SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE

Compromise and Integrity in Ethics and Politics

Martin Benjamin

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF KANSAS

Rorty, in this connection, distinguishes between "a specifically philosophical use of 'good,' a use which would not be what it is unless Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, and others had helped construct a specifically Platonic theory of the absolute difference between the eternal and the spatio-temporal," and a more "homely and shopworn sense," the sense in which in everyday life we say that this or that act, object, desire, argument, and so on is good (1979, p. 307). The latter sense is, of course, heavily context dependent and resistant to sweeping theories and principles because the contexts are so diverse. It is only by abstracting the word from the settings in which it does its work, when it really matters to us whether something is good or bad, that the philosopher in the Platonic tradition has the remotest chance to say something sweeping—sweeping, perhaps, but also without much practical significance. For this reason the pronouncements of most moral philosophers within this tradition have little to contribute to men and women who must cope with the most difficult and pressing ethical issues of the day.

What motivates the Platonic Quest? The answer is probably quite complex, but one important factor is the fear of relativism. Although they might reject the comparison, many whose conception of philosophy is dominated by the Platonic Quest are looking for a secular equivalent of the God whose existence is worrying Dmitri Karamazov. There is a deep desire to have our beliefs about goodness, truth, and reality compelled and constrained by something external, entirely independent of historically, culturally, and linguistically conditioned beliefs. Even the positivists, Rorty suggests, who claimed to eschew metaphysics for the hard-headed reality of empirical science, went only halfway in doing without God: "For positivism preserved a god in its notion of Science (and its notion of 'scientific philosophy'), the notion of a portion of a culture where we touched something not ourselves, where we found Truth [with a capital 'T'] naked, relative to no description" (1982, p. xliii). Though we might think them strange bedfellows, positivists and Platonists are quite alike in this regard:

> The Platonists would like to see a culture guided by something eternal. The positivists would like to see one guided by something temporal—the brute impact of the way the world is. But both want it to be *guided*, constrained, not left to its own devices. For both, decadence is a matter of unwillingness to submit oneself to something "out there"—to recognize that beyond the languages of men and women there is something to which these languages, and these men and women, must try to be adequate (Rorty 1982, p. xxxix).

In both instances the flight from relativism goes too far and is tantamount to a flight from the conditions of human life.

Following Sartre, Rorty regards the Platonic Quest as partly a failure of nerve, a reluctance to cope with the complexity and uncertainty of the world as it is. If, as the Platonists wish, "we could convert knowledge from something discursive, something attained by continued adjustments of ideas or words, into something as ineluctable as being shoved about, or being transfixed by a sight which leaves us speechless, then we should no longer have the responsibility for choice among competing ideas and words, theories and vocabularies" (Rorty 1979, pp. 375–77). Although Rorty is opposed to the more vulgar and pernicious forms of epistemological and moral relativism, he suggests that they can be resisted well short of embarking on one or another form of Platonic Quest (Rorty 1980).

Even if these criticisms of the Platonic project are largely correct, as I believe they are, it is still possible perhaps that one set of values and principles will emerge from our various discussions and debates as consistent, comprehensive, and capable in principle of rationally resolving without remainder all moral conflict. One might, that is, reject the Platonic conception of a complete and coherent ethical theory as a matter of discovery while retaining the aspiration of inventing or devising such a theory (Walzer 1987, pp. 3–32). To abandon the Platonic Quest is not to rule out the possibility of eventually harmonizing our ethical values and principles, the realization of which would significantly reduce the need for compromise. This undertaking is, however, also misconceived. A significant number of values and principles, intrapersonal as well as interpersonal, are and are likely to remain irreducibly plural, diverse, and resistant to efforts to fully harmonize them.

THE DOCTRINE OF MORAL HARMONY

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ethical inquiry has—by identifying inconsistencies, drawing distinctions, unmasking raw prejudice, clarifying concepts, acquiring additional information, refining principles, and so on—contributed to resolving or ameliorating conflicts and rendering our prereflective choices and judgments more coherent and systematic. Extrapolating from these achievements, they maintain that additional knowledge and further reflection will ultimately allow us to devise a consistent and comprehensive theory that will be capable, at least in principle, of resolving all moral conflicts without remainder.

Underlying this rationalistic outlook, Isaiah Berlin points out, are a number of assumptions: (1) that our only true purpose is rational self-direction; (2) that all of our rational ends must ultimately fit into a single, universal, harmonious pattern; (3) "that all conflict, and consequently all tragedy, is due solely to the clash of reason with the irrational or the insufficiently rational—the immature and undeveloped elements in life—whether individual or communal, and that such clashes are, in principle, avoidable, and for wholly rational beings impossible"; and (4) that insofar as we are rational, we will all obey the same moral rules and principles that emanate from our rational nature (1958, p. 154). Yet, Berlin argues, these assumptions and thus "the conviction that all the positive values in which men have believed must, in the end, be compatible, and perhaps even entail one another" cannot survive scrutiny. "It is a commonplace," Berlin points out,

> that neither political equality nor efficient organization nor social justice is compatible with more than a modicum of individual liberty, and certainly not with unrestricted *laissez-faire*; that justice and generosity, public and private loyalties, the demands of genius and the claims of society, can conflict violently with each other. And it is no great way from that to the generalization that not all good things are compatible, still less all the ideals of mankind (1958, p. 167).

