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The Experience of Values

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I. THE WORLD IS NOT "NEUTRAL"

The world is not an object that confronts me. It does not "present itself"; it is not something that faces me from the other side of a distance and submissively waits for my appraisal. It is not a separated tame thing. It is not neutral. It is not a field indifferently strewn with indifferent facts. It almost never is simply the case. It is not just there. It acts on me in ten thousand different ways. It invites and rejects, excites and charms, threatens and overwhelms me. It horrifies and disappoints me but fills me in the next minute with exhilaration. Occasionally it wounds me, but it also soothes and calms.

I am not at all sure that all these complex interactions can be reduced to a matter of "positive" and "negative" value, to a single parameter that points only in two directions. And yet most contemporary theories of ethics seem at least to give the impression that this can be done. Part of this is due to the very frequently employed distinction between values and facts. When the factual, descriptive content of judgments is separated from the evaluative component or force, all the variety and concreteness is usually treated as part of the description, and the evaluative aspect is reduced to a quite general endorsement or to a rejection. One does, of course, distinguish the degree or the manner of this positive or negative judgment. There are judgments supported by reasons, recommendations, commands, and merely emotive expressions of approval and of disfavor. But that is not my point. My concern at the moment is not with degrees, or even with degrees of support, but with the varieties among different values. One is apt to think that words like "rotten," "awful," "filthy," "horrible," "disgusting," and "dirty" have quite different descriptive contents but that the evaluative

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part of their meaning is simply "negative" yet of one and the same kind. One imagines, in other words, that the meanings of words like "horrible" and "disgusting" and "rotten" can each be divided into two parts. One of these is descriptive. It refers to a complex occurrence of features, to a set of "neutral," "objective" facts. The other part is thought to contain the evaluation, and it is thought of primarily in terms of degrees. It is imagined as a kind of minus-sign or as a head-shake which can be big or little, hesitant or emphatic, but which is otherwise dumb. Eventually I will argue that this view is quite implausible—if one considers words like "awful" and "dirty" it seems to me fairly obvious even on superficial inspection that this framework is somehow mistaken, that the evaluative components are different in kind and not only in degree—but first some clarification is needed.

The most important part of this can be put briefly. I do not maintain that the view that the evaluative content is of one kind is logically or otherwise entailed by the fact/value distinction. Obviously one can make that distinction and hold at the same time that the evaluative content of words is very diverse (one could even hold that it is *sui generis* for each word). Also I do not want to raise the question whether three or seven important philosophers have explicitly defended this view. This would be quite contrary to my picture of this situation. To my mind the notion that the evaluative force could be charted on a single or at least on very few scales (say the moral, the aesthetic, and the prudential) is a hidden assumption, or one might also say an unintended and unacknowledged result. It underlies most discussions in the theory of value, but it is not itself contested or brought out into the open. This, in fact, is precisely one of the things I mean to accomplish. An enormous amount of attention has been lavished on the question concerning the degree of the evaluative force, on what reasons can be used to support it, and on the nature of the support that these reasons give. This concern has been so paramount that the various ethical theories that currently contend with each other are all essentially different answers to this principal question. This is the issue that names and divides them: are the reasons merely persuasive or are they of a stricter logical nature? I want to claim only that philosophers often *sound* as if the evaluative component, once its degree and the reasons for it have been considered, is no more than a pro or a con, and that the fact/value distinction has helped to produce that *impression*, since the evaluative component is often so treated when it is employed. If someone protested that this is decidedly no more than an impres-
sion: that it is but an unfortunate misunderstanding produced by the accidental professional preoccupation with this rather than with other, less interesting questions; that one of course never meant to deny that the evaluative components may be extraordinarily various, since surely "horrible" and "disgusting" could not be analyzed into two different descriptive contents plus two essentially similar evaluations—both simply "negative" though perhaps to different degrees—if one so protested, I would be pleased. An occasional agreement among philosophers does not mean that we are done for. Things may still become interesting later. But I would go on to say that this—in such a case unintended impression—is not only given by the non-cognitivist or non-descriptivist theories of value but is also created by the other theories, even by those who do not make a radical fact/value distinction but think of ethical judgments as making certain assertions of fact. It may receive more power from emotivism than from anywhere else, since the reduction to a pro- and con-attitude is there most explicitly present, but it is fed by all theories that are currently discussed in ethics and may even be the one thing they all have in common.

What I have in mind in the case of cognitivism is, for example, the fact that intuitionists usually speak only of very few non-natural properties, those denoted by the words "right," "good," or "ought." (Sidgwick, "ought"; Moore, "good"; Ross, both "good" and "ought.") An intuitionist may of course be prepared to introduce additional "non-natural" properties. But it is a fact that intuitionists have not usually done this, and that their theories give one the picture of a generally neutral and indifferent world in which one or two special properties gleam like nuggets of gold in a sandbox. These properties may be abundantly present, but there are only one or two against a uniform background. The situation is similar with the theories that have often been called "definist." R. B. Perry's definition of good as "being an object of favorable interest" and F. C. Sharp's which gives "desired upon reflection" as a translation of "good" both seem to me to reduce at least all ethical values to a matter of "desire," or respectively "interest."

Telling me that I should think in terms of a simple positive or negative value, or in terms of "goodness" and "badness" is a little like asking me to go through a museum and telling me that I can only either shake my head or otherwise nod it. I could do that, of course, and I could shake or nod with more or less vigor, but it would be ludicrously confining, and I certainly could not communicate what I felt. Moreover—and this is the point—the situation would not
change much if I had permission to use as many purely descriptive, valuationally neutral words as I liked and could shake or nod my head in addition. A painting might seem impressive, majestic, coy, timid, self-conscious, or sentimental; or it might be grotesque, clownish, boorish, or severe or ascetic. Each of these words would be normally regarded as having some evaluative ingredient; but if I were told to make the descriptive content explicit, to articulate that part and only that part of its meaning in words, I would not know how to do it. What is the strictly descriptive content of “grotesque” for example? I can think of words that are more or less close to it in meaning, like “ghoulish,” “clumsy,” “untoward,” “fantastic,” or “ugly,” but these are, if anything, more evaluative and certainly not purely descriptive.

It still may seem as if my point depends on the relative strangeness of the words that I have picked for examples. But I do not think it does. We could take the modest and self-effacing word “pleasant” and I think we would find that all serious attempts to actually express its descriptive content in words—that is, all attempts actually to do this, where we no longer let ourselves off with the assumption that it must be possible somehow—would end in failure. (That the word “pleasant” can sometimes be used for a purely descriptive purpose—just like the still simpler word “good” is sometimes so used—does not affect my contention.) In fact, with the word “pleasant” one would not only find it impossible to complete this task; one would not even know how to begin. It would be as if somebody had asked one to specify the components of “red” or of some other primary color. That one here would not even know how to start shows, I think, that we are not only dealing with an accidental shortage of words. With the word “grotesque” we might have supposed this. One could have imagined that the components of “grotesque” can really be separated (in one’s mind, as it were), and that the difficulty of articulating them was due simply to there not being any words for them in the English language, but that they perhaps could be expressed in a language that had more adjectives at its disposal. But if the difficulty is not of that sort with the word “pleasant,” then this at least begins to suggest that the same may be true for the other examples we mentioned. (Of course I do not maintain that the descriptive content of words that also have evaluative meaning can never be expressed. Probably, on occasion, it can be. The word “cowardly” may be an instance.)

Earlier I spoke of the one-dimensional conceptualization of values and criticized it. This may have given the impression that I
only wanted to substitute a larger number of parameters for the one, or the very few, that usually occur in such discussions. But this is not my intention. I am not only saying that something goes wrong if we add the same simple “negative” or “positive” value to the descriptive part of qualities that are so different, and that we should therefore conceive of quite various value-components that have to be added to the descriptive parts—one for grotesqueness and another different kind for the melancholic. This situation cannot be rectified through a diversification of values, for the troubles not only in the value-components. What I really mean to question is the more basic idea that these qualities can be divided, that they fundamentally should be understood on the model of “compounds.”

