have certain feelings or opinions about it. They would admit that the feelings and opinions of men may, in various ways, have a bearing on the question; but the mere fact that a given man or set of men has a given feeling or opinion can, they would say, never be sufficient, *by itself*, to show that an action is right or wrong.

But the views, which have been considered in this chapter, imply the direct contrary of this: they imply that, when once we have discovered, what men's feelings or opinions actually are, the whole question is finally settled; that there is, in fact, no further question to discuss. I have tried to show that these views are untenable, and I shall, in future, proceed upon the assumption that they are so; as also I shall proceed on the assumption that one and the same action cannot be both right and wrong. And the very fact that *we can* proceed upon these assumptions is an indirect argument in favour of their correctness. For if, whenever we assert an action to be right or wrong, we were merely making an assertion about some man's feelings or opinions, it would be incredible we should be so mistaken as to our own meaning, as to think that a question of right or wrong *cannot* be absolutely settled by showing what men feel and think, and to think that an action *cannot* be both right and wrong. It will be seen that, on these assumptions, we can raise many questions about right and wrong, which seem obviously not to be absurd; and which yet would be quite absurd—would be questions about which we could not hesitate for a moment—if assertions about right and wrong *were* merely assertions about men's feelings and opinions, or if the same action *could* be both right and wrong.

CHAPTER IV

THE OBJECTIVITY OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS (*concluded*)

It was stated, at the beginning of the last chapter, that the ethical theory we are considering—the theory stated in the first two chapters—does not maintain with regard to any *class* of voluntary actions, that, if an action of the class in question is once right, any other action of the same class must always be right. And this is true, in the sense in which the statement would, I think, be naturally understood. But it is now important to emphasize that, in a certain sense, the statement is untrue. Our theory does assert that, if any voluntary action is once right, then any other voluntary action which resembled it *in one particular respect* (or rather in a combination of two respects) must always also be right; and since, if we take the word class in the widest possible sense, any set of actions which resemble one another in any respect whatever may be said to form a class, it follows that, in this wide sense, our theory does maintain that there are many classes of action, such that, if an action belonging to one of them is once right, any action belonging to the same class would always be right.

Exactly what our theory does assert under this head cannot, I think, be stated accurately except in rather a complicated way; but it is important to state it as precisely as possible. The precise point is this. This theory asserted, as we saw, that the question whether a voluntary action is right or wrong always depends upon what its *total effects* are, *as compared with* the total effects of all the alternative actions, which we

could have done instead. Let us suppose, then, that we have an action X, which is right, and whose total effects are A; and let us suppose that the total effects of all the possible alternative actions would have been respectively B, C, D and E. The precise principle with which we are now concerned may then be stated as follows. Our theory implies, namely, that any action Y which resembled X in *both* the two respects (1) that its total effects were precisely similar to A and (2) that the total effects of all the possible alternatives were precisely similar to B, C, D and E, would necessarily also be right, if X was right, and would necessarily also be wrong, if X was wrong. It is important to emphasize the point that this will only be true of actions which resemble X in *both* these two respects at once. We cannot say that any action Y, whose total effects are precisely similar to those of X, will also be right if X is right. It is absolutely essential that the other condition should also be satisfied; namely, that the total effects of all the possible alternatives should also be precisely similar in both the two cases. For if they were not—if in the case of Y, some alternative was possible, which would have quite different effects, from any that would have been produced by any alternative that was possible in the case of X—then, according to our theory, it is possible that the total effects of this other alternative would be *intrinsically better* than those of Y, and in that case Y will be wrong, even though its total effects are precisely similar to those of X and X was right. *Both* conditions must, therefore, be satisfied simultaneously. But our theory does imply that any action which does resemble another in *both* these two respects at once, must be right if the first be right, and wrong if the first be wrong.

This is the precise principle with which we are now concerned. It may perhaps be stated more conveniently in the form in which it was stated in the second chapter: namely, that if it is *ever* right to do an action whose total effects are A in preference to one whose total effects are B, it must always be right to do any action whose total effects are precisely similar to A in preference to one whose total effects are precisely similar to B. It is also, I think, what is commonly meant by saying, simply, that the question whether an action is right or wrong always depends upon its total effects or consequences; but this will not do as an accurate statement of it, because, as we shall see, it may be held that right and wrong do, in a sense, always depend upon an action's total consequences and yet that this principle is untrue. It is also sometimes expressed by saying that if an action is once right, any precisely similar action, done in circumstances which are also precisely similar in all respects, must be right too. But this is both too narrow and too wide. It is too narrow, because our principle does not confine itself to an assertion about *precisely similar* actions. Our principle asserts that any action Y, whose *effects* are precisely similar to those of another X, will be right, if X is right, provided the effects of all the alternatives possible in the two cases are also precisely similar, even though Y itself is *not* precisely similar to X, but utterly different from it. And it is too wide, because it does not follow from the fact that two actions are both precisely similar in themselves and also done in precisely similar circumstances, that their effects must also be precisely similar. This does, of course, follow, *so long as the laws of nature remain the same.* But if we suppose the laws of nature to change, or if we conceive a Universe in which

