

What is Moral Action?*

by Robert Sokolowski

"He is devoted to you in his way,"
said Miss Ridley.

"I daresay a cat does the right thing
to a mouse in its way."

"Doing things in your own way is not
really doing them," said Megan.

—I. Compton-Burnett, *The Present and
the Past*.

I WISH TO CLARIFY, philosophically, what a moral action is. The best way to proceed in this venture would be to exhibit a moral performance and to reflect on it. What I have to say could be said much more effectively if I were able to comment on something that occurs publicly before me and my audience, that is, if I could do more than speak in general and in the abstract.

But as I prepare this lecture, I know that I cannot count on a moral exchange happening just when I am to deliver the lecture. It is most unlikely that at precisely *that* moment—at

* An earlier version of this paper was presented as the Suarez Lecture at Fordham University on April 2, 1987. In having the paper published I wish to retain the form it had as a lecture because I think the centrality of actual performances in moral philosophy can be better expressed in that way, and also because the change from a spoken to a written form can occasion an interesting study of perspectival, hermenetutical shifts, as I try to show in fn 1. The paper presents the theory of moral conduct that I developed at greater length in my book, *Moral Action. A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), and in two essays: "Moral Thinking," to appear in a collection entitled *Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, edited by Robert Sokolowski (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming), and "Knowing Natural Law," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 43 (1981), pp. 625-641.

this moment now, while I read these words to you—some moral performance would be transacted in the full view and with the full understanding of my audience and me: some act of cunning revenge or tactful gratitude, of tender benevolence or furious insult. No, it would be too much to ask fortune to place such an example before us at the exact moment it is desired.¹

I have no alternative but to take the issue in hand myself and, by my own efforts, to bring an example to my mind and yours. I cannot do this by doing something moral myself, since I am to be engaged in a situation that requires only that I speak, not that I act. Furthermore there will, most likely, be nothing in the situation in which I speak that will call for an action, and without the appropriate setting no action is possible. Anything that I might do as a contrived performance would be a pretense at action, not a genuine deed. Nor can I depict an action to you in its concreteness by presenting a

¹ Temporal horizons shift in interesting ways when I change from (1) preparing these remarks for delivery in a lecture, to (2) actually stating them before an audience, to (3) preparing them for an essay to be (4) interpreted by readers. The hermeneutic contexts become radically different and the "now" changes in the four situations. I was alone as I originally ("now₁") wrote the words, but when I lectured, I and my audience were together in a single context ("now₂"). I became a public presence. Furthermore, because I was there as the speaker, I could react to the situation and could modify what I said in order to adapt it to what was going on. I was able to control the interpretation to some degree. But when I "now₃" as a writer use the same words I once prepared for an audience, those same words that I once spoke to an audience, I return to solitude, and I know that you at some time ("now₄", while you are reading) will also be alone as you achieve your interpretation. I cannot be there to accommodate my words to your context. At that time we will be bodily separated, but united in the achievement of one and the same meaning, interpreted through all these contexts. You will appreciate what you read as the same as what I once declared before a group of listeners, and you will even see through the speech-situation to the time ("now₁") when I first wrote the lecture. The speech-situation, which was once the final, actual context, becomes relativized and profiled within new contexts, the contexts of the various readers, who will be in many different places. The various "nows" become nested within one another.

drama or running a film, since the time needed to establish the characters, set the circumstances, and stage the transaction would leave us with no time to philosophize about what has taken place. We would be engrossed by the enactment and would have to forego thinking about it.

If I am to bring a concrete action before you, I can do so only by talking about one, by describing one. And this of course is to bring the action before you in its absence. A few words will have to suffice to establish the characters and set the circumstances, a few more words to describe the action itself. What I have to say will be no more than a simple pencil drawing, a few lines that seem as nothing whether compared to the staged depiction or to the bodily presence of the event. Much has to be left to your imagination.

Ralph is a bachelor. Conflicts at his job have worn him down. He has lost his nerve, he is ill and depressed. He happens to have an appointment with Norman, his dentist and friend, who asks him about the general state of his health and soon hears the whole story of Ralph's ordeal. Norman soon realizes that much of Ralph's distress stems from loneliness, from the pressure of living alone at a time when he needs help. He suggests that Ralph come to live for a while with him and his family. Ralph does so. He lives with them for a month, and with their help he is much better able to deal with his conflicts at work and with his other problems. His life is put on a steadier course.

