

# What is Deontology?, Part One: Orthodox Views<sup>a</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Current moral philosophy is often seen as essentially a debate between the two great traditions of consequentialism and deontology. Although there has been considerable work clarifying consequentialism, deontology is more often attacked or defended than analyzed. Just how we are to understand the very idea of a deontological ethic? We shall see that competing conceptions of deontology have been advanced in recent ethical thinking, leading to differences in classifying ethical theories. If we do not focus on implausible versions, the idea of a deontological ethic is far more attractive than most philosophers have thought. Indeed, I shall argue that in an important sense, only a deontological ethic can be plausible.

## 2. Deontology as the Non-teleological

Most commentators follow William Frankena in characterizing deontology as the class of non-teleological theories. “Deontological theories deny what teleological theories affirm.”<sup>1</sup> It is widely agreed that a theory is teleological if it justifies the right, moral duty, or obligation, on the

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grounds that it promotes what is good. This, though, is vague. If we are to understand this characterization of deontology, we need to be clearer about the idea of teleology. Because philosophers disagree about precisely what teleology affirms, we confront different accounts of deontology.

One interpretation of this orthodox formulation is suggested by Jeffrey Reiman:

Teleological moral theories normally take the production of good consequences as the decisive feature of morally approved behavior....What is distinctive about deontological theories is that they take the moral status of actions with their immediate consequences to depend on considerations other than the total goodness or badness of all consequences, immediate and far-flung.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps, then, an ethical theory is deontological if and only there exists some action whose moral status depends on some consideration, where the consideration is not part of the “total goodness or badness of all consequences, immediate and far-flung.” On this view, if a theory yields any judgment that depends on such a consideration, the theory is deontological. Put roughly, even one judgment that is not solely dependent on overall good consequences renders a theory deontological.<sup>3</sup>

Although this seems innocuous enough, it follows that rule utilitarianism is deontological, a view explicitly held by some philosophers.<sup>4</sup> This may seem odd, but it gains plausibility if the rule utilitarianism under consideration is non-optimizing. Some rule utilitarians insist that following rules is necessary in order to promote maximum net value; others insist that an action is wrong if it violates a good-promoting rule, even if it is an optimizing act. John Stuart Mill’s moral theory was clearly of this sort. For Mill, an act is wrong if a coercive rule against it is

justified. An act's wrongness, then, crucially depends on its violation of a good-promoting rule, even if the act itself optimally promotes the good. If so, the moral status of an act at least sometimes depends simply on its conformity to, or conflict with, a good-promoting rule. Such a view qualifies as deontological in the sense of a non-maximizing moral theory. Hence some act utilitarians complain that rule utilitarianism is a form of rule worship.

Frankena, in his almost classic definition of deontology, takes a different view:

Deontological theories. . . . deny that the right, the obligatory, and the morally good are wholly, whether directly or indirectly, a function of what is nonmorally good or what promotes the greatest balance of good over evil for self, one's society, or the world as a whole. They assert that there are other considerations that may make an action or rule right or obligatory besides the goodness or badness of its consequences — certain features of the act itself other than the *value* it brings into existence, for example, the fact that it keeps a promise, is just, or is commanded by God or the state. Teleologists believe that there is one and only one basic or ultimate right-making characteristic, namely the comparative value (nonmoral) of what is, probably will be, or is intended to be brought into being.<sup>5</sup>

Many philosophers have seen this as equivalent to the first formulation, that a theory is deontological just in case good promoting is not the sole right-making characteristic, but Frankena explicitly says that rule utilitarian theories are teleological. A theory is teleological if it requires that the “obligatory, and the morally good are wholly, *whether directly or indirectly*, a function of what is nonmorally good.”<sup>6</sup> This makes indirect, or rule, utilitarianism teleological. Frankena, then, does not see conformity to good-promoting rules as a non-teleological right-making feature of actions. It is not immediately clear, however, why this, and not other, non-

good-maximizing features of actions, should be understood to be consistent with teleological justification. If a theory can be teleological even though conformity to good-promoting rules is itself a right-making feature of an action, then we obviously cannot understand an ethical theory to be teleological just in case good promotion is the only right-making feature of actions.

