PHILOSOPHY

SOCIAL MORALITY AND INDIVIDUAL IDEAL [1]

BY P. F. STRAWSON

MEN make for themselves pictures of ideal forms of life. Such pictures are various and may be in sharp opposition to each other; and one and the same individual may be captivated by different and sharply conflicting pictures at different times. At one time it may seem to him that he should live—even that *a man* should live —in such-and-such a way; at another that the only truly satisfactory form of life is something totally different, incompatible with the first. In this way, his outlook may vary radically, not only at different periods of his life, but from day to day, even from one hour to the next. It is a function of so many variables: age, experiences, present environment, current reading, current physical state are some of them. As for the ways of life that may thus present themselves at different times as each uniquely satisfactory, there can be no doubt about their variety and opposition. The ideas of self-obliterating devotion to duty or to the service of others; of personal honour and magnanimity; of asceticism, contemplation, retreat; of action, dominance and power; of the cultivation of "an exquisite sense of the luxurious"; of simple human solidarity and co-operative endeavour; of a refined complexity of social existence; of a constantly maintained and renewed affinity with natural things —any of these ideas, and a great many others too, may form the core and substance of a personal ideal. At some times such a picture may present itself as merely appealing or attractive; at others it may offer itself in a stronger light, as, perhaps, an image of the

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only sane or non-ignoble human reaction to the situation in which we find ourselves. "The nobleness of life is to do thus" or, sometimes, "The sanity of life is to do thus": such may be the devices with which these images present themselves.

Two quite different things may be urged against, or in mitigation of, this picture of a multiplicity of pictures. First, it might be said that the many, apparently conflicting pictures are really different parts or aspects, coming momentarily into misleading prominence, of a single picture; this latter being the composite ideal image of our coolest hours, in which every god is given his due and conflict is avoided by careful arrangement and proper subordination of part to part. And it may be true of some exceptional individuals that they entertain ideal images which exhibit just such a harmonious complexity. I believe this to be rarer than we sometimes pretend; but in any case to describe this situation is not to redescribe the situation I have spoken of, but to describe a different situation. The other mitigating point has more weight. It is that, however great the variety of images which dominate, at one time or another, our ethical imaginations, our individual lives do not, as a matter of fact, exhibit a comparable internal variety. Indeed they scarcely could. Something approaching consistency, some more or less unsteady balance, is usually detectable in the pattern of an individual person's decisions and actions. There are, so to speak, empirical grounds for ordering his ideal images in respect of practical efficacy, even, perhaps, for declaring one of them to be practically dominant. This point I shall grant. I think it is easy to exaggerate it; easy to exaggerate the unity of the personalities of those we say we know, when we really know them only in one or two particular connections; easy to dismiss as phases or moods whatever lacks conformity with our only partly empirical pictures of each other. But I shall not dwell on this. What I shall dwell on is precisely this readiness, which a great many people have, to identify themselves imaginatively at different times with different and conflicting visions of the ends of life, even though these visions may receive the scantiest expression in their actual behaviour and would call for the most upsetting personal revolutions if they received more.

This fact about many people—a fact which partly explains, among other things, the enormous charm of reading novels, biographies, histories—this fact, I say, has important consequences. One consequence is that when some ideal image of a form of life is given striking expression in the words or actions of some person, its expression may evoke a response of the liveliest sympathy from those whose own patterns of life are as remote as possible from conformity to the image expressed. It is indeed impossible that one life should realize all the ideal pictures which may at one time or

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another attract or captivate the individual imagination. But the owner of one life may with perfect practical consistency wish that his conflicting images should all be realized in different lives. The steadiest adherence to one image may co-exist with the strongest desire that other and incompatible images should have their steady adherents too. To one who has such a desire, any doctrine that the pattern of the ideal life should be the same for all is intolerable; as it is to me. The way in which I have just expressed the position makes its practical consistency look more simple than it is. One cannot simply escape the conflict between different ideal images by diffusing their realization over different lives. For different lives interact and one's own is one of them; and there may be conflict in the areas of interaction. One is not forced to welcome this, though one may; it is simply something that in fact goes with the fulfilment of the wish for this kind of diversity in the pursuit of ends. Equally one is not precluded from taking one side in a conflict because one has wished that both sides should exist and has some sympathy with both.