different laws of nature hold from those which hold in this one, then plainly a precisely similar action done in precisely similar circumstances might yet have *different* total effects. According to our principle, therefore, the statement that any two precisely similar actions, done in precisely similar circumstances, must both be right, if one is right, though true as applied to this Universe, provided (as is commonly supposed) the laws of nature cannot change, is not true *absolutely unconditionally*. But our principle asserts *absolutely unconditionally* that if it is once right to prefer a set of total effects A to another set B, it must always, in any conceivable Universe, be right to prefer a set precisely similar to A to a set precisely similar to B.

This, then, is a second very fundamental principle, which our theory asserts—a principle which is, in a sense, concerned with *classes* of actions, and not merely with particular actions. And in asserting this principle also it seems to me that our theory is right. But many different views have been held, which, while admitting that one and the same action cannot be both right and wrong, yet assert or imply that this second principle is untrue. And I propose in this chapter to deal with those among them which resemble the theories dealt with in the last chapter in one particular respect—namely, that they depend upon some view as to the *meaning* of the word 'right' or as to the meaning of the word 'good'.

And, first of all, we may briefly mention a theory, which is very similar to some of those dealt with in the last chapter and which is, I think, often confused with them, but which yet differs from them in one very important respect. This is the theory that to say that an action is right or wrong is the same thing as to say that a majority of *all* mankind have, more often

than not, some particular feeling (or absence of feeling) towards actions of the class to which it belongs. This theory differs from those considered in the last chapter, because it does not imply that one and the same action ever actually is both right and wrong. For, however much the feelings of different men and different societies may differ at different times, yet, if we take strictly a majority of *all* mankind at *all* times past, present and future, any class of action which is, for instance, generally approved by such an absolute majority of all mankind, will *not* also be disapproved by an absolute majority of *all* mankind, although it may be disapproved by a majority of any one society, or by a majority of all the men living at any one period. This proposal, therefore, to say that, when we assert an action to be right or wrong, we are making an assertion about the feelings of an absolute majority of *all* mankind does not conflict with the principle that one and the same action cannot be both right and wrong. It allows us to say that any particular action always is either right or wrong, in spite of the fact that different men and different societies may feel differently towards actions of that class at the same or different times. What it does conflict with is the principle we are now considering. Since it implies that if a majority of mankind did *not* happen to have a particular feeling towards actions of one class A, it *would* not be right to prefer actions of this class to those of another class B, even though the effects of A and B, respectively, might be precisely similar to what they now are. It implies, that is to say, that in a Universe in which there were no men, or in which the feelings of the majority were different from what they are in this one, it might *not* be right to prefer one total set of effects A to another B, even though in this Universe it *is* always right to prefer them.

Now I do not know if this theory has ever been expressly held; but some philosophers have certainly argued *as if* it were true. Great pains have, for instance, been taken to show that mankind are, *in general*, pleased with actions which lead to a maximum of pleasure, and displeased with those which lead to less than a maximum; and the proof that this is so has been treated as if it were, at the same time, a proof that it is *always* right to do what leads to a maximum of pleasure, and wrong to do what leads to less than a maximum. But obviously, unless to show that mankind are *generally* pleased with a particular sort of action is *the same thing* as to show that that sort of action is *always* right, some independent proof is needed to show that what mankind are generally pleased with *is* always right. And some of those who have used this argument do not seem to have seen that any such proof is needed. So soon as we recognize quite clearly that to say that an action is right is *not* the same thing as to say that mankind are generally pleased with it, it becomes obvious that to show that mankind are generally pleased with a particular sort of action is *not* sufficient to show that it is right. And hence it is, I think, fair to say that those who have argued as if it *were* sufficient, have argued *as if* to say that an action is right were the same thing as saying that mankind are generally pleased with it; although, perhaps, if this assumption had been expressly put before them, they would have rejected it.