### **3. Deontology and Justice**

“Conformity to good-producing rules” is not the sort of non-optimizing property that philosophers usually have in mind when they contrast teleology and deontology. What they often have in mind is a distinction between teleological theories that promote the good and deontological theories as those which distribute it according to rules of justice. Insofar as a theory makes the distribution of a good a right-making feature of an act  $\phi$ , the theory is typically seen as non-teleological, hence as deontological. A theory is especially prone to be deemed deontological if an act can be right when it distributes a good in the proper way at a cost of the total amount of goodness produced.<sup>7</sup>

Although equating deontology with justice as right-making captures the common idea that deontologists insist that “justice be done though the heavens fall,” it abandons the characterization of deontology in purely negative terms as simply non-teleological. To characterize deontology in terms of justice is to give a positive, substantive, definition. In any event, this is implausible: building in a distributive criterion is not enough to make a theory deontological. Although distributive properties are not an element of the good in a simple hedonistic utilitarianism such as Bentham’s, in more complex, so-called ideal, utilitarian theories such as the theory of Hastings Rashdall, justice is itself an element of the good, and so “[w]hen Justice itself is given its due place as part of the true good for society and each individual in it,

we may say that it is always a duty to promote the greatest good on the whole.”<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, Thomas Scanlon suggests that “equality of distributions and fairness of processes are among the properties that make states of affairs worth promoting.”<sup>9</sup> Scanlon, however, seems to see such a theory as a “third way”:

[F]airness and equality often figure in moral arguments as independently valuable states of affairs. So considered, they differ from the ends promoted in standard utilitarian theories in that their value does not rest on their being good things *for* particular individuals: fairness and equality do not represent ways in which individuals may be *better off*. They are, rather, special morally desirable features of states of affairs or of social institutions. In admitting such moral features into the evaluation of consequences, the theory I am describing departs from standard consequentialist theories, which generally resist the introduction of explicitly moral considerations into the maximand. It diverges also from recent deontological theories, which bring in fairness and equality as specific moral requirements rather than as moral goals.<sup>10</sup>

Note that Scanlon moves from the claim that the goodness of fairness and equality is a kind of goodness which pertains to states of affairs and does not make individuals better off to the claim that it is a kind of moral goodness. The first claim distinguishes Scanlon’s proposal from Bentham’s type of utilitarianism. It is, however, the second claim that is necessary to distinguish Scanlon’s proposal from teleological theories in general. If equality can be identified as a moral requirement before we know whether it promotes a nonmoral good, then the theory qualifies as deontological: it identifies a right-making feature which is not good-promoting. But there is no reason to suppose that the goodness of equality and fairness must be seen as a moral requirement

in this way: fairness and equality may be seen as non-moral goods. If a theory requires the good to be complex, and involve what is good for individuals and good features of states of affairs, and the right is that which maximizes this complex good, then given a certain trade-off rate among the goods, the theory is purely teleological.

All this points to a fundamental problem not only with the attempt to characterize deontology in terms of justice, but the wider tradition of characterizing deontology in terms of relying on right-making properties that are not reducible to good optimizing. It is very difficult to determine whether a given candidate property is or is not a good-making property. Are justice, fairness, respect for rights, desert recognition goods that right action promotes, or are they right-making properties in some other way? It appears that this question cannot be answered without a much more specific notion of goodness or value. In its most general sense, philosophers use “good” to describe any feature of an action or state of affairs that is desirable, worthy or, indeed, that gives us reason to pursue it. If, as many philosophers have maintained, all purposive action aims at a good, it will be hard to make sense of a right-making property that does not derive from a good-making one.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, if we have a more definite theory of what is good or valuable, which specifies that, say, value is an evaluative property with a certain constellation of features, then we can begin to sensibly ask if there are right-making properties that do not stem from value properties.<sup>12</sup> In the abstract, however, the general distinction between the right-as-optimizing-the-good, and other sorts of right-making properties, does not get us far in distinguishing deontology from teleology.