I think there can be no doubt that what I have been talking about falls within the region of the ethical. I have been talking about evaluations such as *can* govern choices and decisions which are of the greatest importance to men. Whether it falls within the region of the moral, however, is something that may be doubted. Perhaps the region of the moral falls within it. Or perhaps there are no such simple inclusion-relations between them. The question is one I shall come back to later. I should like first to say something more about this region of the ethical. It could also be characterized as a region in which there are truths which are incompatible with each other. There exist, that is to say, many profound general statements which are capable of capturing the ethical imagination in the same way as it may be captured by those ideal images of which I spoke. They often take the form of general descriptive statements about man and the world. They can be incorporated into a metaphysical system, or dramatized in a religious or historical myth. Or they can exist—their most persuasive form for many—as isolated statements such as, in France, there is a whole literature of, the literature of the maxim. I will not give examples, but I will mention names. One cannot read Pascal or Flaubert, Nietzsche or Goethe, Shakespeare or Tolstoy, without encountering these profound truths. It is certainly possible, in a coolly analytical frame of mind, to mock at the whole notion of the profound truth; but we are guilty of mildly bad faith if we do. For in most of us the ethical imagination succumbs again and again to *these* pictures of man, and it is precisely as truths that we wish to characterize them while they hold us captive. But these truths have the same kind of relation to

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each other as those ideal images of which I have already spoken. For pictures of the one kind reflect and are reflected by pictures of the other. They capture our imagination in the same way. Hence it is as wholly futile to think that we could, without destroying their character, systematize these truths into one coherent body of truth as it is to suppose that we could, without destroying their character, form a coherent composite image from these images. This may be expressed by saying that the region of the ethical is the region where there are truths but no truth; or, in other words, that the injunction to see life steadily *and* see it whole is absurd, for one cannot do both. I said I would give no examples, but I will allude to one near-contemporary one. Many will remember the recorded encounter between Russell and Lawrence, the attempt at sympathy and the failure to find it. That failure is recorded in such words as: "I thought there might be something in what he said, but in the end I saw there was nothing" on the one hand; and "Get back to mathematics where you can do some good; leave talk about human beings alone" on the other. The clash was a clash of two irreconcilable views of man, two irreconcilable attitudes. The spectator familiar with both may say: Russell is right; he tells the truth; he speaks for civilization. He may also say: Lawrence is right; he tells the truth; he speaks for life. The point is that he may say both things. It would be absurd to hope for a reconciliation of the two conflicting attitudes. It is not absurd to desire that both should exist, in conflict.

The region of the ethical, then, is a region of diverse, certainly incompatible and possibly practically conflicting ideal images or pictures of a human life, or of human life; and it is a region in which many such incompatible pictures may secure at least the imaginative, though doubtless not often the practical, allegiance of a single person. Moreover this statement itself may be seen not merely as a description of what is the case, but as a positive evaluation of evaluative diversity. Any diminution in this variety would impoverish the human scene. The multiplicity of conflicting pictures is itself the essential element in one of one's pictures of man.

Now what are the relations between the region of the ethical and the sphere of morality? One widely accepted account of the latter is in terms of the idea of rules or principles governing human behaviour which apply universally within a community or class. The class may be variously thought of as a definite social group or the human species as a whole or even the entire class of rational beings. It is not obvious how these contrasting conceptions, of diversity of ideal and of community of rule, are related to each other; and in fact, I think, the relationship is complicated. One way of trying to harmonize the ideas would be as follows. This

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way is extremely crude and inadequate, but it may serve as a starting point. It is obvious that many, if not all, of the ideal images of which I spoke demand for their realization the existence of some form of social organization. The demand is in varying degrees logical or empirical. Some ideals only make sense in a complex social context, and even in a particular kind of complex social context. For others, some complexity of social organization seems, rather, a practically necessary condition of the ideal's being realized in any very full or satisfactory way. Now it is a condition of the existence of any form of social organization, of any human community, that certain expectations of behaviour on the part of its members should be pretty regularly fulfilled: that some duties, one might say, should be performed, some obligations acknowledged, some rules observed. We might begin by locating the sphere of morality here. It is the sphere of the observance of rules, such that the existence of some such set of rules is a condition of the existence of a society. This is a minimal interpretation of morality. It represents it as what might literally be called a kind of public convenience: of the first importance as a condition of everything that matters, but only as a condition of everything that matters, not as something that matters in itself.