Thus, he concludes,

> that the belief that some single formula can in principle be found whereby all the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realized is demonstrably false. If, as I believe, the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict—and of tragedy—can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social. The necessity of choosing between absolute claims is an inescapable characteristic of the human condition (1958, p. 169).

Our efforts at systematization and unification will, on this view, never be complete. Although we should do what we can to reduce or mitigate moral conflict, it is fantasy—and dangerous fantasy at that—to think it is possible, even in principle, to fully eliminate it. Throughout history too much blood has been spilled and too many lives lost or ruined for the sake of one or another conception of ultimate moral harmony. Whatever efforts at systematization and unification that we undertake should, therefore, be retail rather than wholesale, piecemeal rather than all at once. Only then can we avoid the Procrustean oversimplifications that—when harnessed to political power and the means of oppression—have contributed with such depressing regularity to the world's ills.

In recent years a number of philosophers have developed variations on this general theme. Bernard Williams, for example, observes that philosophical writing "has typically tended to regard value-conflict, except perhaps in the most contingent and superficial connections, as a pathology of social and moral thought, and as something to be overcome—whether by theorising, as in the tradition of analytical philosophy and its ancestors, or by a historical process, as in Hegelian and Marxian interpretations" (1978, p. 72). He then adds, "It is my view, as it is Berlin's, that value-conflict is not necessarily pathological at all, but something necessarily involved in human values, and to be taken as central by any adequate understanding of them." Indeed, taking Williams's point a step further we might add that it is not value conflict in itself that is pathological but rather the obsession with wholly eliminating it, especially when this obsession leads to systematic denials of the nature and complexity of human life.

Stuart Hampshire's account of the persistence of moral conflict is especially instructive. Hampshire identifies Hume, Kant, the utilitarians (particularly Mill and Moore), the deontologists (for example, Ross and Prichard), and ideal social contract theorists (such as Rawls) with "the doctrine of moral harmony" (1983, pp. 143–44).[1] Whatever the well-known differences among them, Hampshire maintains, these moral philosophers are

> united and in agreement in one respect: their theories of moral judgment agree with Aristotle, first, in stating or implying that moral judgments are ultimately to be justified by reference to some feature of human beings which is common throughout the species; secondly, they agree with Aristotle in stating or implying that a morally competent and clear-headed person has in principle the means to resolve all moral problems as they present themselves, and that he need not encounter irresoluble problems (1983, p. 144).

But, Hampshire argues, Aristotle and those who follow him in this respect are largely mistaken: Many moral judgments are (and can only be) ultimately justified by considerations that are not common throughout the species. And, because these considerations are often conflicting and incommensurable, a number of moral problems are not, in the desired sense, rationally resolvable. Abstract or universal reason of the sort favored by philosophers is, though indispensable to ethics, insufficient to resolve all (or perhaps even most) of our moral disagreements.

If "moral judgments are ultimately to be justified by reference to some feature of human beings which is common throughout the species," exactly what is this feature? Two main candidates are: a conception of the good rooted in one or more universal features of human nature; and the equal capacity among human beings for reason. Both are usually identified with Aristotle, though in recent times it is Kant's version of the second that has received the most attention. Yet neither version is able to bear the justificatory burden placed upon it by the Doctrine of Moral Harmony.

Consider, first, the possibility of a conception of the good that is rooted in our common human nature. If we can indisputably ground a complete conception of the good in human nature, we may then with increasingly improved knowledge and powers of prediction be able, at least in principle, to harmonize differences and resolve or eliminate internal and external conflicts by reference to what contributes to and what detracts from the common human good. Everything would then come down to maximizing the good, either collectively or individually. (Let us disregard for the moment possible conflicts between collective and individual good.) Aristotle's conception of the good was rooted in his conception of our common biology.

Now it is certainly true that our common biology places constraints on our conceptions of morality. Common vulnerabilities relating to (physical) pain and death are, for example, sufficient to ground widespread prohibitions against murder or causing gratuitous pain. With this there can be no argument. Moreover, "the dependence of very young children on adult nurture, the onset of sexual maturity, the instinctual desires associated with motherhood, the comparative helplessness of the old, are all biological features of a standard outline of human life, which may be appealed to as imposing some limits on moral requirements at all times and in all places" (Hampshire 1983, p. 142). But as an elementary understanding of history and anthropology clearly reveals, these limits will take different (and occasionally conflicting) forms at different times and in different places. To point out that young children are universally dependent and in need of nurture is one thing; to maintain that there is one, and only one, form that the provision of nurture is to take is quite another. With regard to the common sexual and reproductive needs of the species, Hampshire points out, "history and anthropology together show that the natural constraints still leave a wide area for diversity: diversity in sexual customs, in family and kinship structures, in admired virtues appropriate to different ages and to the two sexes, in relations between social classes, also in the relation between the sexes, and in attitudes to youth and old age" (1983, p. 141). Indeed, taking a less reductionist conception of human nature (one with no hidden philosophical agenda and that does not, as a result, attempt to reduce everything to, say, biology), one might say that human nature as revealed by literature, history, psychology, anthropology, and sociology as well as biology reveals diversity itself to be "a primary, perhaps the primary, feature of human nature, species wide" (Hampshire 1983, p. 141). Thus Hampshire concludes, "human nature, conceived in terms of common human needs and capacities, always underdetermines a way of life and underdetermines the moral prohibitions and injunctions that support a way of life" (1983, p. 155).

