

Excerpt from *On Human Conduct*

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I. ON THE THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN CONDUCT

Understanding in general—levels of understanding: recognizing, identifying, theorizing—theoretical inquiry—its ironic character—orders and idioms of theoretical inquiry—‘process’ and ‘practice’—instruments of theoretical understanding (sciences), their character and use—virtues and limits of ‘psychology’ and ‘sociology’ as instruments of theoretical inquiry concerned with human conduct—the conditionality of theoretical understanding.

‘Human conduct’ as an ideal character and an instrument of theoretical inquiry—identification of ‘doing’ as transaction *inter homines* for the satisfaction of wants—its postulates: ‘free’ agents, deliberation, persuasion, ‘explanation’—further postulates considered—‘practical’ distinguished from transactional relationship—a ‘practice’ identified as a ‘language’—‘moral’ conduct as self-disclosure and self-enactment in terms of the conditions of a non-instrumental ‘practice’—human conduct as ‘free’ agents related in conditional transactions for the satisfaction of wants.

The engagement to theorize a specific human performance or ‘practice’—the instrument of theoretical inquiry here—‘human nature’ and ‘social being’ considered and rejected—a performance identified as an *eventum*, the circumstantial outcome of contingently related beliefs, recognitions, understandings, acknowledgements, responses, etc.—contingent relations distinguished—the theoretical understanding of human performances identified as historical understanding.

On The Theoretical Understanding Of Human Conduct

I

The theme of this essay is human conduct and the engagement to understand it. And I shall begin with a brief account of what I take understanding to be.

1.

Understanding is not such that we either enjoy it or lack it altogether. To be human and to be aware is to encounter only what is in some manner understood. Thus, it may be said that understanding is an unsought condition; we inexorably inhabit a world of intelligible. But understanding as an engagement is an exertion it is the resolve to inhabit an ever more intelligible, or an ever less mysterious world. This unconditional engagement of understanding I shall call ‘theorizing’. It is an engagement to abate mystery rather than to achieve definitive understanding.

The features of this engagement are: a ‘going-on’ attended to; a reflective consciousness attending to it and concerned to understand it, a theorist; an inquiry designed and undertaken by a theorist in which he seeks to understand a ‘going-on’, theorizing; and what emerges from this enterprise, a theorem.

A first inspection of these features discloses the following considerations. The ‘going-on’ in which this engagement notionally begins is specific, although its specification may be sketchy. It is not merely looked at; it is noticed, distinguished (often with some difficulty’) in all that may be going on, attended to, recognized, taken hold of, and in some degree identified. Thus, although this ‘going-on’ is recognized as a ‘given’, it is not a mere gratuity; it is itself an achievement in understanding and not therefore (in its distinctness) independent of reflective consciousness. And although in its distinctness

it is inseparable from reflective consciousness, it is not merely a self—observation of reflective consciousness. It is a something—in—particular’ which, in reflection, disengages itself to us from the unconditional (and therefore unrecognizable) confusion of all that may be going on. The immediate intelligibility of such a ‘going on’ is not accidental to it; this intelligibility is what we learn in distinguishing this ‘something-in-particular’. And subsequent inquiry (if it is undertaken) is learning to enhance it. Nor does reflective consciousness supervene accidentally upon the confusion of all that may be going on; its reflectiveness is the recognition of itself as a ‘going-on’ distinguished in this same confusion.

The engagement of understanding, then, begins in an already understood: a verdict, or what we ordinarily call a ‘fact’. But this verdict is the contingent starting-place of a critical inquiry; it is an understanding waiting to be understood. This first account which a theorist gives to himself of a ‘going-on’ has, like all understanding, a conditional sufficiency; but for him it is an invitation not to accept but to interrogate it. What he has given to himself as an answer to the question, ‘what is going on here?’, he now recognizes as a question to be answered. Nevertheless, the undertaking to theorize (that is, to go on learning to understand) does not begin only when this enterprise of interrogation supervenes upon the activity in which an intelligible ‘going-on’ is elicited from the unrecognizable confusion of all that may be going on, is noticed and recognized. These are conditionally distinguishable gradations in a continuous and unconditional engagement of learning to understand which is well on its way in even the most exiguous acts of attention. Thus, there can be no absolute distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘theorem’. A fact has no finality and no authority over further adventures in understanding: it is a first and conditionally acceptable understanding of a ‘going-on’. And a theorem is not an unconditional terminus; it, also, is an understanding waiting to be understood. What distinguishes a theorist is his undistracted concern with the unconditional, critical engagement of understanding in which every understanding (be it ‘fact’ or ‘theorem’) is recognized as a not-yet-understood and therefore as an invitation to understand.

The engagement of understanding is, then, a continuous, self-moved, critical enterprise of theorizing. Its principle is: Never ask the end. Of the paths it may follow, some (we may suppose) will soon exhaust their promise. It is an engagement of arrivals and departures. ‘Temporary platforms of conditional understanding are always being reached, and the theorist may turn aside to explore them. But each is an arrival, an enlightenment, and a point of departure. The notion of an unconditional or definitive understanding may hover in the background, but it has no part in the adventure.

I am not here concerned to fill in this sketch systematically,¹ to explore all the questions it suggests but leaves unanswered, to embark upon the adventure of theorizing the engagement of theorizing. And I propose to say no more than is needed to identify theorizing a little more fully and then only in relation to my concern with what it is to theorize human conduct.

2.

Intelligibles emerge out of misty intimations of intelligibility when noticings become thoughts and when, in virtue of distinguishing and remembering likenesses and unlikenesses in what is going on, we come to inhabit a world of recognizable. These recognitions may often be vague, obscure, and tentative, and often mistaken; that is, unlikes mistaken for likes and likes for unlikes. But continually gone over, rehearsed, revised, and refined they endow what is going on with the intelligibility of familiar characteristics. And every achievement is also an investment. The language of noticing, recognizing, and remembering resemblances and differences is a language of characteristics. Shapes, sizes, colours, textures, movements, sounds, scents, tastes, etc., are distinguished and attended to, not-yet-named recurrences are remarked, and not-yet-named connections observed. The limits of this least adequate understanding are severe, but its constant exercise increases its resources. It becomes more exact and more confident when recollection (the self-conscious recall of recognizable) is added to remembering, when recognition is in terms of words, when thoughts take more definite shapes in ideas, when abstraction becomes more discriminating, when experiences are made to serve inferences, and when new experiences become more readily recognizable because they have been anticipated in educated imagination. But, however, it is extended,

what is going on thus understood is a largely mysterious scene composed of characteristics in search of characters.

The wanderings to and fro of understanding in the tentative terms of the recognition of characteristics, always on the margin of unintelligibility, is abated when characteristics are detached from their contingent circumstances and are combined to compose the features of ideal characters. Indeed, even what I have called recognition' itself postulates some measure of this activity: characteristics are themselves rudimental ideal characters. Such a character is a reflective composition which may begin by being no more than a sketch. It emerges from a selection, combination, and arrangement of characteristics in which recollection has superseded remembering, in which observation is directed by anticipatory guesses, and in which the characteristics upon which attention is focused cease to be recognized merely in terms of resemblances and differences and merely as indications of one another and are understood as the lines or marks which together delineate a conceptual identity.

Understanding here becomes identification: 'goings-on' understood in terms of ideal characters specified as compositions of characteristics. And since these ideal characters have themselves emerged in the enterprise of specifying 'goings-on' as compositions of characteristics, delineating an ideal identity and identifying a 'going-on' are interdependent components of a single activity of seeking to understand. In the engagement of understanding identification is inextricably a 'going-on' understood and a contribution to the delineation of an ideal character. The understanding and the instrument of understanding emerge together.

Thus, to recognize is to distinguish an otherwise unknown *this* from an otherwise unknown *that* in terms of a characteristic: an unknown Peter from an unknown Paul as two different manners of walking, a *this* from a *that* in respect of its taste, a question from an answer by the question mark, a moral proposition by the presence of the word 'ought'. To identify, on the other hand, is to specify a *this* in terms of an ideal character composed of characteristics; it is to understand a 'going-on' as a unity of particularity and genericity.

By identification, then, I mean an understanding in which we take a hold upon 'goings-on', not in terms of casual and marginal resemblances and differences of recognizable characteristics, but in terms of ideal characters specified as compositions of characteristics. In identifying a 'going-on' we do not need to announce the specifications we are relying upon, but if we are asked to account for our conclusion we can only point to the marks which specify an ideal character and to the manner in which they are represented in what we are attending to as the reasons for it: 'for these reasons I understand that what I am attending to is a dance, a book, a wild flower, a proposition, a performance of *King Lear*.'

Identification is, of course, fallible; as at every other level of understanding, mistake is possible, and mistake here is confusion. But identifying is itself a procedure in which doubts are entertained and resolved or not resolved, suspicions and guesses are confirmed or not confirmed, and misidentifications corrected. Such conclusions as, 'not a boy but a dwarf', 'not a bird but a kite', 'not a court of law in session but a scene in a play', are its characteristic outcomes.

The hold it gives upon a 'going-on' may often be insecure. Some of the recognized features of the 'going-on' may point in one direction and others in another; or, from a different point of view, some specifications of a conjectured identity may not be satisfied and others may be satisfied only in part. But these indeterminacies are discrepancies between understandings which reveal themselves only in an attempt to identify and their emergence is, thus, a contribution to understanding. The aim in identification is not to secure a knock-down conviction at any cost; it is to understand. And in every 'going-on' identified there remains an imperfectly resolved tension between particularity and genericity.

An ideal character the instrument of identification may be a crude or a comparatively sophisticated construction; it may be simple or relatively complex; it may be composed of few or of many characteristics. And a 'going-on' first understood in terms of few and crude characteristics may subsequently be reidentified in terms of a more refined ideal character: the dance understood as a fandango, the book as a copy of Hume's *Enquiry*, the proposition as a moral proposition, the performance of *King Lear* as the production of

a particular director. This reidentification is not the correction of a mistake; the new understanding neither denies nor excludes what went before.

Thus, a 'going-on' identified is always as intelligible as the terms in which it is being understood allow it to be. I do not need to understand what I have dug up in the garden as 'a round metal object' *before* I can understand it as a 'Roman coin'; nor do I need to perceive 'marks on paper' before I can discern 'a page of writing', or to understand 'a page of writing' before I identify it as 'Latin or as an argument designed to justify'. There are no so-called minimum epistemological conditions to be satisfied *first*. A symbol is not an 'object' in advance of being recognized as a symbol, and a picture does not need to be recognized as 'paint on canvas' before it is understood or misunderstood as 'a work of art'. And while each of the features of a complex 'going-on' such as, 'the Pleiades are shining brightly in the west, it is very cold and I am alone in the world' may be understood in terms of an ideal character and may be reidentified in more exact terms, the 'going-on' remains an individual composition, a unity of particularity and genericity, in which each component is what it is in virtue of what it contributes to the delineation of the whole.

Understanding what is going on in terms of ideal characters composed of characteristics is, then, a considerable advance upon understanding in terms of the mere recognition of characteristics which are not yet recognized as features of ideal characters. This world composed of identities may remain a somewhat mysterious world of occurrences and recurrences, but mystery has receded; it has acquired the condition of 'facts' understood.

But a 'going-on' identified in terms of an ideal character itself specified in terms of characteristics is not only an understanding of a certain sort (namely, a verdict); it is also an invitation. It invites the theorist to extend his understanding of it by investigating its relationships with other such identities. Indeed, theorizing here has reached what I shall call a platform of conditional understanding which invites exploration.

The condition (the uncriticized assumption) which constitutes this platform of conditional understanding is that every 'going-on' is what it is in respect of being understood in terms of an ideal character specified as a composition of characteristics. This condition allows for the correction of misidentifications and it permits reidentifications, but it excludes any interrogation which calls in question the conditional sufficiency of the identities themselves. Understanding, here, is concerned with unproblematic verdicts.

To explore this platform of understanding is to seek connections between the identified 'goings-on' which are its unproblematic features. And the outcome of this exploration is an understanding in which different identities may be linked with one another in respect of their common characteristics or of the circumstances of their individual occurrence; in which they may be related, correlated, juxtaposed, concatenated, joined and conjoined, matched, paired, grouped, compared, classed and reclassified in respect of various common characteristics; in which alliances, congruences, correspondences, parallelisms, appositions, etc. may be established; in which they may come to be understood as irreducible parts of composite identities, like the bricks which compose a wall or the cards which make up a 'pack'. And these relationships may be plotted on graphs, expressed in mathematical ratios, and (in certain circumstances) displayed in terms of probabilities. In short, the exploration of this platform of understanding is a conditional adventure in theorizing committed to 'saving the appearances' of the identities which compose it, the outcome of which is a map upon which their relationships to one another are exactly displayed. The theorems in terms of which this hold is taken upon these identities specify arrangements of uncompromised 'facts'. Each identified 'going-on' remains an unquestioned verdict. Comparison, for example, postulates 'goings-on' whose identities are unproblematic.

Moreover, this platform of conditional understanding, composed of identities each understood in terms of an ideal character specified as a composition of characteristics and whose relationships have been investigated and recorded on maps, is also eligible to be explored in conduct. here, identification is diagnosis; that is, a verdict recognized as an invitation to illustrate what is being understood in the performance of an action. Thus, the identities disclosed in 'this is a case of measles', 'that is a bank robbery', 'guilty but insane', and 'this is combustible' are diagnoses when they are understood to prescribe

utterances such as 'isolate the patient', 'sound the alarm', 'detain during Her Majesty's pleasure', 'put it on the fire', or performances which correspond to these utterances. Or, conversely, an utterance which provokes laughter is an utterance diagnosed as a 'joke', and the understanding entailed is specifiable as 'seeing the joke'.

These invitations are conditional, and their acceptance constitutes a suspension of the unconditional critical engagement of understanding in which the appearance of an assumption is a signal for it to be interrogated. But we do not need to search far and wide for reasons why the engagement should be arrested at the level of identification, or why the theorist should turn a deaf ear to his calling and devote himself to the exploration of this platform of conditional understanding, making a map of it, or recognizing an identity as an invitation to act; they are ready to hand. These 'goings-on' abstracted from all that may be going on, understood in terms of ideal characters specified as compositions of characteristics, and related to one another in terms of their common features or in respect of the circumstances of their occurrence, are intelligible. Why should he not enjoy this intelligibility if it is equal to his needs? The puzzle, if any, is why he should ever feel the urge to leave this world of satisfying and useful verdicts.

3.

Our concern, however, is with the unconditional engagement of understanding and with the theorist for whom 'facts' are understood but are also waiting to be understood and not merely to be related to one another or to be used, and to whom this (or, indeed, any other) platform of conditional understanding is something of a prison from which he seeks release. How shall he resume his engagement of critical inquiry and thus recover his laid-aside character as a theorist?

He may do so in recognizing an identity not as a verdict to be accepted but as an invitation to interrogate it. It is to be expected that he will tinker with his identities, abstracting them more decisively and specifying them more exactly in order to endow them with characters capable of being investigated; for, only a 'going-on' purged of ambiguity qualifies as an identity waiting to be understood and prescribes an inquiry. But his exertions will be rewarded when, almost without premonition, he finds himself to have acquired a new employment. His enterprise now is to make his identities more intelligible, neither by reidentifying them in a reconsideration of their component characteristics, nor by relating them more decisively to one another in terms of their features and of the circumstances of their occurrence, but by seeking to understand them in terms of their postulates that is, in terms of their conditions.

Thus, a theorist is not provoked to this enterprise by his recognition of identities as compositions of characteristics (these he already understands, perhaps as well as they may be understood) but by what in such identities he does not yet understand; namely their conditionality. In turning his critical attention to this conditionality he is released from the prison of his current understanding; and in identifying the component conditions of their conditionality and in making these postulates the terms of his understanding he comes to occupy a new platform of conditional understanding.

A platform of conditional understanding is constituted by its conditions which, from different points of view, may be recognized as assumptions or as postulates. To occupy and to explore such platform is to engage in interrogative adventures among identities adventures which do not question these conditions but are contained by them. To read the face of Big Ben (that is, to 'tell the time') postulates and *therefore* does not question the idea 'time'; 'time' here is unproblematic; the problem is, 'What is *the* time?'

And to understand a 'going-on' such as 'my friend Tom considering which of two hats he shall buy' postulates and *therefore* does not interrogate the ideas 'deliberation' and 'choice'. And

theorist, attending to a 'going-on' understood in terms of an idea character specified as a composition of characteristics, but engage to understand it in terms of its postulates, may be said, alternatively, to be seeking to understand a familiar identity in terms different from those in which it is already understood, or to have replaced one subject of inquiry by another.

Thus, a 'going-on' abstracted from all that may be going on attended to and identified as a 'thunderstorm' in terms of an idea character whose features are noise, flashes of light, an oppressive

feeling in the air, torrents of rain, etc., may be reidentified in terms of more closely specified characteristics (e.g. the colour or interval of the flashes), and its relations with other such identities may be explored; but when it is understood in terms of the theorems of electro-magnetism and as an example of the operation of the 'laws' alleged to relate to electrical discharges it is being understood in relation to an ideal character not recognized as a composition of characteristics but specified as a system of theorems alleged to be its postulates.

But a theorist who makes this transfer of attention from characteristics to postulates has embarked upon an adventure in understanding which must soon carry him far out of sight of what he purports to be seeking to understand. For what he first discerned as the postulates or conditions of a particular identity and used as an instrument for understanding *it*, demand to be recognized as identities on their own account. And in attending to them, not as the postulates of that which had invited investigation (not, that is, as conditional instruments of understanding), but as themselves understandings to be investigated, he is occupying and exploring a platform of understanding from which the identities they may be used to explain are excluded. He is no longer concerned with a 'thunderstorm' but with the now *problematic* theorems of electromagnetism.

Thus, a 'going-on' understood in terms of its characteristics may be identified as, a 'tug-of-war'; but to theorize it in terms of postulates is to set foot upon and to explore a platform of understanding composed of theorems of (say) 'mechanics' among which the 'tug-of-war' (although it also, in its modest way, is a theorem) has no necessary place and in relation to which it is no more than one of an untold number of contingent 'goings-on' from which an identity capable of being understood in the terms of 'mechanics' may be abstracted. And if the theorist were to go on to recognize the conditionality of this new identity (a science of 'mechanics') and were to investigate the postulates of these theorems he would have exposed for exploration a further platform of understanding. Boyle's 'law' is not a gas, and a theorem explanatory of comic situations is not itself a joke. The 'law' and the theorem may each be recognized as a postulate and may be used as an instrument of understanding, but they cannot escape recognition as themselves invitations to understand; and the postulates in terms of which the 'law' or the theorem may themselves be understood are at two removes from the identities these may respectively be used to explain.

Moreover, the theorist who takes this path does not merely open the door upon, and declare his interest in, a special engagement where postulates are identities waiting to be understood and not instruments of understanding, and in which questions are asked not in order to be answered but so that they may themselves be interrogated in respect of their conditions; he recognizes this to be the character of the engagement of understanding and he acknowledges his calling to be that of a 'philosopher'. Here, theorizing has revealed itself as an unconditional adventure in which every achievement of understanding is an invitation to investigate itself and where the reports a theorist makes to himself are interim triumphs of temerity over scruple. And for a theorist not to respond to this invitation cannot be on account of his never having received it. It does not reach him from afar and by special messenger; it is implicit in every engagement to understand and is delivered to him whenever he reflects. The irony of all theorizing is its propensity to generate, not an understanding, but a not-yet-understood.

Nevertheless, the engagement of understanding is not unconditional on account of the absence of conditions, or in virtue of a supposed terminus in an unconditional theorem; what constitutes its unconditionality is the continuous recognition of the conditionality of conditions. And consequently, this engagement to be perpetually *en voyage* may be arrested without being denied. The theorist who drops anchor here or there and puts out his equipment of theoretic hooks and nets in order to take the fish of the locality, interrupts but does not betray his calling. And indeed, the unconditional engagement of understanding must be arrested and inquiry must remain focused upon a *this* if any identity is to become intelligible in terms of its postulates. An investigation which denies or questions its own conditions surrenders its opportunity of achieving its own conditional perfection; the theorist who interrogates instead of using his theoretic equipment catches no fish.

Thus, every specific undertaking to understand a *this* is the exploration of a conditional platform of understanding. Its starting-place is an identity understood and not yet understood, and its conclusion is this identity transformed by being understood in terms of

its postulates. Each is an autonomous adventure in theorizing, insular, inextinguishable, resistant to 'reduction', having its own conditional 'truth', and capable of its own conditional perfection. In every such conditional inquiry there is a recognition of the unconditional adventure of theorizing and this qualified in terms of an identity understood and waiting to be understood. And since the undertaking to theorize 'human conduct' is a conditional engagement of this sort, I must consider briefly what more is entailed in the enterprise of understanding a specified identity in terms of its postulates.

4. Understanding is concerned with the intelligibility of ideal characters and it may be concerned with the intelligibility of 'goings-on' in terms of these ideal characters. The gross undifferentiated sum (so to say) of what is going on is incapable of being characterized; it prescribes no inquiry, it remains for ever speciously ambiguous and therefore unintelligible. And a 'going-on' in respect of its bare particularity is neither intelligible nor capable of inviting investigation in which it may become intelligible. A specific engagement to understand begins in a 'going-on' abstracted from all that may be going on and understood in terms of an ideal character specified as a composition of characteristics, a unity of particularity and genericity. And when, as part of that understanding, the identity is apprehended as a not-yet-understood, it is recognized as an invitation to an inquiry designed to expose and specify its postulates, to relate them systematically to one another, and, by displaying them as the postulates of *this* identity, to make it intelligible.

But to become the subject of such an inquiry, an identity must not only be recognized to be predicative (that is to be a not-yet-understood predicating an inquiry), but to be a predicament; that is, to be a not-yet-understood which predicates what I shall call the 'order' of the inquiry in which it may come to be understood. Thus, the formal condition of every specific engagement to understand is that the identity to be investigated shall have been abstracted and composed in such a manner as to be categorially unambiguous, the word 'category' being used here in the strict sense of that which predicates the 'order' of the inquiry in which an identified 'going-on' may come to be understood. And I say 'an order of inquiry' because what is predicated is never the questions to be asked (these must be left to the theorist), but only the kind of questions to be asked. A categorially ambiguous identity is one which predicates no inquiry because it is incapable of prescribing a particular 'order' of inquiry.

There are two categories of identities to be reckoned with, predicating categorially different 'orders' of inquiry. To the first belong 'goings-on' the identification of which includes the recognition that they are themselves exhibitions of intelligence: for example, a 'going-on' identified as itself an engagement to understand (a biologist at work, the engagement of the audience at a play, a boy learning Latin), a 'going-on' identified as a human action (that is, an agent responding to an understood situation meaning to achieve an imagined and wished-for outcome), a subscription to a 'practice' which requires to be understood in order to be participated in, a work of art, an artefact, an argument, a barrister addressing a court of law, an expression of moral sentiment, a statement of belief or of policy, etc. These identities and their likes, when recognized as not yet understood, predicate an inquiry in which, by coming to be understood in terms of their postulates, the mystery of their characters and occurrence is abated. The detailed character of this order of inquiry is to be considered later in this essay; here, no more need be said than that these postulates must be theorems concerned with the understandings which constitute these identities. Theorizing here is seeking to understand identities specified as expressions of reflective intelligence.

To the second category belong 'goings-on' recognized, in virtue of their characteristics, *not* themselves to be exhibitions of intelligence: for example, a rock formation, a wave breaking on the shore, metal fatigue, a thunderstorm, a butterfly on the wing, the facial resemblances of children and parents, a chameleon changing colour, melting ice, etc. These 'goings-on' and their likes, in virtue of being identified, are, of course, understood. But, since as part of that understanding they are recognized both as not yet understood and as 'goings-on' which are not themselves exhibitions of intelligence, they predicate an inquiry into their conditions and they predicate also conditions which somehow 'determine' (and thus make intelligible) what is going on but which do not require to have been learned, to be understood, and to be assented to in order to be operative: for example, so-called 'causal' conditions. (A falling apple does

not need to have learned 'law' of gravitation in order to fall.) And understanding such an identity is specifying it as an example of the operation of such conditions. 'The ideal character in terms of which 'goings-on' thus identified and categorized are to be understood may be said to be that of a 'process' and not that of a 'procedure'.