This comes out more strongly, I think, if we turn from this analytic to a more phenomenological consideration and focus on the actual experience of these situations. What we notice is the stark and unqualified “givenness” of these qualities. They present themselves and they confront us. If we set aside all explanatory frameworks and assumptions, even those that are only hazy shadows and habits, and make the effort to see clearly nothing but the actual brute experience of them (and that is at least a large part of what Husserl meant by his “return to the facts”) then we are struck by the simple “thereness” of them. We look and we see that this gesture is clumsy while that one is graceful. We listen and we hear the sadness of a little tune. In all of this we are spectators and the qualities do not act on us, do not even offer themselves to us, but they simply are in a stolid and assertive independence.

The purpose behind the hard look at these qualities is of course not to reject the fact/value distinction in general. Naturally there are contexts in which this categorization is useful. But that is not the issue. What I am saying is that this separation does not work for the qualities under discussion. Nor is this argument on its way to the conclusion that values and facts are so exquisitely blended that it is impossible to sort them apart. At stake is something completely different. It is this: The basic orientation, the kind of “stance” that one adopts toward the whole issue of values, and derivatively from that, toward the question of how one should live, is powerfully influenced by the subterranean conceptions that we have tried to bring to the surface. These ideas exist not only in philosophy but are pervasive. (Every time you are challenged to “stick to the facts” and not make value judgments you are in their presence.) Thus far, I have only made them explicit and set them
into confrontation with a class of qualities that do not seem to fit into this framework. The eventual aim of this is not any one specific conclusion. The idea is rather to dissolve a conceptual pattern that has ordered the general approach to the theory of values, that has marked out the points that are regarded as problems and has defined what may count as their solution. In short: the aim is to achieve a new perception and a different orientation.

We can now move on to a second conception, though we will deal with it only quite briefly. It is again not a philosophical theory that is explicitly avowed and defended but another underlying view or image which has been fostered by much philosophical thinking, though it has numerous other and important sources. It differs in two respects from the first one. Its connection to technical philosophical claims is more tenuous and less transparent, and it is decidedly not intended. One rejects it as soon as it is openly stated. I shall once more use the comparison to a museum, but now to make a quite different point. We sometimes talk as if life were a walk through a museum. We talk as if it were at a safe distance from us—a succession of objects, immobile and quiet—and we act as if living were an exercise in connoisseurship. To be blunter: we try to gainsay the fact that the world acts on us. We treat ourselves sometimes as if we were outside observers, as if we lived in a sacrosanct, extraterritorial bubble, from which we could safely and calmly survey not only the world but also everything that we imagine to occur inside us. In the process we misconstrue some of the ways in which the world affects us. We postulate a mitigating buffer that removes us from the external world. We make the effect that the world has on us less direct, and this, again, opens one road into the theory of values and bars others.

Take the experience of being tempted by a cigarette or a drink of whiskey. As soon as we begin to give a philosophical analysis of such a common situation a picture comes into play. Customarily it is only a tacit, shadowy backdrop but I will now bring it deliberately into relief. We imagine, or postulate, the cigarette as an essentially neutral object and think that it produces across the distance a sensation or a tickle of desire in us. So again we make a split, only this time we envision the parts in a sequence. The world “out there” is once more made neutral. It is a sheer causal agent. The element of value is separated off and relocated. It is internalized and vested in our own sensation. Thus we no longer confront value directly; there is a buffer, an almost temporary intermediary.
This way of seeing things may be a concretization of the more abstract idea that "nothing possesses value except in relation to the human." It may represent the transposition of that humanistic declaration into something of a story. If so, the extremes to which we have gone are amazing: to take from God the ultimate authority in moral matters we drained the whole world of value and placed all of it into man’s sensations. In a sense we went even further. For this thinking postulates an inner Ego, a Subject, who observes these feelings, and ultimately even the sensations are still neutral, for in the end it is this inner Subject who values or rejects them, who exercises choices, and he therefore is the only real locus of all valuation.

That this inner observer does not actually exist becomes, I believe, obvious as soon as he is imagined vividly enough. But quite apart from him other questions must be raised against this bifurcation. Take a situation that is very threatening. Imagine a tree falling down in your direction. Does it really make sense to believe that we do not perceive the danger directly but that the "neutral" tree causes a sensation in us and that the whole response of our body is produced by it? But if not, then why should the experience of being charmed or tempted be metaphysically so different from that of terror? For that matter, what of other organisms? Are we to suppose that they too respond largely to their own sensations? If so, would this assumption not conflict with everything we know about awareness in the lower forms of life? Moreover, is this not in any case an inherently strange view of organisms? Is it not a needlessly complex theory of how organisms interact with their environment? Still further, what of Gestalt Psychology, or of Piaget's contention that infants perceive (in his terminology) "affective qualities" before they have either a concept of self, or of their own body? There are other, similar questions, but in the end some very simple points are stronger.

It is a matter of immediate experience. If we simply look and see (not in any special "bracketed" or Husserlian manner, but just with open eyes) we notice that this is plainly not what happens. In these situations there often is no sensation inside us. It may sound strange, but if one wanted to describe these experiences correctly one would have to say that it is the cigarette itself, or the drink itself that has the quality of "being-tempting." And the same is true for the falling, threatening tree, for a leaf that is luxurious, for a vulnerable face, or a voice that is revolting. The main pattern in all these situations is that of a presentation. One confronts. Just as earlier we noted that no seam separates fact from value, so we now
contend that there is no duality of different, neutral stimulus and value-quality-endowed sensation. In direct experience these qualities are not by-products. On the contrary, they “come first,” their assertion is immediate, and it is they who in turn evoke effects. They are of one piece with the “given” and are encountered as integral with it.

The imagery associated with the two-stage process completely falsifies the general structure of these situations. There is not a neutral world out there which causes sensations (pleasant or unpleasant) inside us to which we then in turn react. And there is no sacrosanct, unaffected “point of observation” from which these sensations are perceived. These qualities are outside, in the public world and they themselves affect us, and they do so not mediated but quite directly, very much as if they were forces. Their influence does not stop short before a “self” that surveys the scene from the calm of an “inner fortress.” Nothing is a barrier to them. We are like bits of wood in their surf.

To say all this is not simply to propose an “alternative conceptual framework.” It involves a different experience of oneself and of the world. There should be a powerful sense of displacement, of an outward shift; the discovery that much to which we had so far given only a doubtful, internal, flimsy existence is in fact real, and out there, and substantial.

Consider one further example. You enter a room and the silence inside is “oppressive.” This is not a feeling imparted to you, it is in the room. Something has descended on the people sitting in their chairs, something holds them in place. But then the attention, first of one, then of the others, begins to turn to you. Sartre is fascinated by this experience of being looked at by another, and he describes it as a “restructuring of space.” The lines of your world converge toward the other’s eyes. “It is as if your world drained into the point from which his look originates,” it feels like water flowing down a sink-hole. This too is something that happens outside, in the room. And in the next stage there might be the expectancy for you to speak. And it too originates outside you. It builds up as a pressure, comes closer, forms itself around you, and finally edges you over a brink. Suddenly you realize that you are speaking.

The main point at issue, of course, need not only be “seen.” One is by no means forced to refer to nothing but “direct experience.” Far from it. Perfectly conventional philosophic considerations can be adduced in its support. There is, for instance, the fact that we do not ordinarily either discover or verify the presence of these
qualities through an act of introspection. What we observe is the object, and not a sensation inside us. If we are in doubt whether someone else is or is not angry, we look at him rather than inside ourself, and the same holds true for all the other examples that have been mentioned, from the gracefulness of a gesture to the bleakness of a landscape. This is philosophically telling, for if the objects we faced were indeed “neutral,” and if they merely produced certain feelings in us, then we would be compelled to act otherwise; we would have to introspect to make these judgments.