It is, of course, open to those hoping to ground a common, more determinate conception of the good in human nature to resort to more metaphysical conceptions. Aristotle's biological grounding of morality was embedded in a metaphysical conception that no longer seems plausible (MacIntyre 1981, p. 152; Williams 1985, pp. 43–53). Yet enriching our scientific understanding of universal human biology with

a more up-to-date metaphysics has two defects as a strategy for grounding a comprehensive and consistent moral theory. First, as Williams has suggested, far from grounding an ethical theory, such a biological-cum-metaphysical theory of human nature is likely to already be (or at least presuppose) an ethical theory itself (Williams 1985, p. 52). Hence the enterprise will be circular. Second, in attempting to avoid charges of circularity, proponents of this view may be tempted to embark on one or another variation of the Platonic Quest, which is to exchange the perils of the frying pan for those of the fire.

Let us turn from biology to the equal capacity for reason as a possible ground for the Doctrine of Moral Harmony. Does it fare any better? I think not. Hampshire illuminatingly compares efforts to resolve all ethical conflict by appeal to abstract impersonal reason with the project of Esperanto, the attempt to devise a comprehensive universal language. The project of Esperanto does not succeed, Hampshire points out, because it cannot account for the local and particular circumstances and history that give shape and meaning to our lives: "A language distinguishes a particular people with a particular shared history and with a particular set of shared associations and with largely unconscious memories, preserved in the metaphors that are imbedded in the vocabulary" (1983, p. 135). The same is true of some parts of morality, especially those that govern sexual and family relationships and matters of life and death. To restrict the resolution of conflicts involving these aspects of morality to abstract, impersonal reason is to be as remote and detached from what actually matters to (particular) people as is the project of Esperanto—or, to echo Putnam, as is the development of an interplanetary passenger-carrying space ship (1983, p. 3). Conflicts about the structure and nature of the family (which, for example, underlie controversies over the use of new reproductive technologies, the legitimacy of homosexual marriage, child raising, and adoption, and the authority of parents to accept or refuse medical treatment for seriously ill newborns [Benjamin and Weil 1987, pp. 3–29]) turn on values and principles that are historically conditioned, contingent, and not fully determined by abstract, impersonal reason.

Contrary to what many ethical theorists would like to believe, the values governing our convictions on such matters are more closely related to sentiment and personal circumstance than to abstract, impersonal reason (Warnock 1985b). They are bound up with particular

conceptions of ourselves and the world that are themselves rooted in divergent personal, cultural, and historical ways of living. As such, they will often conflict. For example, the world view and way of life of a housewife and mother of five with strong fundamentalist convictions is likely to differ considerably from that of a single, female executive who wants to become a mother through artificial insemination but who has little or no inclination to be married. We can reasonably assume, for example, that they would have differing ethical views on the use of new reproductive technologies or abortion (Luker 1984a; Strong and Schinfeld 1984).

In emphasizing the limits of abstract, impersonal reason we need not deny that general principles of, say, justice or utility are at some level applicable to everyone. But like our understanding of human biology, which is also applicable at some level to everyone, such principles underdetermine many of our ethical choices and judgments. General principles of justice and utility can as a rule be used to show murder, rape, slavery, racism, and so on to be clearly wrong. But many actual conflicts cannot be resolved by considerations of justice or utility alone. These general principles fail to determine the whole of morality; they do not, to adapt a phrase from Williams, "go all the way down" (1985, p. 108). They do not, for example, go all the way down to the level of particular disputes about surrogate motherhood or the moral status of the embryo. Such disputes are rooted in opposing world views (including opposing religious and metaphysical beliefs) and ways of life that do not clearly violate general principles of justice or utility.

Attempts to resolve these matters in terms of one or another abstract, general principle will be either controversial or vacuous. Close examination of the frequently labored attempts to "deduce" a concrete, more or less purely utilitarian or Kantian solution to these issues invariably reveals a number of question-begging factual and metaphysical assumptions. The reasoning will incorporate an unacknowledged bias toward one or another world view and way of life (Warnock 1985a, 1985b). The practical conclusions will, as a result, be unacceptable to those who do not share the relevant world view and way of life. It is not, as the proponents of such arguments often suggest, that those who disagree with them are "irrational" or "illogical", but rather that what is at stake involves more than the sort of abstract, impersonal reason to which academic philosophers are by tempera-

ment and training generally drawn. Ethical arguments that studiously avoid commitment to one or another particular world view and way of life may avoid such biases, but they pay a heavy price for their neutrality; on many questions they will be so abstract and theoretical as to have no practical bearing whatever.