Adventuring into Yucatan, I may perceive a 'going-on' which in perceiving it, I identify as the ruins of a Maya temple; that is, as a human artefact, an expression of intelligence. And if, as part of that understanding, I recognize it as a not-yet-understood it predicates an 'order' of inquiry in which it may come to be understood in terms of its postulates. Since it is an artefact, these postulates are themselves understandings. They may be Maya religious beliefs, rituals, etc., extending to the religious history of this people. Or, if what I perceive is the ruin of an architectural construction, my theorizing will be concerned with its design and with its materials understood as the outcome of choice, circumstance, and acquired skill. And its ruinous condition will be understood as a historical event, the outcome of such neglect or design as the evidence may point to. In short, my inquiry will be concerned with human beliefs and understandings, with actions recognized as responses to understood situations, with events, and with customs, practices, and uses. But if, instead, I were to abstract and identify a 'going-on' specified as a collapsed physical structure or a process of chemical change, and were to understand it as a not-yet-understood, the 'order' of inquiry predicated and the theorems in terms of which this identity might come to be understood would be of a categorially different kind. The identity I would have before me would not be an expression of reflective consciousness and the instrument of understanding would be an ideal character composed of the 'laws' or causal conditions which specify a 'process', not a 'practice'. This process may be strictly articulated or it may be a comparatively loose composition of propensities, but its determinateness or indeterminacy is not a result of its components having learned and understood their parts well or ill.²

This distinction, then, between 'goings-on' identified as themselves exhibitions of intelligence and 'goings-on' which may be made intelligible but are not themselves intelligent, is not a distinction between mental and physical or between minds and bodies regarded as entities. It is a distinction within the engagement of understanding, a distinction between 'sciences' (that is, ideal characters) and the identities with which they are concerned. And in calling it a categorial distinction what is being asserted is that the understanding of identities recognized as themselves exhibitions of intelligence cannot be 'reduced' to the understanding of identities not so recognized. 'A biologist at work' (or any other exhibition of intelligence) cannot be understood in terms of the theorems of a science of biology, not because a process of biochemical change cannot be abstracted from this 'going-on' but because this biochemical process is *ex hypothesi* incapable of self-understanding. And the contention that all exhibitions of intelligence may themselves be understood as examples of the operation of 'laws' (psychological or sociological) of human understanding recognized as itself a 'process' is vetoed by the consideration that the theoretical engagement in which such 'laws' might be formulated must (within the terms of the contention) also be understood as an example of the operation of the same 'laws', which is categorially absurd.³

Identities in respect of their categories and inquiries in respect of their 'orders' are, then, exclusive of one another. A categorially unambiguous identity is the condition of every significant adventure in theorizing, and the recognition of the category of the identity concerned is the first step in every such adventure. Thus the movement of a human eyelid is a categorially ambiguous identity; it may be a wink or it may be a blink, a wink which is an exhibition of intelligence, a subscription to a 'practice' and has a reason, and a blink which is a component of a 'process' to be understood in terms of a 'law' or a 'cause'.

Contingently, and where identification is diagnosis predicating response in a performance, it is important that the 'going-on' should not be categorially misidentified, otherwise an irrelevant response will be made: the wink, misidentified as a blink, will be neglected as not looking for such a response. But in respect of the engagement of understanding, this is of no importance; what matters there is that, whatever the verdict (wink or blink), the 'order' of inquiry it predicates should be recognized. And the certainty that, at some near or distant point in the engagement (where what is being theorized becomes and remains itself the engagement of theorizing), only the first of

these categories survives, is irrelevant to us who are, here, concerned with arrests in that engagement where the liability to categorial confusion is to be reckoned with.

Related to this there is a further consideration (already noticed) about which something more must be said. To become the subject of an inquiry designed to make it intelligible in terms of its postulates, an identity must be recognized not only to be 'problematic', but to be a specific problem; that is, it must be recognized to be unambiguous not only in predicating what I have called an exclusive 'order' of inquiry but also in prescribing what I shall now call a particular 'idiom' of inquiry. For a categorially unambiguous identity may still have contingent ambiguities which must be resolved before it can become the subject of an inquiry.

For example, a 'going-on' identified, in terms of its characteristics, as three intersecting lines on a piece of paper is categorially ambiguous; it may be recognized, but it cannot be recognized as a not-yet-understood and consequently it invites no inquiry. This categorial ambiguity may be resolved in identifying it as an exhibition of human intelligence. But the ideal character 'exhibition of human intelligence' is itself ambiguous. Thus, the 'going-on' may be identified simply as an occurrence, the outcome of a human action, or it may be identified as a symbol (a design for a trade mark, for the emblem of a religious faith or a political party, or for a sign denoting what should or should not be done: 'no entrance'), or it may be identified as a work of art, the childish representation of a wigwam, etc., etc. Each of these identities and their like is recognizable as a not-yet-understood waiting to be understood because each prescribes not only an 'order' of inquiry but also (within that 'order') a particular idiom of inquiry. The ideal characters, 'historical occurrence', 'symbol', and 'work of art', are idiomatically (but not categorially) different from one another. And in default of an idiomatically distinct identity there can be no inquiry. On the other hand, the categorial ambiguity of this 'going-on' may be resolved in the opposite direction; but here again alternatives present themselves. It may, perhaps, be identified as a geometrical figure (a triangle) prescribing an inquiry into its geometrical postulates, or it may be identified in terms of its materials (paper and ink) thus prescribing an inquiry into a chemical process, and so on. And here, again, there is a not-yet-understood capable of being investigated because there is the prescription not only of an 'order' of inquiry (that appropriate to non-intelligent 'goings-on'), but also of a particular idiom of inquiry, geometrical or chemical.

Alternatively, it may be said that a theorist, committed to that arrest in which the engagement of understanding becomes the enterprise of understanding an identified 'going-on' in terms of *its* postulates, has at his disposal (actually or potentially) a variety of what I have called 'idioms' of inquiry. Each such idiom is an unambiguous system of theorems which has acquired (or which aspires to) the condition of a distinguishable 'science'; that is, the always unfinished ideal character composed of theorems which it is the concern of a theorist to construct, and used here as an instrument of understanding. Thus, for example, within the 'order' of inquiry concerned with 'goings-on' identified as exhibitions of intelligence, ethics, jurisprudence, and aesthetics are distinguishable idioms; and physics, chemistry, and psychology are similarly distinguishable idioms within the 'order' of inquiry concerned with identities specified as components of a 'process'. And while the 'sciences' which fall within an 'order' of inquiry are not categorially exclusive of one another and therefore may suffer 'reduction' (e.g. chemistry to physics), each is autonomous in being constituted in terms of theorems exclusively its own, and each is capable of its own conditional perfection.

As an instrument for understanding a 'going-on', an ideal character of this sort (a 'science') purports to distinguish and expose the postulates of the identity waiting to be understood, and theorizing this identity purports to be understanding it in terms of this system of theorems.⁴ But every such understood 'going-on' is necessarily the creature of the ideal character in terms of which it is being understood. An investigation in which the instrument of understanding is such a system of theorems (a 'science') itself designates the identity investigated and gives it the required unambiguous character by endowing it with the categorial and idiomatic unambiguity of the ideal character concerned. Indeed, the virtue (and the conditionality) of a 'science as an instrument of understanding is that it designates an idiomatically unambiguous identity as the subject of investigation.

Thus, when Lord Kelvin said that he could understand anything if he could make a mechanical model of it, he confessed to a disposition (where understanding was

concerned) to abstract from all 'goings-on' a generically mechanical identity and to make this the subject of his inquiry. His command over the theorems of 'mechanics' was used both to abstract this identity and to make it intelligible. And he might plausibly contend that no 'going-on' identified in terms of its characteristics was impervious to this treatment: a rock-formation, a boy on a bicycle, a waterfall, Westminster Abbey, the circulation of money in an economy, a man going upstairs to bed or posting a letter, or a volume of Racine's plays standing on a bookshelf, each might be subjected to it. But it was a muddled way of speaking to describe this as 'making a mechanical model *of it*'; what he did was to abstract a mechanical identity *from it* and to make this the subject of his inquiry.⁵

To be concerned to understand in terms of its postulates a 'going on' identified in terms of its characteristics is, then, an arrest in the unconditional engagement of theorizing. It entails, alternatively, either the abstraction and recognition of a categorially unambiguous identity predicating an 'order' of inquiry and (within that 'order') a particular idiom of inquiry, or the command of an idiom of inquiry capable of abstracting, designating, and making intelligible a categorially unambiguous identity.

Each such idiom of inquiry may be supposed to have sprung from patient and tentative engagements to elicit their postulates from 'goings-on' relieved of some of their ambiguity by the care with which they have been abstracted and identified in terms of their characteristics: ethics from an identification of moral conduct and utterance, jurisprudence from legal systems, economics from business transactions, geology from rocks, biology from organisms, crystallography from crystals. But as an ideal character composed of theorems begins to emerge from these identificatory engagements, the concern of the theorist recedes from the identities which first held his attention and becomes that of investigating this character. The aspiration to endow it with the condition of a 'science' outwits the urge to use it to explain contingent 'goings-on', and the naïve notion that these theorems may be verified in the successful or falsified in the unsuccessful prediction of the occurrence of such 'goings-on' is put aside: the abstraction of 'experiment' concerned with ideal characters takes the place of the abstraction of observation concerned in concrete occurrences. But in so far as it achieves this condition it may be confidently used as an instrument for understanding, in its own conditional terms, what is going on.⁶ Thus, a command of the theorems of mechanics will enable a theorist to abstract a mechanical identity from a balancing act in a circus and to display it as a parallelogram of forces; but he will have to think in different terms if he is to understand an identity abstracted and specified in the programme as, 'Stello and Stella in their world-famous act, as performed in London, Madrid, Berlin, Rome, and Skibbereen: the acme of the art of the equilibrist', for this is certainly not a 'mechanical' identity.

No doubt the theorist who has turned aside from the unconditional engagement of understanding in order to make intelligible to himself an identified 'going-on' will sometimes find his theoretic equipment unequal to his enterprise: there may be no well-articulated ideal character composed of related theorems available to him. This is likely to be the case where he is concerned to understand 'goings-on' identified as themselves exhibitions of intelligence: ethics, jurisprudence, aesthetics, economics, for example, are certainly no contemptibly inchoate 'sciences', but they may scarcely be said to constitute readily usable theoretic ideal characters in terms of which to abstract and to make intelligible moral, legal, poetic, etc. 'goings-on'. In this situation, the theorist must either do his best with what he has got, or he must himself re-engage in the different, more difficult, but also more interesting task of constructing an unambiguous theoretic character (a 'science') which might subsequently be used as an instrument of abstraction and understanding.

But, frustrating as this may be, it is less embarrassing than the offer of categorially ambiguous instruments of understanding; that is, alleged all-purpose 'sciences' on behalf of which it is claimed that they are equipped to theorize both 'goings-on' identified as exhibitions of intelligence whose postulates are reasons, beliefs, and practices, and also 'goings-on' not so identified whose postulates are the regularities of a 'process' or some kind of causal conditions. And in particular there are two alleged 'sciences' whose usefulness as instruments of understanding is qualified because they are themselves

infected with this ambiguity: psychology and sociology. And my concern with theorizing 'human conduct' makes it appropriate to say something here about them.

Beyond reasonable doubt there is a genuine 'sciences of psychology which has emancipated itself from suspicion of categorial ambiguity. It has emerged from the enterprise of theorizing such 'goings-on' as feeling, being interested, perceiving, being disposed, learning, remembering and forgetting, wanting, wishing, willing, believing, doubting, fearing, discriminating, reasoning, imagining, playing, acquiring habits, etc., etc., identified, not as states of consciousness or exhibitions of intelligence, but as observable processes; that is, understood in terms of theorems which denote regularities which are not themselves exhibitions of understanding and do not have to be learned in order to be operative. That those who devote themselves to this science are often inclined to concern themselves merely with characteristics, and that they have not yet fully emancipated themselves from a concern for the comparison and correlation of 'goings-on' in terms of their characteristics is, perhaps, a sign of theoretical immaturity or recidivism. But they have equipped this science with concepts (often borrowed from other sciences) in terms of which to formulate theorems about the postulates of these processes—faculty, instinct, drive, association, reflex, organic tension, function, valence, canalization, tolerance, conservation, latency, threshold, trace, re-inforcement, *pragnaz*, deflection, sublimation, repression, field of perception, configuration etc., etc. And these, like the concepts of physics, are periodically criticized, reformulated, or abandoned, as well as being used. This science has acquired scales of measurement and its theorems are such that they may be plotted on graphs and displayed in diagrams or mathematical equations. And although there has been gross imprudence in the haste with which these theorems have been set to work by technologists to 'explain' goings-on in the world, this science is not without something to offer by way of an unequivocal instrument for abstracting and investigating conditional identities. Like every other science it is capable of its own conditional perfection. But like them it is also unable to resist hypotheses which ally it to what began by being somewhat different investigations (e.g. neuro-physiology and genetics) and thus to prefigure the 'reduction' of the terms in which its theorems are formulated to the categorially similar terms of chemistry and physics. Its theorems are not categorially equivocal and its conclusions (such as they are) are in step with its pretensions.

But alongside this, and often confused with it, there has emerged a spurious intellectual enterprise in which the theorems of this science (which concern so-called 'mental' processes vulnerable to reduction to 'physical' processes) are made to appear as formulations of causal conditions or 'laws' in terms of which to understand 'goings-on' identified as themselves exhibitions of intelligence—expressions of sentiment or belief, arguments, practices, artefacts, intentions, motives, actions, etc. Thus, there are said to be 'psychological mechanisms by which individual buyers and sellers are *motivated* to buy and sell' and in terms of which these intelligent commercial transactions may be explained and understood. The theorems of a science concerned with the process of believing are represented as the causes of beliefs; a craving for power or for community' is said to be a 'psychological fact', and an acquaintance with the theorems of this science is equated with an agent's understanding of himself and of what he is doing. This, of course, is all a great muddle; psychological mechanisms cannot be the motives of actions or the reasons for beliefs. And so far from it being the case that a science of 'psychic processes is the only valid instrument we have for understanding human actions and utterances', such a science is categorially excluded from providing any such understanding.

And, as if this categorial muddle were not enough, it is now partnered by an alternative confusion. Here, a man's beliefs and sentiments, his motives and his intentions are said to be his 'psychology' and to be that to which his actions and utterances are to be referred in order to be understood: hence such expressions as 'the psychology of Henry VIII', or 'the psychology of the industrial worker'. What a man believes is said to be his 'psychological condition', changes in his beliefs are said to be his 'psychological development', and if his thoughts or emotions are notably incoherent or astray he is said to be in a state of 'psychological crisis'. A novelist who is concerned with the motives and intentions of his characters is called a 'psychological' novelist, and of a biographer it is said that 'he does not dig deeply enough into the psychology of his subject to make his conduct intelligible'. No doubt much of this is no more than journalistic inadvertence, mere verbal

confusion, but among alleged scientific writers these expressions enunciate a doctrine. For the design in calling a man's thoughts, sentiments, beliefs, etc., his 'psychology' is to reduce them to the components of a process (commonly called 'ego functioning') to be understood in terms of a temperament, of a so-called 'psychological type', of the *ur-*experiences of infancy, biological urges, genetic inheritance, repressed anxieties, or of environmental pressures anything but the ideas he has learned (but might not have learned) to think. And when this psychological process is represented as an ideal character in terms of which to understand the actions and utterances of reflective consciousness a categorial confusion has intervened. Human conduct, an exhibition of intelligence, cannot be understood as a response to what in this process are declared to be 'psychic needs'; beliefs, actions, and utterances cannot be, or be the effects of, this 'ego functioning'. The prevalence of astrology, magic, witchcraft, and Satanism in fourteenth-century Europe is not explained by being identified as 'the normal psychological reaction to circumstances of unusual danger and physical suffering'; and gnostic belief cannot be understood as the outcome of a breakdown of trust between father and son. This is categorial rubbish: a belief is what it means to the believer.

Nor is there any validity in the claim that psychology is the science in terms of which to understand certain kinds of human conduct: so-called 'irrational', or 'instinctive', or 'mass' conduct. A psychological process (or, indeed, a physiological, a chemical, or a mechanical process) may, of course, be abstracted from every 'going-on' identified as human conduct, but wherever there is action or utterance there is an intelligent agent responding to an understood (or misunderstood) situation meaning to achieve an imagined and wished-for outcome, and this cannot be 'reduced' to a psychological process or 'structure', however gross the misunderstanding, however lunatic the imagination, however fanciful the wish, and whatever its similarity to the actions and utterances of others. And where there is neither identifiable action nor utterance there is, in the end, only chemistry or physics.

The ideal character constituted by a science of psychology has, then, been blurred and its value (such as it is) as an instrument for abstracting and understanding a 'psychological' identity from human conduct has been obscured in the dust raised by some mis-conceived intellectual adventures. And sociology may be recognized as a not dissimilar 'darkling plain'

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Hidden in the confusion, an unambiguous intellectual engagement is to be discerned; namely, the enterprise of theorizing conduct *inter homines* in terms of the conditions imposed upon it by the multiplicity of more or less durable relationships of human beings ('practices') and of theorizing these relationships in terms of their postulates. Here, the human beings concerned are neither biological organisms identified in terms of their genetic characters, nor 'psychological *egos*', but reflective intelligences whose actions and utterances are choices to do or to say *this* rather than *that* in relation to imagined and wished-for outcomes. And the relationships between them to be investigated are recognized to be themselves expressions of intelligence which may be enjoyed only by their having been learned and understood and in virtue of an acknowledgement of the authority of their conditions or of a recognition of their utility. The subject of inquiry in this enterprise of theoretical understanding is actions and utterances in respect of being subscriptions to procedures or 'practices' comprised of rules and rule-like considerations whose postulates are beliefs. It is a science of intelligent procedures, not processes. And it is of no consequence that it can provide an understanding of human actions and utterances no more substantial than (for example) the exiguous understanding provided in the reference of a poem to a literary tradition or to a genre, so long as it does not pretend to offer what it is categorially and idiomatically disqualified from supplying. It is (as will later appear) an engagement of historical understanding of a certain limited sort.

But projects of other kinds, purporting to endow the understanding of human conduct with a superior 'scientific' quality have supervened to distract and to corrupt this genuine but modest enterprise. In the commonest and least equivocal of these 'sociological' projects the identity to be investigated is said to be a 'society': that is, an alleged totality of human relationships. But whether it is because of the palpable difficulty of representing such a totality as itself human beings associated in terms of a specifiable procedure or practice, or because to regard it as a practice and not as a process seems to

be no better than an apology for the absence of a 'scientific' understanding, a 'society' is identified as a 'system'. It is recognized as a process to be understood in terms of its regularities or its causal conditions, and not as a procedure whose postulates are reflective intelligence, contingent beliefs and acknowledgements of authority or utility. Accordingly, this 'system' is said to have a 'structure' which contains and displays functional relationships between its parts or properties. And change in this structure (so-called 'social change') is understood to be a process analogous to the metabolic or evolutionary change of biological organisms. What are called 'cultures' are said to 'evolve' and to survive in a process of 'natural selection'; that is, by proving themselves to be 'adaptively superior innovatory ways of surviving'. Or 'social change' is understood in terms borrowed from physics and represented as an example of entropy. In the more naïve versions of this 'sociological' understanding of human conduct the so-called 'law-like relations between the components of social systems' are merely correlations of characteristics. In the more sophisticated versions, the explanatory 'laws' are the alleged psychological or bio-evolutionary 'laws' or causal conditions said to be postulated in the correlations of characteristics. But, however this may be, and whether or not a 'general sociological theory' is made to emerge from this engagement to understand 'social processes', it is remote from anything recognizable as an engagement to theorize human conduct. Theorems about the so-called 'behaviour of social systems', or about the behaviour of their alleged components, can be represented as theorems about the actions and utterances of human beings only in a masquerade of categories.

'There remains to be noticed one further entailment of this undertaking to theorize an identity in terms of its postulates. Theorizing when it is concerned with understanding an abstracted identity in terms of its conditions is (so to say) poised between heaven and earth; and there it must remain. This theorizing does not deny the unconditional critical engagement in which conditions cease to be instruments of abstraction and understanding and become themselves subjects of inquiry as soon as they are recognized, but is estopped from pursuing it. An ideal character (e.g. a 'science') cannot be both used and interrogated at the same time, and here the enterprise is to use it as an instrument of understanding. And, on the other hand, theorizing here has emancipated itself from a concern with identities specified merely in terms of their characteristics; but, of course, without impugning the conditional intelligibility of such identities.

This self-consciously conditional theorist (so to say) can accommodate himself to the first of these conditions without serious difficulty; he easily understands that nothing will come of questioning everything at the same time. Indeed, he recognizes this to be the condition of any specific achievement in understanding. He has a heavenly home, but he is in no hurry to reach it. If he is concerned to theorize moral conduct or civil association he must forswear metaphysics. But he is apt to be less easy in his relations to what he has left behind: identities specified in terms of their characteristics. And this is particularly the case where he is concerned with human conduct and with 'goings-on' recognized as exhibitions of intelligence. He certainly occupies a platform of conditional understanding superior to that of even the most competent map-maker of the relations of identities specified in terms of their characteristics and to that of even the most adept diagnostician responding to their invitations to act; and he may be said to 'offend' (in the expression of Heidegger: 'erklären heisst beleidigen') the map-makers and those engaged in conduct only by committing the pardonable solecism of having a different concern: namely, to investigate the conditions of their enterprises, not to engage in them. Thus, he may be supposed to be beyond any severe temptation to confuse the postulates of an identity with its features or to pass off either for the other. But if there is a risk, it is that he will look back rather than forward. He has, of course, no reason to consider himself able to provide a *substitute* for the activities of map-makers or of agents in conduct, to have the authority to seize the helm in their concerns, or to be persuaded by others that this is the case. And if he keeps his head he will not be tempted to confuse (for example) theorizing moral conduct with knowing how to subscribe to a moral practice. But he will become genuinely and unpardonably 'offensive' if he so far mistakes the character of this superiority as to think of map-making and diagnosis as a kind of worthless nescience, or if, in virtue of occupying a superior platform of understanding and of his concern with postulates, he so far forgets himself as to assume the office of tutor to those he has left behind who have no such concern. Either way, he would commit the enormity of

deserting his own character as a theorist with a modest programme of investigation for that of a 'theoretician'.

This deplorable character has no respectable occupation. In [virtue of being a theorist he purports to be concerned with the postulates of conduct, but he mistakes these postulates for principles from which 'correct' performances may be deduced or somehow elicited. He understands it to be his business to umpire conduct, certifying performances to be 'corrects or condemning them as 'incorrect' inferences from the theorems of an alleged understanding of conduct in terms of its conditions. But since such theorems are incapable of specifying performances, the engagement of the 'theoretician' is a spurious engagement in conduct itself, an undertaking to direct the activities of map-makers, diagnosticians and agents by systematic deception. He is a fraudulent tutor; and the certificates he issues are counterfeit, acceptable only by those who share his belief in the truth of his theorems and share also his delusions about their character.

This account of the engagement of understanding owes so much to the account in Plato (*Republic*, vi, *ad init.*, and elsewhere), that it may be instructive to notice its divergencies.

The cave-dwellers, who inhabit a 'hollow in the earth' (*Phaedo*, 109), occupy a platform of conditional understanding. They recognize their world in terms of identified and named occurrences understood as compositions of characteristics. It is, thus far, a world of intelligibles and they move within it confidently. They can remember and recollect, they have expectations about the occurrence of these 'goings-on', and they can pay more or less attention to them when they appear. They have their likes and dislikes, greeting these occurrences not only with a limited curiosity but with joy, sorrow, anger, repugnance, affection, delight, surprise, etc. They are capable of inferences which are verdicts or diagnoses. And the more intelligent (or the more attentive) among them are admired by the rest, and sometimes rewarded with small prizes for the reliable information they have acquired and are able to impart about the connections and correlations of at least some of these occurrences, and for their ability to forecast their appearance upon the scene.

This platform of understanding is, however, a 'prison'. Its inhabitants are 'prisoners', not merely because they are wholly ignorant of its conditions but because the level of their understanding excludes even the recognition that it is conditional. In short, in Socrates' phrase, they are 'like ourselves', only more so than Plato will allow. Distracted by his exclusive concern with the engagement of theoretical understanding and with the manifest shortcomings of this platform of understanding, the intelligibility of the cave-dweller's world seems to him at once so complete (leaving no room for mystery and inviting no questions save those concerned with the relationships of identities understood as compositions of characteristics) and so minimal that he is disposed to write it off as nescience. This, I think, is a mistake. It is a conditional understanding of the world, valuable so far as it goes, and indispensable in the engagements of practical life, but not fully in command of itself because it is unaware of its conditionality.

The theorist, not without something of a wrench, courageously escapes; and to escape is to free himself from the idiom of the cave-dwellers' understanding. This he does in stages, each of which is adventure in theorizing and each has its outcome in theorems. After standing up and 'turning round', his first achievement is the recognition of the conditionality of the understanding he had hitherto shared with the cave-dwellers. This comes to him, not in a general proposition but in his recognition of its immediate conditions. What is going on at the parapet (and particularly the 'models' and the 'fire') are the postulates of the cave-dwellers' world. Since it is a graphic story, they appear as other identities understood in terms of their characteristics, but we should not allow this to divert our attention from the significance of that momentous act of 'turning round': in it the theorist says farewell to identities as compositions of characteristics and fixes his attention upon the 'ghostly ballet' of bloodless postulates.

Unlike the 'prisoners', for whom the word 'shadow' is merely a means of distinguishing one sort of observed occurrence from another, the theorist can now recognize the cave-dwellers' world as a world composed entirely of 'shadows'. And if he had been so disposed he might immediately have run back to his fellows with this interesting information. Had he done so, his message would have been surprising, but less likely to provoke dismay than incredulity or the vulgar retort, 'so what?'. Plato, however, would have expected even this interim report (if it could be supposed to be understood

and believed) to have a shattering effect upon the cave-dwellers, depriving them altogether of their simple understanding and enjoyment of the scene constantly unrolled before them, turning cave life 'upside-down' (*Gorgias*, 481). But here, I think, he would have been mistaken. To discover that a platform of understanding is conditional and to become acquainted with its proximate conditions is a notable step in the engagement of understanding, but it is not like exposing a fraud. The cave-dwellers' language of characteristics would not have suddenly become nonsensical: shadows are not forgeries.