Or, again, there are situations in which we do not realize that something does indeed tempt or attract us until we are already, so to say, in forward motion. We suddenly notice that we have begun to perform an action, and this first tells us that we were attracted. This, too, could not happen if the temptingness of the object were communicated to us via a sensation. (We would notice the sensation. That it is unconscious does not fit the account as given, and is in itself unlikely. Unconscious in what sense, and why?)

Other, similar considerations could be mentioned, but ultimately there is no need to list them, for my main thought has been all along to raise to daylight a set of assumptions that once exposed hardly call for slowly rehearsed refutations.

The result should be a sense of contrast: A certain kind of thinking is almost automatic to us (“The world, facts are of course neutral”) and yet this seeming platitude rests on foundations that collapse if one inspects them. All the same these premises have had an almost uncontested hold on a domain of thinking. On their basis only some approaches seemed conceivable. With them gone it is like a new day.

We still have to look at a third division. To understand it properly one aspect of the so-called Mind/Body problem must be sketched. This quick delineation is of course not meant to address this problem in its own right. I only hope to trace some lines and to mark out a place from which the cut that runs into the theory of value can be sharply seen.

One root question which opens the Mind/Body problem is the doubt about the status of our perceptions. In the habits of our weekday thinking we live with the conviction that we perceive material objects, and that they exist quite independently of us. Their shapes and colors are real, are outside us, and are public and objective. This seems firm and stable and obvious, and yet, when we look again and only stumble along with the simplest kind of thinking, this stability
begins to tilt. We only have to remember that our perceptions are of course communicated to us through sense-organs, that we really receive only a radiation of a certain wave-length, which our specific neural apparatus transforms into this shape or this green surface, but which might not look at all the same if our eyes were fashioned differently, and that security is lost. If we continue to think along these lines all manner of facts and general considerations drive us further. Facts like the occurrences of color-blindness, or the yellow that accompanies jaundice, facts like that shapes change when we press against our eyeballs, but also all we know from physics about light and sound-waves, as e.g., the fact that there are many waves which our organs do not see—all this joins in, and soon the world begins to lose its substance. After some further steps along this path we may come to the conclusion that everything is mere appearance, is dependent on us and subjective, and finally we may end with the suspicion that everything perhaps exists but in the privacy of your or of my mind.

In this way we shift from one extreme to the other. Seen in a different perspective, we are in the presence of a paradox. There are two views which stand in radical conflict with each other. Yet both seem equally legitimate. On the one side, it seems perfectly obvious that we do perceive a public, objective, material world that is really out there, but it seems equally evident, on the other side, that this is not so, that our perceptions are a function of our sense-organs and hence subjective and private.

A large part of the history of philosophy since Descartes has consisted in attempts to resolve this main dilemma. One could think of the various philosophic positions as a set of proposals to draw the line between Mind and Matter, between the objective and subjective, the public and private, in different places. One might represent them as opting for points on a continuum between two extremes. Idealism and Materialism would be at the end poles, each following one side of the dilemma through to its conclusion while utterly denying the other. Locke’s, Hume’s and Kant’s positions could be thought to make the claim for different places in between. Locke, for example, thinks of the primary qualities as outside and objective, and considers the secondary to be private and subjective.

I have already said that I am here only using this problem to mark out a point of perspective, and entirely to that end—not with any claim that they advance a solution. Two comments can now be made.
First: Whatever the center of this problem may be, one thing that certainly aggravates it is the tight interlocking of certain associations, the blending and coupling of several different and vague notions. We fuse the ideas of the "mental," of the "subjective," the "private," the "internal," the "illusory," and the "unreal" and form of them a single amalgam. This we constitute as a single, powerful pole on one side of this division. Similarly we join the notions of the "material," "objective," "external," and "real" again into one unit and set this on the other side. In this way we create the picture of a dichotomy. We make the world Manichean and divide it between an either and an or. If something is mental, we think of it also as somehow "subjective" and "unreal" and "internal" and "private." If not, then we tend to think of it under the ready-made juxtaposed configuration.

To single out some examples that illustrate this. The argument that our perceptions depend on our sense-organs is often believed to prove the conclusion that what we see is therefore illusory and not real. But this, clearly, is a confusion. The argument proves only what it says; namely, that our perceptions are functions of our sense-organs. Still we tend to link the notion of the "illusory" with that which is produced by our sense-organs, and that makes it easy to slide from one to the other. All the same it is an elementary error. And the same goes for the inference that the world must be "mental." The plain fact that our perceptions vary with our sense-organs simply does not carry us all the way to that startling conclusion. If we reach it then it is only because we first pretended that there was a gap, and then leapt from the side of the "either" all the way across to the side of the "or." An even more extreme case of the same sort occurs when the same argument brings people to suspect that the objects they see are not really outside them, but are really images inside their head. This is again the result of sliding via several associations from one of the terms we conglomerate in this amalgam to quite another. (Possibly from "mental" to "inside my head.") We again operate with a false either/or which occurs only because we illogically combine all these terms into two conglomerates that face each other. This allows us to think that because something has been shown to “depend on our sense-organs” it is therefore also “mental” and beyond that “in our heads.”

Second: Wherever the real solution to the larger Mind/Body problem may lie, there can be no doubt that the careful and proper severing of these connections presents itself as a first task. The no-
tions of the "mental," the "private," the "subjective," the "unreal," and the "inside us" must be cut apart from each other. In much of our common thinking, but in technical philosophy too, we still divide the world like Moses splitting the sea. We simplify our conceptual machinery and leave ourselves only a "here" and a "there": "there," the objective-material-external-and-real and "here," the subjective-mental-internal-unreal. In fact we not only reduce these multiple and different distinctions to the picture of two hostile "realms," we do not even keep the border between them in one single place. We shift and move the chasm between them, imagining it here at one time, and assuming it in other places at others.

Sometimes we imagine this break in a very peculiar place. This happens when we treat colors and shapes and sounds as objective, external and real but posit the main-line division between them and all the qualities we discussed: when we give to the sadness of a piece of music, to the gracefulness of a gesture, to the charm of a vase the modality of the subjective, internal and mental but imagine colors and sounds on the other, the far side of the split. It is this that establishes the connection between the general Mind/Body problem and everything we did before. By now it should be clear that the two earlier separations, those into descriptive and value component, and into neutral object and sensation represent embellishments and elaborations of this deeper division. The arguments against all three therefore flow together into one cumulative array; they reinforce each other and combine their weights.

This leads to the conclusion that the radical division suggested by the words "subjective" and "objective" does not apply. There are of course differences between the status of shapes and colors and the status of charm and grotesqueness, but they are differences of degree and of gradation. These naturally should be determined, yet it is clear even now that whatever they may turn out to be in the end they are not anything like the contrast between a brute given and a something that is created by the brain.

More exactly, at stake is a denial. Whatever the exact status of colors and of grotesqueness may be, I mean to deny that qualities like colors are on one side of this division while qualities like grotesqueness are on the other. The point is not that qualities like sadness or grotesqueness should be shifted from one side across to the other, that they are not subjective but objective instead. The upshot is rather that they are neither, that this bifurcation is a trapdoor into a blind alley.
In sum: I want to deny that the world is in any sense neutral. The sadness of a piece of music, the bleakness of a dried barren landscape, the melancholy of a weeping willow, the austerity of a building, the flamboyance of a leaf and even the attractiveness of a vase are qualities that are essentially on a par with the shapes and sizes and colors of things. This should challenge the tacit and silently assumed picture that many of us have of the world. The world of physics and of commonsense is not the "really real" world. The motions and dimensions and weights of things do not have privileged status. When things look somber or grotesque then they have these qualities in at least very nearly the same sense in which they have their weights and textures and colors. The world is therefore much richer and denser than we sometimes imagine. It is a proliferation and crowding; it is an excess.