WORLD VIEWS AND WAYS OF LIFE

A *world view* is a complex, often unarticulated (and perhaps not fully articulable) set of deeply held and highly cherished beliefs about the nature and organization of the universe and one's place in it. Normative as well as descriptive—comprising interlocking general beliefs about knowledge, reality, and values—a world view so pervades and conditions our thinking that it is largely unnoticed. The components of a world view are, as Luker points out, usually, "so deep and so dear to us that we find it hard to imagine that we even have a 'world view'—to us it is just reality—or that anyone else could not share it. By definition, those areas covered by a 'world view' are those parts of life we take for granted, never imagine questioning, and cannot envision decent, moral people not sharing" (1984a, p. 158). Among the elements of world view are one's deepest convictions about (1) God—that is, whether there is a God and, if so, what God is like; (2) the nature and purpose (if any) of the universe and human life; (3) the nature, justification, and extent of human knowledge and our capacity to acquire further knowledge; (4) the basic nature of human beings (including, for example, their capacities for free will, goodness, compassion, selfishness, and, in certain world views, "sin" and "redemption"); (5) the best way to structure human relationships (including sexual and familial relationships, friendships, political institutions, and obligations to strangers); (6) the demands of morality, especially injunctions and principles having to do with the taking of life, the nature of equality, respect for liberty, and so on; and (7) the moral standing of nonhuman animals and the intrinsic value of the natural environment. A world view may, as this list suggests, be religious or entirely naturalistic or secular.

Closely related to a particular world view is a corresponding *way of life*. "Ways of life are," Hampshire writes, "coherent totalities of customs, attitudes, beliefs, institutions, which are interconnected and mutually dependent in patterns that are sometimes evident and sometimes subtle and concealed" (1983, p. 6). "Alongside repeated patterns of behaviour," he adds, "a way of life includes admired ideal types of men and women, standards of taste, family relationships, styles of education and upbringing, religious practices and other dominant concerns" (1983, p. 5). A particularly distinctive and easily recognizable way of life is that of the Amish.

Originating in Europe as followers of Jakob Ammann, a seventeenth-century Mennonite elder, the Amish began migrating into North America around 1720. Although the Amish differ little in formal theological doctrine from other Mennonites, they have adopted a distinctive way of life, in large part to preserve the integrity of their world view. The men wear broadbrimmed black hats, beards, and homemade plain clothes fastened with hooks and eyes instead of buttons. The women wear bonnets, long, full dresses with capes over the shoulders, shawls, and black shoes and stockings. They do not wear jewelry. Their patterns of dress have more to do with maintaining group identity (their clothing is largely the same as that worn by the rural populace in seventeenth-century Europe) than with biblical restrictions. In addition, they reject telephones and electric lights and prefer horses and buggies to automobiles. Although regarded as excellent farmers, they are inclined to reject modern farm machinery. Their self-conscious distinctiveness and their reluctance to send their children to public schools are largely motivated by their desire to preserve and perpetuate their world view and way of life. The demands of individual and group integrity, they believe, require that they remain a people apart.

The majority of world views and ways of life in modern pluralistic societies are more difficult to identify and delineate. A complex amalgam of a wide variety of beliefs, attitudes, ideals, and practices, a typical modern world view and way of life will often be highly personalized. Understanding and articulating a person's world view and way of life becomes the task of the sensitive biographer, requiring a thorough grounding in a particular historical and cultural setting as well as a detailed understanding of the individual's personal and familial history. Even then we may reasonably entertain doubts as to whether we have fully and accurately identified the core of a person's outlook and practices, whether that of ourselves or of others. But this is not to say that these more individualized world views and ways of

life are less significant to those who identify with them than are the world view and the way of life articulated by Jakob Ammann to the Amish.

World views and corresponding ways of life may be placed on a spectrum ranging from more to less readily identifiable. At the right end will be those of the Amish, Hassidic Jews, and Christian and Muslim fundamentalists. At the other end will be world views and ways of life of iconoclasts like Thoreau, Margaret Sanger, and Bertrand Russell. In between, reading from right to left, will be those of Conservative Jews and practicing Catholics, Reformed Jews and nonpracticing Catholics, and various atheists and agnostics. Although world views and ways of life toward the left end of the spectrum may be more flexible and difficult to delineate than those at the other end, their wide and overlapping variety and occasional fluidity should not prevent us from acknowledging the important role they play in determining an individual's identity and integrity.

A person's world view and way of life are dynamically interrelated. A world view helps to govern a way of life; a way of life presupposes and embodies a world view. Deep changes in one are likely to occasion related changes in the other. Those who, like Ivan Karamazov or his half-brother Smerdyakov, believe that "if there is no God then everything is permitted" will live quite differently depending on whether God remains part of their world view. And children brought up within a particularly restrictive, religious way of life may alter their world view if, for example, a secular state enjoins their parents to place them in a public school where they will come into sustained contact with and be encouraged or tempted to participate in a significantly less restrictive way of life. Consider the reluctance of the Amish to send their children to public high schools or the efforts of other religious groups to have organized prayer become a part of public schooling and to replace or supplement instruction in the theory of evolution with instruction in "creation science."