What Norman and his family did was a moral transaction. Ralph is grateful for what was done, and gratitude is the response to benevolence. Gratitude is, we might say, the appropriate perception of benevolence. It is the way the target of the benevolence, the beneficiary, recognizes what has been done. Ralph's gratitude is a kind of warrant for us *that* a moral performance has occurred.

But what makes Norman's action to be a moral action? What

makes it different from an action without moral quality? Suppose that Ralph had rented a room in a boarding house and through the conviviality of the other boarders managed to get over his nervous isolation. The owner of the house, in renting Ralph the room, did not become engaged in a moral transaction. Ralph would consider himself lucky that he moved into the house, but strictly speaking he would not be morally grateful to the man who rented the room to him. There would be no change in the moral relationship between Ralph and the owner, but there is a change in the relationship between Ralph and Norman because of what was done. What accounts for this difference? What is there in a moral exchange that is not found in other human exchanges?

Before trying to answer this question, let us observe that benevolent actions, or what we could call good moral actions, are not the only kind we must discuss. A malevolent transaction is a moral action too. A moral action can be morally good or morally bad. The special difference that constitutes a moral act as moral must be able to account for both the good and the bad. What we are looking for is what puts human behavior into the domain of morals as such. We wish to determine what places a human action into the "game" of morals, whether the action be judged to be good or bad.

I will therefore sketch in words another moral exchange besides the one that occurred between Ralph and Norman. Let us add a concrete instance of maleficence to the benevolence we have described.

Sidney is working hard for advancement in his career. Just when the crucial promotion is within his reach, just as he is about to get what he has always wanted, Arthur reveals Sidney's secret. It was something that was done a long time ago, something of which Sidney has often repented. He lived in fear that it would someday become known. Arthur learned about the secret through the long-standing rivalry between their

respective families, and just at the right moment, at the time when it would do the most devastating and irreparable damage, Arthur reveals the secret to the local gossip, who by the very inclination of his nature quickly makes it known to everyone. Sidney's career is destroyed.

What makes this to be a moral exchange? Why does Sidney bear resentment toward Arthur, and why have he and Arthur been established, by the action, as morally related, as offended and offender? What makes this case different from one in which, say, a clerk happens to discover and reveal the damaging information during a routine check? If only this had happened, the effect on Sidney's career might well have been the same; his career might well have been just as decisively destroyed. Sidney would then have considered himself unlucky, but he would not have been henceforth morally related to the clerk as the one offended to the offender, nor would he bear resentment toward the clerk. In fact, even in the exchange between Sidney and Arthur, Sidney does not bear the same resentment, the same moral response, toward the gossip as he does toward Arthur, who "did" something to him more explicitly than the gossip did. What makes this action moral?

A moral action is constituted as such by a special identificational form. An action is a *moral* action because it is identified by the agent in a special way. A particular human performance is established as, say, a benevolent action, because what is done is appreciated, by the agent, as good for someone else, and it is wanted and accomplished precisely as good for that other person. Norman appreciates company and conversation here and now as good for Ralph; he knows that Ralph needs this and that it will be good for him; and he wants and accomplishes it precisely as good for him. As good for Ralph, it becomes good for Norman. It is because of this identificational form that the behavior becomes a moral transaction and does not remain a morally indifferent exchange. It is because Norman

wanted and did something as good for Ralph, that Ralph becomes constituted as a beneficiary and responds with gratitude.

An analogous recognitional form establishes a performance as a malevolent moral action. Arthur appreciates the disclosure of Sidney's secret as bad for Sidney, as dreadfully bad for him. And Arthur wants and accomplishes this event precisely as bad for Sidney. As bad for Sidney, it becomes Arthur's good. Because of this recognitional form, a moral transaction, an act of cruelty or of revenge, has been enacted between Arthur and Sidney.