We may therefore say, I think, that the theory that to call an action right or wrong is the same thing as to say that an absolute majority of all mankind have some particular feeling (or absence of feeling) towards actions of that kind, has often been assumed, even if it has not been expressly held. And it is, therefore, perhaps worth while to point out that it is exposed to exactly the same objection as two of the theories dealt with in the last chapter. The objection is that it is quite certain, as a matter of fact, that a man may have no doubt that an action is right, even where he *does* doubt whether an absolute majority of all mankind have a particular feeling (or absence of feeling) towards it, no matter what feeling we take. And what this shows is that, whatever he is thinking, when he thinks the action to be right, he is not merely thinking that a majority of mankind have any particular feeling towards it. Even, therefore, if it be true that what is approved or liked by an absolute majority of mankind is, *as a matter of fact*, always right (and this we are not disputing), it is quite certain that to say that it is right is not *the same thing* as to say that it is thus approved. And with this we come to the end of a certain type of theories with regard to the meaning of the words 'right' and 'wrong'. We are now entitled to the conclusion that, whatever the meaning of these words may be, it is not identical with any assertion whatever about either the feelings or the thoughts of *men*—neither those of any particular man, nor those of any particular society, nor those of some man or other, nor those of mankind as a whole. To predicate of an action that it is right or wrong is to predicate of it something quite different from the mere fact that any man or set of men have any particular feeling towards, or opinion about, it.

But there are some philosophers who, while feeling the strongest objection to the view that one and the same action can ever be both right and wrong, and also to any view which implies that the question whether an action is right or wrong depends in any way upon what men—even the majority of men—actually

feel or think about it, yet seem to be so strongly convinced that to call an action right *must* be merely to make an assertion about the attitude of *some* being towards it, that they have adopted the view that there is some being other than any man or set of men, whose attitude towards the same action or class of actions never changes, and that, when we assert actions to be right or wrong, what we are doing is merely to make an assertion about the attitude of this non-human being. And theories of this type are the next which I wish to consider.

Those who have held some theory of this type have, I think, generally held that what we mean by calling an action right or wrong is not that the non-human being in question has or has not some *feeling* towards actions of the class to which it belongs, but that it has or has not towards them one of the mental attitudes which we call *willing* or *commanding* or *forbidding*; a kind of mental attitude with which we are all familiar, and which is not generally classed under the head of feelings, but under a quite separate head. To *forbid* actions of a certain class is the same thing as to will or command that they should *not* be done. And the view generally held is, I think, that to say that an action *ought* to be done, is the same thing as to say that it belongs to a class which the non-human being *wills* or commands; to say that it is *right*, is to say that it belongs to a class which the non-human being does *not* forbid; and to say that it is *wrong* or ought not to be done is to say that it belongs to a class which the non-human being *does* forbid. All assertions about right and wrong are, accordingly, by theories of this type, identified with assertions about the *will* of some non-human being. And there are two obvious reasons why we should hold that, if judgements of right and

wrong are judgements about any mental attitude at all, they are judgements about the mental attitude which we call *willing*, rather than about any of those which we call *feelings*.

The first is that the notion which we express by the word 'right' seems to be obviously closely connected with that which we express by the word 'ought', in the manner explained in Chapter I (pp. 21–26); and that there are many usages of language which seem to suggest that the word 'ought' expresses a command. The very name of the Ten Commandments is a familiar instance, and so is the language in which they are expressed. Everybody understands these Commandments as assertions to the effect that certain actions *ought*, and that others *ought not* to be done. But yet they are called '*Commandments*', and if we look at what they actually say we find such expressions as '*Thou shalt* do no murder', '*Thou shalt* not steal'—expressions which are obviously equivalent to the imperatives, '*Do* no murder', '*Do* not steal', and which strictly, therefore, should express commands. For this reason alone it is very natural to suppose that the word 'ought' *always* expresses a command. And there is yet another reason in favour of the same supposition—namely, that the fact that actions of a certain class ought or ought not to be done is often called 'a moral *law*', a name which naturally suggests that such facts are in some way analogous to 'laws', in the legal sense—the sense in which we talk of the laws of England or of any other country. But if we look to see what is meant by saying that any given thing is, in this sense, 'part of the law' of a given community, there are a good many facts in favour of the view that nothing can be part of the law of any community, unless it has either itself been willed by