#### **4. Deontology as Non-Optimizing with a Vengeance**

Before turning to more promising approaches, one more way of understanding deontology as a non-optimizing morality should be considered. Robert Olsen says that a “deontological theory of ethics is one which holds that at least some acts are morally obligatory regardless of their consequences for human weal or woe. The popular motto ‘Let justice be done though the heavens fall’ conveys the spirit most often associated with deontological theories.”<sup>13</sup> On this view a theory is deontological only if it justifies at least one duty, such that it is wrong, all things considered, to violate the duty regardless of the cost of honoring it. This is non-optimizing with a vengeance.

Admittedly some deontologists have espoused such a view. Charles Fried tells us that there “are things you must not do --- no matter what.”<sup>14</sup> Alan Donagan maintains that “it is absolutely impermissible to commit murder” and “[e]ven for a good end, it is impermissible for anybody, in conditions of free communication between responsible persons, to express an opinion he does not hold.”<sup>15</sup> Kant, of course, is well known for his supposed absolutism. Insofar as these duties are absolute, then it is wrong to violate them, no matter what the costs to what is good.

Nancy (Ann) Davis, in her strikingly unsympathetic review of “Contemporary Deontology,” takes Fried and Donagan as exemplars of deontologists. Thus, on her view, “deontologists tell us that deontological constraints are absolute, that we are obliged to refrain from violating deontological constraints even when we know our refusal to do so will have very bad consequences.”<sup>16</sup> Davis has no trouble criticizing such views; as soon as we have multiple duties, she rightly notes, we run the risk of moral dilemmas in which we must do wrong whatever we do. Certainly her characterization does not apply to classical deontologists such as David Ross, who was no

absolutist. Ross's crucial claim was simply that right was not *identical* with optimific. He did not hold that rightness was blind to consequences. In analyzing our duty to keep our promise to someone, Ross writes:

[T]hough we do not think it is necessarily our actual or absolute duty to do so, we are far from thinking that any, even the slightest, gain in the value of the total consequences will necessarily justify us in doing something else instead. Suppose, to simplify the case by abstraction, that the fulfillment of a promise to A would produce 1,000 units of good for him, but that by doing some other act I could produce 1001 units of good for B, to whom I have made no promise, the other consequences being of equal value; should we really think it is self-evident that it was our duty to do the second act and not the first? I think not.<sup>17</sup>

Davis asserts that such a view is a "far cry from deontology, at least as its contemporary advocates understand it," but she is clearly drastically overstating her case.<sup>18</sup> Kurt Baier, for example, made the possibility of exceptions to moral rules a necessary condition for any morality.<sup>19</sup> As Bernard Gert says:

It is the claim of some moral fanatics that one ought never to break any moral rule. This is what is claimed by those who regard moral rules as absolute. But this claim has little support even from those who have some relevant views concerning the supernatural. Almost everyone is aware that there are circumstances when any rule can be broken without the person thereby doing anything immoral. Even killing done in self-defense is usually regarded as morally justified, and breaking a promise to save a life is not normally regarded by any rational person as being immoral....[M]oral rules have exceptions.<sup>20</sup>

S.I. Benn, another important recent deontologist, insists that while a rational agent could accept a



single absolute principle, multiple absolutes make a consistent, complete preference ordering impossible, and so are irrational. Benn analyzes the famous moral dilemma of Agamemnon, who, in order to succeed in his role as commander must sacrifice his own daughter, as resulting from inconsistent commitments. His absolute duty to his family and his absolute duty to the state conflict: “whatever he does must seem to Agamemnon wrong .... Because his ordering of the options fails to satisfy the condition of asymmetry required for rational choice, while at the same time being in no wise a condition of indifference, he has no way ... of making the best of a bad job.”<sup>21</sup> Benn is explicit that this is irrational, and no part of a reasonable deontological view.

### **5. Deontology as the Priority of the Right Over the Good**

Like many others, Davis takes the formulation of deontology as any non-teleological theory to be equivalent to the claim that deontologists “reject the idea that the good is prior to the right.”<sup>22</sup> More strongly, it is often said that “for the deontologist ... the right is prior to the good.”<sup>23</sup> This formulation is suggested by Rawls, and perhaps even more vividly by Michael Sandel’s criticism of Rawls’s “deontological liberalism.”<sup>24</sup> The basic thought is that since teleologists characterize the right as maximizing the good, for a teleologist knowledge of the good must be prior to knowledge of the right. Because deontological theorists reject teleology, they also must reject the priority of the good to the right.