I am disposed to see considerable merit in this minimal conception of morality. By this I mean not that it is really, or nearly, an adequate conception—only that it is a useful analytical idea. There would be objections to claiming that it was an adequate conception. One objection might be simply expressed by saying that, after all, being moral is something that does matter in itself, that it is not simply an affair of complying with rules in a situation where the observance of some such rules is an indirect condition of approximating to ideal forms of life. There is a lot in this objection. But it is not an objection to *using* the minimal idea of morality. We might for example argue that there was an intricate interplay between ideal pictures of man on the one hand and the rule-requirements of social organization on the other; and that one's ordinary and vague conception of morality was the product of this interplay. This would be one way—I do not say the right way—of using the minimal idea of morality to try to get clearer about the ordinary idea. I shall come back later to this question too.

Meanwhile there is another objection to be considered. I think there is something in it as well, but that what there is in it is not at all straightforward. It turns on the idea of the universal applicability of moral rules. The idea is that it is a necessary requirement of a *moral* rule that it should at least be regarded as applying to all human beings whatever. Moral behaviour is what is demanded of men as such. But we can easily imagine, and even find, different

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societies held together by the observance of sets of rules which are very different from each other. Moreover we can find or imagine a single society held together by a set of rules which by no means make the same demands on all its members, but make very different demands on different classes or groups within the society. In so far as the rules which give cohesiveness to a society are acknowledged to have this limited and sectional character, they cannot, in the sense of this objection, be seen as moral rules. But the rules which do give cohesiveness to a society may well have this character, whether acknowledged or not. So the prospect of explaining true morality in terms of what I called the minimal conception of morality is a poor one. Now it is possible to admit the principle of this objection, and then meet it with a formal manœuvre. Thus a rule which governs the professional behaviour of Samoan witch-doctors can be said to apply to all men under the condition that they are witch-doctor members of a society with the general characteristics of Samoan society. Or again, a rule which might be held to apply to ten-year old children, namely that they should obey their parents in domestic matters, could be represented as applying to all men without exception, under the condition that they were ten-year old children. Obviously there is a certain futility about this manœuvre, and equally obviously there is no compulsion to execute it. We might simply drop the idea of moral rules as universally binding on men as men. Or we might say that though there was something in this idea, it was absurd to try to apply it directly and in detail to the question of what people were required to do in particular situations in particular societies. And here we might be tempted by another manœuvre, which we should note as a possible one even if we do not think that it, either, is altogether satisfactory. We might be tempted to say that the relevant universally applicable, and hence moral, rule, was that a human being should conform to the rules which apply to him in a particular situation in a particular society. Here universality is achieved by stepping up an order. A man should perform the duties of his station in his society. This allows for an indefinite variety of societies and of stations within them; and would also seem to allow us, in so far as we regarded the universal rule as a truly moral one, to see at least part of true morality as resting upon and presupposing what I called the minimal social interpretation of morality.

Enough, for the moment, of objections to this minimal idea. Let me set out some of its merits. First we must be clearer about what this minimal interpretation is. The fundamental idea is that of a socially sanctioned demand made on an individual in virtue merely of his membership of the society in question, or in virtue of a particular position which he occupies within it or a particular relation in which

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he stands to other members of it. I spoke of rules in this connection; and the rules I meant would simply be the generalized statements of demands of this type. The formula I employ for the fundamental idea is deliberately flexible, the notions of a society and of social sanctioning deliberately vague. This flexibility is necessary to do justice to the complexities of social organization and social relationships. For instance, we can regard ourselves as members of many different social groups or communities, some of which fall within others; or again, when I speak of the social sanctioning of a demand which is made on an individual member of a group in virtue of his position in the group, we may think of the social sanction of that demand sometimes as arising only within the limited group in question, sometimes as arising also within a wider group which includes that limited group. A position in a society may or may not also be, so to speak, a position in society. Thus a position in a family generally gives rise to certain demands upon the holder of that position which are recognized both within the family and within some wider group or groups within which the family falls. The same may be true of membership of a profession or even of a professional association. On the other hand, some of the demands of certain class or caste moralities receive little or no extraneous reinforcement from the wider social groupings to which the members of the limited class also belong. Or again what one might call the internal morality of an intimate personal relationship may be as private as the relationship itself. One of the merits I should claim for this approach to morality is precisely that it so easily makes room for many concepts which we habitually employ, but which tend to be neglected in moral philosophy. Thus we talk of medical ethics, of the code of honour of a military caste, of bourgeois morality and of working-class morality. Such ideas fit more easily into an account of morality which sees it as essentially, or at any rate fundamentally, a function of social groupings than they do into the more apparently individualistic approaches which are generally current.