I will still add four specific arguments in support of this general contention. First: One might object that our experience of the sadness of a piece of music, or our experience of the fact that it is majestic, is clearly a function of our sense-organs and of our cultural experience, that all we really receive are sound-waves, and that these are therefore not qualities which the music has but rather something that we "contribute," something that we make of the sound-waves. My reply to this would be that one can say exactly the same thing about colors. They, too, are dependent on the physiological equipment with which we perceive them, and experimental studies have shown that training and conditioning influence our perception of them to a surprising degree. But we nevertheless think of colors as qualities that objects have and think of them as external and as belonging to the real world. And to do this is proper, for to call them on that account "subjective," or to think of them as not really there would be to draw a conclusion that their dependence on our physiology does not warrant. This argument therefore cannot establish that there is a categorical difference between qualities like sadness on the one hand, and colors or shapes on the other. On the contrary, their dependence on our sense-organs is precisely a fact which they have in common. If anything it constitutes a similarity between them, but it certainly cannot demonstrate that they are radically different from each other.

Second: One might argue that the sadness or the majesty of a piece of music is "subjective," since there is much more disagreement in their case than in that of colors. My first reply to this would
be that this, even if true, could never establish the radical difference that is at stake. What a leap of an inference! To move from the minor fact that the variations in the perception of one quality are statistically greater than they are in another to the conclusion that some are real, and independent of us, and out there, while others exist only in our minds. If these differences do exist then they should of course be exactly determined, but nothing about them either requires or justifies the postulation of two different worlds. (The same is true for similar arguments, like that we have laws about the objective qualities, but not about those that are subjective. This difference, even if true, also does not warrant anything like that juxtaposition.)

My second reply would be that the premise on which this argument rests is in any case very doubtful. There are empirical studies and also many examples from common experience, which show that at least very often the situation is, surprisingly enough, just the reverse. Particularly in the case of colors the perceptions of different people seem to vary greatly (think of the subtle distinctions that a good painter makes—two colors which look the same to us, may appear quite different to him), while the agreement on what is repulsive, or cheerful, or threatening or sad is surprisingly high. This is true even across very different cultures. If we look at a carved African mask, where the cultural background and the "conditioning" would be extraordinarily different, we still seem to see it as angry or peaceful. What is astonishing is therefore really not the amount of variation, but on the contrary, precisely the high uniformity. Surely there would not be much disagreement in the example of the falling tree. Who doesn't perceive it as dangerous?

My third reply would be that a great deal depends on the specificity of the words with which we make our descriptions. If one uses very precise color terms, disagreement increases, while it declines if one says that this is a red or a blue. The same applies to the description of music. Few people would disagree with the statement that the chorus in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is somehow powerful or strong, while there might be argument over whether it is jubilant or majestic.

Third: The most important single consideration is that we experience these qualities not within us but as part of the world. Separating them off from the so-called "objective" or "factual" qualities and subsuming them under a juxtaposed classification tends to interpret this fundamental fact out of the picture. In our experience these qualities inhere in the objects or constitute them.
Their relationship to objects is not different from that of colors. If one were still to use the terms "objective" and "subjective," then there would at least be one very good reason for thinking of them as objective. They do confront us. They are something that is perceived; they obtrude on us and are experienced as given. They are received.

Fourth: If we approach the matter through language, then it seems clear that I do not mean that I feel sad or majestic when I predicate these qualities of a piece of music. Ordinary language makes the distinction between "being made to feel sad by a piece of music" and the music itself "being sad." We therefore could not claim that the statement "this piece of music is sad" really means that it produces in us a certain reaction. Language treats the sadness of music as something that is predicated of it.

Also, we often say such things as "the music really was very sad (or gay, or exciting) though I was unfortunately too tired to respond to it. I had no feelings at all during the concert." We simply could not say this if calling a piece of music sad were a circuitous way of reporting an introspection. When we say such things we obviously distinguish our own feelings from the sadness of the music itself. But that presupposes that the sadness of music is a real quality that has been perceived.

This brings us to a first way-station. The thoughts so far adduced were designed to lead us to one plain conclusion: the world does not consist of neutral objects which we disdain or value; the world is sad and alluring, horrible, magnificent and disgusting, attractive, splendid and mean in its own right.

II. SKETCH OF A THEORY

We perform the virtuosities of our surgical thinking in the dim light that falls through heavy and cracked metaphors. Above all we needed to see the new and different pattern that a less obstructed light reveals. If we now have this otherwise arranged perception, we can begin to trace the alterations engendered by it in the evolving structure of a theory.

As long as the world is seen as a gray collage of facts one problem stands unavoidably in the center: the question of how values are "justified." If the given is thought to be bare fact, and values are conceptualized as fundamentally different, the issue of their entrance, of their arrival in this strange domain, has to arise. From the
outset, the discussion takes the form of a search: where in this great wall of facts is the chink through which values come in? And what gives them a creditable base? This is now radically changed. There is of course still a problem of "justification" but it no longer has the same meaning, or the same size. To say it first bluntly: there no longer is any question about how values "come in," or about the nature of their "derivation" from facts, for the plain reason that they are there from the beginning, and that they are not "secondary" to facts.

The psychologies of the two positions stand at opposite poles: the former is reminiscent of a Beckett landscape. An expanse of broken slate, dejected feet shuffling through stones, moving them, playing with hope to make hopeless time pass. The view to which we have come has its analogue in a sense of pressure. Now there is no question of looking for one thing that perhaps merits attachment, instead there is too much. Values clamor, crowd in, and exhaust us. One looks for a bench to find a rest from them.

But let us look at this contrast closely, and examine the workings of some details in the two schemes. On the traditional and customary view, we encounter this problem whenever a particular specific judgment is questioned, and we want to "justify" it in the face of this doubt. If we have condemned a given action as wrong, and someone intercedes with the question "Why do you think so?" we have to support our judgment. The question therefore centers on how we do this and in what the nature and quality of the mustered support consists.

The most prestigious and usual answer has been that we perform a deduction. In practical terms this means that we look for a generalization from which the particular judgment can be derived; i.e., we justify our judgment by referring the particular case to a more general rule, and by showing that it is an instance falling under the principle we have invoked.

Take an example: If a conversation started with my saying that it was rotten of you to lie, and you turned and asked "Why?" then the justification of my condemnation would move one level up to a more general rule—to something like "dishonesty is in general bad"—and from that my individual judgment on the lie could then be deduced. But if you were serious you very likely would not be ultimately satisfied with this answer. You would be apt to feel that this only shifts the place of the problem. So you might press further and ask what entitles me to such confidence in this rule, and how I
propose to justify it. This would set off a repetition of the same procedure. To satisfy the renewed demand I would move up yet another level of generality, and invoke a still higher rule. But there is no reason why this process should come to a halt there. The second order, higher principle would have to be justified from a still higher rule. And of course that third principle could once more be doubted, and so forth and so on. It is easy to see that the repetition of this question and answer process would eventually drive us inevitably to a first, most general, and ultimate rule. Whether this would happen in very few steps or in a great many is quite unimportant (though it will be fewer than one often imagines), and the actual content of the highest principle also does not matter in our context. The crucial point is that this would occur, and that the highest principle, too, is subject to challenge. Now, however, there is a difference. If we really are dealing with the first and cardinal rule in our moral position, then there is, ex hypothesi, no more basic or encompassing principle from which it can be derived. (If there is one, we simply have not yet reached the first principle.) When this principle is called into question, we are therefore no longer in a position to give the answer that we have hitherto given. And it is this that has led many philosophers to the conviction that values are ultimately without justification.