Let us state this more formally. A performance becomes a moral performance when it becomes wanted and done, or unwanted and averted, precisely as good or bad for the target of the action. As good or bad for the target, it becomes good or bad for the agent. It is this identificational form, this categoriality, this thoughtful recognition, this style of "taking . . . as . . .," that changes a bodily performance into a moral transaction. The identificational form changes a handing over into a generous giving, it changes a shove into an insult, it changes an act of feeding someone in a restaurant into an expression of gratitude, it changes denting someone's car into a mean-spirited act of revenge. Adapting a word used by Husserl, I would like to introduce the term "moral categoriality" to name this recognitional form, the form that constitutes a moral transaction.²

By categoriality Husserl means the formal articulation we achieve in an object when we let the various parts of the object be differentiated and recognized as parts. In a perception, for example, we might first simply see a shiny, whitish patch; then we may register the patch as ice; then we may take the ice as slippery and dangerous. The simple, precategorial sensi-

² On Husserl's notion of categorial form, see my essay, "Husserl's Concept of Categorial Intuition," *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences*, Supplement to *Philosophical Topics*, 12 (1981), pp. 127-141. On the application of categoriality to Morals, see *Moral Action*, pp. 1-6.

bility of a shiny white patch becomes articulated into a categorial object, one that we might express as, "This slippery patch of ice is dangerous." A categorial object is an object infected with syntax, and the categoriality of the object lies in the syntactic form the object takes on.

There is a categoriality proper to moral thinking and moral conduct. It is the form of someone else's good or bad being taken, and done, as my own good or bad. In this categorial form the various parts of the good, and the various slants the good presents, are articulated and registered. Such moral categoriality is specifically human. It is also a rational accomplishment. It is the introduction of moral thinking into human desires and aversions. When we become capable of exercising such moral categoriality, we become established as moral agents. This moral form, this categorial identification is what opens up the logical space in which terms such as resentment and gratitude, pity and pardon, indignation and forgiveness, blame and praise, and other terms that express moral uptake acquire their meaning. This identification form puts us into the domain of morals.

Various objections to my analysis come to mind. One objection might be formulated as follows: "Arthur injured Sidney by revealing his secret. But surely the reason why the revelation was a moral transaction lies not in any complicated form such as you describe, not in any categoriality, but rather in the fact that Arthur freely decided to reveal the secret. It was an act of Arthur's will, a decision, that made his performance moral. His act of free choice, together with the intention he had at the time, made the revelation to be not merely an unlucky accident but a moral transaction."

But this objection misplaces the central and primary accomplishment in moral action. It assumes that the substance of a moral performance lies in a decision that precedes the public behavior. The public behavior, in this understanding,

would only *issue* from the act of the will; the public behavior would be the outcome of a choice. But in fact the substance of the moral action is in the performance itself. Sidney is injured when the secret is revealed. The public event is what changes the moral relationship between Sidney and Arthur. Arthur may have made up his mind at an earlier time to reveal the secret, but this making up of his mind is only a kind of anticipation of the deed. We should understand the decision in relation to the performance, not the performance in relation to its anticipation.

To place the substance of a moral action in the internal act of the will is to etiolate the moral action, to make it far too much a private episode rather than a transformation or rearrangement of the way things are in the world. There are such things as decision, and we do sometimes make up our minds to act before we perform, but such thoughtful changes in us must not be seen as ends in themselves; they are the beginnings which end in public performances, they are anticipations of morally formed behavior, the initial stirrings of action. They are faint inceptions and not the climax of action. They are the empty intendings of which the actions themselves are the fulfillments.

The substance of a moral transaction lies therefore not in a thought or in an intention or in an act of willing, but in thoughtful behavior, in an embodied performance which, as good or as bad for another, is done or averted as the agent's good or bad. It is the thoughtful form that makes the performance moral, but of course the form needs the performance as its embodiment and expression.

The form of a moral transaction can be realized in innumerable ways, and there are countless variations and nuances in the manner in which I can take your good or bad, as such, as my own good or bad. Let us mention a few examples from Shakespeare: Iago's fanning of Othello's suspicion; Edgar's

protection of his blinded father Gloucester; Maria's deception and humiliation of Malvolio; Macbeth's slaughter of Macduff's wife and children; the shepherd's preservation of Perdita; even Hamlet's refusal to kill Claudius while he is praying (Claudius' good, the salvation of his soul, is taken as Hamlet's bad and is averted); so much variety of performance, so many vivid transactions, yet in all of them the same formal pattern, with the agent taking the good or the bad of his target as his own good or bad. And moral actions, constituted by this form, do not occur only as momentous actions that are worthy of being displayed in a drama. They occur on the small scale as well: the person seated next to you rudely steps on your foot while he makes his way to his seat, so you then stick chewing gum onto his coat. This nasty action is moral: you take and do what is bad for your neighbor as your good.