These groups have some ground for complaint when they charge the state with imposing the alien "religion of secular humanism" on their children, although they are mistaken in identifying what they call secular humanism with religion. A religious outlook involves more than a set of deep, fundamental beliefs about the cause, purpose, and nature of the universe; it must also include some reference to supernatural agency either as the cause of the universe or as somehow

overseeing and governing it, or both. To construe religious belief simply as a person's deepest convictions about the universe is to trivialize it. Because everyone has some beliefs that are deeper or more fundamental than the others, we all become religious believers by definition. But characterizing someone as religious is not empty or tautologous. Not everyone believes in a God either as the cause of the universe or as somehow providing guidance in how we should live. Those characterized as secular humanists, for example, differ from religious believers in embracing world views and ways of life that have little or nothing to do with the supernatural, including the notion of a Supreme Being. When, therefore, the courts uphold, in the name of the separation of church and state, laws prohibiting organized prayer and the teaching of creation science in state-supported schools they are not promoting one religion, the "religion" of secular humanism, over others. They are, however, endorsing an outlook that acknowledges the equal legitimacy of a number of different world views and ways of life. And it is this (broadly) liberal or pluralistic outlook that is incompatible with the world views and ways of life of the Christian fundamentalists who make the complaint. In attending public schools, the children of Christian fundamentalists will be exposed to books, materials, world views, and ways of life that are to their lights "Godless" and contrary to their beliefs in the literal and uncompromising truth of the Bible. They are mistaken in claiming that this amounts to the imposition of an alien religion. But they are quite correct about its constituting a significantly different world view and way of life, one that, given their singular and totalizing outlook, may somehow be threatening to the maintenance of their own.

Many bitterly divisive moral and political conflicts are grounded in conflicting world views and ways of life. For example, Luker, in her revealing study of prolife and prochoice activists (1984a), shows that for members of these groups what is at stake in the abortion debate is more than a moral position on one discrete issue.[2] "In the course of our interviews," Luker writes, "it became apparent that each side of the abortion debate has an internally coherent and mutually shared view of the world that is tacit, never fully articulated, and, most importantly, completely at odds with the world view held by their opponents" (1984a, p. 159). Underlying their opposing positions on abortion are different interrelated beliefs about the roles of the sexes, the meaning of motherhood, the extent to which there is goodness or

order in the universe, and the extent to which one ought to accept or attempt to alter nature.[3] Luker's account of the prochoice activists, whose world view is for the most part more secular than that of the prolife activists, shows, too, that just as "you don't have to be Jewish to enjoy Levy's rye bread" (a memorable caption on an advertisement picturing an American Indian biting into a sandwich) one does not have to be Amish, Hassidic, or a devout Mormon or Catholic to have a particular world view and corresponding way of life. That one person's view of the world is centered around a conception of the universe as largely indifferent to human striving and aspiration, together with a way of life emphasizing scientific reason, planning, and autonomous decision, is as much a matter of historical, cultural, and personal circumstances as is another's world view that is centered on a conception of the universe as a divine creation—basically benign and having a certain order and purpose (even though its exact nature may elude our finite understanding)—and a corresponding way of life. An appeal to nothing more than reason and science to determine which of these two world views is "more accurate" is no more neutral than an appeal to God or religious authority.[4]

Not all strongly held positions on the question of abortion are, however, identified with stereotypical world views and ways of life. Mary Meehan and Sidney Callahan, for example, combine strong opposition to abortion with what they regard as equally strong commitments to feminism and opposition to violence. As a member of Feminists for Life and the peace-prolife group Prolifers for Survival, Meehan does not fit the profile of prolife activists sketched by Luker (Meehan 1984b). Callahan's eloquent portrayal and defense of a particularly attractive and coherent prolife world view and way of life is equally idiosyncratic. In tracing her southern Protestant origins, her going north to college and embracing "Quakerlike" liberal politics, and her conversion to Roman Catholicism, she says, "I have always lived between worlds, constantly moving back and forth. I have to carve out my own territory in my own way and stand by it." She characterizes her world view and way of life as, among other things, "feminist, pacifist, and prolife" (Callahan 1984, p. 286).

A person's commitment to a particular world view and way of life is, as Callahan's words and the example of the Amish suggest, identity conferring. This is why we are often reluctant to give up a world view and way of life or even to modify them. A particular world view and

way of life determines who we are and what we stand for. At stake in a disagreement rooted in conflicting world views and ways of life, therefore, are the identity and integrity of each of the contending parties. To be forcibly and irreversibly deprived of one's world view and way of life occasions grief and mourning for the loss of a particular self.[5]

World views and ways of life come into conflict because they acquire their shape and direction from local and particular, rather than more general and universal, aspects of human life. They embody perspectives, values, and principles that are historically conditioned, contingent, and sometimes fiercely personal and parochial. Loyalties to particular institutions, practices, projects, and persons are regarded as essential to one's way of life; they largely constitute one's identity and set one off from others as a particular person or type of person. To celebrate these loyalties is to celebrate what is distinctive about oneself or one's group and not what is common to all. To relinquish them or to be stripped of them is often to surrender or to be deprived of one's integrity and identity as a particular person.

As suggested by our rejection of the Platonic Quest and the Doctrine of Moral Harmony, there is no single world view and way of life that can claim to be uniquely supported by reason or "the facts." Certainly abstract, impersonal reason and a widely shared, publicly accessible understanding of the facts can rule out certain world views and ways of life—for example, those presupposing morally significant differences between blacks and whites or Jews and Aryans. But after this essentially negative, or winnowing, process is completed, there will still be a variety of different and occasionally conflicting world views and ways of life, each of which seems compatible with abstract, impersonal reason and a widely shared, publicly accessible understanding of the facts.