The image which underlies many of these discussions is that of a hierarchy of principles and of values that ends with an impasse. It is like a pyramidal mobile that hangs in the air. The lower parts are always suspended from those which are higher up, but the pinnacle of the whole structure is without support. The whole, therefore, threatens to fall.

Continental philosophers commonly associate this picture with the “death of God,” and the need for commitment. The idea is that God, before He absconded, served as an anchor that brought this unseemly regress to a halt, while it now has to be ended with a leap to commitment. The feeling is that on the final principles one is compelled to take a blind stand. They can only be clung to, but not rationally defended. And this, naturally, affects one’s perception of the previous “justification.” To what extent is it a foreground distraction designed to veil this stark and more basic fact? How much of its “rationality” is a self-deception, a game of postponement, an elegant minuet danced before the anguish of action?

This overall schematization of what in fact occurs, and of where the main problems lie, changes completely as soon as we replace the
first premise of the "nothing-but factual world" with the axiom that things are sad and alluring, horrible, magnificent, and disgusting in their own right. If a specific, initial judgment is questioned, then the obvious way to support and justify it in this new framework is not by deduction. One does not turn upward to a general rule, but on the contrary to the object, as it were "downward." The slow systematic ascent hence does not even begin, and it therefore does not end in a blind shaft.

But we had better take one step at a time. The whole foregoing discussion was intended to lay the foundations on which we can now proceed to build. The upshot of it is in essence that the qualities whose status we examined at length constitute the base, the solid fundament, on which the theory and praxis of valuing rests. The judgments that ascribe these qualities to an object or an action are basic. They exist on the ground-level, and are the elementary particles from which the rest is built up. (There is an analogy here to the "report-sentences" of some Phenomenalists.) Their "justification," i.e., the kind of support that validates or establishes them, is quite simply that they are true, that they correspond, that the quality which they predicate is in fact there.

Involved in the actual making of these judgments is nothing more complicated than whatever is required for assertions like "this is red," or "this is green." If these statements presuppose the application of certain criteria and rules, then the same is true for our ability to say that something is sad or frightening or vulgar. But the crucial point is that it is no more than this, that only criteria of that sort, and that kind of use of them, are in play. Specifically, it is not a precondition that there be some more abstract or ultimate "standard," or a general measure or criterion of "goodness" or "value." In short, we need only the ability to recognize qualities and to use words.

There are of course instances of disagreement. But we have already seen that these are not nearly as common as one is apt to imagine, and that the metaphysical status of these qualities is in any case not radically affected by their occurrence. We can now add to this that we are not reduced to a dumb pointing when our judgment conflicts with that of others. How very far we are from this helpless silence comes into sharper focus if we distinguish the question of what gives legitimacy to a judgment—which in this case is the sheer "there-ness" of the quality—from the quite different question of how we conduct ourselves when there are disputes. Nothing could
be more mistaken than the fear that we could only "agree to disagree" and then part. This specter haunts the discussion of values in the framework that we have discarded. For us it is the other way around. There is no end to what we could do, and the limits are set only by our patience. A complete psychoanalysis, for example, may help someone see that his mother is really "aggressive." And entire college curricula are meant to cultivate the ability to recognize some of these qualities in poems or plays. Just as painters spend a life-time learning how to see colors. So it is not at all as if there is "no more to be said" if I call it magnificent and you think it grotesque. We could talk about nothing else for the next ten years, if that is how we wanted to spend our lives. And this has theoretical importance: it means that we do not substitute innumerable little impasses on the ground for the single big impasse at the top.

The next logical question is, how do we ever come to formulate general rules from these beginnings, and what is it that finally makes something "bad" or "good"? Here we should not overlook the possibility that someone might decline to go on. There is nothing insane, or nihilistic in the position that only these particularistic judgments are to be made, and it would be utterly wrong to think that such a person "had no values." What he would not have are principles, but that is not the same thing.

Still, how could we move beyond these pointillistic judgments if that is what we wanted to do, and how is their justification to be conceived?

Into the framework of an otherwise neutral world the idea of goodness breaks with a sharp abruptness. There it appears as a novum, as the contrast, in short as "value" against a uniform backdrop of facts. This changes drastically once the full qualities have been restored to the outside that we confront. In the new framework, good or bad are not at all the value-terms par excellence. They do not have the central place assigned to them in most recent philosophical writings. The judgments close to the base that we have been discussing are all in all the more precise, the more discriminating, and the more informative evaluations. The strain is on, and our perceptivities are exerted, when we say of a dance, that it is "fluffy," or of a piece of music, that it "clowns." (And that is still only the surface. When we want to come closer, single words do not cut a sharp enough pattern. Then only images and metaphors draw a thin enough line.) Compared to that, "good" and "bad" only
sort sheep from goats. In most circumstances these are precisely not the words that can be used for a genuine assessment. When that is asked for, we use another much more richly qualified language.

This is the vocabulary that critics use. The discovery and articulation of these qualities is the critic's performance. One might say, that he uses the language of the myriad qualities when he is serious, when he is writing his book on Blake, or on Kafka or Yeats. And that is why a real appraisal often needs an entire book. It is only because there are other contexts, and because other purposes have to be served, that cruder and blunter judgments are also felled. Books must be reviewed—one doesn't want to waste one's investment—and for that a more abstract and loose-shanked set of terms will still do. Yet even there (in his newspaper column) the critic will still avoid "good" and "bad," or "ugly" and "beautiful." They are too slap-dash (and intellectually snubnosed) even for a morning-after review. They operate too much like the man in Hesse's parable who divided all things only into those he could eat and those he could not eat. This kind of yes/no judgment a critic might only make in exasperation, when his children have worn through the last thread of his patience: "No you can't go—because it is bad."

And is the critic's hierarchy of language so different from our own? What words do we use when in talking to a friend late at night the improbable is granted, and we say what we think? Do we ever judge a man, an action, or anything to be simply "bad" or "good" if we take the time to be precise?

Still, we need a rigorously formulated account of how a concept like good does function. (Even if it were only to understand why it is so blunt.) That there are many uses goes without saying. One, however, seems to be central. In that use the word "good" works in important ways like a generic term. It groups or orders the concrete, low-level qualities, and makes assertions in an abbreviated, shorthand fashion about whole sets or classes of them. If the subject were, for example, plays, then the lower, or intermediate level judgments might deal with qualities like the "clarity of structure," the "economy of style," the "deftness of characterization," the "intellectual substance," and so forth, while judgments concerning the "goodness" of a play would be quick summations that presuppose and tally these evaluations. The manner of this reduction to a single denominator is of course flexible and subject to change. A play, to be good, must not possess one set of qualities that all good plays have in common. If it lacks structure but is very witty it can still be
good. So one might say that the idea of goodness is like a minimum that the sum-total of these qualities must reach on balance. And this is one of the principal reasons for the essential vagueness and uninformativeness of the word. It only conveys the result of a very general weighing. Everything else—which qualities were weighed and how they have been reduced—is omitted.

The fact that we can arrive at this kind of tallied judgment does not mean that there is after all a positive or a negative "value component" in each of these qualities. But the connection is important: the fact that this is not the case shows further how very gross the word "good" really is. It means that judgments which pronounce something "good" are not the outcome of a genuine adding or subtracting (give "six" for sensitivity, take away "three" for rashness), or of a fine-spun calculation. They cannot be, since the basic qualities are not sufficiently commensurate for that.

And here lies perhaps the crassest error of the theory of value. It is one thing for a theory to be exact. It is quite another thing if a theory makes the phenomena with which it deals more "geometric" than they actually are. Then the theory is wrong. The best theory of value is not the theory that reduces the activity of evaluating most nearly to a calculus, but the theory that comes closest to the truth.