Another merit which I shall claim for the present approach is that it makes it relatively easy to understand such notions as those of conscientiousness, duty and obligation in a concrete and realistic way. These notions have been treated almost entirely abstractly in moral philosophy in the recent past, with the result that they have come to some of our contemporaries[1] to seem to be meaningless survivals of discarded ideas about the government of the universe. But as most ordinarily employed I do not think they are that at all. There is nothing in the least mysterious or metaphysical in the fact that duties and obligations go with offices, positions and relationships

[1] Cf. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy*, January 1958.

to others. The demands to be made on somebody in virtue of his occupation of a certain position may indeed be, and often are, quite explicitly listed in considerable detail. And when we call someone conscientious or say that he has a strong sense of his obligations or of duty, we do not ordinarily mean that he is haunted by the ghost of the idea of supernatural ordinances; we mean rather such things as this, that he can be counted on for sustained effort to do what is required of him in definite capacities, to fulfil the demand made on him as student or teacher or parent or soldier or whatever he may be. A certain professor once said: "For me to be moral is to behave like a professor".

Suppose we now raise that old philosophical question: What interest has the individual in morality? The question may force us to a more adequate conception of morality than the minimal interpretation offers by itself. It certainly forces us to strike, or to try to strike, some delicate balances. The only answer to the question so far suggested is this: that the individual's ethical imagination may be captured or fired by one or more ideal pictures of life which require for their realization the existence of social groupings and social organizations such as could not exist in the absence of a system of social demands made on individual members of these groups or organizations. I have already hinted that this answer is too crude, that the interplay between ethical ideal and social obligation is more intricate than it suggests. The answer is also not crude enough. The picture of the ideal form of life and the associated ethical vision of the world tend to be the products of the refined mind and relatively comfortable circumstances. But when we ask what the interest of the individual is in morality, we mean to ask about all those individuals on whom socially sanctioned demands are made; not just about the imaginatively restless and materially cosy. We need not, perhaps, insist upon just the same answer for all; but, if we take the question seriously, we must insist on *some* answer for all. There may seem to be a broader answer which does not altogether depart from the form of the over-refined answer. For who could exist at all, or pursue any aim, except in some form of society? And there is no form of society without rules, without some system of socially sanctioned demands on its members. Here at least is a common interest in morality as minimally conceived, an interest which can be attributed to all those about whom the question can be raised. Still we may feel that it is not enough. And in this feeling is the germ of the reason why the minimal conception of morality is inadequate to the ordinary notion, at least in its contemporary form; and perhaps, in uncovering the reason for this inadequacy, we may discover too what there is in the notion of the universal applicability of moral rules.

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We have arrived at the fact that everyone on whom some form of socially sanctioned demand is made has an interest in the existence of some system of socially sanctioned demands. But this fact seems inadequate to answer the question what the individual's interest in morality is. We can begin to understand this inadequacy by thinking of the different things that might be meant by the social sanctioning of a demand. "Sanction" is related to "permission" and "approval"; and also to "power" and to "penalty". A socially sanctioned demand is doubtless a demand made with the permission and approval of a society; and backed, in some form and degree, with its power. But the idea of a society as the totality of individuals subject to demands may here come apart from the idea of society as the source of sanction of those demands. The sanctioning society may simply be a sub-group of the total society, the dominant sub-group, the group in which power resides. Mere membership of the total society does not guarantee membership of the sanctioning part of the society. Nor does a mere interest in the existence of some system of socially sanctioned demands guarantee an interest in the particular system of socially sanctioned demands to which one is subjected. But unless at least one, and perhaps both, of these non-guaranteed conditions is satisfied, it does not seem that the fulfilment of a socially sanctioned demand comes anywhere near being what we should regard as the fulfilment of a moral obligation. That is to say, if I have no foothold at all in the sanctioning part of society, and if no interest of mine is safeguarded by the system of demands to which I am subject, then, in fulfilling a demand made upon me, I may indeed, in one sense, be doing what I am obliged to do; but scarcely what I am *morally* obliged to do. No wonder, then, that the question "What is the individual's interest in morality"? is not answered by mentioning the general interest in the existence of some system of socially sanctioned demands. The answer now scarcely appears to touch the question.