The form of a moral transaction is an elementary form of thinking. It is the installment of reason into our likes and dislikes. It allows us to live beyond our own immediate desires and aversions and it introduces a special kind of transcendence into our pursuit of the good. Through this form we become capable of appreciating something as good or bad for another; but more than this, through this form we become capable of accomplishing or averting something as good or bad for another. The form allows us not only to appreciate but also to do. The form is so simple that it is usually overlooked in philosophical analyses of moral conduct, just as the simple recognition of an object as being the same in many perceptions is often overlooked in studies of the more amplified forms of predication and relation. Moral categoriality is one of those forms that make all the difference, that open a new dimension, but that are so taken for granted that we hardly notice their presence and their achievement. We usually get caught up in issues found within the space opened by the moral form and overlook what generates the space itself. Furthermore the

form not only constitutes an action as moral, it also constitutes us as morally responsible, as agents that can be morally praised or blamed for what we do. It is the initial form of moral reason.

My philosophical use of the moral form, the form of taking the good or bad of another as one's own good or bad, can give rise to another objection. Someone might say, "Issues of temperance and fortitude are among the most common topics discussed in morals. Indeed Aristotle mentions them as the first examples of virtuous and vicious behavior in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. But when we act self-indulgently or temperately, or when we act with rashness, cowardice, or courage, we do not seem to be related to the good or bad of another. We seem to be related to our own selves. Does your moral form, your moral categoriality, apply to temperance and courage?"

In response to this objection, I assert that in issues of temperance and fortitude we take a kind of distance to ourselves, and we become either friends or enemies to ourselves. If Helen performs temperate actions—if she eats the right food in the right amounts, for example—her actions are temperate not just because they happen to be the healthy thing to do, but because she does them as healthy, as good for her own self, and as the way of being moderate in regard to appetite. She does not just do the right action; she does it as good for herself. Only if this further categoriality is added to the healthy performance is the performance changed into a moral action. And the intemperate action, which is a kind of malevolence or enmity toward oneself, is constituted when something that is bad for you is taken as your own good; when smoking, which is bad for Helen, is wanted and chosen and done, when it is taken as her own good.

Thus the formal interplay of goods and bads can take place within our own selves. We are such beings that we can be

harmonized or divided within ourselves, we can be friends or enemies, benevolent or malevolent, to ourselves. What makes it possible for us to be like this is precisely the distance to ourselves that is generated when reason is introduced into passion and thoughtful identifications take place that are more complicated than the identifications that our desires and passions alone can achieve.

My analysis of moral action bears an affinity to one of Aristotle's teachings in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and can, I think, be confirmed by what he writes. It is often said that Aristotle deals with ethics and not with morals as we understand morals. But the difference between ethics and morals should not be exaggerated, and I would suggest that what I have described as the domain of morals is treated by Aristotle under one of his definitions of justice in Book V, Chapter 1, of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In that chapter Aristotle makes a distinction between particular justice, which is one virtue among many, and justice in a more general sense, the justice which can be equated with the whole of virtue. Particular justice is the virtue that makes us seek fair distributions and corrections; it keeps us from being grasping and from seeking more than our share. Justice in the more general sense is the virtue of obeying the law, and since the law orders the whole of our ethical life, a person who is law-abiding will, if the laws are as they should be, cultivate all the virtues.

Now Aristotle says that justice as lawfulness does not only perfect us in our individual activity; he says that such justice is "complete virtue, but not simply, but toward another, *pros heteron*" (1129b26-27).³ The specific feature of general, legal justice is its involvement with other agents. Aristotle says such justice is complete virtue "because one who possesses it can

³ The passages from Aristotle are taken from Ross's translation, with extensive emendations.

exercise his virtue toward another and not only in himself; for many can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but cannot do so in matters relating to another" (1129b31-1130a1). He goes on to state that "for this same reason justice, alone of the virtues, seems to be 'another's good,' because it is [directed] toward another; for it does what is advantageous to someone else . . ." (1130a3-5).