Which qualities must be present in a given case, and to what degree, is to some extent fixed by convention. There is a rough consensus on what makes a fuse, a hammer, a painting, or a person "good." (This is no different from the understanding attached to other classifying terms.) It works rather like a check-list, and we perform a task similar to those which some workers execute on assembly lines. We simply know which properties are expected, very like a man who is testing radio tubes.

Of course this is not all. Often, though not always, another aspect comes into play, and that side is best understood on the analogy of a "special place" in a room, or garden, or to "the place of honor" at table. The fact that there is such a place is also, as it were, a social given. The aura with which it is invested, the distinction it confers, are relatively stable. They constitute a kind of instrument furnished by society and language—it is the use to which we put it that is more up to us.

Prose, for example, needed to have a measured and gracious elegance to be "good" in the early nineteenth century, but in a very gradual process the quality of elegance has been demoted. For the structural design of the theory of value it is important to understand that this sort of alteration results from a host of small-scaled
reconsiderations, and even from shifts in perception: that the
general thrust is up from the specific and concrete, and not
down—via deduction—from general criteria and standards. The
same is true on the more private plane. As we compare countless
passages of prose, and become by slow degrees more aware of what
elegance sometimes hides, and of the sacrifices it exacts—as we
begin to see strength and economy where before we noticed only
roughness—we gradually approach the point where we are ready to
bring the cruder and more general level into line. We reach a deci-
sion and cross elegance from the list.

The genesis and justification of principles and rules follow
essentially the same scheme. A rule, such as that prose should be
lucid or transparent, has the same relationship to the more in-
teresting, more perceptual judgments that the notion of "good"
prose has to them. Again one has to tally the many qualities of
many instances of prose and reduce them to one denomination. If
many of the cases that were on balance "good," were also at the
same time lucid or transparent, then one can tentatively postulate
this general rule. But its force would be no greater than the ex-
amples on which it rests. In this case one could cite the prose of
Tolstoy, of Heine, and of Lichtenberg to support this rule, while the
works of Joyce or Faulkner could be adduced against it. This being
so, one would not set great store by it. Instead one would introduce
qualifications until some principle might be discovered, that con-
formed more closely to one's more concrete judgments.

The rules with which we judge our own and others' actions have
the same foundation. The general proscription against lies has its
actual final base only in the qualities of individual deceptions. It is a
giant structure, but in the last analysis it rests on the loss of pride,
or the isolation, in short on all the qualities produced in the great
complexity of circumstances, by all manner of dishonesties. That
measures the force to which this rule—or any other principle of con-
duct—is entitled. The rest, its authority beyond that, is insuppor-
table excess.

This means that all valuational principles stand theoretically
only until further notice. They all live by the grace of the more par-
ticular, concrete judgments that they entail. If there is conflict, then
there may of course be reason for delay (considerations of consisten-
cy and so forth), but in the long run the concrete and perceptual
judgments must prevail. The generalizations have to yield and are
rejected or revised to suit the level of experience.

This Primacy of the Concrete is not at all put forward as a
radical reversal. On the contrary, this is one place where our frame-
work means only to produce a theory that is in line—and as intelligent—as parts of our practice already are. In the whole domain of art we have come to act on it, and there it is nearly banal. The testimonial that painters and composers violate old catechisms, and that their work succeeds precisely because of this, has been so faithfully repeated, that the mere crudity and fallibility of rules sounds by now like a middle-aged and mellow proposition that would be noddingly acknowledged. So, of course, would the idea that the rules of art are mere abstractions from the best art of the past, and that it is therefore the rules that must adjust themselves to art, and not the other way around.

But when it comes to conduct and to morality, then the situation is weirdly ambiguous and inconsistent. On the one hand we have begun to give priority to the concrete in actual practice. Especially when there is openly acknowledged conflict, in the debates over Capital Punishment or Birth Control, for instance, less and less weight is given to the high-flying arguments from the necessity of retribution, and gradually more and more is said about the concrete consequences. Single cases of prisoners in death-row, or of 16-year-old mothers are looked at closely, and we have moved some distance toward the idea that the laws and rules have to be changed until they conform to our individual judgments. This "turn to the concrete" may actually be the larger revolution. The other changes in our values and morality, compared to it, are small effects. Still, on the other hand, there remains the feeling that first principles must be adhered to, that they are somehow sacrosanct and sacred, and that morality could not survive without them.

It is this inconsistency that our framework allows us to eliminate, or that it compels us to abandon. There is no reason why what we already do in the sphere of art, and with conduct when it is controversial, should not be extended to the whole domain of values. The general status of the rules of conduct is not different from that of the precepts of art. Both derive from the same foundation and should be treated in accord with it.

This means of course that they are all subject to revision. But the loss of the presumption to infallibility (or a priori-ty, or even permanence) seems small compared to the gain of a solid basis. Yet there are other changes. Really one's whole relationship to the rules of conduct becomes different. It is no longer necessary to struggle for some deep and main foundation stone. The existence of values is quite secure; no leap of faith or any other act on our part is needed to prevent their metaphysical disintegration. Just as with art: rules are clumsy and make-shift things. Of course we need them: we could
not possibly evaluate each situation fully; the effort of perception would exhaust us; a great deal must be filtered out and simplified to keep us sane. Still, that is all "principles" are: tools for crude, perfunctory estimations, which cannot serve us once we need to be precise. When we are not just flipping cards across a table but face a real decision, then all the rules are nothing but coy preparations. We have not begun until we face our situation in the same solitude in which we encounter books.

The categorical principles are no longer the main beams from which all other values hang. They are more like a grid that covers up and blocks out. Those who always follow them don’t use their eyes.

All the same, we eventually do build a whole hierarchical structure of rules; and in this construction all levels are constantly in interaction with all other parts. Individual perceptions from the ground are pitted against high and ancient virtues; the most general rules are applied to everything that is subsumed beneath them and are yet at the same time revised and tested. All the intermediate levels are continuously matched against each other, and anything can be standard at one moment, and be on trial at the next. The whole system is thus in an unceasing flux. One never questions the whole body of rules and judgments at one and the same time. If one rule becomes problematic, other rules are still employed in the evaluation. Only gradually are all the rules held at one time replaced by others. It is possible to end up with a completely new system, but it happens as in a card game where one may get a totally new hand by exchanging two cards several times. The whole process moves slowly toward some coherence, but never reaches it; for long before all the rules conform to the concrete perceptions and particular judgments, these, influenced by the new rules, have themselves changed.

III. SOME IMPLICATIONS

We first moved the theory of value to a different beginning: The starting point was, for us, not a vast plain of facts on which values had somehow to descend. Values were always there: they inflict themselves on us. That premise, understandably, recast the problem of how values should be "justified," and gave it a quite different orientation. (A justification in a strong sense was simply no longer needed.) But the paths from these two separate origins continue to diverge and, in conclusion, some points of this evolving contrast can be marked out.
The main forms of intuitionism differ sharply from the position we have begun to sketch. Most patent is the conflict over the founding qualities. Intuitionism has mostly based itself on barely two or three ("goodness" or "rightness," for example), and these were always singled out and isolated—so much so that only a special, enigmatic power was capable of apprehending them. Disagreements, therefore, broke down almost at once into an exchange of charges—one was accused of moral blindness. In our framework, on the other hand, these qualities are panoramic and they are most emphatically mundane. Their perception is not the work of a special, "higher" faculty but takes place through the ordinary humdrum channels possessed even by lower organisms, and not just by man. In our case sporadic disagreements, therefore, do not begin to indicate the failure of a faculty. In fact an organism literally "blind" to the sum-total of all these qualities is almost inconceivable. (It certainly could not survive.) Someone who does not see vulgarity where others do is therefore still far from lacking the entire faculty for apprehending values.