Suppose, then, that we consider the idea of a society such that all its members have *some* interest, not merely in there being a system of socially sanctioned demands, but in the actual system of demands which obtains in that society. It seems that we can ensure such an interest even to the powerless and enslaved by stipulating that the system includes not only demands made on them in the interest of their masters, but also demands made on their masters in their interests. We might be tempted to say that by thus securing to them an interest in the system of demands, we secure to them also some sort of position or foothold in the sanctioning part of society. Certainly, when the master recognizes moral obligations to his slave, we shall be at least one step nearer to allowing that the slave is not merely subject to the demands of his master, but may recognize a

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moral obligation to fulfil them. Even in this extreme case, then, we can approach the situation which everyone would agree to regard as characteristically moral, the situation in which there is reciprocal acknowledgment of rights and duties.

Still I think we must admit a distinction of two stages in this approach to the characteristically moral situation. Interest in claims on others and acknowledgment of claims on oneself are connected but not identical. It is a tautology, though not an easy one, that everyone subject to moral demands has some interest in morality. For a demand made on an individual is to be regarded as a moral demand only if it belongs to a system of demands which includes demands made on others in his interest. It would be agreeable, as I just now suggested, to be able to argue strictly that this fact carries with it the conclusion that mere self-conscious membership of a moral community implies at least in some degree extending one's sanction to its system of demands, to the extent of genuinely acknowledging as obligations at least some of the claims which others have on one, even if only provisionally and with the strongest desire that the system should be different. But to argue so would be to equivocate with the phrase "membership of a moral community". There would be nothing self-contradictory about the idea of one who recognized his interest in the system of moral demands and resolved merely to profit by it as much as he could, fulfilling its demands on himself only in so far as his interest calculably required it. He might get away with it successfully if he were subtle enough in his practice of the hypocrisy which this policy would necessarily involve. But it is an important fact that hypocrisy would be necessary. It is connected with the further fact, a fact of human nature which can probably be explained in a number of ways, that quite thoroughgoing egotism of this kind is rare. But for this fact there could be no such thing as a system of moral demands. We cannot argue that it is a tautology that *anyone* subject to moral demands who recognizes his interest in the system of demands must also genuinely acknowledge some obligations under the system. But we can argue that it is a tautology that the *generality* of those subject to moral demands must genuinely recognize some obligations under the system of demands. For if this were not so, there would be no such thing as a system of moral demands and hence no such thing as being subject to a moral demand.

These steps from a minimal to a more adequate conception of morality (i.e. to a conception which at least begins to square with what we nowadays vaguely understand by the word) may easily encourage abstract exaggerations and distortions in moral philosophy. For instance, the necessary truth that the members of a moral community in general acknowledge some moral claims upon them may be

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exaggerated into the idea of a self-conscious choice or adoption of the principle of those claims, So everyone appears, grandly but unplausibly, as a moral self-legislator. This is an exaggeration which has appealed, in different forms, to more than one philosopher. Again these steps reveal something genuinely universal in morality: the necessary acceptance of reciprocity of claim. And *one* way in which a demand made on one individual in the interest of others can be balanced by a demand made on others in his interest is through the operation of a general rule or principle having application to all alike. But it does not follow from this that *all* moral claims have, or are seen by those who acknowledge them as having, the character of applications of universal principles holding for all men. There is no reason why a system of moral demands characteristic of one community should, or even could, be found in every other. And even within a single system of reciprocal claims, the moral demand may essentially *not* relate to a situation in which any member of the system could find himself *vis-à vis* any other. Here are two reasons why it is misleading to say that moral behaviour is what is demanded of men as men. It might, in some cases, be essentially what is demanded of Spartans by other Spartans, or of a king by his subjects. What is universally demanded of the members of a moral community is something like the abstract virtue of justice: a man should not insist on a particular claim while refusing to acknowledge any reciprocal claim. But from this formally universal feature of morality no consequences follow as to the universality of application of the particular rules in the observance of which, in particular situations and societies, justice consists.

