dictates of that morality does nothing whatsoever to promote the *satisfaction* of any interest of mine, extended personal

interests included. All that it achieves is that I continue to satisfy the conditions for barely *possessing* a certain category of interests.

V

The thought that each of us has an interest, though not an extra-moral one, in obeying the requirements of the morality of respect for persons, because obedience to those requirements is a precondition for the continued existence of moral relationships in which he or she has an extended personal interest, has consequences which bear upon the extent to which we can regard the requirements of morality as voluntarily assumed, and thus upon the ancient question of Thrasymachus: why should I, or anyone, be moral?

The theory of civil association represents the citizen's obligation to obey the laws, and by extension the commands of morality, as arising from a voluntary commitment, entered into as the outcome of a process of reasoning conducted from a standpoint exterior to society and dependent upon no antecedent moral commitment. The interesting philosophical project for the theorist of civil association is thus that of stating the nature of the reasoning leading up to the commitment. John Rawls' contractual theory of justice offers one possible way of carrying out this project, as does Professor Hare's account of the processes of reasoning which should govern the choice of moral principles.

Our freedom to choose the moral relationships in which we are to be involved is clearly far less than the freedom which the theorist of civil association takes to attend the choice of moral principles. Many moral relationships, such as those in which we stand to parents, or to the family or nation we happen to be born into, cannot in any serious sense be said to be ones we choose to stand in. Others, like the moral relationship in which we stand to our children, are 'chosen' only in a rather restricted sense: one chooses to have *a child*, not to have *as a child* the person that child, once born, develops into. Even types of moral relationship which can significantly be said to be voluntarily entered into have about them elements of the involuntary. One can choose to make more effort to make friends, or to find someone about whom one might care enough to want to marry them; but neither friendship nor love will consent to be summoned by a whistle, nor can they be brought into existence by signing a contract.[6] Even so, of course, we retain the power to elect whether to remain party to a moral relationship or to abrogate it. And the freedom thus conceded to

[6] Cf. Paul Gilbert's insightful discussion in 'Friendship and the Will', *Philosophy* **61**, No. 235 (January 1985), 61–70.

determine one's moral commitments in response to rational criticism might appear at first sight essentially equivalent in extent to that conceded by the theory of civil association. There are two important differences, however. The first is that, whereas the options confronting me in the choice situation envisaged by the theory are without exception options from which I stand wholly apart, in the sense that none of them have any moral psychological hold over me prior to the conclusion of whatever process of rational deliberation I engage in in that choice situation; some of the options confronting me when I consider abrogating a moral relationship are not just abstract possibilities, but ones in which I am actually involved, and which have intrinsic value for me because they are, even if I am unwilling to recognize the fact, in part constitutive of the meaning that my life at present has for me. It follows that I shall not be able to exercise the option of abrogation without some degree of pain and distress. Even if I decide to leave the Party, or to abandon the marriage, for what not only seem to me but would seem to a great many other people good reasons, I shall still suffer some of the distress, the sense of amputation, diminution of self and rudderlessness, that I would suffer if I had been unjustly expelled from the Party or betrayed by my spouse. The second difference is that whereas the processes of rational deliberation envisaged by the theorist of civil association operate *directly upon the content of the moral principles which I am to adopt as the outcome of deliberation*, the choice between maintaining or abrogating a moral relationship offers merely the options of withdrawing from the relationship or sustaining, with whatever grace I can muster, whatever moral demands it makes on me.

Back now to Thrasymachus' question. The question 'Why should one be moral?' assumes a deliberative standpoint akin to that presupposed by the theory of civil association. It assumes, that is, a questioner who sees himself as antecedently bound by no moral considerations whatsoever, but who is deliberating whether or not to consider himself subject to the demands of morality, and who challenges us to give him one good reason why he should accept the restraints of morality. It should hardly surprise us, given these constraints, that the challenge is difficult to meet. The only possibility of meeting it is by showing how obedience to the demands of morality will help to satisfy some interest of the questioner's. And while it is relatively easy to show how obedience to the demands of morality *on the part of most people* will advantage him, it is notoriously hard to show that he will necessarily profit from consistently imposing such demands on himself. But suppose we change the deliberative context of the Thrasymachean question. Suppose we take someone who is about to act rightly, much against the thrust of his desires, because he sees that if he does not he will not only injure something he at present takes an extended personal interest in,

but change his relationship to the world in ways which will make a joke of any further pretension of his to care personally about the thing in question, and put to him the Thrasymachean question: 'Wouldn't you be better able to satisfy your interests if you gave up altogether this dull farce of morality?' Placed in this context, the Thrasymachean questioner, far from looking the hard man he appears from his chosen 'external' standpoint, just looks silly. His question invites the reply, 'Ah, if only it were as easy as *that*! My problem is precisely that I can only go on *having* some of my interests if I am prepared to give up the satisfaction of others; and the first lot are just not ones I am prepared to contemplate abandoning. For one thing, abandoning them would be painful; for another it would involve a kind of self-mutilation, since they are interests integral to my person and to the meaning life has had, and has, for me.' The Thrasymachean question depends for its force, in other words, on the assumption that moral considerations and considerations of interest are fully separable from one another. This assumption is correct so far as interest-*satisfaction* is concerned, but false so far as the *possession* of certain categories of interests is concerned. Its falsity subverts the presumed exhaustiveness of the conception of rationality upon which the force of the Thrasymachean question depends. The Thrasymachean questioner relies, that is, on the thought that it is irrational not to want to satisfy one's interests. So it is, but it is also irrational not to want to preserve the possibility of one's going on possessing one's interests. So 'opting into' the morality of respect for persons is not, after all an irrational or quixotic gesture: on the contrary it is 'opting out' which would be quixotic and irrational: a way of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. The Thrasymachean egoist is right to point out that the acceptance of moral responsibility is in principle threatening to one's narrow personal interest, but wrong to conclude from that that the acceptance of such risks is irrational, since rational action is as much a matter of preserving the possibility of having interests as of satisfying them once I have them.[7]

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[7] The text of this essay was delivered as a Professorial Inaugural Lecture at the University of Sussex on 28 April 1988.