But the escaped prisoner is a confirmed theorist and he knows he must be *en voyage*. He recognizes these conditions (the performance at the parapet), not as instruments of understanding but as themselves invitations to inquiry. What are the postulates of the 'fire' which casts the 'shadows' now understood to compose the cave-dwellers' world? And in stages, not all of which Plato divulges to us in detail, the theorist achieves, in the end, what Plato thinks of as a definitive understanding, in which the world acquires unconditional intelligibility in being understood in terms of the ultimate postulate, 'the Good'. I shall pass over the difficulties entailed in the notion of an unconditional understanding, which are, perhaps recognized in the visionary quality attributed to this final achievement; what is important is the critical inquiry into the conditions of conditions in which it is reached.

According to Plato (in some accounts, at least), the theorist who now reluctantly returns to the cave from this greatest of all intellectual adventures carries with him an unconditional understanding of the world in terms of its ultimate postulates (or, as he says, its 'causes'). This understanding, it goes without saying, is vastly superior to that of the cave-dwellers. But it is represented as something more than merely superior. It is alleged to be a complete *substitute* for that and for every other conditional understanding. Thus, the theorist returns, not with something useful in his pocket (as a man might carry a copy of Horace to console him as he goes to prison, to exile, or to war), but with a gift of inestimable value to mankind: a definitive understanding and language to supersede and *to take the place of* all other understandings and languages.

But on his return he earns the amiable ridicule and provokes what is alleged to be the ignorant and undeserved animosity of the cave-dwellers. He is a figure of fun because, having learned to think and to speak in terms of postulates, he has lost command over the cave-language of characteristics. That he cannot quickly readjust himself to cave life is laughable in so learned a man; his scarcely concealed aversion from doing so is intelligible but, perhaps, not so funny: it portends the inevitable defeat of his mission. But he arouses what is represented as the mindless and unmerited resentment of the cave-dwellers by his indictment of their ignorance and by the galling offer of release from a bondage they are too stupid to be aware of suffering. They are inclined to dispose of him forthwith as an enemy of the people. Indeed, in some of Plato's accounts of the situation, the death of the returned philosopher is raised to the level of necessity.

In the account I have given, the cave-dwellers are sagacious and knowledgeable persons, and among them are expert map-makers and adept diagnosticians. They are not at all inadequately equipped for understanding and dealing with the world in which they live, and their only serious intellectual defect is to be unaware of what they do not understand. They accept the intellectual superiority of the returned theorist very much as a travelled man, whom they knew as a boy, is welcomed (a little incredulously) by stay-at-homes who can scarcely imagine the world except in their own limited terms. They are perplexed, and they may suspect him of being a *revenant*: come to us in our dreams', they murmur, 'but not as a ghost to haunt us'. But he is recognized as a man with an unusual store of surprising information and also a fresh, questioning, unconventional intelligence. When he tells them that what they have always thought of as 'a horse' is not what they suppose it to be (a composition of characteristics, not unlike a zebra), but is, on the contrary, a modification of the attributes of God, he is clearly recognizable as a clever fellow from whom there is much to be learned. They will applaud his performance even where they cannot quite follow it.

But if he were to tell them that, in virtue of his more profound understanding of the nature of horses, he is a more expert horseman, horse-chandler, or stable boy than they (in their ignorance) could ever hope to be, and when it becomes clear that his new learning has lost him the ability to tell one end of a horse from the other, no doubt the conversation would take a less animated turn. And if, in taking part in legal proceedings (as Plato said he might), he were to brush on one side the cave-understood conditionality

of 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth' and were to insist that matters should be delayed while the question What is truth? was explored, or if he were to lecture judge and jury about the postulates of justice, those concerned might be expected to become a trifle restless. Before long the more perceptive of the cave-dwellers would begin to suspect that, after all, he was not an interesting theorist but a fuddled and pretentious 'theoretician' who should be sent on his travels again, or accommodated in a quiet home. And the less patient would be disposed to run him I out of town as an impudent mountebank. In short, what the cave dwellers resent is not the theorist, the philosopher (him they are inclined to admire even if they have not much use for his concern with postulates), but the 'theoretician', the *philosophe*, the 'intellectual'; and they resent him, not because they are corrupt or ignorant but because they know just enough to recognize an impostor when they meet one.

II

1. My concern now is with the identity 'human conduct', with the engagement of theorizing it, and with its employment as an instrument for understanding contingent substantive actions and utterances.

The expression 'human conduct', here, denotes an ideal character. A man may perform actions, he may undertake a course

of action, and he may make utterances which are themselves actions or are auxiliaries to actions. He may recognize Jones and cross the street in order to avoid him, he may go without breakfast, he may remain calm under provocation, point his finger at Z while denouncing his conduct as vile, respond to an invitation to 'explain' or to 'justify' what he has done, make a promise, or he may go for a walk in the rain. But 'conduct' itself cannot be performed. And it is neither an ingredient of human actions which might be extracted (like alcohol from wines), nor is it a characteristic or set of characteristics in terms of which a family of 'goings-on' may be reliably recognized. It is the ideal character which the postulates of human performances compose and in terms of which they may be understood.

'Human conduct', as it first comes before us in terms of its features, is, of course, rough and ragged at the edges. And it would be tedious to rehearse the steps, the tentative recognitions of likes and unlikes, the distinctions and the refinements in which an identity, a composition of characteristics, may be conjectured to have emerged, to have been endowed with a character, and to have become available to be employed as a means of taking hold of and identifying what may be going on. Indeed, its implicit recognition is so nearly related to reflective consciousness that it may scarcely be counted a separate achievement. Moreover, our distant ancestors seem to have been so greatly disposed to understand all the 'goings-on' in the world on the analogy of human conduct that the intellectual achievement lay not in making explicit the identity 'conduct' but rather in the discrimination which returned the idea whence it came, namely, to 'goings-on' exclusively characteristic of human beings. But be that how it may, I shall begin at the point where a relatively unambiguous identity has been elicited, has been delineated in terms of characteristics, and is understood: a human being responding to his contingent situation by doing or saying *this* rather than *that* in relation to an imagined and wished-for outcome and in relation, also, to some understood conditions.

The more important marks of this identity are: beliefs distinguished from organic conditions, a world of *pragmata* (things and occasions related to wants), situations recognized to predicate action, imagined future conditions of things, agency, deliberations, choices, decisions, intelligible utterances, performances, satisfactions, procedures, practices, motives. And here they are no more than characteristics (each itself an identity recognized in terms of its features) held together so as to delineate a recognizable character.

But even without further specification they divulge the category of the identity denoted in the expression 'human conduct' and the idioms of inquiry appropriate to theorizing it. They disclose doing as itself an exhibition of intelligence. An agent is one who is recognized to have an understanding of himself in terms of his wants and his powers and an understanding of the components of the world he inhabits; and action is recognized as an illustrative exhibition of this understanding. The attribution of agency and the recognition of action is already the attribution and the recognition of reflective

consciousness. Our commonplace refusal to attribute agency to the sun setting over Galway Bay, and our refusal to recognize 'being an albino' as an action or as the outcome of an action are refusals (correct or incorrect) to recognize this occurrence or that manner of being as themselves exhibitions of intelligence. And our recognition of a cat sitting mute before a door waiting for it to be opened as a performance is an attribution '(correct or incorrect) of intelligence. Or, to put it another way recognize a 'going-on' as 'conduct' is to acknowledge it to be something that has had to be learned. In refusing to recognize the movement of water when it meets a declivity or the fluttering of a flag in the wind as 'doing' we are denying that it is an exhibition of what the stream or the flag has learned to do; and in recognizing *A* making an offer to purchase a house, or *B* inviting *C* to dance, or *D* giving a pupil a first lesson in the violin, or *E* trying to comfort an unfortunate, as agents we are acknowledging them to be doing what they could not do unless they had learned (well or ill) how to do it.

Nevertheless, whatever the familiarity of this identity, however well understood it may be and however adept we may be in using it to distinguish and make more intelligible passages in our experience, for the theorist it is a predicament; it is still waiting to be understood and it invites inquiry. His engagement is neither to act, nor to use this composition of characteristics to enhance the intelligibility of what goes on, but to understand it in terms of its postulates.

No doubt there will be many who may properly find this task uninteresting; they prefer to inhabit and to respond to the invitations of the world of *pragmata*. And others may lament the compromise it entails: released from the conditions of doing, having recovered the critical initiative in which understanding is not an instrument to be used but an energy to be enjoyed, and their sails set to catch the wind of an unconditional engagement, they will be disposed to resent this submission to another (if less onerous) set of conditions. But to fulfil this undertaking he must somehow avoid the defect of the one and the excess of the other. His business is to make theorems, not to perform actions; but he is concerned with theorems about conduct. And since it is upon this intermediate level of understanding that he must move, all that is important is that he should set out circumspectly and should learn to enjoy its liberties and submit to its servitudes as he goes along. And he will need, also, the forgiveness of his readers for his almost unavoidable divergencies from this difficult path; for saying, at some point or other, either too little or too much.

But before setting out, there is a contention (already mentioned but pushed on one side) which calls for closer consideration, because, if it could be upheld, it would return the theorist to the servitude of doing before ever he set out. If (it is contended) doing is recognized as itself an engagement to understand, surely it must be no less the case that every engagement to understand is to be recognized as a 'doing'. Each entails a performance, a choice to do or to say *this* rather than *that* in relation to an imagined and wished-for outcome, and therefore submission to the conditions of doing. The anchorite withdrawn in contemplation, Descartes cogitating in his stove-warmed room in Breda, and the theorist of conduct, no less than the carpenter at his bench, the salesman at the door, and the negotiator at the table, are responding to their situations in actions or in utterances which are the equivalent of actions. If this is the engagement of any of them, surely it is the engagement of all. And, not without paradox, this observation has provoked the conclusion that all engagements to understand (including that of the theorist of conduct) are themselves to be understood in the terms of doing.

It is not denied that the performer and the theorist of conduct occupy different platforms of conditional understanding; or that, while the engagements of both entail an acceptance of the conditions of conduct, in the one acceptance is an unqualified submission and in the other it is the acceptance of an invitation to investigate what is accepted. And further, it is admitted (or it should be admitted) that a theoretical understanding cannot itself be an engagement in the conduct being theorized: to theorize a 'comic' performance (that is, to understand it in terms of its postulates) is not itself to make a joke or to have the understanding of it denoted in the expression 'seeing the joke'. But it is correctly observed that none of these considerations releases the engagement to theorize conduct from its character as itself conduct. Doing is an understanding, and undeniably in all understanding there is doing.

Nevertheless, there is an important distinction to be observed. The doing in conduct is intrinsic to the engagement. To act is to occupy and to explore a platform of conditional understanding; it is diagnosing a situation, recognizing it as an invitation to act, imagining a satisfaction, making a choice, performing an action, and encountering an outcome. Thus, doing is an engagement to understand in which the understanding and the doing are assimilated to one another so that the outcome of the understanding is not a theorem but a contingent illustration of understandings and beliefs, namely, a performance. The doing, here, is the adjective of understanding. But the doing in theorizing is incidental to the engagement. To theorize conduct is to occupy and to explore a conditional platform of understanding, but this platform is not that of a performer and the outcome of the engagement is not an action but a theorem. The ingredient of doing here is that of choosing to undertake this engagement rather than any other, of being patient and determined, of reconsidering the argument, of taking up one's pen and writing down the theorems, etc. But what constitutes the understanding is the theorems themselves, and these are not choices, or reconsiderations or actions. A theorem is not the adjective of the doing concerned in formulating it; and if, for example, its copyright were sold the recompense received would not be an outcome of the theorem and the transaction would not itself be theorizing. The theorist of conduct is not, as such, a 'doer', and the theoretical understanding of conduct cannot itself be theorized in the terms of doing.

One further consideration in respect of the delineation of the identity 'human conduct' remains to be noticed. It is customary to distinguish between 'acting' and 'fabricating'. In 'acting' the imagined and wished-for outcome of the agent's performance is the response looked for in the performances of other agents or in himself when he comes (as he must) to respond to what he has done; and every such performance is an episode in an interminable adventure. In 'fabricating' the imagined and wished-for outcome is an artefact; a finished product. And the theorist of conduct is called upon to declare which of these identities he is concerned with.

This is not a worthless distinction in so far as it allows inquiry to consider postulates which may be exclusive to fabrication; but it has only a limited significance and cannot be pressed. An artefact is an interpolation which does not necessarily deprive fabrication of the character of a performance. In most fabricating engagements the imagined and wished-for outcome is not the artefact itself but the response it is designed to evoke in the conduct of other agents, or in the fabricator himself. This is clearly the case where artefacts are produced for sale, in building a bridge or a ship, in the construction of works of fortification, and wherever the artefact may be considered in terms of utility. Indeed, fabricating may be said to divest itself of the character of a performance, and the artefact to reveal itself in terms of what is exclusive to fabrication only when it is recognized as a work of art. An artist may seek a response from others or from himself at a later time, but it is often a very indefinite response and the meaning of what he has made is independent of it. Here, what is made may be said to be made with no other intention but that of making it; unlike an action, it is not intrinsically episodic. Consequently, in identifying what I am concerned with as 'conduct *inter homines*' (that is, performances understood as transactions between agents), I do not take this to exclude fabrication, but only to exclude what is unique to fabrication, namely a work of art properly so called. Nor does it exclude the activities in which what Bacon called 'the empire of men over things' is exerted; here also the immediate is a utility, an intermediate in a transaction between agents. The idea 'conduct' I am concerned with is, then, that of an agent disclosing and enacting himself in performances whose imagined and wished-for outcomes are performances of other agents or other performances of himself: satisfactions, not only pursued in actions and purchased by actions, but wholly composed of actions.⁷

2. In theorizing an identity its postulates must be distinguished and exposed and each must be held up to careful inspection. As postulates in terms of which the identity is to be understood they elucidate and confirm one another; each reflects and implicates the others. And with this warning, I shall begin what I have to say about the postulates of conduct by considering the 'human being' concerned, who is both the subject and the object in conduct.

Doing, identified as *response* to a contingent situation related to an imagined and wished-for outcome, postulates reflective consciousness; that is, an agent who inhabits a

world of intelligible *pragmata*, who is composed entirely of understandings, and who is what he understands (or misunderstands) himself to be. Further, it postulates an agent whose situation is what he understands (or misunderstands) it to be and who understands it to be one which invites an action, who is able to imagine it different from what it is and can recognize it to be alterable by some action or utterance of his own; and when alternatives present themselves to his imagination, he must be able to choose between them and decide upon a performance. In short, conduct postulates what I shall call a 'free agent'. And I use the word 'free' because I am concerned here with the formal detachment from certain conditions which is intrinsic to agency, and not with the quality of being substantively 'self-directed' which an agent may or may not achieve and which, when a high degree of it is enjoyed, is properly called 'self-determination' or 'autonomy'. The 'freedom' inherent in agency may be specified as follows.

The starting-place of doing is a state of reflective consciousness, namely, the agent's own understanding of his situation, what it means to him. (And, of course, it is no less *his* situation even though it may be a concern with what he understands to be the situation of another or of others. In this understanding, the situation is identified in specific terms; it is never the recognition of it as, for example, merely pleasurable or painful, rightful or wrongful. And it is in respect of this starting-place in an understood contingent situation that the agent in conduct may be said to be 'free'; all other considerations which point in this direction are subsidiary and derivative.

If this situation were one of 'organic tension', peculiar to himself or characteristic of his biological species, if it were some other condition of himself or of the world which was imposed upon him and which he suffered without having to understand it, or if he were himself the mere battle-ground of arbitrary impulses or the mouth-piece of a god, then he would not be 'free'. But as a reflective consciousness his situation is necessarily an understanding and as an understanding it is necessarily his own. He is 'free' not because his situation is alterable by an act of unconstrained 'will' but because it is an understood situation and because doing is an intelligent engagement. Nor does it matter how he may have come by this understanding, because (since it is composed of beliefs) it cannot be a genetic inheritance, it cannot be the outcome of what has merely happened to him (what is sometimes miscalled his 'history') distinguished from his understanding of it, and it cannot have been imposed upon him by any external agency. He can have come by it only in learning, and in learning he acquires only what he accepts and makes his own in an understanding. In short, the starting-place of doing is the agent himself as a 'historic' self-enacted reflective consciousness.

There may be organic conditions which may make certain understandings less likely than others. A man congenitally deaf is not the most likely promoter of 'noise abatement' because he is not apt to recognize his own situation in terms of 'noise'. But his congenital condition does not exclude him from *understanding* his own situation in terms of 'noise', e.g.: 'I am the deaf husband of a wife who suffers greatly from the noise of air-traffic.' Indeed, the most devoted promoter of 'noise abatement' may be one who, by circumstances never himself suffers the evil he wishes to reduce. And if an agent's recognition of his situation is, as it may be, the recognition of an organic condition ('I am an albino'), what constitutes it an understood situation capable of being responded to in conduct cannot be its character as an organic condition, because no such condition is capable of self-understanding or of responding to itself.⁸

This attribution of independence in virtue of an agent's situation being what he understands it to be does not release his understanding from judgement in which it may be pronounced a misunderstanding, nor does it prevent reasons for it being adduced: misunderstandings are themselves understandings and reasons are not 'causes' of understandings. What it asserts is that, in virtue of an agent being a reflective consciousness, his actions and utterances are the outcomes of what he understands his situation to be, and that this understanding cannot be 'reduced' to a component of a genetic, a biochemical, a psychological or any other process, or to a consequence of any causal condition. And if two or more agents have similar understandings of their situations this is because they have independently learned to think alike and not because they share common organic tensions, have similar genetic characters, or have suffered or enjoyed like external circumstances.

An agent's understanding of his situation is a diagnosis: that is, a verdict in which it is recognized to be in some respect unsatisfactory, wanting, amiss, or objectionable and

therefore to suggest alteration. But, since it is *his* situation, this unsatisfactoriness is recognized not merely as a defect but as a defect unacceptable to himself; and since he is an agent, he recognizes it as inviting a response of which he is to be the author. This unacceptability is specific; the situation is not understood to be merely inadmissibly imperfect and thus to suggest alteration, but to be unacceptably defective in some particular respect and thus to invite remedy. And it is not merely a feeling of discomfort; it is an understood unacceptability inviting a response.

This response is an action or an utterance equivalent to an action. It is, of course, related to the diagnosed unacceptability of the agent's situation, but this unacceptability is not a 'stimulus' or a 'motive force' causing or compelling him to act; and it neither specifies a particular action nor is any particular action deducible from it. The response is a genuine answer or rejoinder which must be chosen by the agent concerned. But he is not 'free' because he is able (or because he believes himself to be able) to 'will' what he shall do or say; he is 'free' because his response to his situation, like his situation itself, is the outcome of an intelligent engagement. Indeed, what is called 'the will' is nothing but intelligence in doing; in denying 'will' to an ebbing tide we are refusing to recognize it as an exhibition of intelligence.

In acting an agent imagines, wishes for, and seeks to achieve a satisfaction; that is, a condition in which the specific unacceptability of his current situation is remedied or abated. This satisfaction is not, therefore, to be thought of as the fulfilment of an evolutionary drive, a genetic impulse, an organic want, or a psychological urge or tendency. Nor is it merely wanted, as a satisfaction impossible of achievement or one unrelated to his own agency might be wanted: the fancy of being able to fly or wanting a certain horse to win the Derby. It is an understood satisfaction, imagined, wished-for, specified, promised, and sought in his chosen action. And in conduct *inter homines* it is both formally and substantially specific: it is other agents responding to his action by themselves choosing and performing actions aimed at particular satisfactions, and it is this being done in the wished-for manner.

An action, then, is tied to the agent's understood situation, not only in being concerned with the agent himself as a continuing identity, but also in being the particular manoeuvre in which he has chosen to remedy its unacceptability. And it is tied to the wished-for satisfaction as the doing or utterance whose imagined outcome is that condition. Thus, conduct is not to be understood (as it is often understood) as performing actions designed to achieve imagined and wished for ideal satisfactions. The wished for satisfaction is what the agent 'intends', in the proper sense of 'means', not before he decides what he shall do, but in deciding it. What is chosen is not an end or a means of achieving a wished-for end; what is chosen is an action with this specific meaning.⁹

But an action is not tied to the achievement of what is meant in performing it. If it were frustrated of its intention it would not cease to be an action or become another and a different action. And although in 'doing' an agent is certainly seeking a satisfaction, he is not carrying out an *experimentum luciferum* whose outcome is a theorem, nor is he embarked upon an *experimentum fructijferum* to test the hypothesis that his performance will have the hoped-for or expected outcome: the satisfaction he seeks is his world actually changed in an imagined and wished-for manner or himself in a less undesirable situation. And whether or not he achieves the satisfaction he seeks (that is, the imagined abatement of the unacceptability of his current situation), what he does will certainly have an outcome in which his situation will be substantively, and not merely experimentally, modified. Thus, it may be said that in 'doing' an agent casts off a mooring. He may be seeking a satisfaction, but what he *chooses* is an action; that is, the adventure of aiming at an imagined satisfaction. Hence the saying of Democritus that courage is the beginning of action: courage to put out to sea.

The 'freedom' intrinsic to agency is, then, the independence enjoyed by the agent in respect of being a reflective consciousness composed of acquired feelings, emotions, sentiments, affections, understandings, beliefs, convictions, aspirations, ambitions, etc., recognitions of himself and of the world of *pragmata* he inhabits, which he has turned into wishes, and wishes he has specified in choices of actions and utterances. It does not exclude him from giving reasons for what he has done or others from seeking them, for reasons are not causes and this freedom is not that of a so-called autonomous 'subjective will'. It does not depend upon his actions being 'rational' rather than 'emotional' responses, upon their being wise rather than foolish, calculated to achieve their wished-

for outcomes rather than impulsive, or achieving their wished-for outcomes rather than failing to do so. Victory does not demonstrate this freedom nor defeat qualify it. It does not require substantive self-sufficiency in the agent. And it excludes neither dispositions to act in a certain manner, the acknowledgement of obligations, subjection to orders or commands, the obedient service of a master, nor subscription to the conditions of practices; that is, to procedures which are themselves exhibitions of intelligence, which can be observed only in virtue of having been learned and being understood, and which never prescribe substantive performances. And it does not isolate action from expectation or conjecture. It entails only the recognition of 'doing' as an intelligent engagement, action linked with learned and understood belief, distinguished from a genetic, a psychological, or a social process or from a consequence of causal conditions.

The self-understanding of the agent who is both the subject and the object postulated in conduct may be small, his powers of self-determination may be modest, he may be easily imposed upon, he may be duped into acting, but he is what he understands himself to be, his contingent situations are what he understands them to be, and the actions and utterances in which he responds to them are self-disclosures and self-enactments. He has a 'history', but no 'nature'; he is what in conduct he becomes. This 'history' is not an evolutionary or teleological process. It is what he enacts for himself in a diurnal engagement, the unceasing articulation of understood responses to endlessly emergent understood situations which continues until he quits the diurnal scene. And although he may imagine an 'ideal' human character and may use this character to direct his self-enactments, there is no ultimate or perfect man hidden in the womb of time or prefigured in the characters who now walk the earth.

3.

In an agent's understanding of his situation its contingency is postulated; it is, but it could have been other than it is and it is alterable. And in virtue of his situation being understood to be, in some specific respect, unacceptable to himself it is understood to predicate alteration of which he is the author.

Understanding his situation as that of being in debt and finding this unacceptable, *Z* recognizes himself to be invited to respond in an action or an utterance; he discloses in himself the character of an agent and acquires an employment.¹⁰ His situation is specific; he is not merely 'unhappy' or 'in pain', he is unacceptably in debt. What he owes, how he came to owe it, his creditors and the respect or the degree in which it is unacceptable to him are known, are ascertainable, or do not significantly qualify the situation. Nevertheless, neither his understanding of his situation, nor the ideal situations in which its defect is removed (solvency or successful indifference to indebtedness) prescribe any particular action to be performed: an 'interest' never specifies a performance. Severally or together they may suggest (or, under close interrogation, they may be made to suggest) a variety of alternative responses, but beyond this they cannot go. Thus, recognizing himself as an agent, *Z* recognizes himself as having to choose what course of action he shall embark upon as a rejoinder to his situation.¹¹ But choosing is an engagement of thinking, and consequently this reflection in the service of acting may be said to be a postulate of conduct. It is to be identified as deliberation.

No doubt there are many actions (properly so called) performed off the cuff without any considerable engagement of choosing, and a choice of what to do or to say is often made without any significant deliberative engagement. Indeed, a 'man of action' is, characteristically, an agent so little hesitant about it that we imagine him to be absolved from having to *decide* what to do. But, of course, none of these considerations impugns the status of deliberation and choice as postulates of conduct. A postulate is not an engagement, it is a condition in terms of which an engagement may be understood. Nevertheless, the character of deliberation may most clearly be displayed when it is considered as a feature of conduct: deliberating.

Deliberating is reflection concerned with doing, with the choice and the performance of actions; it is an agent considering his situation and what he shall do in response to it. And an action is a performance in which an agent aims at and intends an imagined outcome and whose purposed outcome is its meaning. Consequently, what falls to be deliberated are alternative concrete performances, actions or utterances each of which is distinguished by a 'meaning', a purposed outcome, exclusively its own. And deliberating cannot be (what it is often said to be) considering alternative means for achieving an

independently premeditated end with a view to discovering the best, the easiest, the most effective, etc., way of achieving it. What Z has to consider is not the best, the quickest, or the most economical, etc. means of becoming solvent or of achieving a successful indifference to being in debt, but with what action or utterance he shall respond to what he understands his situation to be.