One must beware, however, of meeting exaggeration with counter-exaggeration. It is important to recognize the diversity of possible systems of moral demands, and the diversity of demands which may be made within any system. But it is also important to recognize that certain human interests are so fundamental and so general that they must be universally acknowledged in some form and to some degree in any conceivable moral community. Of some interests, one might say: a system could scarcely command *sufficient* interest in those subject to its demands for these demands to be acknowledged as obligations, unless it secured to them *this* interest. Thus some claim on human succour, some obligation to abstain from the infliction of physical injury, seem to be necessary features of almost any system of moral demands. Here at least we have types of moral behaviour which are demanded *of* men as men because they are demanded *for* and *by* men as men. Another interest which is fundamental to many types of social relation and social grouping is the interest in not being deceived. In most kinds of social grouping for which there obtains any system of moral demand and claim at

all this interest is acknowledged as a claim which any member of the group has on any other; and perhaps most such groupings could scarcely exist without this acknowledgment. When all allowance has been made, then, for the possible diversity of moral systems and the possible diversity of demands within a system, it remains true that the recognition of certain general virtues and obligations will be a logically or humanly necessary feature of almost any conceivable moral system: these will include the abstract virtue of justice, some form of obligation to mutual aid and to mutual abstention from injury and, in some form and in some degree, the virtue of honesty. This guarded recognition of the necessary universal applicability of some relatively vague and abstract moral principles is itself a corrective to the idea of unbounded freedom of choice of such principles on the part of the individual.

I spoke earlier of the need for striking some delicate balances, and I hope that the nature of some of these is now apparent. Constant checks are required if these balances are not to be lost. We have seen in what sense it is true that everyone on whom a moral demand is made must have an interest in morality. But we have also seen that the existence of a system of moral demands (at least as we now understand this concept) requires some degree of general readiness to recognize claims made upon one even when this recognition cannot plausibly be said to be in one's own interest. The existence of some such readiness needs no more to be argued for than the existence of morality in general. But it is necessary to emphasize it in order to correct another exaggeration, the exaggeration which would represent all morality as prudential.[1] To say that this readiness to acknowledge the claims of others does not need to be argued for is not to say that it does not need to be explained. We may discuss its natural sources; and the terms in which we do so will change with the state of our psychological knowledge: the appeal to the concept of sympathy, for example, will scarcely now seem adequate. But, however we explain it, there is no need to sophisticate ourselves into denying altogether the existence or fundamental importance of this recognition of others' claims. Again, we have seen that the fact of acknowledgment of claims may be blown up into the picture of the self-legislating moral agent; and here we should do well to scale down our pretensions to freedom by remembering, if nothing else, the importance of the training we receive and the limited choice we exercise of the moral communities to which we belong. Finally, we have acknowledged some force in the idea of universally applicable principles of moral demand and claim. But to keep within bounds the pretensions of this idea, we must insist again on

[1] Cf. P. R. Foot, "Moral Beliefs", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1958–59.

the flexibility of the concept of a social group, upon the diversity of groups and upon the absurdity of the idea that detailed demands could be shifted indifferently from group to group or apply to all members alike within a group.

There are further important moral phenomena of which the account I have given makes little or no explicit mention. Some of these it might even seem, at first sight, to exclude. Is there not such a thing as moral criticism, from within a society, of the existing moral forms of that society? Cannot different systems of socially sanctioned demand, under which those subject to demands genuinely acknow-ledge obligations, be the subject of relative moral evaluation? Cannot there be situations in which men may or should recognize moral obligations to each other, although there is no common society of which they are members and there is no concept of a "social" relationship which can be at all plausibly represented as applying to their situation? Any acceptable account of morality must certainly allow an affirmative answer to these questions; and there are others which will suggest themselves. But they no more yield a reason for mistrusting the approach I have adopted than the inadequacy of what I called the minimal interpretation of morality gave a reason for wholly discarding that idea. By enriching the minimal interpretation with certain applications of the notions of interest, and of acknowledgment of obligation, we obtained what was recognizably a concept of social morality. It is necessary only to draw out the significance of certain elements in *this* conception in order to make room for the ideas of moral criticism, and of a morality which transcends standard forms of social relationship. I have remarked already that, because certain human needs and interests are as fundamental and as general as they are, we shall find corre-spondingly general types of virtue and obligation acknowledged in some form and in some degree in almost any conceivable moral system. Now it is characteristically by analogy with, and extension of, acknowledged forms of these, that moral development proceeds, and that these ideas themselves assume more refined and generous shapes. And moral criticism at its most self-conscious proceeds characteristically by appeal to, and interpretation of, such general moral ideas as those of justice, integrity and humanity: existing institutions, systems of demand and claim, are criticized as unjust, inhumane or corrupt. We may say that so far from excluding the idea of moral criticism, the concept of social morality, as I have outlined it, makes fully intelligible the nature and possibility of such criticism. For we can perceive how the seeds of criticism lie in the morality itself; and we may even hope, on this basis, to achieve some understanding of the complex interrelationships between social and economic change, the critical insights of individual moralists,