I would suggest that what Aristotle describes as justice in this general sense, justice as lawfulness and as equivalent to the whole of virtue, is similar to what I have described as "the moral." The point in common is the orientation toward another: the just man wants to do the good of another, the unjust man is willing to do what is bad for another; the just man takes and does the true good of another as his own good, the unjust man will take and do the bad of another as his own good. If such general justice is virtue entire, then the "toward another," the *pros heteron*, brings about a completion of ethics and sheds light on all the other virtues. The involvement with others is a form that fulfills all the particular virtues.⁴

⁴ The most conspicuous difference between Aristotle's analysis and mine consists in the following: I claim that the form of eating "toward another" works even in the case of the private, individual virtues such as temperance and courage, but Aristotle seems to limit his concept of justice to actions that are explicitly directed toward others. However, in Book V, Chapter 11 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he does concede that "by metaphor and by resemblance" (1138b5-6) there is a kind of justice within an individual, a justice that consists in the proper ordering of the various parts of the soul under the guidance of reason. And earlier, in Chapter 1, he indicates that the law does attempt to form such virtues as bravery, temperance, and gentleness (1129b19-25). Furthermore, Plato is quite willing to admit that justice can be found in the individual soul, not just metaphorically but literally and in the primary sense. In the *Republic*, Socrates asserts that justice "does not lie in a man's external actions, but in the way he acts within himself, really concerned with himself and his inner parts. . . . He orders what are in the true sense of the word his own affairs well; he is master of himself, puts things in order, is his own friend . . ." (443C-D; Grube translation).

The reason there is some difference between Aristotle's analysis and mine is that Aristotle presents virtue and justice as they appear politically

In his analysis in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle works gradually toward justice as the completion of virtue. He reaches justice only in Book V. What I have tried to do in invoking the "toward another" as constitutive of morals is to begin with such justice as the measure and standard of behavior, and to analyze the being of moral conduct in terms of it.

After this comparison of my analysis with that of Aristotle, I would like to draw another comparison, a comparison between my description of moral action and the analysis of morals provided by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁵ Smith describes our various moral sentiments and considers sympathy to be the most important and most fundamental of them all. He then says that sympathy itself, as well as all the other moral sentiments, is made possible by a special ability that we enjoy. He says that our moral sentiments come into being because we are able to place ourselves, in imagination, in the situation of someone else. We change places, in fancy, with another person.⁶ Smith repeatedly refers to "that

and ethically, as they are political and moral phenomena, whereas I am trying to uncover the form of presentation, the way of being manifest, that is proper to moral agency. Getting to this level of analysis highlights the similarities in all moral behavior, whether public or private. Plato is also interested in the primary differentiations of morals, in the first sorting out of justice, and so my remarks more obviously conform to his teaching.

Another difference between my analysis and Aristotle's is that his general justice is also legal justice, the virtue of the law-abiding man, whereas my description does not invoke a legal dimension. I need primarily the "toward another" as constitutive of morals, not the dimension of civic law. But even here one can find a similarity. Moral categoricity involves something analogous to law; the interplay of the good and bad of another with my own good or bad has something of the obligatory about it. I ought to respect the good and eschew the bad of another. Civic law draws on this pre-legal obligation and receives some of its moral force from it.

⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford, 1976).

⁶ *Ibid.*, I.1.1, pp. 9-13.

imaginary change of situations.”⁷ Sympathy and all the other moral sentiments depend on this displacement. Because we can displace ourselves imaginatively into the situation of another, we can sympathize with the resentment or gratitude of that other person, we can praise or blame what he does, we can share in his fear and hope.

The imaginary change of situation is something like a presentational or categorial form. It allows us to live a human life in common with others. According to Smith, it establishes us as moral beings. Is it the same as the moral categoriality that I have described? I think not, and I think there are two important differences between Smith’s concept of imaginative displacement and my concept of moral form.

First, Smith describes moral sentiments, whereas I have tried to describe moral actions. Smith admits that moral actions issue from moral sentiments, but his analysis rests chiefly with the sentiments. The actions seem to be established as moral by the sentiment that precedes or accompanies them, not by the understanding that informs them. Indeed much of his analysis is directed toward the spectators of human behavior, to the ones who respond with approval or disapproval, with the appropriate sentiments, whereas my analysis is centered on the transaction itself and on the understanding of the agent who initiates this transaction. In analyzing moral sentiments, Smith describes the penultimate in moral conduct, whereas I have tried to describe the ultimate, the climax and the actuality of conduct itself, not what precedes it or what responds to it. This is one difference between Smith’s analysis and mine.