Nor is the agent in conduct in the position, for example, of a chess-player who has to choose between a fixed number of alternative moves. The alternative actions he has to consider are his own inventions, and deliberating is not merely reflecting in order to choose, it is also imagining alternatives between which to choose. No doubt (unless he is a lunatic) he will limit his deliberation to actions which he has both imagined and also believes himself capable of performing. But if to this circumstantial condition is added the qualification that (in order to address himself to his situation) he must deliberate only those actions which are plausibly responses to it, that is scarcely a limitation. It allows him to consider doing nothing because all the actions he can think of seem to carry with them unacceptabilities greater than that which he now suffers; and at the other extreme it permits him to consider the sovereign release from all unacceptable situations, namely, suicide. And between these the number of remedial actions eligible to be deliberated as responses to any situation is limited only by the virtuosity of his imagination. Z may decide to offer to pay a bit on account, but how much? and which of the many ways of raising the instalment shall he choose to explore? and exactly how shall he pay over the sum decided upon? That is, which of the many alternative actions within this way of dealing with the situation shall he perform? He may consider marrying an heiress, pawning his violin, missing dinner for a month, or going into voluntary liquidation. He may try to reassure his creditors in any of the many ways in which he may think them likely to be reassured. Or he may consider escaping from them in any of the many ways in which a man may attempt such an escape—feigning death, emigrating to Nicaragua, joining the Foreign Legion, or disguising himself and taking a job under an assumed name with the Yeovil Town Council. In short, and although there are certainly limiting conditions he *ought* to take into account (which I shall shortly investigate), the eligible alternatives in conduct are virtually unlimited; each is a different action distinguished from all others in respect of its exclusive meaning, and none may be deduced from the situation to be responded to.

The meaning of an action is a wished-for response from other agents who, because they are similarly engaged, cannot be depended upon to respond in the wished-for manner. Consequently acting is making a bargain with an imperfectly imagined future. Choosing an action is an agent settling for a performance with which to put out to sea. And deliberating a choice is reflecting upon the only considerations capable of being deliberated; namely, the likelihood of uncertainties.¹² The questions to be explored are the circumstantial adequacy of an action as a response to the agent's situation, the likelihood of its evoking the looked-for response from those who have to respond without this outcome being so qualified by other unwanted consequences as to make it a bad bargain. And these questions cannot be explored independently of one another.

The conditions of deliberation are, then, an agent not heedless of the future, not knowing for certain what that future will be as a consequence of his action, but counting upon there being a relation between his action and the response it is likely to receive such that whatever he chooses to do is not equally likely to be frustrated of its wished-for outcome. And these are the postulates of conduct.

Nevertheless, deliberating is not to be understood as a regrettable frustration of a demonstrative manner of thinking. It is the only kind of argument in which an agent can recommend an action to himself, and its reasons are the only kind of reasons which may legitimately be adduced for having made *this* rather than *that* choice. The materials at the disposal of an agent are beliefs about his own capacity to act, opinions about the world of *pragmata* he inhabits, expectations about the response a projected action is likely to meet with, about the incidental satisfactions it may bring with it, and about the likely cost in terms of satisfactions foregone or imperfectly enjoyed or dissatisfactions incidentally to be suffered.¹³ Some of these beliefs may be prudential maxims, 'opinions about things that could happen otherwise', which have to be deliberately brought to bear upon the agent's situation; or they may be general precepts of indeterminate relevance, or mythical beliefs about the world he inhabits, or home-made conclusions about the persons and circumstances concerned. They may be more or they may be less reliable, but they are

not flickering shadows of necessary truths or premises from which conclusions can be deduced. They are aids to deliberation, guesses of varying generality, made with different degrees of confidence and drawing upon evidence of varying quality, which, in deliberation, are not subjected to the test of a criterion superior to themselves but are made to criticize and illuminate one another.

Doing as an engagement of reflective consciousness, then, postulates deliberation; that is, reflection related to choice. But deliberating as a specific activity (the extent of which varies in conduct) may be recognized as a counterpoise to the inherent uncertainty of doing. Doing is an adventure of uncertain outcome in three respects. It is action in search of a wished-for response from other agents which it may not receive. It is action which, even if it receives its wished-for response, may fail to provide the satisfaction anticipated. And it is action the outcome of which (whatever it is) is always a new situation calling for new responses. There are no 'final solutions' in conduct, and deliberating (reflecting in the service of choice) is the concern to diminish these hazards.

The next postulate of conduct to be considered also has its counterpart in a contingent feature of conduct designed to diminish the hazards of action: persuasion and persuasive speech.

Conduct *inter homines*, understood as an agent disclosing himself in an action and thus seeking a wished-for response from another or from others, identifies action as emotive utterance; that is, utterance which divulges (or at least points to) the response wished for and also moves (or at least invites) the respondent to make it. And conduct thus recognized is being understood as a transaction between agents in terms of the postulate, persuasion.

On the other hand, to speak persuasively is itself a recognizable kind of action: it is a 'doing' (in this case a verbal utterance) designed to evoke a response which is itself an action or another such verbal utterance (e.g. a promise) the equivalent of an action. To undertake to persuade a man to allow himself to be considered for an appointment is an engagement which lacks nothing that properly belongs to an action. It is an agent responding to his own understood situation by choosing to say *this* rather than *that* in relation to an imagined and wished-for outcome.

More commonly, however, persuasive speech appears as instrumental or auxiliary to action. It may be addressed to an agent and designed to instigate him to perform a specified action; or to a respondent or respondents and designed to prompt a wished-for response to an action already performed or about to be performed; or it may be addressed to an audience of agents whose concurrence is needed for the performance of an action and designed to evoke their agreement to act in concert. But these and other differences of circumstance are overridden in the general character of persuasive utterance. It is always a transaction between agents, and it is always a recommendation to choose and to perform an action in terms of the alleged merits of its likely outcome.¹⁴ And, as deliberation may be said to be the characteristic idiom of reflection in conduct, persuasion may be said to be the characteristic idiom of speech.

In respect of being a transaction between agents, persuasive utterance may be identified as speaking words or making signs which have meanings for a reflective consciousness who can receive what is said or indicated only in terms of believing, doubting, or disbelieving it and who consequently has the alternative of not being persuaded or of being persuaded to some other conclusion. It is addressed to choosers and its design is to evoke a choice. And in this respect it is easily distinguished from attempts to secure acquiescence by hypnotic suggestion, electrical shocks, chemical injections, physical deprivations, etc., all of which deny agency to the subject by denying understanding. It may be allowed, however, to include exhortation, encouragement, pleading, coaxing, reproof, expostulation, polemic, diatribe, or even utterances designed to alarm for these are all appeals to intelligence.

But as a transaction between agents designed to evoke the choice of an action by recommending it in terms of the alleged merits of its likely outcome, persuasive speech is properly identified in terms of its focus of attention. And utterances which, although they recognize the agency of him to whom they are addressed, nevertheless divert his attention from what is being recommended and direct it elsewhere, are not, properly speaking, persuasive. Thus, blackmail, where it takes some such form as 'You are an elector in an appointment for which I am a candidate, and in this respect there are no doubt

considerations of fitness of which you should take account, but I suggest that you vote for me because if you do not I shall expose your shameful past', is not persuasive because the merits of his responding thus to his situation as an elector are not even mentioned. Similarly, to promise a reward, or to threaten a penalty, if a certain choice is or is not made, are not persuasive, although, of course, they may be efficacious. And again, in what is called a 'demonstration' in favour of an action, the merits of the action as a response to the situation are at least obscured by the threat of earning the disapproval of the demonstrators if some other choice is made. It could, however be recognized as qualified persuasive utterance if the approval of the demonstrators were, as such, part of the merits of a response to the situation. This, of course, is rarely the case.

But the distinctive character and resources of persuasive utterance appear, not in isolated utterances, but only in argumentative discourse, in negotiation, or in debate with or without an audience other than the debaters. For here utterance is unequivocally directed to the situation to be responded to and to the merits of the recommended response in terms of its likely outcome.

Persuasive argument is discourse designed to recommend and to prompt a choice about what shall be done in response to a specified situation, to defend what has been done as having been well done (and thus to prompt approval or acquiescence), or to condemn what has been done as having been ill done and therefore to call for a remedy, and to do this in relation to the likely or to the actual outcome of the actions proposed or executed. It will not concern itself with very near or with very remote consequences, nor will it pretend that all the likely consequences are desirable, for these concerns and pretensions would at once make it implausible to any but an extraordinarily naïve audience. And since in any situation there will be more than one possible response, a persuasive argument will be concerned with the superiority (in terms of likely outcome) of the response advocated over any other suggested response. It is, therefore, a pragmatic argument concerned with the relative merits of the recognized alternative choices and with the preponderance of desirable consequences. It does not pretend to demonstrate its conclusions and consequently it cannot be refuted. But it may be resisted or rebutted by arguments of the same sort which call in question its guesses, its calculations, its prognostications, and its attributions of desirability.

All this approximates persuasive argument to deliberation. But they are not the exact counterparts of one another. The difference lies in the audience, and it is a difference which imposes itself upon the utterance. Persuasive argument is designed to convince others of what the speaker has already convinced himself in respect of its merits, or at least of what he has convinced himself that he wishes to convince others. The 'others' are like the speaker in being acknowledged to be intelligent agents, and they are recognized to be in a situation which calls upon them to act or to participate in an action. But in most other respects the speaker and his audience may differ, and in some they will certainly be different. The speaker, we may suppose, has deliberated the situation to be responded to and has convinced himself of the merits of the action he wishes to evoke from his audience. But since what he is seeking is the performance of this action by another, or the agreement of many to act thus in concert, and not the acceptance by others of the reasons which have convinced him of the merits of the action he is recommending, he must offer them what they will recognize as cogent reasons for doing what he recommends them to do. And a speaker who is not ready to forego agreement with the reasoning which has convinced him of the merits of this action proposed, one who is unaware of the difference between the logic of deliberating and the logic of persuading, will never persuade, or will do so only by chance.

In short, persuasive argument even as an auxiliary to action is itself action; it is the diagnosis of a situation (the task of persuading another to perform a chosen action), deliberation about what will persuade (namely, about the beliefs and opinions and perhaps the interests of an audience in relation to an action), the choice of an utterance related to an imagined and wished-for outcome (these others persuaded) and the resolve to make the utterance. It was in virtue of these considerations that Plato identified persuasive discourse as inherently corrupting utterance, especially where the audience is large and miscellaneous, and conduct (of which persuasion is a postulate) as an inherently corrupting engagement.¹⁵

Where agency is utterance, then, it is most commonly persuasive speech. But conduct licenses another kind of speech which also may have the status of an action; namely, 'explanatory' utterance. If an agent were to accompany his action with a statement, not prompting the wished-for response but designed to reveal more clearly than the action itself what he had done, the doing and the speaking might fairly be recognized to constitute a single action; the agent merely confesses his doubt about being able to disclose himself in the manner in which he wishes to disclose himself without adding utterance to act. But if the immediate response to an action is an imputation of unintelligibility and an invitation to the performer to 'explain' what he has done, what is being called for is a supplementary action in the form of an explanatory utterance. This invitation may be a subterfuge on the part of the respondent to gain time before having to respond or to make the agent commit himself more decisively, but where it is ingenuous it will be issued because the respondent finds himself unable to respond since he is at a loss to understand what he is being asked to respond to. The invitation may be declined. The performer may prefer to leave his action 'unexplained' in the belief that it is more likely to receive its wished-for response if it remains obscure; or he may have nothing to say which he has not already said in performing the action. But if it is accepted the response to it will be an utterance designed to rebut the imputation of unintelligibility or to provide the elucidation asked for.

A performance may be said to be unintelligible or difficult to understand (in the sense of being difficult to respond to with confidence) if the respondent is doubtfully specified ('Do you suck your thumb at me, Sir?'); if the situation it sprang from or its imagined and wished-for outcome is obscure ('What did you *think* you were doing?'); if the wished-for outcome is not obscure but where there is a genuine puzzle about how, in the circumstances, it could be hoped for ('Are you *really* suggesting that I should do this?'), or how in any circumstances it could be thought to be either possible or desirable ('Are you crazy?'); or on account of any combination of these considerations. And the 'explanation' will be an utterance which resolves these doubts or puzzles. It will soon be over. What is being sought is not a release from the considerabilities of conduct into the realm of theoretical understanding with its inevitable threat to the survival of the *explicandum*, nor an extended elucidation of a performance in which it becomes interestingly but unnecessarily transparent (like Conrad's delvings into a performance of Lord Jim's), but merely a settlement of the doubts which made difficult a response to the action concerned.

In short, persuasive discourse is conduct in which actions are recommended or a wished-for response to an action prompted by displaying its alleged merits to those who have to act or to respond; and 'explanatory' discourse is conduct in which an agent responds to an invitation to make his action more intelligible by displaying the deliberation in terms of which he made his choice of what to do.

4. Thus far, I have considered conduct as the engagement of agents responding to their own understood contingent situations by choosing to do or to say *this* rather than *that* in relation to imagined and wished-for outcomes recognized as satisfactions; that is, conduct as the prudential self-disclosure of agents. This characterization of it, however, in terms of the postulates reflective consciousness, situations recognized to predicate actions, agency, imagined future conditions of things, prudential deliberation, choice, decision, performance, etc., is clearly incomplete. There are other conditions to be considered, and taking them into the account will extend our understanding not only of conduct but also of the postulates of conduct already investigated. But before going further I propose briefly to restate two conclusions in somewhat different terms.

First, I have insisted that an action is a response to a situation which an agent recognizes to be his own; situation and response are inseparable from an assignable agent. But this does not mean (what it is often taken to mean) that an agent's diagnosis of his situation and his choice of a response are 'merely subjective'. Indeed, 'merely subjective' is an empty expression.

My situation (e.g. 'I am cold') is my diagnosis of my circumstances; it is not itself a 'feeling', but an understanding. And my chosen response (e.g. shutting the window, or poking the fire, or deciding to do nothing about it), whatever it is and however foolish or ineffective it may be, is also an exhibition of intelligence. That is to say, the situation is an understanding and not a 'feeling', an organic tension or the like, and the response is an

understanding and not the resolution of an organic tension. These understandings are certainly 'mine', and in respect of being assignable states of consciousness they may be said to be 'subjective'. And in conduct, where the response to an understood situation is a performance and not a theorem, the recognition of this subjectivity is, or may be, important: *whose* understanding it is, is not insignificant. But these understandings cannot be 'merely subjective'. They have meanings, and their meaning is not 'these are *my* thoughts' but 'these are *my thoughts*'. In virtue of their meanings they are 'objective' conclusions; I may question them myself and they may be questioned by others. And even if, as is possible, investigation were to convict them of illusion, they would not cease to be 'objective' conclusions and relapse into 'merely subjective' states of consciousness. A misunderstanding is not, on that account, a 'merely mine'; it remains what it always was, a conclusion eligible to be considered. Z, diagnosing his situation as that of being unacceptably in debt, may be grossly mistaken (he owes nobody anything), his decision to seek a remedy by selling his violin may be futile (he has forgotten that he gave it away to his niece five years ago), and even his belief that his situation is 'unacceptable' may be mistaken (he may easily, on second thoughts, reach the conclusion that it is acceptable enough), and we may perhaps be forgiven for thinking that he is 'dreaming'. But we should be mistaken if we identified this 'dreaming' with 'mere subjectivity'. What characterizes these conclusions is not that they are 'subjective' (that they are *his*) but that they are misunderstandings and therefore not merely 'his'. They are, in fact, neither more or less 'subjective' than they would be if they were not errors. In short, the recognition of the 'subjectivity' of an understanding in conduct may be significant, but it has nothing whatever to do with the quality or the acceptability of the understanding. 'Objectivity' is not an attribute of correct understanding, it is an attribute of understanding distinguished from mere 'feeling'. And this is an important consideration in respect of so-called 'value-judgements' or the 'creation of norms'. These are often said to be 'merely subjective' acts of 'will', as if to 'will' were to have a 'feeling' or suffer an organic tension. They are, of course, nothing of the kind. Even likings and dislikings are not 'merely subjective'; they are exhibitions of intelligence capable of being investigated.

But further, an action identified as a chosen response of an agent to a situation which he recognizes as his own does not postulate a self-absorbed agent incapable of understanding a situation other than in egocentric terms and therefore unable to identify his own as a concern for that of another. This, no doubt, would be the case if his situation were an organic tension, a psychological state, or an environmental pressure or the like which imposed itself upon him without his having to make it his own in an understanding of it. But in conduct it is never this: an agent's situation is always what he understands or misunderstands it to be.

What predicates action is an agent's understanding of his own situation as, in some respect, unacceptable to himself; but there is nothing to hinder his understanding it to be unacceptable to himself in terms of the unsatisfied wants of another, except a contingent inclination not to do so. He may diagnose *his* situation as 'you are shivering' and he may himself respond accordingly. But the self-reference (which is inherent) is not to be identified with self-preference. It may be true that human beings are more strongly disposed to recognize their situations in terms of their own interests than in those of others, but there is nothing to compel them to do so. And what makes possible the one disposition is that which makes possible the other, namely reflective consciousness. Diagnosis in conduct may be in terms of the wants of another because it is always understanding and not syndrome.

And, of course, what is true of an agent's diagnosis of his situation is true also of his response to it. His act is ineluctably his own and its outcome will unavoidably be himself in a new situation, but it does not follow that what he intends, the meaning of his action, must be a self-gratification. For to act is to choose, and where there is choice there may be decision to perform an action whose meaning is the imagined and wished-for satisfaction of wants which are not the agent's own but those of another. And it is in virtue of his character as a reflective consciousness, and not because his 'will' is 'free' or because of his 'sympathy' for others, that an agent is not bound to care only for his own interests. Agents are related to one another in terms of understandings, not in terms of the similarity of their genetic characters or of their neuro-physiological organizations or of

suppositious gregarious 'instincts'; they may care for one another because they can think of one another. The myth of the necessarily egocentric agent is a denial of agency.

Secondly, I have insisted that an action is a chosen response to an understood contingent situation and is related to an imagined and wished-for outcome; that is, the spring of conduct is a situation in respect of its being recognized to contain a specific unacceptability. From this (as I have already remarked) it follows that it cannot be understood as a means to the achievement of an end not implicit in itself. But it follows, also, that there can be no independent scale which converts these specific disliked situations, or these specific sought-for satisfactions, into commensurable fractions of a single general condition (e.g. amounts of 'pain' or 'pleasure') and in terms of which all situations may be measured, or at least compared, in respect of their unacceptability and all actions in respect of their sought-for or actual yield of satisfaction. Or, in other words, the spring of action cannot be understood as a situation unacceptable in virtue of lacking an acceptable degree of such measurable and homogeneous satisfaction, and what is wished for and sought cannot be understood as an outcome imagined in terms of its having an acceptable degree of such measurable satisfaction. I cannot *want* 'happiness'; what I want is to idle in Avignon or to hear Caruso sing. But, if agents in respect of what they choose to do and actions in respect of their meanings have no such common end, it does not follow that agents and their actions are mere particulars. It means only that the words and expressions often, but improperly, used to denote a suppositious common substantive 'end' pursued in all conduct, or sometimes to denote a suppositious universal reason for the performance of all actions (words and expressions such as 'survival' 'pleasure', 'happiness', 'the desirable', 'the good', etc.)¹⁶ must be taken to refer to something else; namely, to the formal character of actions. Thus, properly speaking, they refer not to agents in respect of what they choose to do but to agents in respect of their recognition of their actions as choices of their own, and to the ideal condition, impossible to be made the substantive outcome sought in conduct, in which the performances of agents continuously achieve their own wished-for outcomes (whatever these may be), and in which these specific outcomes are found not to be unduly disappointing when they are achieved. Conduct is agents disclosing themselves in their own chosen actions, each exercising his own *potestas vivendi ut velis* which belongs to him not because he has 'free will' but because he is an intelligent agent, and thus winning their way through to their own existences, whatever these may be; and 'happiness' is not a substantive condition of things aimed at but merely not to be thwarted in this engagement.

5. 'To understand conduct *inter homines* in terms of he postulates agency, choice, performance and response is to recognize it as an engagement in which agents negotiate bargains with the future. This future is composed of the choices and actions of other agents, and consequently these bargains are recognized to be transactions between agents. Each of these transactions has a beginning, each runs its course, and each reaches an interim outcome of some sort which is itself immediately discerned as a predicament inviting response. But such *ad hoc* terminable encounters postulate more durable relationships between agents which are not themselves transactions but are the conditional contexts of all such transactions. It is time now to consider this postulate of conduct.

Conduct is encounters of reciprocity in which agents converse with one another, and the postulate of these encounters is a relationship in which *this* converse may be understood to take place.¹⁷ Since it is, thus, a relationship between agents, it cannot be a genetic relationship (in terms of blood and genes), nor that of shared biological or psychological urges or tendencies (e.g. gregariousness), nor can it be in terms of physical propinquity (living hard by one another) or of the contingent resemblances of human character, nor that of an 'age-group' (e.g. the animal communion of adolescents), nor that of the components of a so-called 'social system' or of a 'class', nor that which characterizes the successive stages of an evolutionary or a teleological process: these and their like declare themselves *not* to be encounters of reflective consciousness. Nor do agents merely 'communicate' or 'connect' with one another, or 'trigger' one another's reactions; their relationships are not syndromic. On the contrary, they speak to one another in words or gestures and are understood by one another; their responses to one another are in terms of their understandings. Thus, the relationship postulated in conduct *inter homines* is an understood relationship, capable of being engaged in only in virtue of

having been learned. And further, it must be a relationship which prescribes conditions for, but does not determine, the substantive choices and performances of agents. In short, what joins agents in conduct is to be recognized as a 'practice'; that is a procedure proper or useful to be observed and therefore capable of being neglected or violated and capable, also, of being observed only in the chosen subscriptions of agents.

A practice may be identified as a set of considerations, manners, uses, observances, customs, standards, canons, maxims, principles, rules, and offices specifying useful procedures or denoting obligations or duties which relate to human actions and utterances.

It is a prudential or an authoritative adverbial qualification of choices and performances, more or less complicated, in which conduct is understood in terms of a procedure. Words such as punctually, considerately, civilly, scientifically, legally, candidly, judicially, poetically, morally, etc., do not specify performances; they postulate performances and specify procedural conditions to be taken into account when choosing and acting.

Thus, practices may differ in their dimensions, their complexity, and their density; they may range from mere protocol to what may be called a 'way of life': the stoic *apatheia* ('do whatever you do apathetically') is a recognizable practice and so also was the 'chivalry' of the central Middle Ages. They may acquire the firmness of an 'institution', or they may remain relatively plastic. They may overlap one another, they may compose hierarchies, they may join to compose a more intricate practice; judging and advocacy are joined in the practice of a court of law. And most performances are eligible to be 'governed' by a variety of practices: all verbal utterances, for example, are subscriptions to the language in which they are spoken and they participate in one or other (but in not more than one) of the practices which constitute distinguishable *mores* of utterance: *poetice, geometrice, historice, oratorice, philosophice, etc.*

Practices, are themselves the outcomes of performances. They may be expressly designed; that is, devised, chosen, and instituted in a substantive engagement of rule-making. And there may be rules (that is, a procedure or practice) for making rules. They may be expressly modified, reformed, varied, and even redesigned in another such engagement. They may be neglected, they may fall into desuetude, be suppressed, or abolished. But no practice can be so definitively contrived or so securely insulated from circumstance as to become immune to modifications incidentally imposed upon it by the performances it qualifies. More commonly, however, a practice is not the outcome of a performance. It emerges as a continuously invented and always unfinished by-product of performances related to the achievement of imagined and wished-for satisfactions other than that of having a procedure, and it becomes recognizable when it has acquired a certain degree of definition and authority or acknowledged utility. But whether it is designed in a performance or whether it emerges out of performances, a practice is a relationship between agents articulated in terms of specific conditional prescriptions.

A man may give himself a rule of conduct and thus impose a practice upon his own performances: he may resolve to keep all his engagements punctually, that is, to 'make a practice' of being punctual. But conduct *inter homines* is the association of agents (each engaged in seeking his own chosen satisfactions) in terms of mutual participations in multifarious practices of different dimensions and of different degrees of generality, exactness, 'institution', variability, complexity, and independence. Each is agents related to one another in actions and responses to actions qualified by the adverbial conditions of a procedure. The intercourse of friends, the fellowship of convives, the association of partners or colleagues, the relationship of husband and wife, teacher and pupil, doctor and patient, lawyer and client, of a duenna and her charge, of ruler and subject, of master and servant, landlord and tenant, priest and congregation, orator and audience, and that of speakers of a common language—each of these is participation in a distinguishable practice, each is a relationship signalled by the names of the *personae* concerned (teacher, ruler, friend), each is capable of being spelled out (at least in part) in terms of characteristic uses, conventions, rules, or other adverbial considerations, each is an invention of human beings, all are, subject to historic vicissitudes and local variations, and none is capable of being participated in except by learning to do so. A 'neighbourly' relationship is a practice participated in, not in respect of persons living next door to one another, but in respect of their understanding themselves to be 'neighbours'.