On closer inspection, it is clear that this characterization is not equivalent to an account of deontology as non-optimizing. Consider rule utilitarianism, which seems clearly non-optimizing. Most rule utilitarians argue that rules are necessary because of the “the limits of reason.”<sup>25</sup> Our epistemic situation requires that we abandon the impossibly complex aim of

optimizing each time we act, and accept the guidance of rules. If so, then although the account is non-optimizing, and so is deontological under the non-optimizing formulation, the good is nevertheless prior to the right. We have no knowledge of the right that is independent of our notion of the good; indeed, the justification of such a rule-based analysis of the right is simply that it is the only reasonable way of advancing the good. Independently of the good, we do not even know that we should be guided by rules. If the good was very simple, we might be able to optimize it. It is only once we know what the good is, and how complex a matter it is to optimize it, that we see the need to be guided by rules. Under this formulation, rule utilitarianism is teleological, while under a non-optimizing account it seems deontological. Hence, the two formulations of deontology cannot be equivalent.

This standard case for rule utilitarianism might, however, be taken to imply that, after all, it really is optimizing. Under conditions of epistemic scarcity, it may be argued, following rules is the best way to promote the good. For two reasons this need not be so. First, if a utilitarian theorist nevertheless insists that breaking the rules is sufficient for wrongdoing even in cases where it is certain that better results could be achieved by violating them, the theory is manifestly non-optimizing. Second, as Russell Hardin has argued, even if we grant that rule utilitarianism collapses into an act-optimizing theory, other forms of indirect utilitarianism such as Hardin's favored institutional utilitarianism seem devoid of any tendency to collapse into act-optimizing theories.<sup>26</sup>

## **6. Prichard's Critique of Teleology**

The conceptualization of deontology that would make the right prior to the good was at the heart

of H.A. Prichard's and Ross's moral theories. According to Prichard, "the sense of obligation to do, or of the rightness of, an action of a particular kind is absolutely underivative or immediate."<sup>27</sup> In particular, Prichard maintained:

that we do not come to appreciate an obligation by an *argument*, i.e. by a process of non-moral thinking, and that, in particular, we do not do so by an argument of which a premise is the ethical but not moral activity of appreciating the goodness either of the act or of a consequence of the act, i.e., that our sense of rightness is not a conclusion from our apprehension of the goodness either of it or of anything else.<sup>28</sup>

Prichard's case for this notion of the priority of the right is interesting and unappreciated, as it turns the traditional strong point of teleological theories into the decisive point against them. It is commonly thought that teleological theories are attractive insofar as they give us an obvious and clear reason to act morally: we see it as good. Since rational action is commonly thought to seek an end or good, teleological theories seem uniquely rational: they are conducive to the pursuit of ends. Thus, Rashdall, a crucial figure in twentieth-century utilitarianism, insisted that "no better definition could be given of the irrational in conduct" than the Kantian formula, according to which we have reasons to act that are unconcerned with the promotion of ends.<sup>29</sup>

Prichard begins his attack on teleological theories of the right by first considering the claim that recognizing something as good gives us a desire to pursue it, and shows that we ought to pursue it. Prichard, however, insists that the "ought" is not the "ought" that can explain the notion of a moral obligation.

The fatal objection of principle is that it resolves the moral "ought" into the non-moral "ought," representing our being morally bound to do some action as if it were the same

thing as the action's being one we must do if our purpose is to be realized. And in consequence, strictly speaking the theory is not a theory of obligation, or duty, at all, but, if anything, is a theory that what are called obligations or duties are really something else.<sup>30</sup>