and the actual course of moral evolution. (It is, for instance, an easy consequence of our principles that moral *formalism*—i.e. a rigid adherence to the letter, with no appeal to the spirit, of the rules—will tend to be at a maximum in a static and isolated society, and that moral *disorientation* will tend to be at a maximum when such a morality is suddenly exposed to radical change.) Just as a social morality contains the seeds of moral criticism, so the two together contain the seeds of a morality transcending standard social relationships. It is easy to see how the tendency of at least one type of self-conscious and critical morality is generalizing and anti-parochial, as it is anti-formalist. Some moralists would maintain that a true concept of morality emerges only at the limit of this generalizing process. This is a judgment in which, as it seems to me, the sense of reality has become quite subordinated to zeal. But wherever we choose to say that "true morality" begins, I have no doubt whatever that our understanding of the concept of morality in general is best served by the kind of approach that I have sketched. Where what we are dealing with is a developing human institution, it is no reproach to an explanation that it may be described as at least partially genetic.

But now it is time to return to the question of the relation between social moralities and those ideal pictures of forms of life which I spoke of at the outset. All I have so far explicitly said about this is that the realization of any such ideal requires the existence of forms of social grouping or organization which in turn require the existence of a system of socially sanctioned demands on their members. We have since remarked that a system of socially sanctioned demands would fall short of being a system of moral demands unless those demands were not merely enforced as demands, but also at least in some degree generally acknowledged as claims by those subject to them; and it follows from this that to be a member of a moral community cannot merely be a matter of convenience, except perhaps for those who can practise a sustained hypocrisy of which few are in fact capable. Yet it may still be true in general to say that the possibility of the pursuit of an ideal form of life quite pragmatically requires membership of a moral community or of moral communities; for it is extremely unlikely in fact that the minimal social conditions for the pursuit of any ethical ideal which anyone is likely to entertain could in practice be fulfilled except through membership of such communities. But of course the relations between these two things are much more intricate and various than this formulation by itself suggests. The possibilities of collision, absorption and interplay are many. The way I have just expressed the matter perhaps makes most obvious the possibility of collision; and this possibility is worth stressing. It is worth stressing that

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what one acknowledges or half-acknowledges as obligation may conflict not only, crudely, with interest and, weakly, with inclination but also with ideal aspiration, with the vision that captures the ethical imagination. On the other hand, it may be that a picture of the ideal life is precisely one in which the interests of morality are dominant, are given an ideal, overriding value. To one dominated temporarily or permanently by such a picture the "consciousness of duty faithfully performed" will appear as the supremely satisfactory state, and being moral not merely as something that matters but as the thing that supremely matters. Or again the ideal picture may be, not that in which the interests of morality in general are dominant, but rather one in which the dominating idea operates powerfully to reinforce some, but not perhaps others, of a system of moral demands. So it is with that ideal picture in which obedience to the command to love one another appears as the supreme value.