An action, then, is an identity in which substantive performance, and procedural consideration may be distinguished but are inseparably joined, and in which the character of agent and that of practitioner are merged in a single self-recognition. The so-called 'practical' is not a certain kind of performance; it is conduct in respect of its acknowledgement of a practice.¹⁸ This acknowledgement does not reduce conduct to a process or impose upon it the character of a *mere* habit. Customs, principles, rules, etc. have no meaning except in relation to the choices and performances of agents; they are *used* in conduct and they can be used only in virtue of having been learned. Nor do procedures prescribe choices or substantive actions. A rule (and *a fortiori* something less exacting, like a maxim) can never tell a performer what choice he shall make; it announces only conditions to be subscribed to in making choices. And a resolution to 'make a practice' of being punctual is not itself a resolution to perform any particular substantive action.¹⁹

Thus, a practice may properly be recognized as a language of self-disclosure which can be spoken only by agents. It does not impose upon an agent demands that he shall think certain thoughts, entertain certain sentiments, or make certain substantive utterances. It comes to him as various invitations to understand, to choose, and to respond. It is composed of conventions and rules of speech, a vocabulary and a syntax, and it is continuously invented by those who speak it and using it is adding to its resources. It is an instrument to be played upon, not a tune to be played. Learning to speak it is learning to enjoy and to explore a certain relationship with other agents. The requirements of a practice are not obeyed or disobeyed; they are subscribed to or not subscribed to. What Bagehot called 'coarse, causal, comprehensive usage' is a condition unknown to reflective consciousness; it denotes a process, not a practice. Further, a practice cannot itself be 'performed'. Purely regularian conduct (that is, conduct whose imagined and wished-for outcome is solely that a procedure shall have been observed) is impossible: to make a grammatically faultless utterance is always to say *something*, to use an implement 'properly' is always to make *something*, to follow a routine is always to do *something*, and to act 'dutifully' is always to perform some substantive action whose 'meaning' for the agent lies not in the conditional duty, but in its imagined and wished-for response. A practitioner is always a performer, and this holds even in the extreme case where the practice is a ritual.

Conduct *inter homines* is, then, agents disclosing themselves in responding to their contingent situations by choosing what they shall say or what they shall do in relation to imagined and wished-for outcomes, answering one another as seekers and therefore as providers of chosen satisfactions, and related to one another in terms of a multiplicity of practices, each composed of considerations to be subscribed to in choosing and doing, and each constituting a specific formal relationship between the participants. Indeed, agents as historic persons composed of acquired beliefs, understandings, sentiments, imaginings, aptitudes, arts, skills, etc., and capable of self-disclosure in actions, themselves emerge in a transaction between the generations called education, in which new-corners to a local human scene are initiated into its 'mysteries'; that is, into practices which human beings have invented for themselves. And like every other transaction *inter homines*, this engagement to educate is itself utterances, actions, and responses governed by a practice in which a relationship, distinguished from all others, is articulated: the relationship of teachers and learners. And what is learned in this transaction is languages of self-disclosure and self-enactment; not what to do or say, but the arts of agency.

In respect of their generality and their pervasiveness, the two most important practices in terms of which agents are durably related to one another in conduct are a common tongue and a language of moral converse. Of the first of these practices I shall say no more now than that it is the condition both of that prudential deliberative reflection in which situations are diagnosed and responses chosen and of any significant degree of intelligibility and exactness in self-disclosure. No doubt the rude reciprocities of primitive conduct may be articulated in grunts and gestures and in the transparencies of exiguous and familiar actions, and no doubt a language of this sort (a common tongue) is much else besides an instrument of conduct; it is, for example, the condition, and not merely the index, of imaginative magnificence and theoretical understanding. But these considerations do not dispute the observation that a language of this sort is a practice, that to speak such a common language is to be related to others in a specific respect, and that it is an indispensable instrument of conduct identified as transactions between agents. Of

the second (that of moral converse) there is more to be said, and I shall consider it in some detail.

Moral conduct is agents related to one another in the acknowledgement of the authority of a practice composed of conditions which because of their generality attracts to itself the generic name, 'practice': morality, *mos*. A morality is the *ars artium* of conduct; the practice of all practices; the practice of agency without further specification.

Agents thus related are, of course, seekers of wished-for satisfactions and providers of such satisfactions as are enjoyed; they are engaged in the transitory transactions which constitute substantive conduct. And they are related also in terms of many prudential practices, the rules and uses of which are designed to promote the success of the transactions and activities they govern. These practices or skills may epitomize (well or ill) experience in respect of the achievement of some particular wished-for satisfaction (like the rules for making pastry); they may prescribe methods of handling common situations so that they may yield greater rather than less satisfaction (like an office routine); or they may constitute a procedure which approximates expectations to occurrences thus creating a more manageable future for those concerned, even if these expectations are sometimes inconvenient, like a railway service which runs strictly to a published time-table. And the common characteristic of these practices is to be instrumental to the achievement of imagined and wished-for satisfactions.

But a moral practice is not a prudential art concerned with the success of the enterprises of agents; it is not instrumental to the achievement of any substantive purpose or to the satisfaction of any substantive want. No doubt there may be advantages to be enjoyed in subscribing to its conditions: perhaps honesty is the best policy; perhaps speaking the truth is a condition of all durable association for the satisfaction of wants. But a moral practice, unlike an instrumental practice, does not stand condemned if no such advantages were to accrue. Indeed, recognizing and subscribing to these conditions may be expected to add to the cost of these transactions. Nor is a morality a court of arbitration in which the different and often conflicting purposes of agents and their chosen actions are reconciled to one another and mean satisfactions authorized. It is concerned with the act, not the event; with agents as doers making an impact upon one another and not in respect of the particular wants for which they are seeking satisfactions. No action, whether it be of self-gratification or of care for the satisfactions of others, is exempt from its conditions. And no agent, whatever the circumstances of his conduct, is outside its jurisdiction.

This is sometimes denied. The difficulty of recognizing a moral practice as a device for promoting the satisfaction of the wants of individual agents is admitted, but it is said that its conditions are to be understood as those of an unspecified 'social' relationship (distinguished from a transactional relationship) and are alleged to be instruments for procuring a substantive state of things called the 'common good' of those thus related. Or, more generally, it is said that moral considerations are conditions instrumental for the achievement of a superordinate purpose of a human life, 'human excellence', the purpose of all purposes. And agents in respect of moral considerations are recognized as role-performers in the greatest of all human enterprises: the good life.

There is no need to quarrel with such an expression as the 'human good', and the teleological suggestion it contains may be neglected; but this account of the matter will not do. Agents may, of course, be related to one another in the pursuit of a common purpose or in the promotion of a common interest, and where this is so the practice or practices in terms of which they may also be related are properly understood to be instrumental to the common enterprise. But such a common purpose, like any other, is a want for a substantive satisfaction to be procured in co-operative performances, and it must be chosen by each agent related in seeking it. The relationship is constituted in a choice and it subsists so long as this choice is not revoked. But 'human excellence' or 'the human good' is not a substantive purpose to be achieved as the outcome of performances; it is not a purpose which an agent might choose to pursue in preference to the satisfaction of some other want or in terms of which he might or might not choose to be related with others in achieving (and then, perhaps, deliberately revoke the choice), like joining an expedition to climb Mount Everest or agreeing with another to settle in Katmandu. And the 'common good' is not a substantive satisfaction which an agent might or might not choose to be joined with others in procuring, like getting in the

harvest. These are not, properly speaking, purposes at all; and if a morality is a practice concerned with 'human excellence', then it is not a set of conditions instrumental to the achievement of a purpose. In short, a morality may be identified as a practice without any extrinsic purpose; it is concerned with good and bad conduct, and not with performances in respect of their outcomes. And moral relationship is not association for the achievement of a common purpose (e.g. the greatest happiness of those associated); it is relationship solely in respect of conditions to be subscribed to in seeking the satisfaction of any want.

These are, perhaps, cogent reasons for denying to morality the character of an art or a skill and even for hesitating to recognize it as a language. Certainly, conduct in respect of moral considerations is not an art like flute-playing in which some may engage and others not at all; and certainly a moral practice is not a language like Latin or Spanish with which some and not others are acquainted and in which anything may be said. But it is like an art in having to be learned, in being learned better by some than by others, in allowing almost endless opportunity for individual style, and in which virtuosity and mastery are distinguishable; and it is like a language in being an instrument of understanding and a medium of intercourse, in having a vocabulary and a syntax of its own, and in being spoken well or ill. And on this account I shall continue to write of it in these terms.

Further, a moral practice is not a device for controlling or suppressing biological urges, so-called 'natural' instincts or passions or the alleged powerful egocentric system of 'human nature'. It is concerned with the conduct of agents who have beliefs, sentiments, understandings, etc. and not 'instincts', who have wants and not biological urges, and whose wants are choices to seek imagined satisfactions. Nor is the association it articulates a relationship which supervenes upon a suppositious non-relationship in which agents are imagined to pursue courses of unconditional activity or in which their conduct is subject to merely prudential considerations concerned with what they design or are likely to achieve. A human being does not begin his life in a world lit only by the flickerings of biological urges from which he escapes with difficulty into agency. Nor does he start out equipped with unconditional desires which he learns subsequently to choose between and to control with the aid of a moral practice. He comes to consciousness in a world illuminated by a moral practice and as a relatively helpless subject of it. The nurture of children is everywhere performance governed by a moral practice. And the education in which they acquire the prudential aptitudes of agency is indistinguishable from that in which they come to understand the conditions of a moral practice and to understand them as conditions to which they ought to subscribe in making their choices. There is no agency which is not the acknowledgement of a moral practice, and no moral conduct which is not an exercise of agency.

The conditions which compose a moral practice are not theorems or precepts about human conduct, nor do they constitute anything so specific as a 'shared system of values'; they compose a vernacular language of colloquial intercourse. This language is not a vocabulary of abstract nouns denoting recognized *bona* of human conduct in terms of which actions and utterances may be judged, approved or disapproved. Nor is it a language spoken on some occasions (e.g. when explicit moral 'valuations' are being discussed) and not on others; it is spoken, well or ill, on every occasion of human intercourse. Like any other language, it is an instrument of self-disclosure used by agents in diagnosing their situations and in choosing their responses; and it is a language of self-enactment which permits those who can use it to understand themselves and one another, to disclose to one another their complex individualities, and to explore relationships far more varied and interesting than those it has a name for or those which a commonplace acceptance of so-called 'moral values' would allow.

Every such vernacular of moral converse is a historic achievement of human beings. Each is a continuously accumulating residue of conditional relationships learned in an experience of intercourse between operative agents. It emerges as a ritual of utterance and response, a continuously extemporized dance where participants are alive to one another's movements and to the ground upon which they tread. Its abstract nouns (right and wrong, proper and improper, obligation, due-ness, fairness, respect, justice, etc.), when they appear, are faded metaphors, and it is only the uneducated who insist that each must have a single unequivocal meaning indifferent to context. This language is responsive to the aspirations of those who speak it and it is amplified in the *pia libertas*

of its conscientious users. It is never fixed or finished, but (like other languages) it has a settled character in terms of which it responds to the linguistic inventions, the enterprises, the fortunes, the waywardness, the censoriousness, and sometimes the ridicule of those who speak it. It *is* its vicissitudes, and its virtue is to be a living, vulgar language articulating relationships, responsibilities, duties, etc., recognizable by its speakers as reflections of what, on earth, they have come to understand themselves to be.²⁰ It is acknowledged by those who speak it, not because a failure to do so is liable to attract a penalty or because it is recognizably advantageous to do so, but because they have been educated in its use and because in speaking it they re-enact it for themselves. It is learned only in being used.

Of course, no such language can ever be perfectly responsive to the demands made upon it; circumstances may convict it of inadequacy and it cannot altogether exempt from dilemma those who speak it. But if it is without resources to respond to the interrogations of circumstance it is already moribund, and it is only in books (and then only in the worst sort) that moral conduct appears as an incessant lurching from perplexity to perplexity and a contorted endeavour to elicit actions from conditional prescriptions. Moral conduct is not solving problems; it is agents continuously and colloquially related to one another in the idiom of a familiar language of moral converse.

Such a language of moral intercourse, in which agents are related to one another, not in terms of procedures favourable to a common substantive enterprise or to the successful outcome of transactions for the achievement of individual satisfactions, but in the acknowledgement of conditions indifferent to the achievement of any substantive purpose, is an instrument which may be played upon with varying degrees of sensibility to its resources. There is room for the individual idiom, it affords opportunity to inventiveness, it may be spoken pedantically or loosely, slavishly or masterfully; it has rhythms which remain when the words are forgotten. It allows ambages as well as decisive utterance and response. Expressions in it harden into clichés and are released again; the ill-educated speak it vulgarly, the purists inflexibly, and each generation invents its own moral slang. The conduct of some is no better than an adventure in verbiage; clutching at imperfectly recollected and vaguely understood expressions, their conversation is thick with pretention and littered with moral malapropisms. They are aware only of the fashionable indignations. Others recognize a language of moral conduct only in terms of the opportunities it offers for fraud, exploiting its native ambiguities and corrupting it with duplicities of their own contrivance. Few remain totally illiterate; but with some the art of moral agency is an inconsiderable achievement. Like impetuous children, they translate their wants into actions untempered by the compunctions of a moral practice; or, convinced of their own benevolent motives, they mistake the exercise of these for moral conduct.

With us, women are apt to speak this language differently from men; sometimes more and sometimes less punctiliously, but rarely the same. They are apt to get along without any profound respect for rules and they are both more obstinate and more generous; when timid they are more servile and when courageous more reckless. The young speak it differently from the old, not merely because (as Aristotle remarks) they are less competent linguists, but because what he has to say who

Drinks the valiant air of dawn,

who is overwhelmed by the limitless invitations of a human existence, and to whom 'the long littleness of life' is yet undreamed, calls for the lyric mode. Their ingenuousness is not wisdom, but in their shallow utterance a moral language may acquire a refreshing translucence.

Moral association is unavoidably concerned with the young and the old, with those who are setting out and with those who are making the difficult exchange of hope for faith, with men and with women, with those who are born to die young and those who live into old age, and the different manners in which differently situated persons speak its language are emblems of the latitudes inherent in moral agency and not blemishes to be deplored. Nor may all its various calls be equally responded to; each man hears and understands the promptings of some allegiances more clearly than others. As the ancient Greek well knew, to honour Artemis might entail the neglect of Aphrodite.

Such a language will have its professional custodians, its grammarians, and its dictionary-makers. There are 'moralists' who explore its hidden resources and uncover its

ironies; there are connoisseurs of moral style whose recognitions of grandeur leave room for delight in the small perfection of those flashes of felicity which redeem the dullness of commonplace moral utterance; and there are moral philosophers who probe its postulates. But the unprofessional guardians of this vernacular are those who speak it somewhat monotonously but with a care for its intimations of balance, sobriety, and exactness. Their solid gracelessness makes possible the stylist, the hero, the saint, the aristocrat and the vagabond, who, caring only for its intimations of magnificence, are apt to neglect the prosaic pieties which keep barbarism at bay.

Nevertheless, there are in such a language what may be called a basic vocabulary and some elementary constructions familiar to all whose native language it is. These are *rules* of conduct in terms of which the simple (perhaps indispensable) actions are performed, the plain responses made, and the most commonplace relationships enjoyed.

Moral rules are abridgements. But what they abridge is not prudential deliberation about the fitness of actions to procure their circumstantially wished-for outcomes; indeed, moral rules do not even specify actions in terms of their likely consequences. Nor do they abridge alleged calculations of the tendency of actions to promote a suppositious 'happiness' for ourselves or for mankind in general: conduct is not susceptible of such calculations because it has no such universal substantive 'end'. What they do is to concentrate into specific precepts considerations of adverbial desirability which lie dispersed in a moral language and thus transform invitations into prescriptions, allegiances to fellow practitioners into precise obligations, *bona* into *facienda*. Moral rules specify performances in terms of obligations to subscribe to injunctions. What a moral practice intimates as, in general, proper to be said or done, a moral rule makes more explicit in declaring what it is *right* to do.

Where the relationships of a moral practice are articulated in rules they lose some of their characteristic expansiveness. The 'play' between agents is diminished; loyalty becomes legality, *obsequium* supersedes *fides*. And this strictness is magnified where rules become duties. The idea 'duty' is that of a moral practice articulated, not in terms of rules which denote obligations generally owed, but in terms of *officia*; that is, obligations specified in respect of the occupation of 'positions'. An 'office' is an agent standing in an exclusive relationship to other assignable agents in which he owes them a duty: the duty, for example, of a parent or a guardian. The holder of an office is a trustee. Thus, duties denote a moral practice in its most urgent and most exacting character. What is due in respect of the occupation of an office is more precisely determined and more strictly required than is the case in the looser relationships of moral association, and the failure to act in consideration of a duty is a palpable injury to those to whom it is owed. But to owe a duty does not exempt an agent from acknowledging in his conduct the less formal reticences and avowals of moral intercourse; it is an additional stringency. Thus, the idea of strict dueeness distinguishes between agents in respect of their 'stations' and it denotes a special relationship. Where 'to keep one's promises' (in the wide sense of 'keeping faith') is recognized as a general consideration in moral relationship, no particular circumstances are mentioned, compliance is not thought of as subject to specifiable 'exceptions', and it is well understood that there are as many different ways of keeping a promise as there are of making it. Where it is recognized as a *rule*, the conduct which will be taken to subscribe to it is more exactly determined, there may be circumstantial 'exceptions' to be taken into the account, and the requirements of this rule may have to be reconciled with those of another. But where (as in the case of a witness giving evidence under oath) it is recognized to be a *duty*, what is due relates to assigned persons; it is spelled Out to leave little room for honest hesitation, and utterance is both required and required to be exact subscription.

Rules, duties, and their like (moral principles and dogmas) are, then, passages of stringency in a moral practice. But they should not be thought of as strands of some exceptionally tough material woven into the otherwise somewhat flimsy fabric of moral association, constituents not only of notable strength but also of independent authority; conservators of the integrity of a moral practice. Rather, they are to be recognized as densities obtruded by the tensions of a spoken language of moral intercourse, nodal points at which a practice turns upon itself in a vortiginous movement and becomes steadier in ceasing to be adventurous. They may help to keep a practice in shape, but they do not give it its shape. They are abstractions which derive their authority from the practice itself as a spoken language in which they appear as passages of somewhat

exaggerated emphasis. Of course, they give only an abbreviated account of the conditions containing the continuous flow of diurnally enacted genial relationships which constitute unaffected moral association; no moral practice can be reduced to the rules, the duties, or the 'ideals' it obtrudes, and *rightness* is never more than an aspect of moral response. And further the considerations which even they enjoin are unavoidably indeterminate. For while rules, etc. announce relatively hard and unambiguous consider-abilities to be taken into the account in choosing actions, and while they may occupy an important place in moral education, they cannot themselves designate choices. They are not commands to be obeyed but relatively precise considerations to be subscribed to. They are used in conduct, not applied to conduct; and the moral reflection in which they may be brought to bear upon choosing is deliberative, not demonstrative.

The abstract character of a moral practice identified as a system of rules and their like is revealed in that idiom of *ex post facto* persuasive discourse which is designed to relate actions performed to a moral practice; namely, the engagement to 'justify' a performance. This engagement may be recognized as the counterpart of the uneducated moral deliberation in which actions are chosen, not with a feeling for the qualities and opportunities of a language of moral intercourse, but in respect of their subscription to rules of conduct. It is the acceptance of an invitation to respond to an imputation of moral fault which depends for its cogency upon the requirements of a moral practice being understood as subscriptions to rules. And it is itself a performance, an utterance whose meaning is an imagined and wished-for satisfaction: the charge rebutted, a penalty (if only that of disapproval or censure) avoided, and moral confidence restored. To justify a performance is not to undertake to show that it was the best thing to have done in the circumstances, or that it was wise, or to defend it against the imputation of being foolish or imprudent (unless its foolishness was also blameworthy), or to show that it conduced to a suppositious condition of 'happiness'; it is to rebut the imputation that it suffers from the fault of being 'unjust'. And no performance is 'just' or 'unjust' in respect of being a wish to achieve an imagined satisfaction or in respect of its actual outcome, but only in respect of its relationship to a moral practice understood as a composition of rules. The invitation to justify need not be accepted; the belief that an action is somehow morally incomplete unless it is supported by a 'justification' is a superstition. But if it is accepted, it may be responded to only in a persuasive argument which refers to the regularian quality of conduct, an argument designed to 'vindicate'.

A performance may be justified by being shown to belong to a class of actions which (in spite of their differences) all subscribe to the rule it is accused of neglecting, or by pleading the occupation of an office which imposes a specific duty and that the action (whatever else it was) was a fulfilment of that duty, or by showing the connection between an action and an alleged moral principle it is said to have neglected or infringed. 'I made a promise and I contend that my action was one properly to be recognized as a keeping of that promise'; or, 'I was right to say what I said because I believed it to be true and I was under oath not to be silent and to say what I believed to be true'; or, 'My action was right because it was done in the name of the ideal fairness.' And if the argument could be arrested there or thereabouts it would be capable of returning an unequivocal and an appropriate reply to the rule-conditioned inquiry which set it on foot. This, however, is impossible. Moral rules and rule-like principles are indeterminate, multiple, liable to conflict, and of unequal importance: none is categorical or is capable of 'specific performance'. And offices and duties are imperfectly specifiable. Consequently, a justifying argument must be allowed some latitude and it must be prepared to rebut more extensive accusations. It must be permitted to plead, for example, that the action should be judged in respect of some other (allegedly more important) rule than that invoked in the indictment, and it must be ready to rebut the contention that the duty alleged to have been fulfilled was inferior to another neglected. Thus, to justify an action (that is, to invoke rules and rule-like principles as reasons for having chosen actions) is to embark upon a casuistical enterprise of distinctions, exceptions, and obliquities related to rules in which the vitality of a spoken language of moral intercourse is impaired and its integrity compromised. A calculated observance of specified rules has taken the place of the singleness and spontaneity of morally educated conduct.

This does not mean that expressions of moral disapproval must always be otiose and that answers to them must always be valueless:

performances are not arbitrary acts of a sovereign 'will', and their relation to a moral practice must always be important. It means that this rule-oriented indictment of actions rests upon a foreshortened understanding of the character of a moral practice, and that the self-justification sought in rebutting it is trivial. Moral prescriptive principles and rules are not criteria of good conduct, nor are they primarily instruments of judgement; they are prevailing winds which agents should take account of in sailing their several courses.

So far, I have identified a moral practice as a procedure or language of self-disclosure. The conduct it relates to is the intercourse of agents, each concerned with procuring imagined and wished-for satisfactions (which need not be self-gratifications) and each seeking them in responses of another or of others. Actions, here, are performances in respect of their being responses to contingent situations conducive to the achievement of imagined outcomes.

But there is another side to conduct and another aspect of moral practice to be noticed. For, conduct is not only actions related to the achievement of imagined and wished-for outcomes, although it is always this. It is, also, actions in respect of being exploits in the self-enactment of agents; that is, actions understood in terms of the motives in which they are performed. And moral conduct is not only agents engaging in transactions with one another in the recognition of the authority of considerations to be subscribed to in choosing and seeking satisfactions, it is also an agent enacting himself in terms of the motives in which he permits himself to act. For example, a man may, on a certain occasion, faultlessly perform the duties of an office he occupies, his action or utterance may be an undeniably appropriate subscription to the considerations which denote the office and were called for by the occasion, and he may thus earn the recognition of having acted 'rightly' even from those who might not consider what he did to have been altogether the best thing to have done in the circumstances; but this is not the end of the matter. He might have done what he did out of fear of being deposed from his office (or, indeed, any other fear), out of pride in responding to the trust reposed in him or from any of a number of other motives or mixtures of motives; and the moral quality of his action as an exploit in self-enactment will be related to the motive or motives in which he acted.

Some writers (Mill, for example), while not altogether ignoring this feature of human conduct, have denied it any moral significance. To others it has seemed to be not only its most important conditional feature but to be that to which the term 'moral' exclusively refers. Aristotle, from one point of view, and Kant from another, are, perhaps, writers of this persuasion; the one in his concern with the 'virtue' of actions (as distinct from the qualities of their intended outcomes), and the other in his concern for the motives in which actions are performed. But be that how it may, I propose to recognize conduct in respect of its being self-disclosure, and conduct in respect of its being self-enactment, as two distinct considerations present in all human activity, each calling for and receiving recognition in the conditions and promptings of a language of moral conduct.²¹ And I propose to explore the distinction between them with a view to determining how they stand to one another.