The crux of Prichard's argument is that the attractive "ought" that follows from "I desire  $X$  and  $\phi$  is necessary to achieve  $X$ " cannot explain the imperatival "ought," that we must  $\phi$  whether or nor we want  $X$ . If we have a moral obligation to pay a gardener, we ought to pay whether or not we desire to pay, or repaying allows us to achieve our purposes. Insofar as teleologists claim to derive the moral "ought" from the attractive "ought" they are incapable of accounting for imperatival morality. As Prichard rightly observes of Bentham's form of utilitarianism, for example, it is entirely mysterious how we are supposed to get to "it is our duty to maximize the greatest happiness of the greatest number" from the core claim that "we each desire our own pleasure."<sup>31</sup>

Prichard considers a response, which he calls "quasi-teleological theories of obligation," according to which what is right is that which we ought to aim at, or ought to desire.<sup>32</sup> Although moral duty cannot be grounded on what we actually desire, it can be exemplified in terms of what we ought to desire. He replies:

But by "aiming at something  $X$ ," or "having something  $X$  as our aim," we mean having  $X$  as our purpose, and by "having  $X$  as our purpose" we mean having the desire of  $X$  as our motive, i.e., being moved to act by the desire of  $X$ , so that the statement, "I ought to aim at  $X$ " will mean: "I ought to be moved to act by the desire of  $X$ ." The question therefore arises: Can a statement of this form be true if the term "ought" is used in the moral sense? And the answer seems to have to be "No," on the ground that a moral obligation is by its very nature

a moral obligation to perform some activity, and that therefore there cannot be such a thing as a moral obligation to be moved by a certain desire, since whatever our being so moved may be, it is not an activity.<sup>33</sup>

Because we cannot have “an obligation to *act from a certain desire*,” Prichard insists that quasi-teleological theories cannot account for moral obligation.<sup>34</sup> Prichard’s claim, then, is that, *pace* teleological theories, knowledge of the good is no help in explaining moral obligations: the good is an attractive notion, to which desire inclines, while moral obligation is imperativel. Thus an adequate account of moral obligation must be independent of notions of the good.

## **7. Intuitionism and The Priority of the Right**

If Prichard is correct that we cannot justify deontic notions such as moral obligation on the basis of our desire to promote the good, deontologists must provide some plausible account of how we do justify deontic judgments. In the history of deontology, many philosophers have endorsed some form of moral intuitionism. We can better grasp the diversity of intuitionist proposals if we examine three dimensions on which they may differ: self-evidence, strength, and objectivity-subjectivity.

It is generally agreed that central to moral intuitionism is a claim that intuitions are in some way self-evident. As Prichard wrote: “The sense that we ought to do a certain thing arises in our unreflective consciousness, being an activity of moral thinking occasioned by the various situations in which we find ourselves.”<sup>35</sup> Sidgwick too understood intuitionism to rest on self-evident principles.<sup>36</sup> Thus understood, moral intuitions are on the order of spontaneous beliefs, and so are not inferentially justified. However, the traditional intuitionist notion of self-evidence

typically goes beyond this, to include certainty or, at a minimum, a degree of justification sufficient to constitute knowledge. This parallels traditional foundationalist claims in epistemology. Some intuitionists, however, have jettisoned the stronger claim, insisting that moral intuitions are fallible.<sup>37</sup>

If self-evidence is required, it seems clear that the intuitions must be very abstract moral principles. Thus Sidgwick saw intuitionism as a theory about principles.<sup>38</sup> In a similar vein Ross argued:

That an act, *qua* fulfilling a promise, or *qua* effecting a just distribution of good, or *qua* returning services rendered, or *qua* promoting the good of others, or *qua* promoting the virtue or insight of the agent, is *prima facie* right, is self-evident; not in the sense that it is evident from the beginning of our lives, or as soon as we attend to the proposition for the first time, but in the sense that when we have reached sufficient maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without proof, or of evidence beyond itself. It is self-evident just as a mathematical axiom, or the validity of a form of inference, is evident.... In our confidence that these propositions are true there is involved the same trust in our reason that is involved in our confidence in mathematics; and we should have no justification for trusting it in the latter sphere and distrusting it in the former.<sup>39</sup>

For Ross such principles, while self-evident, are not *a priori*. As we mature, we experience particular situations, such as particular acts of promising, where “we apprehend *prima facie* rightness” to belong to the fulfillment not simply of a particular promise but to promises generally: “[f]rom this we come by reflection to apprehend the self-evident general principles of *prima facie* duty.”<sup>40</sup> As Ross realized, it is not plausible to ascribe self-evidence to individual

moral judgments.<sup>41</sup> For Ross, although the correct moral principles were self-evident, what was the right thing to do in a specific situation was a complex matter of moral judgment. Ross insisted that the right thing to do in a specific situation could not be deduced from our knowledge of the correct moral principles.