It is therefore a perfectly adequate initial justification of a course of action to show that it flows from a decent or legitimate world view and way of life, one that does not appear to violate well-grounded principles of justice and utility and that is not in conflict with a widely shared, publicly accessible conception of the facts. Appeals to our identity and integrity, historically rooted and contingent though they may be, are in this view no less important for ethics than impersonal appeals to justice and benevolence. "I know he's guilty, but I've got to help him, he's my son," is a perfectly coherent and sometimes decisive justification for a person's undertaking a particular course of

action as is "I'm a Catholic, so I've got to do what I can to help bring about a change in the law on abortion."

So long as one's commitment to a reasonably coherent, particular world view and way of life does not cause evident and avoidable suffering or is not clearly unfair or unjust, it needs no additional justification. The following are all, as Hampshire puts it, "justifications in a moral context . . . which appeal to the agent's sense of his own identity and character as a person and of his history, which partially determines his sense of identity":

> "This is the approved practice of the people to whom I belong, and to whom I am committed, and *I find nothing harmful in it*": "This is an essential part of the way of life to which I am committed and *it is not an evil way of life*": "This has always been our practice, and, *properly understood, it is not unfair*, and it is important in our way of life": "This is how I feel, and how I have always felt: to change now would be to repudiate my past, and *I find nothing unjust or harmful in the practice*"; . . . "This is my ground and I must stand on it. I do not claim that everyone everywhere must do what I do: but this is my character, and because it is, I must act in this way." Such justifications are sometimes spoken of as appeals to integrity, a distinctive virtue to be ranked with justice and benevolence (1983, p. 8; my emphasis).

As the emphasized passages indicate, appeals to the integrity of one's world view and way of life are not beyond criticism. Widely shared, publicly accessible, and rationally justifiable considerations dealing with harm, evil, justice, or unfairness constrain appeals to integrity. Integrity is not the only or most important value. A life can be fully integrated and wholly reprehensible if it clearly and systematically violates principles of justice and utility. Thus Nazis, professional murderers, racists, sexists, thieves, and other unsavory characters cannot justify their conduct simply by invoking the integrity of their world views and ways of life.

It might at this point be argued that conflicts rooted in opposing world views and ways of life will soon be eliminated. Advances in knowledge and understanding will, for example, reduce differences among people and thus contribute to a convergence or merging of various world views and ways of life. But this argument overlooks the fact

that new knowledge also brings new possibilities—possibilities that create or aggravate as many conflicts as they eliminate or reduce. At the same time that scientific understanding reduces differences based on ignorance and superstition, new modes of intervention multiply possibilities and new ways of differing from one another. Consider how advances in our understanding of reproduction and various new reproductive technologies have provided new and conflicting conceptions of motherhood and family life (Benjamin and Weil 1987, pp. 4–9). And technological advances in contraception and abortion together with various social and cultural changes have, as Luker points out, sharpened the conflict between the two very different world views and ways of life that are at stake for activists on both sides of the abortion debate. Like many other conflicts between "traditional" and "modern" values and ways of life, this debate is a product of new knowledge and technology, not simply a problem to be solved by it.

Thus new knowledge, although eliminating or reducing conflicts based on ignorance, also creates new possibilities, which in turn may become the cornerstone of new or radically different ways of life for men and women who, for various reasons, are strongly dissatisfied with those into which they were born (Marris 1975, pp. 111–56). Perhaps they find their received ways of life obsolete and unresponsive to new circumstances and possibilities; or they find them stifling, allowing insufficient outlet for their imaginative and creative energies. With others of like mind they will adapt or develop different and more satisfying ways of life that set them apart and at the same time sow the seeds for new conflict with those in whom what Marris calls the conservative impulse is stronger. This has repeatedly happened in the past and there is little reason to believe the future will be different.

PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

Related to the notions of a world view and a way of life is the fact that most human beings view the world from two not always reconcilable perspectives. The first is the personal, subjective, or internal viewpoint. Closely connected with personal agency, it is the standpoint of the participant rather than the spectator and involves commitment to a particular world view and corresponding way of life. The second per-

spective views the world from an external standpoint. This more impersonal or objective perspective is closer to that of the detached observer than to that of the fully engaged agent. Although the external point of view may provide grounds for modifying or correcting the world view and way of life embraced from the internal perspective, it cannot by itself generate or maintain a way of life; it approximates what Thomas Nagel (1986) calls "the view from nowhere" and, if fully realized, would be the view of no one in particular.