All actions are 'motivated' and may be considered in respect of their motives. And by a motive I mean, not an antecedent drive or tendency or disposition to choose one action (or one kind of action) in preference to another, but an agent's sentiment in choosing and performing the actions he chooses and performs. Thus, while the 'intention' of an action is the action itself understood in terms of the imagined and wished-for outcome the agent means to procure in choosing and performing it, the 'motive' of an action is the action itself considered in terms of the sentiment or sentiments in which it is chosen and performed. An agent may, for example, choose to perform an action in a sentiment of greed, fear, compassion, resentment, benevolence, jealousy, love, hatred, kind-heartedness, pity, envy, etc.; and he may act grudgingly, charitably, maliciously, obligingly, magnanimously, piously, spitefully, gratefully, or avariciously. No doubt these words specify sentiments which, in conduct, may be inextricably mixed, and it may be difficult for the agent himself to be confident about the sentiment in which he is acting, but choosing an action is always meaning to procure a satisfaction in a motive of some sort. And unless agency is denied, these motives must be recognized as sentiments in which a man permits himself to act and not as organic impulses or urges. But in order to distinguish what I have called self-enactment from self-disclosure and to recognize self-enactment as a distinguishable engagement in agency, it is not necessary to suppose

that an agent in deliberating and choosing an action in relation to a wished-for satisfaction *also* deliberates and chooses the sentiment in which he is to act. What we are concerned with are not psychological states, but the differences which distinguish conduct in respect of its being an agent seeking what he wants from conduct in respect of its being an agent thinking as he chooses to think and enacting or re-enacting himself as he wishes to be.

The sentiment in which an action is performed and its intended outcome are distinguished from one another in the first place in not being related in a manner such that the one implies, or is even a signal of the other. No doubt it is the case that the sentiment in which an agent acts may be, somewhat indistinctly, betrayed in the manner of his acting, in his facial expression, his tone of voice, a gesture, or an attitude; and in so far as it is ascertainable it is known in the same way (though not necessarily with the same confidence) as anything else about an action may be known. But the sentiment has no direct relation to the action as an intention to procure a satisfaction. A man may kill in a sentiment of compassion or of hatred; he may mean to keep a promise in a motive of greed, of gratitude, or of resentment; he may concern himself with another's wants out of fear, kindness, pity, or contempt. And, on the other hand, an agent's choice or disposition to respond to his situation in, for example, a motive of charitableness, of fear, or of avarice is not itself the choice of a response. Spite, greed, jealousy, or benevolence do not specify actions.

And there is another considerable difference between conduct as self-disclosure and conduct as self-enactment. Self-disclosure is in transactions with others and it is a hazardous adventure; it is immersed in contingency, it is interminable, and it is liable to frustration, disappointment, and defeat. No doubt an agent in respect of what he means to do is invulnerable, but his choice is a response to an understood contingent situation and is therefore infected with contingency, and becoming a performance it falls into the hands of other optative agents who may defeat it and will certainly compromise it. And even if what survives bears some relation to the meaning of the act, it may disappoint and it will certainly reveal itself as but another situation to be diagnosed and responded to. Here, even the excellences of things are their undoing: 'Don Juan lui-même n'achève pas sa liste.' In short, this exercise of agency is movement about a world where achieved satisfactions breed wants, a world habitable only when the energy of pursuit is prudentially mixed with *nonchaloir* in respect of the outcome.²²

But where agency is self-enactment, where the consideration in doing is not what is intended to be achieved but the sentiment in which it is done conduct is released from its character as a response to a contingent situation and is emancipated from liability to the frustration of adverse circumstances. For, what the agent chooses to think is related to his understanding and respect for himself, to the integrity of his character, and not at all to his understanding of a contingent situation to which he must respond by choosing an action. And since what he thinks in this manner does not seek an outcome in the responses of other agents, it is released from having to submit to the compromises they impose. In this consideration of it, an agent's conduct, of course, remains an adventure inseparable from the adventure of doing, and in these enactments and re-enactments of himself he may so far forget himself as to affront his own integrity and thus turn them into misadventures. But, in these encounters with himself, an agent's conduct is not an interminable succession of actions and utterances inexorably opening out of one another, each hazardous because the satisfaction it looks for is the response of another. Here, doing is delivered, at least in part, from the deadliness of doing, a deliverance gracefully enjoyed in the quiet of a religious faith.

In conduct, then, there are two inseparable but distinguishable considerations: that of actions as adventures to procure wished-for substantive satisfactions in the responses they receive, and that of actions in respect of being exploits in self-enactment and re-enactment. And a language of moral conduct is concerned with both these considerations.

In regard to the first of them, I have suggested that moral conduct is to be recognized as agents seeking satisfactions in the responses of one another and acknowledging, in this reciprocal intercourse, the authority of a language which articulates considerations, rules, duties, etc., to be subscribed to in choosing and pursuing these satisfactions. 'Good' conduct here is choosing and doing in adequate subscription to these considerations. And to what has already been said on this theme it may perhaps be added that, even here, a moral practice, in providing conditions for acting, provides something more; namely,

some slight relief from conduct as an endless succession of mere adventures in self-disclosure, each the chosen response of an agent to his contingent situation. It cannot, of course, promise a future and final achievement in which activity will cease for want of anything to wish for, nor does it give system to conduct by revealing it as a teleological process in which each action is 'good' in respect of its being related to a predetermined end, and consequently a morality here does nothing to modify the interminability of doing. But in stipulating general conditions for choosing less incidental than the choices themselves, in establishing relationships more durable than those which emerge and melt away in transactions to satisfy a succession of contingent wants, and in articulating rules and duties which are indifferent to the outcome of the actions they govern, it may be said to endow human conduct with a formality in which its contingency is somewhat abated.

In regard to conduct in respect of the sentiments or motives in which actions are chosen and performed, a morality specifies conditions of worthy self-enactment. The compunctions it enjoins are not concerned with recognizing agency in others but with an agent's exercise of his powers of agency in respect of himself. And they are genuine compunctions. The fashionable so-called 'morality of conscience' in which good conduct is identified with the contingent self-approval of the agent concerned is no less preposterous in relation to self-enactment in motive than it is in respect of self-disclosure in action. For, although a man's integrity is certainly something which, if he loses it, he loses all, and although the art of moral agency must include a graceful submission (or, on rare occasions, a fierce adherence) to the qualities which belong to his own character if this is required to keep himself intact, this knowing how to be loyal to himself is not a specification of worthy self-enactment but a postulate of moral conduct. The sentiments in which he acts must be emblems of his self-command if they are to contribute to his self-enactment, but the quality of that self-enactment will depend upon the quality of these sentiments in terms of their subscription to a moral practice. Just as in a theoretical engagement the *meum* of the theorist must exhibit itself in relation to an *argumentum* or a *verum*, so in worthy self-enactment the *meum* of the agent, his 'authenticity', is subscription to an *honestum*. There is nothing 'merely subjective' in motives.

Thus, a moral practice is, in part, a language of self-enactment; that is, a language in which conduct may be recognized in terms of its 'virtue' and an agent may recognize himself in respect of his 'virtuousness'. And since 'virtuous' self-enactment is speaking this language as it should be spoken, it is not to be thought of as obeying injunctions to act in certain sentiments but as responding to an invitation to choose and to cultivate some sentiments rather than others in which to act. There is no one principle or categorical imperative of 'virtuous' conduct when we go beyond the postulate that it is not virtuous unless it is chosen; and, although a moral language may obtrude rules and duties, these are not targets to be aimed at but nodal densities of sentiment to which an agent who is familiar with the language and who acknowledges its authority recognizes himself to be incited to subscribe. Learning to speak a language of self-enactment is learning how to subscribe to its intimations of 'virtue'; speaking it is to be as unconcerned as may be with the brittle pursuit and enjoyment of satisfactions and therefore as indifferent as may be to its frustration. But conduct in respect of being 'virtuous' self-enactment is not to be confused with 'altruistic' conduct. This expression and its likes refer to the quite different considerations of actions in respect of their intended consequences, while 'honour', 'integrity', *aidos*, *prud'homie* (or however it may be identified), which is the consideration here, is totally indifferent to consequences of any sort. And it is this (and not a man's indifference to his own interests) which constitutes its release from the bondage of contingent circumstance.

The compunctions of 'virtuous' self-enactment and those of moral self-disclosure are, then, of different sorts; the first concerns the characters of agents in respect of their dispositions of sentiment, and the second refer to choices and actions performed. This is apt to be obscured in our indifferent use of the words which denote these compunctions. Thus, when it is said that a man gave 'generously', this may attribute to him a sentiment of generosity or it may mean no more than he chose to give more than he needed or was expected to give, which says nothing at all about his motive in giving. A 'friendly' action may mean one intended to be appropriately considerate of the interests of another or it may mean one done in a sentiment of 'friendship'. And Hobbes remarked that a 'just' action might be performed in a variety of different motives (the commonest, he thought, was fear), but that the word 'justice' stood *also* for a 'virtue', that is, a particular

sentiment in which an otherwise 'just' action might or might not be performed, which he identified as a contempt for being unjust. But putting on one side this liability to confusion, the relationship between these two sorts of compunction, although intricate, is not obscure.

Self-disclosure is (briefly) choosing satisfactions to pursue and pursuing them; its compunction is, in choosing and acting, to acknowledge and subscribe to the conditions intimated or declared in a practice of moral intercourse. To act is to be a 'free' agent; and these conditions articulate in relationships, customs, rules, duties, etc., considerations currently believed to be appropriate in the intercourse of 'free' agents. Subscription to them is unavoidably indeterminate, and moral association may as easily founder in censoriousness as in indifference. But notable failure to recognize these conditions is to be *guilty*.

Self-enactment is choosing the sentiments in which to act; and its compunctions are conditions of 'virtuous' self-enactment intimated in a language of moral conduct. And, although these conditions are apt to be less emphatic than those of moral self-disclosure, the simpler of them are never in doubt. Our moral language may often be confused in its identification of 'virtuous' or 'vicious' sentiments, but it is not undecided whether or not to applaud malice or to disapprove a motive of good faith or generosity. And it is of no consequence that we cannot answer the question, Why is magnanimity a virtue and envy a vice? or even that we do not know how to answer it. The compunctions of self-enactment are, then, demands an agent makes upon himself in which he requires of himself a *délicatesse* of conduct which cannot be required of him by another, which he may not make a show of requiring of others, but which are not merely his own good opinion of himself: the requirement of thinking about himself as he should while doing what he ought.²³ Conduct which notably fails to observe this condition is *shameful*.

As agents in moral association we certainly recognize one another to be concrete moral persons and not merely agencies of self-disclosure, and the moral education imparted in learning how to speak a language of moral conduct intelligently is no less an education in 'virtuous' self-enactment than in moral self-disclosure. We are not indifferent to each other's exploits in self-enactment, we readily admire noble self-enactment when we discern it, and we have more confidence, for example, in a man whose subscriptions to his obligations seem to be made in good faith rather than in fear. But our concern with the sentiment in which the action of another is performed is limited by a recognition of our hardly avoidable ignorance and by the conviction that in ordinary human intercourse a man's choices of what to do and the compunctions they exhibit matter more than the sentiment in which he makes them. In respect of motives it is appropriate that we should take our fellows as we find them; not 'judging' them (as we sometimes have to judge their self-disclosures), but contemplating them with admiration, with reserve, or with indulgence.

Since a vocabulary of moral self-disclosure and a vocabulary of virtuous self-enactment are a single language, the considerations they specify cannot be discrepant in any important respect; nevertheless, they concern different things. Worthy self-enactment is never the same thing as adequate subscription to the conditions of moral self-disclosure, and the compunctions of moral self-disclosure in actions are not themselves observed in subscriptions to the conditions of worthy self-enactment.

It is sometimes thought that significant achievement in either of these concerns licenses or at least compensates for the neglect of the compunctions of the other; but this is not so. These different concerns approach one another when moral discourse is to do with *excuse*, but neither here nor anywhere else do they properly touch, much less overlap or coincide. For although the 'virtuousness' of the sentiment in which an alleged wrongful act was performed may sometimes properly be pleaded in an argument to exonerate the agent from blame or penalty, this argument begins with the admission of fault ('qui s'excuse s'accuse', as they say), and never suggests that the wrongfulness of the act is cancelled by the virtuousness of the motive; and, indeed, piety aggravates fraud.

The members of the Order which constituted the Abbaye de Thélème dispensed with rules and duties to govern their conduct and took as their Rule a precept about how they should think when acting: the Augustinian principle of conduct, 'Love and do what you will.' But, Rabelais tells us, this was a sufficient Rule, not because 'virtuous' sentiment suffices, nor because the Thélémites had been miraculously redeemed from inclination to incontinent self-assertion in their adventures in self-disclosure, but because they were

well-born, well-bred, and well-educated in a language of moral intercourse. In the absence of rules and duties, wanton conduct was to seek in the Abbaye (and in the lives of those who went thence into the world), not because the Thélèmites were conspicuously indifferent to self-disclosure in action, nor because Rabelais believed that worthy sentiment necessarily excludes wrongful conduct, but because of their exceptional mastery of a vernacular of moral self-disclosure and their unhesitating acknowledgement of its authority.

A morality, then, is neither a system of general principles nor a code of rules, but a vernacular language. General principles and even rules may be elicited from it, but (like other languages) it is not the creation of grammarians; it is made by speakers. What has to be learned in a moral education is not a theorem such as that good conduct is acting fairly or being charitable, nor is it a rule such as 'always tell the truth', but how to speak the language intelligently. It is a language of reflection as well as of communication; it concerns self-enactment no less than self-disclosure in actions which call for the responses of others; it is spoken continuously and not merely in making or discussing so-called 'valuations'. It is not a device for formulating judgements about conduct or for solving so-called moral problems, but a practice in terms of which to think, to choose, to act, and to utter.

As a practice, it does not prescribe choices to be made or satisfactions to be sought; instead, it intimates considerations to be subscribed to in making choices, in performing actions, and in pursuing purposes. Consequently, it postulates 'free' agents and it is powerless to deprive them of their freedom. Subscribing to a practice cannot turn conduct into a 'process', however slavish that subscription may be. What is called 'moral autonomy' does not require moral choice to be a gratuitous, criterionless exercise of a so-called 'will' (an isolated *meum*) in which a lonely agent simultaneously recognizes or even creates a 'value' for which he is wholly responsible and places himself under its command, thus miraculously releasing himself from organic impulse, rational contingency, and authoritative rules of conduct. Nor is it conditional upon an agent's critical consent or approval of a rule of conduct in terms of a recognition of purported reasons for considering it to be desirable. Nor, again, does it require some other release from having to recognize a rule of conduct merely in terms of its being a rule; that is, in terms of its authority. Indeed, strictly speaking, there is no such experience as 'moral choice'. What is chosen in conduct is a substantive action or utterance in which an agent embarks upon the adventure of seeking an imagined and wished-for satisfaction in the response of another. And his 'moral autonomy' lies, first, in his character as an agent (that is, in his action or utterance being a response to an understood want and not the consequence of an organic impulse), and secondly, in his action or utterance as self-disclosure and self-enactment in a contingent subscription of his own to the conditions of a practice (which cannot tell him what to do or to say) recognized in terms of its authority. Human conduct is not first having unconditional wants (individual or communal) and then allowing prudential reason and moral sensibility to indicate or to determine the choice of the actions in which their satisfaction is sought; it is wanting intelligently (that is, in recognition of prudential and moral considerations) and doing this successfully or not so successfully.

And a moral language is a language of propriety, not of prudence. The considerations of a moral practice are not principles and rules purporting to be instrumental in promoting the achievement of an alleged desirable substantive condition of things—human 'well-being', or 'happiness', or the unhindered pursuit of 'ends' of allegedly superior 'worth'; nor are they concerned with an agent's success or failure in his transactional engagements with others. They are conditions of conduct which, for those who acknowledge them, reflect their self-understanding as persons concerned with the quality of their self-disclosures and self-enactments and with relationships other than the transactional associations in which they seek the satisfaction of an endless succession of contingent wants in the responses of others.

That a moral language should be spoken more or less exactly and with varying degrees of grace or clumsiness, and that there should be near-illiterates and fraudulent verbalizers; that it should be subject to change, that neologisms should make their appearance, and that antique expressions should survive in its interstices; that it should sometimes be unequal to the occasion and that it should not only be liable to corruption

but also commonly corrupt—none of these circumstances is at all remarkable: they are the vicissitudes common to all vernacular languages. Nor is it unexpected that, in these circumstances, it should not lack authority: neither changelessness nor perfection is a necessary condition of authority.

That there should be many such languages in the world, some perhaps with familial likenesses in terms of which there may be profitable exchange of expressions, is intrinsic to their character. '[his plurality cannot be resolved by being understood as so many contingent and regrettable divergencies from a fancied perfect and universal language of moral intercourse (a law of God, a utilitarian 'critical' morality, or a so-called 'rational morality'). But it is hardly surprising that such a resolution should have been attempted: human beings are apt to be disconcerted unless they feel themselves to be upheld by something more substantial than the emanations of their own contingent imaginations. This unresolved plurality teases the monistic yearnings of the muddled theorist, it vexes a moralist with ecumenical leanings, and it may disconcert an unfortunate who, having 'lost' his morality (as others have been known to 'lose' their faith), must set about constructing one for himself and is looking for uncontaminated 'rational' principles out of which to make it. But it will reassure the modest mortal with a self to disclose and a soul to make who needs a familiar and resourceful moral language (and one for which he may hope to acquire a *Sprachgefühl*) to do it in and who is disinclined to be unnerved because there are other such languages to which he cannot readily relate his own.

To this consideration of moral conduct I will add a brief recognition of religious belief: not to do so, however inadequately, would be to leave this account of human conduct inexcusably incomplete.

The gift of a religious faith is that of a reconciliation to the unavoidable dissonances of a human condition, a reconciliation which is neither a denial, nor a substitute for remedial effort, nor a theoretical understanding in which the mystery of their occurrence is abated or even dispelled, but a mode of acceptance, a 'graceful' response. The general character of a man's religion, like the language he speaks and the poetic utterances evoked from it, is a historical contingency, and if it were not so it would be worthless: he is, himself, a 'history'. It is composed of sentiments, beliefs, images, etc., from which he may draw something particularly his own, answering to his own understood situation. He is fortunate where he has a religion, a *traditio*, of notable imaginative splendour to draw upon; and while this reconciliation may be no more than that of a somewhat anxious equanimity or a patiently nurtured hope, it is as complete as it may be when it is a release from care and generates an unostentatious, unaccusing serenity in conduct. Like anything else, a religion may evoke a reflective consideration of its postulates and a theology may emerge from this engagement; but, although a faith is an understanding, a theoretical understanding of a faith is not itself a faith.

A human condition is but rarely recognized as one of totally unrelieved agony, a 'city of dreadful night'; but its commonly felt dissonances are disease, urgent wants unsatisfied, the pain of disappointed expectations, the suffering of frustrated purposes, the impositions of hostile circumstances, the sorrows of unwanted partings, burdens, ills, disasters, calamities of all sorts, and death itself, the emblem here of all such sufferings. These miseries are hardly less keenly felt or less deeply resented when they are recognized to be, in part, the consequences of the prudential folly of the sufferer than when they are taken to be totally unmerited misfortunes. 'They are not ills merely to those who suffer them; indeed, they are often more difficult to countenance in the fortunes of others than in one's own. Their incidence has no plausible relation to good or ill-doing, although they may be believed to represent the displeasure of gods of uncertain temper, to be warded off by appropriate observances in which a precarious *pax deorum* is preserved. And whatever immediate remedy may be found for particular occasions of suffering, or for whole classes of these ills, the dissonance remains: a suffering relieved is not a cancellation of its occurrence.

The reconciliation provided in a religious faith to a human condition recognized, because of its miseries and uncertainties, to be a 'vale of tears' (even if smiles are not wholly absent) has often been no more than a somewhat prosaic consolation: a belief that present ills will hereafter be redressed, that parted lovers will be joined never again to be separated:

Wait for me there; I will not fail

To meet thee in that hollow vale.

Or, it has been fastened to a belief that these miseries are sent to 'try' or to educate us and that great sufferings patiently endured here are the passport to future happiness; this world is a 'vale of soul-making'. Or, it has been found in a faith in which future compensations for present ills have little or no place—a faith such as that set out in the doctrine of *fortuna* in Boethius' *Consolations of Philosophy*. Or again, an austere reconciliation has been found in the belief that the human condition is not a providential order but that it is part of a cosmic process and these miseries are, like everything else, examples of the operation of inflexible 'laws' against which it would be absurd to kick a faith which endowed Lucretius with equanimity and Harriet Martineau (somewhat unaccountably) with joy. And so on, in various degrees of imaginative poverty or magnificence, even the poorest of them awakening the understanding and winning the respect of anyone who has known or seen great sorrow.

There is, however, another level where the dissonances of a human condition to which reconciliation is sought are not disappointed hopes or hardly-to-be-avoided miseries, but never-to-be-avoided sin, the condemnation it entails, and the destroying guilt with which it may be joined. Specific wrong-doings *inter homines* may be attended to by human beings with whatever justice they can muster and with whatever mercy they think they can afford; punishing the guilty and compensating the harmed. For the rest, those who suffer from the ill-doings of others (infidelities of various magnitudes) defend themselves as best they may within the canons of civilized conduct, and great and irreparable human injuries turn themselves into misfortunes to which reconciliation is perhaps possible in terms of the religious faith I have already noticed—a grim fortitude, a hope of compensation hereafter, or a graceful acceptance. And the remorse of the ill-doer (which may be as destructive as the injuries he inflicts) may become bearable in somewhat the same terms. But the idea sin is the idea of offence against God, and it is at once less and more calamitous than all other ill-doing.

The injuries men do to one another may be forgiven or forgotten, but even the least of them may leave a mark which neither remorse, nor compensation, nor punishment can expunge; deities, on the other hand, cannot be irreparably damaged. But in whatever general terms sin is understood (the hubris of Homeric Greece, the hardly distinguishable Augustinian *superbia*, or a banal concupiscence), the relationship it threatens or severs is paramount, and consequently a religious faith here is both a belief that this severance cannot be unconditionally irreparable and an image of this reconciliation here or hereafter. Indeed, in recognizing wrongdoing as sin we deprive it of its fatality without lessening its enormity; we create a refuge from the destroying *Angst* of guilt. And I need not rehearse in detail the varieties of religious belief in this respect: placatory sacrifice, expiatory punishment, 'justification', universal or selective redemption, absolution won on various conditions, atonement, and the forgiveness of an ever-loving God who may even be suspected of a penchant for penitent reprobates: 'O felix culpa quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem.'

But while religious faith may be recognized as a solace for misfortune and as a release from the fatality of wrong-doing, its central concern is with a less contingent dissonance in the human condition; namely, the hollowness, the futility of that condition, its character of being no more than 'un voyage au bout de la nuit'. What is sought in religious belief is not merely consolation for woe or deliverance from the burden of sin, but a reconciliation to nothingness.

The inherently episodic character of the diurnal adventures of self-disclosure which compose a human life may be masked in the greatness of an agent's devotion to his aims and in his singleness of purpose, or it may be somewhat more securely hidden where these can be recognized to concur in the promising pursuit of purposes more enduring than those of a single agent and his immediate associates: the iniquity of oblivion eclipsed by posthumous glory. But what is thus concealed in the illusion of affairs is not thereby extinguished. Every action is a fugitive transaction between mortal agents, its outcome not merely uncertain but fragile and soon dissipated. Every satisfaction is casual and late or soon a casualty. Where conduct is the choice and pursuit of substantive conditions of things every achievement is evanescent, and (as Augustine says) he who thinks otherwise 'understands neither what he seeks nor what he is who seeks it'. And no projected future can be any different from the present in this respect.

This unresolved and inconclusive character of human conduct is qualified (and not merely concealed) when actions are recognized as self-enactments; that is, when they are understood in terms of the sentiments in which they are performed. There is at least the echo of an imperishable achievement when the valour of the agent and not the soon-to-vanish victory, when his loyalty and fortitude and not the evanescent defeat, are the considerations; and even an action in respect of its being dutiful is released from the transitory arbitrament of substantive inconclusion. And this echo of durability (though not of durable self-fulfilment) may even be heard where what is being attended to is, for example, the magnitude of the agent's malice and not merely the injuriousness of his action: the grandeur of devilry. But nowhere is it more than a distant echo. Self-enactment (virtuous or otherwise) is itself an episodic and an inconclusive engagement, as *ondoyant* and as full of unresolved tensions as any other. It is never separable from the deadly engagement of agents disclosing themselves in responding to their contingent situations and achieving their passing satisfactions or suffering their transitory disappointments. And the enacted self is itself a fugitive; not a generic unity but a dramatic identity without benefit of a model of self-perfection. 'Man is time's eunuch', he does not 'breed one work that wakes'. And death is not a conclusion: at best it is final exploit of self-enactment and self-disclosure, a graceful acquiescence in the deadlines of the world's joys and the world's sorrows; at worst, not an act at all but an inconsequent disappearance from the scene.

There are some, no doubt, with whom this condition goes unrecognized; those, for example, who are continuously protected in the illusion of affairs. And there are others who so far misunderstand it as to think that there is something which may be *done* to stay the rot of time; those who are buoyed up by the expectation that unsatisfied want or even death itself might be abolished in a technological break-through, or who are supported by other such hopes of 'cure' for what they mistake for the disease suffered by the patients in this alleged gnostic sanatorium. And others, again, may reconcile themselves to it in a contemptuous defiance of this common and continuous destiny. But with many it is a sufficiently familiar and a disturbing enough predicament—intermittently experienced and felt with varying degrees of intensity—to call not only for acknowledgement but for response. And it is not surprising that the poetic images of human life should commonly be images of evanescence and mutability. This, and neither casual misfortune nor sin, is the central concern of religious imagination:

Knit me that am crumbling dust.