Another difference is that I appeal to a form of thinking, to a categoriality, as constitutive of morals, whereas Smith appeals to a form that belongs in the imagination and with the sentiments. It seems to me that he does not give enough weight

⁷ *Ibid.*, I.i.4, p. 19.

to the rational aspect of moral conduct. It is true that one should not simply rationalize human agency; desires, sentiments, and ethical perceptions must be given their proper place, and Smith's analysis of them rings true as far as it goes. Moreover his description of "that imaginary change of situation" as the foundation of moral sentiments is a recognition of something almost like a moral categoriality, something almost like a form of moral thinking. But the imaginary displacement does not reach moral thinking. It is less than the kind of recognition that makes a particular behavior of mine to be good or bad for me insofar as it is good or bad for you or for another. Smith's analysis remains with the peripherals of moral conduct and misses its center.

An illustration of how different Smith's analysis of human action is from mine can be found in his description of what we praise or blame when we evaluate someone's conduct. He says there are three possibilities:

Whatever praise or blame can be due to any action, must belong either, first, to the intention or affection of the heart, from which it proceeds; or, secondly, to the external action or movement of the body, which this affection gives occasion to; or, lastly, to the good or bad consequences, which actually, and in fact, proceed from it. These three different things constitute the whole nature and circumstances of the action, and must be the foundation of whatever quality can belong to it.⁸

Having distinguished the three components of action, Smith excludes the last two as candidates for what we praise or blame: "That the two last of these three circumstances cannot be the foundation of any praise or blame, is abundantly evident; nor has the contrary ever been asserted by any body."⁹ In particular, he sees no difficulty in dismissing the public behavior:

The external action or movement of the body is often the same in the most innocent and in the most blameable actions. He who shoots

⁸ *Ibid.*, II.iii.intro., p. 92.

⁹ *Ibid.*

a bird, and he who shoots a man, both of them perform the same external movement: each of them draws the trigger of a gun.¹⁰

He will conclude that only the intention or the sentiment from which the action proceeds can be the object of praise and blame.

Smith describes the bodily action as though it were only bodily, as though it were the corpse of an action. The action is said only to "proceed" from the intention and sentiment or to be merely "occasioned" by them. In contrast, in my description the action is seen to be informed by the categoriality and the understanding of the agent. The categoriality and the understanding qualify the behavior and make the behavior to be the agent's own. They make it his action and they make it a live action. They also make the action to be one of a certain kind. Drawing the trigger of a gun must be described as part either of shooting a bird or of shooting a man, and if it is part of shooting a man, then it can be part of the agent's taking the harm of another as his own good.

The reason it is possible for us to add a new dimension to the theory of moral sentiments and to take into account the thoughtful, categorial aspect of moral agency, is that we are lucky enough to have inherited a much more adequate philosophical discussion of human thinking than Adam Smith had at his disposal. In Husserl we have a description of categorial form that does justice to the publicity of thinking. Husserl's analysis of intentionality allows us to see categorial formations as part of the being of things; things are seen as presentational-ly shaped by the categorials in which they are articulated. Husserl's descriptions avoid the excesses of both rationalism and empiricism, as well as the deficiencies of the Kantian philosophy of mind that followed, historically, the thought of the Scottish moralists. Husserl's thought is often applauded for its discussion of prepredicative experience, for its analysis

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

of corporeality, or for its description of the life-world that underlies science, but his analyses of the more formal aspects of experience, his analyses of categorial form and structure, deserve far more study and exploitation than they have received. His descriptions, in the *Logical Investigations*, of identity-synthesis, recognition, predication, and categorial form constitute a radical innovation in philosophy, and my discussion of the categorial form of moral action is but an application of his thought to the domain of human conduct.

In the rest of my paper I wish to discuss further the categoriality, the kind of thinking, associated with moral action. I will do so by responding to a third objection that might be raised against the analysis I have given. Someone might say, "Your moral categoriality is not sufficient to account for all the aspects of moral thinking. In particular, it does not seem to account for questions concerning the truth of a moral transaction. Suppose I take and do someone's good formally as my own good; can I not be mistaken in my assessment of what is my neighbor's good? And even when I try to be malevolent, I may be mistaken in my assessment of what is to my neighbor's disadvantage and I may accidentally help him instead of doing him harm. Your form of moral action seems to have nothing to say about truth and error in human action."