But these contrasts lie relatively on the surface. The difference really runs much deeper, and is not seen until one has recognized that intuitionism presupposes precisely the gray and fact-made world, whose spell we mean to break. Only in a world in which most natural colors had long paled, in a world of dusk, already in half-sleep, eerie and too silent, would anyone insist that there are values nonetheless. Only such a world would prompt that tone of opposition, and only in a world so empty could anyone insist that values are only visible to an ethereal "intuition."

The relationship to emotivism follows the same pattern. No one would have paid much heed, if the emotivists had rested with the mild observation that some value judgments are also sometimes used to express emotions. (Even Kant could have agreed to that.) The position has only philosophic consequences if it maintains that no value judgments ever do more than this. But then it, too—though on the opposite extreme from intuitionism on the spectrum of contemporary philosophic ethics—assumes a world that has been drained of value. Thus the conflict, as in the case of intuitionism has again two levels: on the first we reject the "never more" pronouncement. There are value judgments that vent not only feelings but are genuine predications. But the deeper opposition concerns the underlying precondition. The idea that all value judgments express nothing but emotions (in effect, that they are not informative about the world) presupposes once more the neutral world view, i.e., the basic axiom which we have tried to undermine.
Following this contrast further to the blighted battleground of the “Ought vs. Is” discussion—two things stand out clearly from the more distant vantage point of the position proposed here: In the area of aesthetics this question basically asked whether “aesthetic properties” were “condition governed” by “natural properties,” or, more roughly, whether any aesthetic qualities could be derived from natural properties.

That assumes, as far as I can see, that the natural properties are somehow prior, or more basic than the aesthetic ones. But just this presupposition the whole first part of this essay was again designed to question. There is no reason why aesthetic qualities like “exciting” should be derivable from natural properties like “curved.” The aesthetic qualities are not ephemeral or brain-created. Nothing in the theory of perception, or in general knowledge of organisms makes them so secondary that their presence is merely a by-product of others.

Further—and this is the second point—this non-derivability in no way proves that aesthetics is “arbitrary,” “non-cognitive,” or “subjective.” The debate was predicated on the misconception that the legitimacy of these qualities and judgments had to be demonstrated by descent; that only their relationship to natural qualities could give to the aesthetic their credentials. But this defense can be dispensed with: their own claim in their own right is good enough.

The same considerations run parallel for ethics. One has asked the same, equivalently malposed question there: do any facts, does anything that is the case ever imply a value? This again assumes that the neutral and factual has priority and is the case, and that the valuational is adrift unless it can be anchored there; and both these suppositions seem to me again unfounded. In the domain of conduct values are also not derivative, but this is again no embarrassment to them, for the implication is not that they are too insubstantial for the connection to obtain. On the contrary, the reverse is true: they cannot be derived because they are too basic.

The distance between our course and that of most contemporary philosophic ethics grows larger still if we narrow the focus from judging actions down to judging specifically their “morality.” Concepts like “equality,” or “justice,” or “human rights” would be construed on the same overall interpretation that we have drawn throughout. They would not be regarded as firm first principles but would also be understood to rest on judgments and perceptions that are more specific. The concept of equality, for instance, arises on
this account when some particular forms of degradation or suffering are experienced as so ghastly that a society decides that no one should be exposed to them. The basis of the concept is thus a compassion that lays down certain limits, certain minima below which it resolves not to let any human being fall. This reverses the usual direction, where first a seemingly complete and sweeping equality is proclaimed, which then, on second thought, however, is limited and curtailed until no one has much confidence in the remainder (from the equality of property and even brotherhood, down to mere equality before the law). Equality, on this interpretation, is not a starting point. Man is not somehow equal "to begin with." This idea signifies only the line to which inequality has been (or hopefully will be) forced back.

The same is true of justice, and of humanity, or for that matter of civil rights. In the present framework their origin would not be lofty. It would be understood that justice protects us only from some gross violations, and that it represents only a guarantee against a few selected injuries. The emblem of the balanced scale promises too much. The whole of what one man "deserves" cannot possibly be measured. The aim can therefore be no more than negative. The best that one can hope for is the prevention of some few imbalances. (Not even a father can be fully [positively] just between two sons—even the fact of being first and second born creates differences that cannot be "equalized."’) If a society resolves to give everyone a "correct" trial in courts of law, then this means only that some few outrages have been proscribed. 2

Human rights again would be seen as the expression of a very frail attempt to set at least some limits to abuse and cruelty. The indignation at this violation would therefore come from the other side: one would cry out not because the highest and first principles, from which all else flows, had been transgressed. They too would be regarded as a bare minimum to which all are entitled. The anger provoked by their denial would therefore have a different force: one would demand them with the sense that at least this pittance, this bone from the table, cannot be refused. 3

But these reinterpretations of specific concepts lie again on the surface. The deeper implication, that our framework would have for "morality" is yet to be brought out. It is this: a great quantity of philosophic writings conveys at least the impression that there are only two alternatives: either one lives one’s life by genuine values, and that means by morality, or one is at once reduced either to mere selfish prudence (the alternative that English and American
philosophy envisions) or to the "nothing matters"—to chaos and to nihilism (the death of morality as seen on the Continent). It is the appearance of this forced option, of this Either/Or that our framework means to dissolve. Throughout this essay we have tried to lift the sheets that cover the profusion—the excess of values. They surround us in abundance and "morality" represents only a singular and perhaps quite problematic handful of this whole. This places the assessment of morality in a different position. Now it appears as one distinctive institution, which has its sub-species, and which judges man with its own characteristic conceptual apparatus. In short, one could now begin to argue that what is distinctive of morality and sets it apart are several characteristic notions like "duty," and "responsibility," and "guilt." One could maintain that the use of these and of some other, similar terms indicates the occurrence of a genuinely "moral" judgment, while all other evaluations are something else.

On the base of this circumscription of the "moral" one could then take a further step. One could bear down on these concepts, and show perhaps that they lack an acceptable foundation; that they depend on assumptions which we no longer hold, not unlike the idea of "sin"—that they are chips from ancient tombs and should be in museums. One could study these relics of a past with the same curiosity that we give to magic: we could marvel at their power, and mourn the damage they have done. We might wonder how the idea of "guilt" was able to survive in a culture, which has also coined the concept "superstition." But in any case, we would be in a position to reject them without the fear that after that no up or down would still remain, that "nothing would make a difference, anymore."

I do not think of this as an at all "radical" approach. It only raises to a level of philosophic generality what, e.g., most psychoanalysts already do, when they suspend all "moral" judgments with a patient. That obviously does not produce an absolute indifference. In fact in many cases the patient only discovers what his "real" values are after the "moral" specters have been exorcised.

And similarly in the field of education. A. S. Neill explains in Summerhill that he makes every effort not to subject his children to "morality." What he means, of course, is not that he will abstain from "value judgments," but that he will not have recourse to "guilt," or "duty," or the like against them.

He tells the story of a boy who once attacked Neill's much-beloved grand piano with a hammer, and Neill takes the stand that it would have been unfair and ultimately harmful to raise a moral
barricade before the child by telling him that this was "bad," and something that he "ought" not to do. That in effect would have identified the interests of the adult with an impersonal world-order. It would have allowed the adult to hide himself behind an implacable neutrality while pitting the boy against it. In Neill's estimation, precisely the reverse of the inherited view is true: "Morality" does not raise us above the jungle that is nature. On the contrary, there is more humanity in honestly setting desire against desire, and in making it an open struggle. Of course Neill stopped the boy, but he made it clear that he was simply rising to the defense of something that he cared for.