This is still to draw too simple a picture. Let us remember the diversity of communities to which we may be said to belong, and the diversity of systems of moral demand which belong to them. To a certain extent, though to an extent which we must not exaggerate, the systems of moral relationships into which we enter are a matter of choice—or at least a matter in which there are alternative possibilities; and different systems of moral demand are variously well or ill adapted to different ideal pictures of life. The ideal picture, moreover, may call for membership not merely of communities in which certain interests are safeguarded by a system of moral demands, but for membership of a community or of a system of relationships in which the system of demands reflects in a positive way the nature of the ideal. For one crude instance of this, we may think again of the morality of a military caste in connection with the ideal of personal honour. In general, in a society as complex as ours, it is obvious that there are different moral environments, different sub-communities within the community, different systems of moral relationships, interlocking indeed and overlapping with one another, but offering some possibilities of choice, some possibilities of adjustment of moral demand and individual aspiration. But here again, at least in our time and place, it is the limits of the direct relevance of each to the other that must finally be stressed. Inside a single political human society one may indeed find different, and perhaps widely different, moral environments, social groupings in which different systems of moral demand are recognized. But if the one grouping is to form part of the wider society, its members must be subject too to a wider system of reciprocal demand, a wider common morality; and the relative significance of the wider common morality will grow in

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proportion as the sub-groups of the society are closely interlocked, in proportion as each individual is a member of a plurality of sub-groups and in proportion as the society is not rigidly stratified, but allows of relatively free access to, and withdrawal from, its sub-groups. In a political society which thus combines a wide variety of social groupings with complex interlocking and freedom of movement between them the dissociation of idiosyncratic ideal and common moral demand will doubtless tend to be at its maximum. On the other hand an ideal picture of man *may* tend, in fact or in fancy, to demand the status of a comprehensive common morality. Thus Coleridgean or Tolstoyan dreamers may play with the thought of self-enclosed ideal communities in which the system of moral demands shall answer exactly, or as exactly as possible, to an ideal picture of life held in common by all their members. Such fancies are bound to strike many as weak and futile; for the price of preserving the purity of such communities is that of severance from the world at large. More seriously, there may be some attempt to make the whole moral climate of an existing national state reflect some ideal image of human solidarity or religious devotion or military honour. In view of the natural diversity of human ideals—to mention only that—such a state (or its members) will evidently be subject to at least some stresses from which a liberal society is free.

To conclude. I have spoken of those ideal images of life of which one individual may sympathize with many, and desire to see many realized in some degree. I have spoken also of those systems—though the word is too strong—of recognized reciprocal claim that we have on one another as members of human communities, or as terms of human relationships, many of which could scarcely exist or have the character they have but for the existence of such systems of reci-procal claim. I have said something, though too little, of the complex and various relations which may hold between these two things, viz. our conflicting visions of the ends of life and the systems of moral demand which make social living possible. Finally I have glanced at the relations of both to the political societies in which we necessarily live. The field of phenomena over which I have thus loosely ranged is, I think, very much more complex and many-sided than I have been able to suggest; but I have been concerned to suggest something of its complexity. Some implications for moral philosophy I have hinted at in passing, mainly by way of an attempt to correct some typical exaggerations of contemporary theory. But the main practical implications for moral and political philosophy are, I think, that more attention should be concentrated on types of social structure and social relation, and on those complex inter-relationships which I have mentioned as well as others which I have not. For instance, it is hard not to believe that understanding

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of our secular morality would be enhanced by considering the historical role that religion has played in relation to morality. Or again, I doubt if the nature of morality can be properly understood without some consideration of its relationship to law. It is not merely that the spheres of morality and law are largely overlapping, or that their demands often coincide. It is also that in the way law functions to give cohesiveness to the most important of all social groupings we may find a coarse model of the way in which systems of moral demand function to give cohesiveness to social groupings in general. Similarly, in the complexity of our attitudes towards existing law we may find a model of the complexity of our attitude towards the systems of moral demand which impinge upon us in our social relations at large—or upon others, in theirs.

Finally, I do not think there is any very definite invitation to moral or political commitment implicit in what I have said. But perhaps one question can be raised, and in part answered. What will be the attitude of one who experiences sympathy with a variety of conflicting ideals of life? It seems that he will be most at home in a liberal society, in a society in which there are variant moral environments but in which no ideal endeavours to engross, and determine the character of, the common morality. He will not argue in favour of such a society that it gives the best chance for the truth about life to prevail, for he will not consistently believe that there is such a thing as the truth about life. Nor will he argue in its favour that it has the best chance of producing a harmonious kingdom of ends, for he will not think of ends as necessarily capable of being harmonized. He will simply welcome the ethical diversity which the society makes possible, and in proportion as he values that diversity he will note that he is the natural, though perhaps the sympathetic, enemy of all those whose single intense vision of the ends of life drives them to try to make the requirements of the ideal co-extensive with those of common social morality.

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