Self-evidence, then, is only plausibly endorsed by intuitionists for theories in which the relevant moral intuitions are about general principles rather than particular moral judgments. Given the complexity of moral life, the claim that specific moral judgments are self-evident, while perhaps sometimes plausible, is typically difficult to accept. This is not to say, however, that self-evidence *qua* certainty should ever be accepted, even by deontologists who base moral rightness on conformity to principles. Moral intuitions can be understood to possess an initial minimal credibility, being self-justified to a minimum degree. This would preserve their status as foundational intuitions, but they would fall far short of self-evident truths.<sup>42</sup>

As Ross pointed out, the claim that moral intuitions are certain does not imply that they are absolute, in the sense of being overriding. Intuitions can be of different strengths. “Within Intuitionism,” he wrote, “we can have at one extreme the view of Kant that duties of perfect obligation always outweigh those of imperfect obligation. At the other end we might have people who think the duty of promise-keeping to be *sui generis* but yet be one which very rarely outweighs the duty of promoting the general good.”<sup>43</sup> Ross’s position is well-known: he held that self-evident moral principles reveal what he called *prima facie* duties, but that in specific situations they may not produce actual duties, as more than one moral principle may be relevant. Hence there is a need for non-self-evident moral judgments in specific cases. Deontologists such as Benn seek to be much more systematic about the ways different principles should be traded

off against each other, and against values. That they can be traded off against each other implies that they are not absolute. Benn thus reinterprets decision theory in a way that allows coherence and systematic rational choice among conflicting duties.<sup>44</sup>

Although some recent intuitionists abandon claims of certainty, intuitionists still often insist that intuitions are “factually cognitive” in the sense that they constitute “claims about the world which can be assessed (like any other factual belief) as true or false, and whose truth and falsity are as much possible objects of human knowledge as any other factual claims about the world.”<sup>45</sup> So central was this claim to the philosophical intuitionism of the 1930s and 1940s that a crucial challenge to such intuitionism was taken to be the fact of diversity of intuitions and judgments. If we intuit moral facts, it was asked, why do our intuitions differ? Whether the argument from the fact of diversity is a strong challenge to objectivist accounts of morality need not concern us. The important point is that intuitionism was usually understood as upholding some variety of moral realism, and that is why intuitionist were apt to say that people with the wrong intuitions were morally “blind: they could not see the moral facts of the case.

Yet subjectivist intuitionist theories are possible. To the subjectivist, moral intuitions may have an affective basis, arising from a person’s emotional reactions to situations and characters; the intuitions then derive from our essentially subjective responses to situations. Obviously the subjectivist will not be even a little worried by the argument from the fact of diversity; given the variability in people’s affective natures, if intuitions are essentially emotional responses, we should expect great variability in intuitions.

## **8. Weaker Interpretations of the Priority of the Right**



Traditional intuitionist deontological theories such as those of Prichard and Ross advanced a strong interpretation of the priority of the right over the good: we intuit self-evident principles of rightness without relying on knowledge of what is good. In contemporary moral theory, the priority of the right is typically understood in a more modest way. According to Michael Sandel's well-known formulation, a deontologist "describes a form of justification in which first principles are derived in a way that does not suppose any final human purposes or ends, nor any determine conception of the human good."<sup>46</sup> If emphasis is given to the requirement that deontological justification does not presuppose a determinate conception of the good, a justification can be deontological if it relies on a non-determinate notion of the good. It is in this sense that contemporary contractual moral theory is deontological. David Gauthier is explicit that morals by agreement does not presuppose "any substantive conception of the good": but requires only the general idea that each person's good is to be understood in terms of maximizing the satisfaction of her preferences.<sup>47</sup> If so, the good *qua* satisfaction of preferences is prior to the right. Similarly, Rawls's form of contractualism relies on a "thin theory of the good" according to which parties to contractual deliberations know that they view liberty, self-respect, income, wealth, and opportunities as goods.<sup>48</sup> Again, the claim is that, while the principles of right are based on some knowledge of the good, this is sufficiently thin, abstract, or non-determinate as to qualify the theory as a contractual deontology.