Normal human beings, Nagel emphasizes, have the impulse and capacity to view the world from both perspectives. In ethics we cannot escape, if we do not want to relinquish our identities as particular persons, the internal or subjective viewpoint. It is largely from this viewpoint that we understand and express our identity-conferring commitments and our particular world view and way of life. To be a particular person is to see the world in a particular way, from a particular point in space and time, and to have certain commitments and connections to persons, places, ideas, and institutions that are not those of everyone else. It is, indeed, the multiplicity of world views and ways of life emanating from this viewpoint that gives rise to the myriad of conflicts that historically have driven human beings first to fighting, then to war, and more recently to ethics and politics. Yet what makes ethics and politics possible—and what distinguishes us from our distant ancestors and most, if not all, nonhuman animals and seriously mentally handicapped or mentally ill human beings—is our additional capacity to more or less transcend our particular world view and way of life and to view ourselves and the world as a whole from a more detached or external standpoint. From this viewpoint we can appreciate the contingency of our different and occasionally conflicting particular world views and ways of life and the extent to which they are the products of particular circumstances of history, culture, biology, and psychology that are, to a large extent, beyond our control.

The distinction between the two standpoints is, as Nagel points out, "really a matter of degree, and it covers a wide spectrum" (Nagel 1986, p. 5). During the normal course of psychological development, for example, a person gradually develops the capacity for an increasingly objective viewpoint. Moreover, Nagel adds, "a standpoint that is objective by comparison with the personal view of one individual may be subjective by comparison with a theoretical standpoint still farther

out. The standpoint of morality is more objective than that of private life, but less objective than the standpoint of physics."

Both viewpoints are necessary for civilized life. Yet they often generate internal conflict; despite the heroic attempts of philosophers to do so, there appears to be no way to unify them or to reduce one to the other to entirely eliminate the tension (Beardsley 1960; Strawson 1962; Nagel 1986). As a married person, for example, one generally takes the personal perspective toward one's spouse. One regards him or her as an agent and responds accordingly, expressing gratitude and affection for some things and anger and disappointment at others. As a psychotherapist, on the other hand, one takes a more impersonal or detached attitude toward one's patients. The aim is to view their conduct and problems from an external, largely deterministic perspective and to employ one's knowledge and therapeutic skills to ameliorate what is troubling them. Problems arise, however, when one assumes both of these perspectives toward the same person. "The conflict between the therapeutic attitude," writes Lawrence Stern, "and that of normal personal relations is epitomized by Fitzgerald's hero in *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver, who is psychiatrist and husband to the same woman. It is the conflict between the spontaneous enjoyment of a relationship and its calculated management" (Stern 1974, pp. 77–78). It is perhaps for this reason that physicians generally and psychotherapists in particular do not usually treat members of their own families and why some of us are always a bit uneasy about close personal friendships with members of the psychotherapeutic profession.[6]

People who become locked into one perspective or the other are in a number of senses unbalanced. Those who find it difficult to assume the more detached or impersonal viewpoint will overpersonalize their inevitable losses and frustrations and thereby find it difficult to contend with the vicissitudes of life. Consider how in consoling the bereaved we often remind them that we are all mortal and that if death had not come now to the person for whom we are mourning it would have come eventually. We may point out, too, that time is a great healer and that they will not always feel as empty and sad as they now feel. In so doing we encourage those who have suffered a great loss to balance (but not replace) their painful personal perspective with a more impersonal perspective. Attempts at this sort of balancing are common enough in certain situations to be embodied in some of our clichés, as,

for example, when we remind a rejected and despondent lover or suitor that "there are other fish in the sea."

We can also become locked into the objective or impersonal perspective and here the balancing must go the other way. Those who find themselves incapable of forming close personal attachments and relationships as well as uncommitted to any particular projects are usually as unhappy and as in need of our support as the bereaved. In some cases, their loneliness and emptiness may be all the more desperate, leaving them seriously depressed or suicidal. Their need is to embrace a less-detached world view and way of life, one that will allow them to participate in the joy and risks of human relationships and to commit themselves to projects giving shape and meaning to their lives.

The metaphor or image suggested by these examples is that of tacking. In sailing into a wind we cannot set a direct course. Instead we proceed indirectly, heading first toward one side of our eventual destination, then toward the other side, then back to the first side, and so on. We sail back and forth along these opposing, counterbalancing tacks until we reach our destination. In life, too, we often find ourselves "heading into the wind" and we must judiciously tack between the personal and impersonal perspectives. Although there are situations in which we largely commit ourselves to one tack rather than another—for example, in (initially) falling in love or in conducting a particular scientific investigation—most of us cannot do so permanently nor should we so desire. Successful navigation in life, as on the sea, requires knowing when and how to tack between viewpoints. Those who remain utterly blind to a more objective or detached perspective of their lovers are ill-advised to make longstanding personal commitments to them; psychotherapists who cannot resist analyzing the actions, motives, and choices of everyone they meet are not yet ready for friendship or love.

The capacity to view the world from these two standpoints is what underlies our capacity for critical self-reflection, freedom of the will, and self-direction. Each perspective provides a standpoint for critically examining and constraining the other, providing the possibility for intelligently adapting to new circumstances and assuming some degree of control and responsibility for our lives. This capacity also allows us to understand and enjoy the works of Sophocles, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Ingmar Bergman, and Woody Allen. Comedy, no less than tragedy, depends on the capacity to view the world (and ourselves) from different and often incongruous perspectives.