Religious faith is the evocation of a sentiment (the love, the glory, or the honour of God, for example, or even a humble *caritas*), to be added to all others as the motive of all motives in terms of which the fugitive adventures of human conduct, without being released from their mortal and their moral conditions, are graced with an intimation of immortality: the sharpness of death and the deadliness of doing overcome, and the transitory sweetness of a mortal affection, the tumult of a grief and the passing beauty of a May morning recognized neither as merely evanescent adventures nor as emblems of better things to come, but as *aventures*, themselves encounters with eternity.²⁴

A religion is what I have called a practice; it is a consideration in self-enactment. A man may enact himself religiously, but there are no religious actions. Every religion, each with its own image of deity and of self, has its own idiom of faith which reflects the civilization of the believer. It may be terrible, it may sink to the prose of a merely anticipated release casting its light back upon a malignant present condition, or it may rise to a serene acquiescence in mortality and a graceful acceptance of the *rerum mortalia*, joys and sorrows alike transformed. But the dignity of a religion lies in the intrepidity of its acknowledgement of this human condition, in the cogency of the reconciliation it intimates, and in the poetic quality, humble or magnificent, of the images, the rites, the observances, and the offerings (the wisp of wheat on the wayside calvary) in which it recalls to us that 'eternity is in love with the productions of time' and invites us to live 'so far as is possible as an immortal'.

Human conduct, then, is agents disclosing and enacting themselves in responding to their understood contingent situations by choosing to do or say *this* rather than *that* in relation to imagined and wished for outcomes, in the exercise of chosen sentiments, and

in terms of a multiplicity of arts and practices presided over by a practice of moral conduct and perhaps a religious faith. Totally unconditional or 'artless' conduct is impossible, as impossible as an utterance in no language in particular. Every such practice is a procedure to which the deliberation and choice of actions may subscribe but which does not determine, specify, or command substantive performances. And all the more significant of them are unfinished, historic human achievements into which successive generations may be initiated and upon which each successive generation makes its impression.

But in order to recognize this various inheritance of practices in its proper character as a human achievement and as a condition of all human self-disclosure and self-enactment, we do not need to follow those who tell us that its author is Man and that its current repository is Society, who are tireless in inviting us to understand ourselves as debtors to Man and moral and technological dependants of Society, and who understand entry into it as a process of 'socialization'. Indeed, this is a categorially mistaken view of the matter. This so-called 'social inheritance' is an accumulation of human understandings and is composed of the moral and prudential achievements of numberless individuals expressed in terms of the rules and conditions which specify a multiplicity of particular practices. It is a collected, not a 'collective' achievement. It can be enjoyed only in being understood and understood only in virtue of having been learned, and it is explored and re-enacted in a reflective consciousness whenever any part of it is being used. None but an individual initiate can either use it or educate others in its use. It is not Man who relieves the ills of an invalid, nor is it some abstraction called 'medical science'; the healer is a specific practitioner who has learned his art, not from Society, but from particular teachers. It was not to Man that Newman said he 'almost owed his own soul', but to one whom he had encountered early in life. Meditating upon his moral and intellectual inheritance, Marcus Aurelius tells us precisely who were his teachers and what he learned from each. And it was Étienne de la Boétie, not Man or Society, whom Montaigne recalled as a witness of his conduct that he might live less carelessly. Man has no moral or intellectual stature, Society has no moral or intellectual worth. In short, the arts of agency are nowhere and never to be found save in the understandings of adepts; there is nothing whatever to correspond with the corrupt and corrupting expressions, 'collective understanding' and 'social learning'.

Moreover, the 'social' character of conduct *inter homines* is its character in respect of agents being associated in terms of some specific and understood conditions of association. No doubt the conduct of agents may be said to have a distantly 'social' quality merely because the satisfactions they seek in acting are always the wished-for responses of other agents: but this is insignificant. And this 'social' quality appears perhaps more distinctly on those intermittent occasions when agents, having expressly chosen to concur in seeking a common substantive satisfaction, thus become partners in a joint enterprise; although neither here nor anywhere else is there anything to correspond with the vile expression 'social choice'. But human conduct is continuously and decisively 'social' only in respect of agents being associated in terms of their understanding and enjoyment of specific practices. For, a practice is not only an art in terms of which an agent, having learned it, may disclose and enact himself; it is, at the same time, a procedure in which agents may be durably associated while pursuing their individual purposes - as is the case, for example, with agents who speak a common tongue. And the conditions which specify practices may be said to be the 'constitutions' of those numberless associations in which the conduct of agents declares its 'social' character. Every such association is a *societas* of agents joined, not in seeking a common substantive satisfaction, but in virtue of their understanding and acknowledgement of the conditions of the practice concerned and of the relationships it entails. Agents cannot be associated in respect of no conditions in particular; and there can be no unconditional association to correspond with the expression 'human society' as it is now commonly used. And, of course, there can be no social consciousness which is not the consciousness of a *socius*; that is, of a particular agent understanding himself to be associated with others in recognizing the conditions of some specific practice.

Thus, conduct *inter homines* may properly be said to be 'social' only in virtue of the manners in which 'free' agents are actually associated; that is, in respect of their being associated in a multiplicity of practices of various dimensions and complexities, degrees of independence, and differences of status. This multiplicity of association does not itself

compose a 'society', much less anything that may properly be called a 'community'; but a moral practice, as the *ars artium* of agency, is agents related to one another in terms of conditional proprieties which are expressly or tacitly recognized in the conditions of all other special prudential relationships and manners of being associated in conduct.

6. Having identified reflective consciousness as a postulate of conduct (and thus conduct as an exhibition of intelligence entailing understanding), it might be thought that I am concerned only with those transactions *inter homines* which are distinguished by a significant degree of self-conscious reasoning or calculation; that is, with those actions which are preceded by an express investigation of the situation to be responded to, of the possible alternative responses, of the likely consequences of each and of the relation of each to the conditions of the practices recognized to be concerned, and with carefully composed utterances designed to evoke well imagined responses. And it might be supposed that what I have said has, by inadvertence or neglect, very little to do with the unconsidered actions and utterances and the so-called 'irrational' conduct which constitute, perhaps, the larger part of human doing and speaking. But I must make clear that this is not the case, and that the suspicion that what I have said suffers from a so-called 'intellectualist' disposition is misplaced.

What I have called the postulates of conduct—reflective consciousness, understanding, deliberation, choice governed by the compunctions of practices, etc.—are not 'goings-on' which may or may not precede actions or utterances and which are either consciously engaged in or are absent; they are the conditions of conduct. And if human conduct is said to postulate reflective consciousness it does not follow that what is done or said must be done or said reflectively or self-consciously in order to qualify as conduct. To say, for example, that a self-conscious agent is the condition of imputing moral conduct is not to identify moral conduct with an agent acting in the consciousness of doing right or wrong. The point of this specification of conduct is not to distinguish notably reflected or calculated conduct from 'spontaneous', relatively unreflected, or habitual conduct, nor is it designed to exclude so-called 'irrational' conduct; it is designed to distinguish human conduct, wise or stupid, fanciful or clearly imagined, controlled or at the mercy of emotion, calculated or relatively unconsidered, from 'behaviour'; that is, from a genetic a psychological, or a so-called 'social' process.

The agent in conduct, then, may diagnose his situation with care, or he may resort to a familiar formula; but whatever he does, it is an understood (or misunderstood) situation. He may think discursively about what he shall do, or he may do the first thing that comes into his head; but whatever it is, it is an intelligent response. And where conduct is habitual or utterance is instant exclamation and when a practice is subscribed to 'without thinking', this facility of response has had to be learned. And since the understanding exercised by an agent in conduct is not itself a theoretical understanding of conduct (it is exhibited in the performance of actions not in the formulation of theorems), it may itself be recognized as a distinguishable postulate of conduct, and it falls to the theorist of conduct to consider its character. It is, of course, akin to the Aristotelian *phronesis*; but whereas the *aisthesis* of the *phronimos* was, primarily, his understanding of how to act rightly (his *sophronein*), I am concerned with the understanding implicit both in acting and in acting rightly. I may be brief because I have already considered this topic incidentally. If (as I think is indisputable) the understanding exercised by the agent in conduct is not an understanding of conduct in terms of its postulates and is, therefore, an understanding in terms of characteristics, it does not follow that it cannot recognize general propositions or principles of conduct. It means only that these principles are theorems which denote relations between characteristics and between identities recognized as compositions of characteristics and not the postulates of conduct. And indeed, self-disclosure in actions is difficult to imagine in the absence of what may be called moral and prudential lore; that is, general moral principles and general propositions about the likely meanings and outcomes of actions in terms of which situations may be specified as 'cases' and expectations entertained, although the greater the generality of these principles or maxims the less valuable they will be in conduct. Moreover, an agent (if he has the opportunity) may scrutinize his circumstances for himself and he may identify them and possible responses to them in terms of what he believes to be exact and reliable general theorems. In short, we may suppose there to be available to an agent a store of well-attested propositions purporting to be general principles of conduct, and by

no means worthless. Nevertheless, what is certain is that the understanding exercised by the agent in conduct cannot be an *ad hoc* mobilization of his knowledge of these theorems of moral and prudential lore enlisted to tell him what to do, because they are incapable of any such utterance. These theorems cannot themselves be performed, and acting cannot be ‘implementing’ or ‘applying’ them to contingent situations because they are unable to specify actions. What the agent needs to know (if it has anything to do with such theorems) is how to *illustrate* them in actions, and they do not themselves provide directions about how this may be done. His understanding is his reflected-upon experience of transactions *inter homines* continuously available to him in his ability to identify and to read his actual circumstances and to respond to them in actions which he knows how to perform because they are characteristic of himself. Perhaps, in notably novel circumstances or in a situation of unusual obscurity, when persistent doubt about what to want or what to do has lost an agent his way, he may decide to fix his position by taking his bearings upon a general principle of conduct or a theorem of prudential lore, but he cannot engage in this operation until he has chosen his principle and there is no principle to tell him how to do this; and since all such principles are equivocal, it will provide him neither with a reason for acting nor with a response to his situation.²⁵ Moral and prudential principles may indirectly illuminate the theatre of conduct, but they can neither direct nor ‘justify’ an adventure of doing.

Further, all conduct is performance related to practices (and in particular to a moral practice) which have to be learned. But it is only in fantasy that a practice appears as a composition of rules claiming obedience which to learn is to acquire a familiarity with injunctive propositions and to understand is to know one’s way about a rule-book. For an agent in conduct a practice is an instrument to be played upon, and to do this he must have the understanding of a performer. It is a language, at once responsive to and critical of his wants and aspirations, in which he discloses and enacts himself and upon which his performances may leave a deep, but never indelible, impression. And the understanding this entails is not that of knowing the rules but of knowing how to speak it; that is, knowing how to use its resources in order to respond to a situation in an action or an utterance which, in using this language, acknowledges its authority or utility.

III

1.

Hitherto, I have been concerned, in the main, with the identity ‘human conduct’ and with the engagement of theorizing it; that is, with understanding an ideal character in terms of its postulates. It remains now to consider the engagement to understand a substantive performance. And by this I do not mean the limited understanding of an action or an utterance required in order to respond to it, about which I have said something already. Nor do I mean that exiguous understanding in which a performance may be recognized to have been likely or may be forecast as being likely. I mean the engagement to theorize an already identified action or utterance in terms of its postulates. What sort of investigation is it in which we may come to understand a ‘going-on’ recognized as a human performance?²⁶

It may be thought odd that, having come to know our way about the identity ‘human conduct’ in terms of its postulates, we are not already (and on that account) equipped to understand a substantive performance. If, for example, a mechanical identity is abstracted from all that may be going on, we need no more than the theorems of the science of mechanics in order to understand it; these theorems are the conditions of this identity and they suffice to make it conditionally intelligible. Why then, having command over the theorems which compose the ideal character ‘human conduct’, should we lack the equipment required to understand a ‘going-on’ identified, in the terms of this ideal character, as a performance? But, as the reader will be already aware, there is no puzzle here.

A mechanical identity is intelligible in terms of the theorems of a science of mechanics because they purport to display the conditions which allow it to be understood as an *example* of the operation of ‘laws’ specifying a process (whether these ‘laws’ are probable, statistical, or otherwise determinate does not matter); or, which is the same thing, because the identity is understood *not* to be itself an exhibition of intelligence. The science both identifies and elucidates the ‘going-on’. But a human performance is an

exhibition of intelligence and consequently the theorems which compose the ideal character 'human conduct' identify but cannot elucidate what is going on. They provide the terms of the questions to be asked about a performance in order to understand it, but they cannot provide the answers. The action or utterance in which an agent responds to his situation (*A*'s speech in a court of law, or *B*'s resolve to emigrate to Australia) is an *illustration* (not an example) of 'human conduct', and understanding it calls for an investigation of the conditions of this particular performance.

2.

A performance is an agent disclosing and enacting himself in responding to his understood situation by choosing what he shall do or say. There is, as we know, more to it than this, but thus far we may assume that to understand a substantive performance is to understand a substantive performer; and this is where I shall begin.

Since he falls within the terms of the identity 'agent', we know the performer to be a reflective consciousness; he is capable of error and misunderstanding because he is compact of understandings. He is what he understands himself to be and the world is what he understands it to be. Consequently, he is not what is called a 'genetic' identity which may be diseased but is incapable of error. The conditions in terms of which a performance may become intelligible are not those investigated in a science of human biology: an inspection of the chromosomes of a performer is categorially irrelevant to the understanding of his actions. Further, an agent is not a 'psychological' identity: he is not to be understood in terms of a science of psychology recognized as an inquiry into processes of feeling and thinking.

An agent, then, is a 'character' composed of substantive beliefs, affections, understandings, wants, etc.; that is, exhibitions of intelligence. And the contention we must consider first is that he and his performances are to be understood by relating them to an ideal character, called 'human nature', recognized as an organization of emotional and intellectual dispositions, propensities, inclinations, aptitudes, traits, tendencies, 'humors', demeanours, proclivities, etc.: the contention that to understand an agent and his action is to theorize them in these terms.

Sustained reflection upon 'human nature' understood in this manner has generated a vocabulary of ideas in which to describe human conduct and theorems in terms of which to interpret it. The components of this ideal character have been distinguished with tireless care and their interrelations have been investigated as systematically as may be. Within it, special characters have been discerned, such as 'men', 'women', and 'the young', purporting to be particular organizations of dispositions; and it has been differentiated in terms of ideal characters each representing a single dominant demeanour: the Miser, the 'Stoic', the Magnanimous, the Treacherous, the Secretive, the Ambitious Man. The virtue of this understanding of 'human nature' is to have recognized it, not as a process, but as an organization of dispositional capacities, the outcome of learning and education in which the supposed organic needs, appetites, tensions, etc. of the species are wholly transformed and superseded; that is, to have understood it as a practice to be subscribed to. And on any reading of it, this is one of the great achievements of human self-understanding; we call upon it in all our attempts to interpret actions and utterances.

It is, of course, the ease that 'human nature' has, alternatively, been understood as a system or process. Thus, for example, Spinoza writes: 'If a man has begun to hate an object of his love, so that love is altogether destroyed, he will, causes being equal, regard it with more hatred than if he had never loved it, and the degree of his hatred will be proportional to the strength of his former love.' Hume observes: 'Suppose that an object concerning which we are doubtful, produces either desire or aversion; it is evident that according as the mind turns itself to one side or to another, it must feel a momentary impression of joy or sorrow. Bentham formulated what purported to be 'axioms' of human behaviour expressing functional connections between sentiments. And others have held that performances are intelligible only in terms of a 'science of the tendencies of human actions. The 'humors', the dispositions, the traits which constitute 'human nature', and even the dominant propensities which distinguish special human 'types', have even been recognized as the 'causes' of actions. The dream of a science of 'human nature', a dynamics of human character, has long beckoned those concerned with the theoretical understanding of agents, their actions, and utterances.

But if we put this arithmetic of behaviour on one side (together with the extensions of it which constitute the so-called science of ethology and the extraordinary excursions it has provoked into a theory of good conduct), the reflections of those concerned, not with suppositious 'causes' of performances but with 'human nature' understood as a practice composed of dispositions subscribed to in acting, may be recognized as belonging to a serious engagement to theorize substantive performances. And the question to be considered is: What is the worth of this ideal character, 'human nature', as an instrument for understanding substantive actions?

Understood in terms of this ideal character, an agent is recognized as himself a 'character' (or, to use an expression of Shaftesbury's, a 'self-system') composed of dispositions more or less exactly distinguished; that is, as a particular version of 'human nature' thus understood. This 'human nature' is a practice, and employed as an instrument of understanding it focuses our attention upon an agent in respect of being a practitioner; that is, in respect of being a subscriber to 'human nature'. He is an identity composed of aptitudes. But, although it may be said that an agent's actions and utterances are necessarily conditional upon his dispositional capacities, understanding him in these terms does not carry us far in the direction of a theoretical understanding of any of his substantive performances. Indeed, if nothing more or other than this is recognized, and even if the dispositional properties which compose the ideal character 'human nature' were much more closely specifiable than they are,²⁷ an action as a chosen response to an understood contingent situation related to an imagined and wished-for outcome and performed in consideration of understood compunctions has altogether escaped attention.

An agent's dispositional capacities, his skill, and the range and quality of the aptitudes which he brings to self-disclosure in action cannot themselves account for his choice to do *this* rather than *that*; and an utterance cannot be understood when it is considered only in terms of its subscription to the language in which it is spoken. Nor can the recognition of the moral disposition of an agent supply an understanding of what he has said and done. There is no dependent relation between a performance as an agent meaning to achieve an imagined and wished-for satisfaction and even the sentiments in which it is performed, much less the disposition exhibited in the sentiments. It is only the meanness of an action which may become intelligible when an agent is recognized to have a mean disposition; and no action is merely mean. No doubt *la donna è mobile*: but it is not the substantive actions and utterance of a woman, it is only their fickleness which is illumined by this dispositional theorem. What distinguishes *this* action from the million others which may be performed ficklely remains unrecognized. To understand an action or an utterance as an illustration of the interplay of 'love' and 'hate' is hardly to be counted as an understanding of what is said or done. In short, 'human nature', even when it is recognized as an ideal character composed of dispositional capacities, is an inadequate instrument for understanding the substantive performances of agents.

The second purported understanding of an agent and his actions which calls for consideration is that in which the instrument of understanding is an ideal character specified as a 'social' identity. And the contention to be considered is that the terms in which substantive actions are to be made intelligible are theorems concerning the characters of agents in respect of their 'social being' or 'social circumstances'.

The components of this ideal 'social' character are not merely attitudes, dispositions, or capacities, but are substantive beliefs, preferences, interests, wants, etc.; what distinguishes it as an instrument of understanding is that these are understood to be expressions of 'social circumstances'. Within this somewhat loose theoretical identity, limited ideal characters of this kind are to be discerned, each representing a dominant 'social circumstance' held to be significant in understanding substantive actions: middle-class, unemployed, belongs to a power elite, deprived, immigrant, orphaned, had a grammar-school education, inhabitant of a high-rent low-income area, elderly, urban slum-dweller, peasant, 'underprivileged', etc. Thus, an agent is recognized to be what he is in respect of his 'social being' and his substantive actions and utterances are to be made intelligible as choices to do or to say *this* rather than *that* in relation to conditions specified as 'social circumstances'.

As an apparatus for the theoretical understanding of substantive actions this ideal character is a somewhat ramshackle construction. Appropriately enough, it is less often used as an instrument of understanding than as a handy formula in which to recommend, to excuse, or to denigrate what is said and done. And the scrappy collection of so-called

'variables' with which this formula is commonly set up for use makes the operation look like a parody without an original. But this enterprise may be recognized as a plausible attempt to understand the substantive actions of agents when two conditions are satisfied. First, it must be exclusively concerned with the understanding of *conduct*; that is, it must avoid the absurdity of pretending that these 'social circumstances' are also the conditions in terms of which the engagement and the conclusions of the theorist of conduct are to be understood. 'Social being' must be recognized as *one* of the engagements of reflective consciousness and not as itself 'the determinant of reflective consciousness'. And secondly, it must recognize 'social being' as a practice; that is, as an intelligent engagement concerned with responding to understood situations. Where these two conditions are satisfied this proposal for the theoretical understanding of performances is distinguished from the project of constructing a 'science of society' for this purpose, which it would be otiose to mention here were it not that the two are often confused.

This 'science of society' is the counterpart of the 'science of human nature'. In it a 'society' is understood as a process, or structure, or an ecology; that is, as an unintelligent 'going-on', like a genetic process, a chemical structure, or a mechanical system. The components of this process are not agents performing actions; they are birth-rates, age groups, income brackets, intelligence quotients, life-styles, evolving 'states of societies', environmental pressures, average mental ages, distributions in space and time, numbers of 'graduates', patterns of child-bearing or of expenditure, systems of education, statistics concerning disease, poverty, employment, etc. And the enterprise is to make these identities more intelligible in terms of theorems displaying their functional interdependencies or causal relationships or of their cyclical or secular change. It is not an impossible undertaking. But it has little to do with human conduct and nothing at all to do with the performances of assignable agents. Whatever an environmental pressure, a behaviour-style, or the distribution of gas-cookers may be said to be correlated with or to cause (a rise in the suicide rate? a fall in the use of detergents?) these are not terms in which the choice of an agent to do or to say *this* rather than that in response to a contingent situation and in an adventure to procure an imagined and wished-for satisfaction may be understood. It is only in a categorial confusion that this enterprise could be made to appear to yield an understanding of the substantive actions and utterances of an agent. And that this confusion is now commonplace is a regrettable disservice to a scientific undertaking in any case not notable for its integrity and all too eager to be seduced.

But even when this science of 'social processes' is put on one side, and the 'social being' of an agent is properly understood as his self-recognition in respect of being related to others in terms of 'social circumstances' recognized as a practice and not as a process, the contention that these are the terms in which his substantive performances are to be theorized remains indistinct. There is no such general relationship of agents corresponding to the word 'social'; 'social being', unqualified, does not stand for any significant self-recognition and the expression 'social circumstances' does not denote any identifiable conditions of association to which an agent's performances might be related in order to be understood. 'Social being' is multiple and 'social circumstances' are multifarious. In terms of which of an agent's many, mixed, equivocal, changing, often divergent, and sometimes conflicting understandings of himself in relation to others, or to what contingent combination of such self-recognitions, or to what self-recognition of allegedly superior circumstantial importance, is his choice to perform *this* and not another action to be theorized?

The contention that the substantive performance of an agent is to be theorized in terms of his 'social being' makes sense, then, only when 'social being' is understood as his self-recognition in being related to others in some particular respect and when 'social circumstances' is understood as relationship in terms of some specified conditions. But every such relationship is either association in the acknowledgement of the conditions of what I have called a 'practice' or it is association in the pursuit of a chosen common purpose or in the promotion of a chosen common interest. And although all conduct entails participation in a practice or practices and some is concerned with a choice to be associated in pursuit of a common interest, no action or utterance is what it is in terms of its subscription to a practice or of its aim to achieve a common purpose, and no agent in any of his actions is merely a practitioner or a partner in a common enterprise. Thus, to understand the action or utterance of an agent in these terms falls short of a theoretical

understanding, not because it is a conditional understanding (all understandings are conditional) but because the conditions it invokes are such as to exclude even the recognition of a substantive performance.

Since the common fault I have found with these two proposals²⁸ for the theoretical understanding of performances is that they offer no more than actions and utterances made intelligible in relation to practices, it is proper to pause briefly and to reconsider this offer in more general terms. That this is a recognizable and an important way of understanding human actions goes without saying. And it is enlightening enough for it to be no surprise that so much of the concern with the theoretical understanding of actions and utterances should have had this as its focus of attention. It is the central concern in anthropological and sociological inquiry, an understanding of works of literature, and of art is often sought in these terms, and it was the promise of such achievements of understanding which distinguished *Geistesgeschichte* and set it upon its adventurous path.

In all such engagements, what is sought, in the first place, is an identifiable practice: a morality, a religion, an art, a skill, a genre, a style, a *coutume*, a 'productive' practice, an institution, a cult, a ceremony, a ritual, a 'class', a regime, a profession, an 'economy', a *ménage*, or even a 'society' or a 'civilization', recognized as a procedure (not a process) and understood as an organization of recognitions, considerations, dispositions, compunctions, rules, etc.²⁹ This identity (often spoken of as a 'structure') is a practice abstracted from all that may be going on, sketched, delineated, fitted together, explored, and finally understood as an articulated composition of characteristics. And what emerges from this engagement is, so to say, a map; identified features placed in relation to one another.³⁰

But turned back upon the actions and utterances of assignable agents, this map is not only a practice identified; it offers itself as an instrument of understanding. And performances may be theorized by being read in respect of their places upon this map or by being assigned a place upon it. What is revealed in such an understanding is the character of an action in respect of the reflection of a practice it throws back; that is, in terms of its 'conventionality'. Thus, a performance is first identified and then theorized in relation to a practice understood as a more or less steady (or an evolving) composition of characteristics.

That this engagement makes a considerable call upon the powers of a theorist cannot be doubted. Such an identification, even in its simpler forms (e.g. understanding an utterance as a 'slander', or recognizing a building in terms of its architectural 'style'), is concerned with fine gradations of conformity and disconformity; and only a brash theorist would think he could distinguish a performance in respect of its place upon the dispositional map of 'human nature' or 'Christian conduct' by rule of thumb. And its yield of understanding, when judiciously undertaken, is not negligible. But its limits are narrow.