Whether such contractualism is a form of deontology or teleology can be debated. In some ways this type of contractualist argument has the character of a rule-teleological argument: the justification begins with a certain non-moral conception of the good, and the right is then defined in terms of rules or principles that have a certain promoting relation to the good so conceived.<sup>49</sup>

To be sure, the good is vague or abstract, and the promoting relation is one that does not aggregate the goods, requiring that each person's good be promoted.<sup>50</sup> Certainly in contrast to views such as Prichard's or Ross's, the idea of the right is tied much more closely to what promotes the good of each and every person. However, insofar as deontology is understood as any non-optimizing theory, or any theory which does not presuppose a specific, determinate, or controversial conception of the good, such contemporary contractualism qualifies as deontological.

### **9. Principle-Grounded Values**

Yet another way in which deontologists hold that the right is prior to the good calls attention to the grounding of our important valuings, an approach to justifying moral principles that I have defended elsewhere, and which is suggested in the work of Benn.<sup>51</sup> This deontological method starts with the observation that many of our values are grounded on moral principles insofar as the values presuppose the justification of the moral principles. Thus, for example, to value another person's friendship presupposes the notion of a friend and the respect friends owe to each other; they can trust each other because they are committed to honesty in their dealings with each other. Thus the value of friendship conceptually presupposes the moral requirement of honesty. To conceive of the valued thing inherently assumes the existence of moralized relations. The right is thus prior to many goods: our understanding of what is good is thoroughly informed and colored by moral convictions about the way we are to be treated and are to treat others.

Principle-grounded valuings are a genuine problem for a teleologist. Teleologists wish to apply an optimizing function on a set of values. But many values presuppose moral principles. It

would seem that a teleologist would wish to discount values that are only reasonable if a certain moral principle holds when in fact the principle does not hold. It certainly seems troubling to include in the set of values a value that rationally depends on an unjustified moral principle. But the teleologist can only distinguish justified from unjustified moral principles after the optimizing function has been applied to the set of values, for it is the outcome of the function on the set of values that yields principles of right. But the teleologist's problem is that he does not know what principle-grounded values to include in the set of values to be optimized; he can only know that after he has applied the optimizing function to the set. In short, the teleologist requires knowledge of justified moral principles at the outset of his analysis, knowledge that he can only obtain at the end of the justification. To be sure, the teleologist can simply waive this problem aside by allowing all values into the set, even values that suppose moral principles that are not validated by the optimization procedure. But that response is puzzling in a number of fairly obvious respects. The justified principles of right depend on allegiances to unjustified moral principles.<sup>52</sup>

This conception of deontology also draws attention to the limits of ranking in terms of priority the intertwined concepts of the right and good. Although in one respect we can see that principles of right and duty are prior to our conception of the good or values, we also see that our reason to continue affirming principles of right derives from our values. Suppose, for example, that someone asks why we should continue to affirm the principle of fidelity to friends. Rather than relying simply on moral intuitions, we might argue that our reason for continuing to affirm the principle is that so many of our values depend on it. If our view of the social world is so deeply informed by moral principles, to reject our moral principles would undermine the rational

basis of our values. Hence our reason to continue affirming deontic moral principles is our commitment to our values. In this sense, then, the justification of deontic principles derives from our values.

### **10. Conclusion to Part One**

The main focus of this discussion has been on the notions of the good and right. In Part Two we shall examine ways of characterizing deontology that rely less on these ideas, instead understanding deontology in primarily terms of types of reasons to act.

## Notes

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1. See William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 15 and John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 30.
2. Jeffrey Reiman, *Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 191.
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4. Robert Olson, "Deontological Ethics" in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (London: Macmillan, 1967).
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