Can we, however, retain the personal or internal standpoint (and our identities as particular persons) if we acknowledge the truth of various descriptions of the world—including ourselves and our behavior—from the impersonal or external standpoint? Bernard Williams suggests that there is a sense in which the growth of reflective consciousness, based largely on viewing our conduct from outside, may "destroy ethical knowledge" if it undermines our confidence in the validity or applicability of the ethical concepts and categories associated with our particular world views and ways of life (1985, pp. 148, 167–69). If, for example, I come to understand my world view and way of life as determined by a particular set of historical, cultural, and psychological circumstances and that under different circumstances my values and principles would therefore have been correspondingly different, I may no longer be able to remain committed to them. It is thus that some religious fundamentalists and conservative nationalists worry about an approach to public schooling that emphasizes ecumenicism or, worse yet, secularism and internationalism. Either prayer, the Ten Commandments, and patriotism play a central role in the classroom or, they say, they will send their children to a different school or remove them from school entirely. What troubles them is that an approach to education based almost entirely on an external perspective—one that views our particular world views and ways of life as a product of various historical, cultural, and psychological contingencies—will significantly weaken the students' commitments to the world view and way of life of their parents.

This concern is not restricted to religious and political conservatives. Parents endorsing a particular world view and way of life may be troubled by their children being taught that it is just one among many and that in different historical and cultural circumstances it could have been otherwise. Will not this approach, as Yeats suggests in "The Second Coming," destroy all conviction and leave them vulnerable to the "passionate intensity" of those whose aggrandizing belief in one or another world view and way of life has been untempered by the external standpoint?

In most cases, however, our identity-conferring convictions—those grounded in particular world views and ways of life—are not as tenuous as this worry suggests. First, the impersonal viewpoint is not

alien. It is, after all, our viewpoint (Nagel 1986). When I try to take a more objective, detached, or external view of myself or the world it is *I* who am trying to do so. I do not become someone else; nor do I cease, as an individual, to be anyone at all. The capacity to assume a more impersonal viewpoint is one of the things that characterizes me as a person (though not as a particular person). Thus to deny or repress the external perspective on the world and ourselves is to deny or repress an important aspect of the self as a person. Second, consider the way the internal perspective as manifested in participation in competitive games or athletics is able to survive external understanding. In the midst of playing a competitive game or participating in a competitive athletic event nothing may seem as important to one as winning. Yet later on, viewed externally, winning does not seem so important after all. It was "only a game"; whether one happens to have won or lost usually makes little difference to the world or one's life as a whole. But this does not mean that the next time one is engaged in the game or event one is not going to participate with the same level of intensity and place the same amount of importance on winning. The same is true of the resilience of the internal perspective in life generally. Viewing ourselves from outside may induce us to modify or alter, sometimes quite radically, our internally held world view and way of life. But to modify or alter a particular world view or way of life is still to have one.

Indeed, retaining a personal perspective and thus a particular world view and corresponding way of life may be entirely "natural" for us in the sense of being practically inescapable (Strawson 1985, pp. 31–50). It seems to be a brute fact about human beings that, whatever the external perspective reveals about the genesis of our world views and ways of life, we simply cannot help having a particular world view and way of life emanating from an internal perspective. If we are to remain sane we must regard ourselves as particular people—we must have a particular identity. And this we cannot do unless we have certain identity-conferring commitments that distinguish us from others. Thus we can no more be reasoned out of our proneness to the internal perspective and committing ourselves to a world view and way of life than we can be reasoned out of our belief in the existence of material objects (Strawson 1985, p. 32). World views, ways of life, and our understanding of material objects may as a result of scientific investigation and objective understanding be significantly altered. But they

cannot be categorically abandoned. The internal perspective is deeply rooted in our nature as agents and as social beings. It can be modified and deeply transmuted by observations from the more impersonal and detached perspective, but it cannot be wholly transcended. Adopting an external perspective, then, will not in itself cause us to "lose all conviction." It may induce us to modify or revise our particular internal or personal perspective, but it cannot replace it. Dogmatically refusing to take an external perspective is, however, likely to leave us full of "passionate intensity" and unable to consider the possibility of compromise.

What makes compromise necessary is a multiplicity of conflicting, rationally irreconcilable world views and ways of life rooted in the personal perspective. What makes compromise possible is that we are also capable of adopting a more external perspective, one that allows us to acknowledge the contingency of our world views and ways of life and the equal legitimacy of others with which ours is, on at least some occasions, bound to conflict. The external perspective provides both the idea of the circumstances of compromise and our capacity to recognize them.

What do we do, however, when those with whom we are in conflict do not appear to acknowledge the external perspective? They do not appear to have the concept of a world view; theirs, they believe with more or less passionate intensity, is not a world view (that is, one among many more or less equally legitimate world views), it is rather the (only correct) view of the world. Is it possible, without begging the question, to show them why they should in some circumstances acknowledge the legitimacy and value of compromise? Are we, in other words, assuming the superiority of our own particular view of the world—a more or less liberal view that emphasizes pluralism and tolerance—when we urge others who may be inclined to view us as infidels to consider the virtues of compromise? I address this difficult and important question in Chapter 6.

RETHINKING ETHICAL THEORY

To abandon the Platonic Quest and the Doctrine of Moral Harmony is to relinquish the conception of an ethical theory as a complete, consistent, and comprehensive set of principles and rules, the less general