The same lines can be extended back to Nietzsche. He assaulted not only the pretensions of the specifically Christian ethic. To imagine that he meant to cauterize that single version of morality sets beyond his reach too much that may not be entitled to that safety. On the one hand, he wanted more than simply to substitute one morality for another, yet, on the other, he was obviously not an advocate of "all is the same," "there are no values." That attitude he ridiculed and scorned in countless passages. (Once he likened it to a sullen guest who attends a banquet and has not even the courtesy to bring a good appetite.) If the former interpretation is too narrow, then the latter is much too wide. Nietzsche's thinking on this point may be best represented by the claim that we just posed: he rejected not just the Christian, but all "morality." The weight and the authority of the specifically "moral" seemed to him unjustified, just as the base that we envision would not carry it. But its dismissal did not leave him with "Nihilism," or the inability to judge. More nearly the reverse: he thought that the mystic vapor of the "moral" had blinded and distracted us. It hid the genuine and living ground from which values grow, and we were, therefore, as individuals and as a culture at a costly disadvantage.

The same two main reorientations (i.e., [1] the genesis of values in the concrete, and [2] the identification of "morality" with the particular way of judging that has its center in "duty," "ought," and "guilt") also opens the discussion of utilitarianism from a different side. The kind of "objectivity" that we have claimed for value properties raises first a question about the reduction to one "measure," regardless of whether this be "pleasure" or "utility." The point that there are different and perhaps incommensurate pleasures has often been made. But that grants too much, and throws away the earlier and more telling question, how the singling out of "pleasure" can be justified? If art cannot be judged simply by the pleasure or the
satisfaction it yields, then why should this be good enough for actions, or for people? If an action has all the myriad properties that we have discussed, then why would it be “rational” or “moral” to make decisions on such limited and crude criteria?

But there is a deeper question which can now be pressed: it asks whether utilitarianism was not sheltered by a misconception? As long as one believed that some first principle was absolutely needed, the first rule of utilitarianism may have looked more palatable than most other candidates. But if values have their base in the concrete, and do not require a deductive derivation, then the constraint relaxes and one can open doors to several doubts. Is the idea that an action is not right or moral unless it maximizes the benefits for all mankind as innocuous and sensible as we habitually think? The tone of the formula is so unpresuming that we perhaps no longer realize what it means. Taken seriously, it involves my having to consider all persons equally. In a given choice I have to weigh the effects of my actions on the remotest stranger, with the same scale and measure with which I weigh the consequences that they would have on my own son, or my closest friend. If the total satisfaction to mankind in the long run is the criterion then I must decide to do X, if X gives slightly greater satisfaction (or whatever) to a stranger, while Y would give a smaller quantity to someone whom I love.

It is not enough to say that this requirement is much too high, that no one in practice could possibly live up to it, and that it therefore inevitably makes hypocrisy the standard currency, or that it renders the faculty for values impotent by engaging it with an unworkable and useless “really should” which is so unattainable that it produces only a Sunday morning melancholy, but leaves one’s actual practical existence in darkness and without advice. It is not just “too high.” It is more seriously deficient. Ultimately one cannot stop short of the charge that it sanctifies with the halo of the “moral” a leveling destructiveness. Love, affection, loyalty would all find themselves in opposition and censured by this calculus.

One has to think concretely—I mean, close to life—to see why this is so. I ask myself: should I continue to raise my two-year-old son? He has the love of his mother, also material comfort, and his life would still be like a sunny morning even with me gone. Set against this the suffering of a single starving child. Is there any question where I could make the greater difference? And even if it were by other standards “wrong” to care so much more for two or three human beings than for all the rest—could it be “moral” not to discriminate at all, and to accord to every pain or pleasure the same importance, regardless of who suffers it?
The utilitarian rule is at least not the easy, obvious axiom that can be laid down at the start. Of course, the severity of the requirements embedded in it do imply humane and charitable attitudes and actions. To prove that is child’s play. The point is that the rule in fact entails immeasurably more—a self-effacement that reduces all of my relationships to a single plane. The meaningful question points therefore just the other way: this rule itself needs a justification far more than much of what it has often been used to justify. Regard, compassion, even love for others are easier to justify than the utilitarian rule.—But enough!

For a whole epoch of my life, between sixteen and twenty-four, I was sure that values were illusions. I had come to this conclusion much like most of us at some point do with religion. It seemed as natural as waking up when it grows light. I did not feel lost. The event was altogether not dramatic, more like a leaf turning to the sun. If there was an emotion, then only a sense of lightness, of a burden gone. I remember that those who still regarded themselves as accountable to values seemed to me then like grown men frightened of the dark. Not only that, of course; they also seemed bound by ropes that they could have unknotted. But for me there were “no limits.” Actions moved like canoes in a river, judgments and values splashed against them as mere spray. “Everything was permitted.”

For some years I really lived by this, but then I was changed by the thoughts that I have now put down. For a time the sheer reality of values, the comforting discovery that they did not require some transcendent realm, but had as plain and common an existence as buttons on a coat, seemed to settle things. The landscape of smooth snowdrifts was transformed, and the new, flamboyant, tropic world was no longer silent, but seemed to demand a quite specific attitude. It made an openness, a receptivity, a cautious gentleness the only natural and suitable response.

But then that too disappeared, and I began to realize that even the objectivity of values had no consequences for myself; that there were still no restraints and no arrows marking my direction, even if every possible assessment was firmly fixed in the very core of things. Everything still was possible. Even Camus’s scornful distance, his lyrically pronounced determination not to make his peace with life, but to keep his eyes fixed on its disproportionality, and to revolt against it—even that was still an appropriate reaction. One that in fact was predicated precisely on the objectivity of values, though on an objectively existing clash, an objectively ex-
isting absence and deficiency. And if his stance was still consistent with the sheer fact of the actuality of values, and depended on the internal substance, on what specific value this or that thing had, then this was true as well for countless other ways to live.

The controversy over the subjectivity or objectivity of values thus became for me "academic" in this specific sense. The resulting greater firmity of guidance supposedly at stake—the reward that those who argue for the objectivity of values seek—is simply not received. It shifts elusively and is again on the far side of a gap when that battle has been won. The division between fact and value can perhaps be bridged, and values can perhaps be shown to be included in the realm of facts, but if so then there is still on one side the objectively existing value, and on the other my response to it. There is still the gap between the worth that something has and the action that I decide to take.

The whole trajectory of thoughts that we have so far traversed brings us, therefore, only to the start of a beginning. Up to this point we have only cleared the air of ghosts. No positive conclusion has yet emerged. The results of these preliminary probings are almost wholly negative: we know which questions are bones that have been chewed too long. Perhaps this understates it. Some are not merely theoretical exclusions. But the one that is to me the most decisive is also paradoxically almost invisible to many of my friends. A rather personal way of stating it would be to say that "there is no should." I mean by this that there is no external sanction, that no court at all sits in judgment over our life. Everything we touch shines with a multiplicity of values, and everything we do moves in their flow. To breathe is an act of affirmation—but that is all. The qualities that our actions realize are the end. We do not place them one by one into a swaying scale, they are like pebbles over which a river flows.

I know that some will not perceive this as even an assertion, maybe because they lack the experience that it denies. Yet there are moments when it does seem, all the same, as if the large philosophical debates in ethics were finally a struggle over these alternatives. The more definable divisions—Are values objective or not? How absolute or relative should their existence be conceived? Can there be general rules?—these were of course the loudly stated conflicts. Still, it is possible that they were animated by the wish to exorcise this ghost. Those who argued outwardly against absoluteness and objectivity perhaps still inwardly protested that there was no court, that no one calls us to account. We can now see
that none of this needs to be denied. Values may be objective, and of course there can be rules, and yet living may still be like a silent walk.

NOTES

2. I owe this idea to Walter Kaufmann.
3. I have developed this view of human and civil rights more fully in a separate paper which I expect to publish soon.
4. Utilitarianism may be the important fork where the English-American and the continental philosophy of values (and not just they) separated, and went different ways: on the Continent, utilitarianism was dismissed, and the questions put to values, therefore, became radical. In England and America this did not happen; perhaps in part because utilitarianism seemed to provide a new and different base as soon as the religious legitimation had collapsed.