The issue of truth is indeed a further issue, one that has not been addressed in my description of moral conduct. But it does come after the issue of what makes an action to be moral. In fact we can distinguish several levels in the issue of truth. The first level is that of the truth or falsity of the material part of the performance. I may attempt, say, to help someone by giving him food, but it turns out that he is diabetic and the food I give him makes him sick. I am in error concerning the material part of the action. This is a question of premoral truth or falsity.

On a second level, I may be right or wrong about the moral

predicate that applies to what I have done. I may claim that I am helping someone by, say, getting him out of trouble, but in fact I may be doing it in such a way as to make him cowardly or dishonest. I may call the action benevolent, but another person may call it inducement to treason. In this case there is no argument about the material character of what has been done, but there is a question about how we are to classify the action morally. What kind of moral action is it? Is it true that it is an act of dishonesty? Or is it true that the action is a clever but honest escape?

When we try to describe the moral nature of what has been done, when we try to specify its moral kind, we make use of the moral predicates that our community has developed and keeps in store: terms such as murder, cruelty, irreverance, treason, cowardice, and bellicosity; or terms such as gratitude, piety, courage, temperance, and justice. And when we apply such terms we use them as predicates, and we engage what I would like to call the categoriality of judgment. The judgment is meant to be true; it is meant to state what the action really is. And it is true that such judgmental categoriality accomplishes more than does the categoriality that establishes the action as moral in the first place. The moral categoriality, the agent's taking the target's good or bad as his own good or bad, remains, so to speak, naive and simple. It remains in the domain of immediate appearances. It has not yet fully activated the truth or falsity of the appearances; it has not yet explicitly confirmed whether the appearances are genuine. For this reason, the judgmental categoriality, which does do such things, accomplishes more than the original moral categoriality can accomplish.

However, if the moral categoriality had not done its work, there would be nothing for the judgmental categoriality to be about. Only because the action has already been constituted as a *moral* action is it possible for us to raise the further question

about what *kind* of moral action it really is. The judgmental categoriality does do more, but it does not do everything, and in particular it does not first establish the action as moral. That achievement is the work of the form of a moral transaction.

And because the moral categoriality is a categoriality, a form of thinking, it sets us on the road to truth. It engages not just mere appearance but a pretense at the true or genuine appearance. Because I take someone's good or bad as my own good or bad, I begin to submit myself to the question whether the good or bad really is as it seems to be. Categoriality inevitably engages truth; logical form of any kind commits us to determine whether what seems to be is genuinely so. The judgmental categoriality therefore follows naturally after the moral categoriality, just as predication follows naturally after the more simple identifications we make when we just recognize individuals. Moral categoriality does not only put us into the "game" of morals; as categoriality it also puts us into the "game" of truth. We want to pursue good and avoid evil as *truly* good and *truly* evil.

In responding to the last objection raised against my analysis, I have discussed two levels of the issue of truth: the truth of the material aspect of moral actions, and the truth of the moral predicates that are to be applied to actions. There is a third level of truth that I will mention only briefly. It is also possible, and sometimes necessary, to turn to the moral predicates themselves that are found in our moral community, and to ask whether they are genuine, whether they really should have the positive or negative character they are thought to possess. In this case we argue not about a particular action and what sort of action it is, but about a kind of action, about a type of moral behavior. We do not ask whether this particular action should receive this or that predicate, but whether the predicate itself truly is as it seems to be. We might, for

example, argue about the morality of slavery, or piracy, or usury, or abortion. It is in such controversies that the distinction between what is good or bad by nature and what is good or bad by convention or custom comes into view. This is a further aspect of moral reasoning, but once again this kind of controversy can arise only because something far more elementary has occurred, only because human actions have been constituted as moral in the thick of human exchanges; and they are constituted as such by the form of a moral transaction, by the initial installment of moral reasoning into human desires and aversions.

Moral philosophy must therefore always return to human action as its theme. For that reason, the concrete examples I used to begin my paper, the stories about Norman and Ralph, and Sidney and Arthur, were more than rhetorical devices or aids in making my argument clear. They, and other actions like them, are what our moral discussion must always ultimately be about. Moral truth begins and ends in what is done.

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