Practices are not stable compositions of easily recognized characteristics which they are here assumed to be. Even the few which have been expressly designed are not merely current 'patterns of conduct' of acknowledged utility or authority; they are footprints left behind by agents responding to their emergent situations, footprints which are only somewhat less evanescent than the transactions in which they emerged. And further, what distinguishes them from processes is their character as compositions of beliefs and sentiments which, in turn, are not merely the recognizable conditions in terms of which a practice may become intelligible, but (like performances) are themselves historic occurrences whose intelligibility is contextual. But, however a practice is understood (as a current, authoritative or useful procedure or as an emanation of performances), no substantive action or utterance is to be understood merely in terms of theorems which specify its subscription or non-subscription to it.³¹ We must seek elsewhere for the kind of inquiry in which substantive performances may be theorized.

3.

Understood in terms of the ideal character 'human conduct', a substantive performance is identified as an intelligent 'going-on' composed of related circumstantial occurrences: an assignable agent engaged in self-disclosure and self-enactment, the understood emergent situation in which he recognizes himself to be, the beliefs, sentiments, understandings, and imaginings in terms of which he deliberates and chooses his response to it, the

conditions he acknowledges in making this choice, the action he performs, and the reply it receives. To theorize it is to accept it in its character as a manifold of related occurrences, to discern the identity it constitutes and thus to understand it without explaining it away. The relationship concerned is that of contingency; the identity it constitutes is an *eventum*.

To theorize contingency is a large and difficult enterprise and I shall limit myself to an attempt to identify it in terms of its characteristics. Like the expressions 'functional', 'probable', 'causal', etc., 'contingent' denotes a kind of relationship which specifies the character of what is related. Two claims are made on its behalf. First, it is said to be a relationship of dependence or interdependence such that the recognition of it enhances the intelligibility of the 'goings-on' concerned that is to say, it purports to be a significant relationship and neither a merely factual juxtaposition of 'goings-on' in terms of 'when' or 'where' nor a mere correlation of 'goings-on' in terms of likenesses or arbitrarily chosen common characteristics. And in default of this quality it would surely be a worthless instrument of understanding. But secondly, contingency purports to be distinguished from all other kinds of significant relationship: from the sort of interdependence which the components of a teleological, an evolutionary, a mechanical, an organic, or other such process or system enjoy in virtue of the regularities which constitute the process or the structure which constitutes the system; from a relation of necessity; from a relation of cause and consequence; from functional dependence; from a relation of implication or entailment (like, 'ought' implies 'can', or having swum the English Channel entails knowing how to swim); and it is distinguished also from analogical relationship. And here, again, without this distinction it is surely an undistinguishable instrument of understanding. But the difficulty of reconciling these two claims has made it appear that contingent relationship should either be dismissed as a delusion or even a self-contradiction, or place found for it in the interstices of causal or functional process or system.

Thus, when contingency is said to be fortuitous or merely accidental relationship, it is being distinguished from systematic relationship but at the cost of its rationality: it is being denied the character of a significant relationship. The somewhat vague ideas of chance and accident may be recognized to correspond to something in common experience (where they are partnered by such notions as 'mishap' and 'ill fortune') and they may be useful in diagnosing situations in order to respond to them, but these expressions may belong to a vocabulary of theoretical understanding only when *fortuna* is identified as itself a process. And when it is identified as a somewhat uneven and loosely articulated process, leaving room for manoeuvre and allowing, for example, the sort of relationship a tethered goat has to its stake, 'contingency' may seem an appropriate expression for the relations of its components. But a somewhat loosely articulated process or system, and particularly one in which the 'play' is understood in terms of statistical probabilities, is not on that account less of a process or system, and it has no room for relationships other than those of a process or system.

Further, place has been sought for contingency by recognizing it as the relation between that which, in the characters of its components, a system or process itself necessarily ignores, namely their particularity or (as it is sometimes said) their uniqueness. Contingency, it is said, denotes the relations of particulars as such. But this is only a somewhat muddled way of disposing of contingent relations altogether. For, there can be no relationship save between identities, and all identities are unities of particularity and genericity and are related, if at all, in terms of their content or characters.

Again, contingency has been recognized as the relation of abnormal to normal in a system or process: the behaviour of comets in a system of solar mechanics or disease and decay in a biological organism. But there is nothing distinctive in such a relationship: pathology is not concerned with supposititious identities and relations which fall outside or which call for a modification of the physiological functional dependencies in terms of which the behaviour of organisms is understood.

And lastly, it has been said (after Aristotle) that where two or more independent teleological or other processes are related to one another the relationship is unlike that which constitutes the processes themselves and may be recognized to be contingent. Or, more narrowly, contingency has been identified as the relationship of 'goings-on' which, belonging to independent teleological or other processes, occur at the point where such independent processes intersect. But there is nothing whatever in such a crossing-point

which cannot be understood in terms of the processes concerned and thus calls for another kind of relationship in order to make it intelligible. If this situation demands recognition, it suggests that there had been some misunderstanding in thinking that the processes concerned were indeed independent of one another rather than the need to invoke a special, contingent, relationship in order to understand it.

Where, then, there is understood to be process or its equivalent there is no room for a relationship between 'goings-on' other than that of the functional or causal dependencies of the components of a process: the project of finding a place for contingent relations in the interstices of process or system is otiose. But where process or its equivalent is understood to be absent, and where the 'going-on' is identified as an exhibition of intelligence and therefore as an individual occurrence which is in itself what it is for itself, there is not only room for the kind of relationship which corresponds to the claims of contingency, but such a relationship is the condition of the intelligibility of such 'goings-on'. An occurrence which presents itself as a component of a process or system denies its own character, and one which presents itself in isolation is merely a recognizable waiting to be understood.

Contingency, then, is a relationship between 'goings-on' identified as individual occurrences exhibiting intelligence (human actions and utterances) in which they are understood in the only way in which their formal character as such individual occurrences allows them to be understood, namely, in terms of their dependent connections with other such occurrences.

The most exiguous form of such a relationship may be called 'incidental'. Here, a falling together of such occurrences is understood to intimate a dependent relationship and recognition of it thus to enhance the intelligibility of the occurrences, not because there is any assigned reason why they should have fallen together, nor because there is any noticeable 'fit', but merely because having fallen together they do not repulse one another. They are recognized to hold together rather than identified as belonging together. And this holding together (however tenuous it may be) is recognized in terms of their substantive characters (or some feature of them) and not on account of any external containing or conjoining circumstance.

A contingent relationship in the full sense, however, is a sequential relationship of intelligent individual occurrences where what comes after is recognized to be conditional upon what went before, not merely because before and after cannot here be reversed, nor (of course) because what went before is recognized as a causal condition or because they are recognized to be functionally related, but because they 'touch' and in touching identify themselves as belonging together and as composing an intelligible continuity of conditionally dependent occurrences.

But what, here, is meant by 'touch'? Formally, it means the absence of interval and therefore the absence of a mediator between occurrences which is not itself an occurrence, e.g. a 'law' or a 'function'. The relationship is direct and is in terms of the substantive characters of the occurrences alleged to be related. And it means, also, that the relationship in terms of which intelligibility is being sought is that of each occurrence to the one before and, thus, that every antecedent is itself a subsequent and every sequel is an antecedent. In contingent relationship there is no teleology; but neither is there a 'first' or original occurrence in terms of which all subsequent occurrences may be understood. There is only an unbroken continuity of occurrences, each a unity of particularity and genericity.

Substantially, however, this relationship of 'touching' itself specifies the identities related. In it, what went before, in respect of its going before, is understood (so to say) as a prognosis, an adventure, a bid, an overture, an invitation, or a solicitation; that is, as an action which calls for a response, which perhaps even knows how it would be responded to but, since there are many possible alternative responses, is necessarily ignorant of the exact response it will receive. And what came after, in respect of its coming after, is identified as an acknowledgement, a response, a complement to what went before. Thus, a sequence of contingently related occurrences is not a process in which there is room to manoeuvre; it is wholly composed of manoeuvrings in touch with one another. The continuity is not merely the absence of interval; it is the congruity of what came after with what went before. And the intelligibility lies in the recognition of what came after as acknowledging, taking up, and in some manner responding to the antecedent, and of what went before as in some respect conducive of what came after. In brief, understanding in

terms of contingent relations is contextual: what has to be understood and the terms in which it is understood are not two different kinds of identities (like a 'law' and examples of its operation), they are individual occurrences made to elucidate one another in an investigation of their evidential relationships.

To understand a substantive performance in which an agent discloses and enacts himself is to put it into a story in which it is recognized to be an occurrence contingently related to other occurrences. Such a story does not open with the unconditional, 'In the beginning...' but with a conditional, 'Once upon a time....' And it has no unconditional conclusion; its end is the beginning of another story. This story has no over-all meaning; it is occurrences understood in terms of the meanings they acquire from their evidential contingent relationships. And the teller of such a story has no message for those who listen other than the intelligibility with which he purports to have endowed the occurrences concerned by putting them into a story. It is, of course, true that a story may be used to point a moral, to serve as an authority for future conduct, to teach its hearers how to perform actions likely to have wished-for outcomes, to assure them of a golden destiny, or to reconcile them to an unhappy fate; and it has been well said that all sorrows may be redeemed by putting them into a story. But to do this is to give up the story-teller's concern with the topical and the transitory and to endow occurrences with a potency they cannot have without surrendering their characters as occurrences. It is not to tell a story but to construct a myth.

A substantive action or utterance identified in terms of the ideal character 'human conduct' is, then, an individual occurrence and the inquiry in which it may be theorized is concerned to understand it in terms of its conditions. These conditions are other such occurrences to which it is connected in a contingent relationship. What has to be investigated is the evidential detail of a continuity of contingently related occurrences in which *this* performance is the current focus of the theorist's attention. And the theorem thrown up in this investigation is a narrative in which the performance is understood neither as a fortuitous happening, nor as a necessary consequence, but as an intelligible event.

Like all other adventures in theorizing, this engagement to understand a substantive performance in terms of its contingent conditions is an engagement to abate mystery rather than to achieve a suppositious definitive understanding. And here, as elsewhere, every achievement is a theorem which not only expresses a relationship (or web of relationships) between occurrences, but which, in doing so, specifies more exactly recognized but not yet understood occurrences by understanding them in terms of their conditions. Theorizing, here, is concerned to expose the contingently related beliefs, sentiments, understandings, and compunctions of an agent, and to discern the congruity of his action with his diagnosis of his situation. It is concerned with the practices subscribed to, with the relation of the action performed to the responses it received, and with the reverberations set up in the transaction. It may be hindered, or even frustrated, by the absence of evidence; the scent may be lost by inadvertence; it may founder in fantasy. But it is an engagement of understanding. The theorist is not concerned to re-enact in his own imagination the performance of an agent or to rehearse it in the terms in which it was performed. His engagement is to enlist whatever evidence he can find in order to take hold of a performance and to endow it with a conditional intelligibility of which he is the author. 'What he must bring to this understanding is a deep respect for the individual action, patience in exploring its connections, an exact appreciation of its provenance and circumstances, an eye for shades of difference between plausible likenesses, an ear for echoes and the imagination, not to conjecture what was likely, but to devise, recognize, entertain, and criticize a variety of contingent relationships, each sustained by a reading of the evidence. And it is an engagement of theoretical understanding: the theorist here, is not concerned to understand the performance merely in order to respond to it. He is not one of the parties in the transaction he is theorizing.

'The theoretical understanding of a substantive action or utterance is, then, in principle, a 'historical' understanding. Theorizing a performance is attending to an occurrence and understanding it as an agent (himself a contingent continuity of beliefs) embarked upon an adventure of self-disclosure and self-enactment in relation to and in terms of his understood contingent circumstances. Its concern is with the actions and utterances of agents in respect of the beliefs and sentiments in which they were performed and the

imagined and wished-for satisfactions they sought, with the transactions these actions and utterances circumstantially converged to compose and with the reverberations they contingently set going. Such a convergence of occurrences is an *eventum*; not a merely recorded occurrence, not itself an assignable action or an assignable response to an action, but the contingent outcome of the choices and encounters of assignable agents and understood as this outcome.

¹ My sketch owes much to a brief vocabulary in which the ancient Greek language delineated the engagement of understanding. *Thea*: a spectacle, the observation of a 'going-on'. *Theorein*: to distinguish, attend to, and perhaps to identify a 'going-on'. *Theoros*: a spectator concerned to follow and to understand a 'going-on' a theorist, *Theoria*: the activity of contemplating, of inquiry and of seeking to understand: theorizing. And *theorema*: what emerges from this activity, an understanding of a 'going-on'; a theorem.

This vocabulary has the virtue of distinguishing 'theorizing' from 'theorem', a distinction obscured in its English counterpart where the word 'theory' is used indifferently for the enterprise and its outcome. And it centres our attention upon the engagement, thus suggesting that we may more profitably ask ourselves, what is theorizing? than, what is a theorem? What is the relation between theorizing and doing? than, what is the relation between theory and practice?

Further, my use of 'theorizing' as a transitive verb is not an inadvertence; it is the recognition of the enterprise as one of learning to understand; that is, as a transitive engagement. 'The undertaking in which a 'theory of genetic inheritance emerges is a further learning to understand what has already the intelligibility of distinctness (e.g. the facial resemblances of parents and children). 'The 'theory' is not 'another thing'; it is this intelligibility raised to a level which I shall later try to specify.

² The notion that the categorial gap is narrowed or even bridged when relationships between identities are understood in terms of probabilities is, of course, an illusion. A relationship may be understood as a probability only when the identities concerned are already recognized as the components of what I have called a 'process'. And a probability is no more 'uncertain' than the most determinate causal relationship.

³ When a geneticist tells us that 'all social behaviour and historical events are the inescapable consequences of the genetic individuality of the persons concerned' we have no difficulty in recognizing this theorem as a brilliant illumination of the writings of Aristotle, the fall of Constantinople, the deliberations of the House of Commons on Home Rule for Ireland and the death of Barbarossa; but this brilliance is, perhaps, somewhat dimmed when it becomes clear that he can have nothing more revealing to say about his science of genetics than that it also is *all* done by genes, and that this theorem is itself his genes speaking.

⁴ 'Scientific' understanding is not concerned with identities as compositions of characteristics, and the correlation or comparison of identities in these terms is merely an apology for the absence of scientific inquiry. A feature or a symptom is never a cause or a postulate.

⁵ This point is made (although with some philosophical *naïveté*) in a sentence of Dirac's: 'Nature's fundamental laws do not govern the world as it appears in our mental picture in any very direct way, but instead they control a substratum of which we cannot form a mental picture without introducing irrelevancies.'

⁶ This should be distinguished from the idea of an 'applied science'—the lingering superstition that the theorems of a science are not only the specifications of an ideal character and the postulates in terms of which the identity (e.g. a mechanical identity) they specify may be understood, but that they are also the postulates (or even the 'determinants') of any 'going-on' (e.g. Westminster Abbey) from which an identity corresponding to this ideal character may be abstracted. To say that the postulates of 'skating' are the theorems of dynamics is either a false or a tautologous proposition.

Further, it excludes the muddled notion that a complex ambiguous identity is composed of a multiplicity of simple unambiguous identities and is itself to be made intelligible in terms of the theorems of what is called (after Mill) 'an intermixture of sciences': 'a man sitting in front of his fire after his day's work and reading a book' recognized as an identity to be understood in terms of the theorems of physics, optics, biology, genetics, psychology, ethics, economics, sociology, etc., etc. And, of course, an understanding of an identity in terms of its postulates is not to be confused with the prediction of the occurrence or the recurrence of a 'going-on' from which this identity may be abstracted.

⁷ I have used the expression *conduct inter homines* because the alternative, 'man in society', can mean only human beings associated in respect of some understood specifiable formal relationship (a 'practice') and what I am concerned with here is human beings related to one another in terms of substantive actions and utterances and responses to them.

⁸ The proposition that 'biological and psychological knowledge are themselves biologically and psychologically determined', if it means (as it appears to mean) that theorems in the sciences of biology and psychology are themselves to be understood as the products of biological and psychological processes, is categorially absurd.

⁹ Of course, description in terms of means and ends is not senseless, but its conditionality (means may become ends and ends means) is such as to make it theoretically worthless.

¹⁰ *P* is also 'in debt'; but since he does not find this unacceptable, he is not similarly situated. He receives no such invitation to act and in respect of his indebtedness he does not acquire the character of an agent.

¹¹ The situation to be responded to by the choice of an action is, of course, that to which the agent is presently attending. Usually, as in the case of *Z*, it is only a fraction of what may be called his notional total situation: *Z* is much else besides being a debtor and there may be other unacceptabilities in his total situation besides that of being a debtor. Thus, situation and agent are always inseparable but not always indistinguishable, and the first choice an agent may have to make (usually without much deliberation) is concerned with which of the many unacceptabilities he shall attend to now. Further, situations call for responses commensurate with their fractional characters. No man (unless he were a lunatic), who understood his situation as 'I shall be late for my appointment', will choose a response out of proportion to its triviality: he may break into a run, look round for a swift conveyance or for a telephone, but he will not seriously consider suicide or resigning his office of Lord Chancellor.

Great deeds and heroic actions, on the other hand, are great and heroic in being responses to situations of such notable magnitude that they are indistinguishable from the agent concerned; that is, situations whose unacceptability is understood to be of overwhelming proportions by the rare persons capable of being moved by such understanding or by more ordinary persons understanding themselves to be in extraordinary situations: Othello (to whom honour was all) shamed; Cleopatra totally bereft; the saint to whom everything topical, transitory, or fractional is wholly insignificant; and the hero equal to a situation which can be responded to only in a total engagement.

¹² Probability, in the strict sense of distributional uncertainty of a factor in a finite series of commensurables, plays no part in the deliberation of actions. Likelihood may be the guide to life, but not probability.

¹³ The science of economics is concerned with human servitude to the scarce resources of the world (which include time) and with more or less desirable conditions of things in respect of the ease (cost) of their attainment. Consequently, activity, the expenditure of energy, work, time spent, etc. are reckoned as a cost; it is what Adam Smith called 'laying down a portion of a man's ease, liberty and happiness'. And economists have devoted themselves to an even more exact and refined understanding and calculation of this cost. But in conduct more generally considered this need not be the case. The expenditure of energy entailed in a performance may itself be a satisfaction and not a cost to be set off against the yield of the performance.

¹⁴ I must postpone the consideration of persuasive speech where an action or a response is recommended in terms of its being a subscription to a rule.

¹⁵ There would seem to be three kinds of argumentative discourse: demonstrative; argument where the conclusion cannot be demonstrated but where it is inseparable from the reasons adduced and must be accepted or rejected in these terms; and persuasive argument.

¹⁶ These words here, of course, have no 'moral' meaning. They stand for a suppositious universal 'end' sought in all conduct whatsoever.

¹⁷ There are two circumstances (to be noticed now and considered later), in which this relationship of reciprocity is, or appears to be, qualified. The first is when an agent secures (or attempts to secure) the wished-for outcome of his action by force. This reduces conduct to the condition of 'fabrication' in respect of an artefact: the agent acknowledges his action to be an action and therefore to need to be requited if a satisfaction is to be achieved, but exacts this return in something other than a response of an agent. The second is when agents are joined, not in the mutuality of seeking different but interdependent satisfactions, but in the pursuit of a common satisfaction.

¹⁸ I hope to avoid the notorious ambiguity of the word 'practical' by using it only to stand for participation in or subscription to a 'practice'. Thus, there are two reasons why I shall not (when I come to consider it) speak of the understanding implicit in conduct as 'practical understanding': first, because to do so might falsely suggest that the only understanding implicit in conduct is knowing how to participate in practices; and secondly, because knowing how to participate in a 'practice' (and being, in this proper sense, 'practical') is not exclusive to conduct. It is present also, for example, in both 'historical' and in 'scientific' inquiry, both of which are engagements in theoretical understanding released from the considerations of conduct.

¹⁹ The appearance procedures and rules may have of excluding (forbidding), or more rarely of enjoining, substantive choices and actions is illusive. Practices identify actions adverbially; they exclude (forbid) or enjoin them in terms of prescribed conditions. A criminal law, which may be thought to come nearest to forbidding actions, does not forbid killing or lighting a fire, it forbids killing 'murderously' or lighting a fire 'arsonically'; and these adverbs are narrowly specified in terms of the evidence required to substantiate or to rebut the considerations alleged.

²⁰ Self-understanding is, normally, a continuous engagement of self-education; notable disjunctions (so-called 'identity crises') denote failure. But its relation to a moral practice may be most clearly discerned in unusual circumstances. For example, Christians of the first generation came to understand themselves in terms of their expectation of a dramatic transformation of the world and for some of them this was both a novel and a traditional self-understanding. They were persons awaiting an imminent event, huge in magnitude and importance, and their business in the world was to adapt their current conduct to it. And to understand themselves to be associated in terms of Faith, Hope and Charity (rather than in terms of respect for persons, fairness, truth-telling or unselfishness) seemed to them the appropriate response to their new-found self recognition. These virtues were not instrumental, devotion to them would not either hasten or delay the event. Nor did they extinguish the more commonplace moral and even civil considerations; these merely became considerations of inferior importance. But this so-called *Interimsethik*, with its emphasis upon self-enactment rather than self-disclosure, represented their reading of themselves and of the human condition.

²¹ These disparate considerations may be said to be concerned respectively with justice and built on the one hand and honour and shame on the other. But, although a practice of moral conduct may give more weight to the one and less to the other, it must recognize both; an exclusively 'justice' morality or an exclusively 'honour' morality is impossible. This is recognized in the Protogorean myth where Zeus (indistinguishably the fountain of both justice and honour), sends Hermes to bestow upon mankind both *Dike* and *Aidos*. Plato: *Protagoras*, 332c.

²² This consideration has an important place in both the Stoic and the Epicurean understanding of conduct and it may be expressed in various ways, some more technical than others. The expression I have used comes from Montaigne: 'Nous sommes nés pour agir. Je veux qu'on agisse et qu'on alonge les offices de la vie tant qu'on peut; et que la mort me treuve plantant mes chous, mais nonchalant d'elle, et encore plus de mon jardin imparfait.' Montaigne: *Essais*, I.XX. 'Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir'.

²³ This self-enactment may go on without the counterpart of self-disclosure in action or utterance, e.g. in the manner in which we allow ourselves to think of the actions and characters of others.

²⁴ What I refer to here is, of course, but one idiom of religious faith, which has its counterparts elsewhere and at other times. It is that idiom of Christian faith in which twelfth-century European religious imagination caught up and transformed into a reading of human life scenes from the gospels, the somewhat prosaic expectations of early Christianity, the at once severe and

generous Augustinian faith and current Celtic and Teutonic poetry and legend, which was expressed, for example, on the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and the ironies of which were explored by Cervantes.

²⁵ For example, the maxim of the Cardinal de Retz that ‘what is absolutely necessary can never be dangerous’ is not unusable; but since ‘necessity’ in conduct is always a matter of surmise, it can only be *used*, not applied.

²⁶ What I have to say on this topic of course applies *pari passu* to practices.

²⁷ Since ‘human nature’ here is a practice, its dispositional components are imperfectly specifiable and subscription to them is similarly indeterminate, allowing incalculable (but not necessarily unrecognizable) gradations of conformity and disconformity. In this respect they are to be distinguished from the propensities of the components of a process, which are expressed in the ‘laws’ (probable or determinate) of their functional relationships. Different pieces of glass may have different degrees of brittleness, but brittleness (unlike kindness or miserliness), when used as an instrument for understanding what is going on, is exactly specifiable as a coefficient of elasticity.

²⁸ After what I have said about ‘psychology’ in the first part of this essay it is unnecessary for me, here, to consider the contention that substantive actions and utterances are to be theorized in terms of the so-called ‘psychology’ of the agents concerned.

²⁹ e.g. the English Constitution (Bagehot), Oriental despotism, le phénomène bureaucratique, a political party, Renaissance Man, a kinship ‘system’, Romanticism, the Christianity of Port-Royal, baroque architecture, feudalism, ‘the Enlightenment’, chivalry, *Manchestertums*, ‘the nineties’, the *devotio moderna* of the fifteenth century Netherlands, ‘tragedy’, medieval kingship, ‘bourgeois society’, central banking, ‘realism’ in art, ‘the proletariat’.

³⁰ Or, maybe, an account of changes which have taken place on such a map. This was Maitland’s conception of ‘constitutional history’—‘a history, not of parties, but of institutions, not of struggles, but of results’. *Constitutional History of England*, p. 537.

³¹ The consideration I am concerned with may be illustrated as follows. Anyone who listened to the late Professor Hugh Last’s account of the legal and constitutional changes in which the Roman Principate emerged under Octavius may properly be said to have been offered a profoundly explored understanding of the situation in terms of the modification of a practice. In *The Roman Revolution*, on the other hand, Sir Ronald Syme displays the situation, not in terms of the modification of a practice but in terms of the contingent transactions of assignable agents, each responding to his understood circumstances by choosing to do or to say *this* rather than *that* in relation to imagined and wished-for outcomes and in individual subscriptions to a multiplicity of practices.

And the short-coming (it is not, of course, error) of a historian who laces his narrative with so-called ‘moral’ judgements is not on account of his concern to understand performances in terms of a *moral* practice, but on account of his concern to understand performances in terms of a practice of any sort.