some person or persons having the necessary authority over that community, or can be deduced from something which has been so willed. It is, indeed, not at all an easy thing to define what is meant by '*having the necessary authority*', or, in other words, to say in what relation a person or set of persons must stand to a community, if it is to be true that nothing can be a law of that community except what these persons have willed, or what can be deduced from something which they have willed. But still it may be true that there always is some person or set of persons whose will or consent is necessary to make a law a law. And whether this is so or not, it does seem to be the case that every law, which is the law of any community, is, in a certain sense, *dependent* upon the human will. This is true in the sense that, in the case of every law whatever, there always are *some* men, who, by performing certain acts of will, could make it cease to be the law; and also that, in the case of anything whatever which is *not* the law, there always are *some* men, who, by performing certain acts of will, could make it be the law: though, of course, any given set of men who could effect the change in the case of some laws, could very often *not* effect it in the case of others, but in their case another set of men would be required: and, of course, in some cases the number of men whose co-operation would be required would be very large. It does seem, therefore, as if laws, in the legal sense, were essentially dependent on the human will; and this fact naturally suggests that moral laws also are dependent on the will of some being.

These are, I think, the two chief reasons which have led people to suppose that moral judgements are judgements about the *will*, rather than about the *feelings*, of some being or beings. And there are, of course, the

same objections to supposing, in the case of *moral* laws, that the being or beings in question can be any man or set of men, as there are to the supposition that judgements about right and wrong can be merely judgements about men's feelings and opinions. In this way, therefore, there has naturally arisen the view we are now considering—the view that to say of an action that it ought to be done, or is right, or ought not to be done, is the same thing as to say that it belongs to a class of actions which has been commanded, or permitted, or forbidden by some *non-human* being. Different views have, of course, been taken as to who or what the non-human being is. One of the simplest is that it is God: that is to say, that, when we call an action wrong, we mean to say that God has forbidden it. But other philosophers have supposed that it is a being which may be called 'Reason', or one called 'The Practical Reason', or one called 'The Pure Will', or one called 'The Universal Will', or one called 'The True Self'. In some cases, the beings called by these names have been supposed to be merely 'faculties' of the human mind, or some other entity, resident in, or forming a part of, the minds of all men. And, where this is the case, it may seem unfair to call these supposed entities 'non-human'. But all that I mean by calling them this is to emphasize the fact that even if they are faculties of, or entities resident in, the human mind, they are, at least, not *human beings*—that is to say, they are not *men*—either any one particular man or any set of men. For *ex hypothesi* they are beings which can never will what is wrong, whereas it is admitted that all *men* can, and sometimes do, will what is wrong. No doubt sometimes, when philosophers speak as if they believed in the existence of beings of this kind, they are speaking

metaphorically and do not really hold any such belief. Thus a philosopher may often speak of an ethical truth as 'a dictate of Reason', without really meaning to imply that there is any faculty or part of our mind which invariably leads us right and never leads us wrong. But I think there is no doubt that such language is not always metaphorical. The view is held that whenever I judge truly or will rightly, there really is a something in me which does these things—the same something on every different occasion; and that this something *never* judges falsely or wills wrongly: so that, when I judge falsely and will wrongly, it is a *different* something in me which does so.

Now it may seem to many people that the most serious objection to views of this kind is that it is, to say the least, extremely doubtful whether there is any being, such as they suppose to exist—any being, who never wills what is wrong but always only what is right; and I think myself that, in all probability there is no such being—neither a God, nor any being such as philosophers have called by the names I have mentioned. But adequately to discuss the reasons for and against supposing that there is one would take us far too long. And fortunately it is unnecessary for our present purpose; since the only question we need to answer is whether, even supposing there is such a being, who commands all that ought to be done and only what ought to be done, and forbids all that is wrong and only what is wrong, what we *mean* by saying that an action ought or ought not to be done can possibly be merely *that* this being commands it or forbids it. And it seems to me there is a conclusive argument against supposing that this can be all that we mean, even if there really is, in fact, such a being.

The argument is simply that, whether there is such

a being or not, there certainly are many people who do not believe that there is one, and that such people, in spite of not believing in its existence, can nevertheless continue to believe that actions are right and wrong. But this would be quite impossible if the view we are considering were true. According to that view, to believe that an action is wrong is *the same thing* as to believe that it is forbidden by one of these non-human beings; so that any one whatever who ever does believe that an action is wrong is, *ipso facto*, believing in the existence of such a being. It maintains, therefore, that everybody who believes that actions are right or wrong does, as a matter of fact, believe in the existence of one of these beings. And this contention seems to be plainly contrary to fact. It might, indeed, be urged that when we say there are some people who *do not* believe in any of these beings, all that is really true is that there are some people who *think* they do not believe in them; while, in fact, everybody really does. But it is surely impossible seriously to maintain that, in all cases, they are so mistaken as to the nature of their own beliefs. But if so, then it follows absolutely that even if wrong actions always are in fact forbidden by some non-human being, yet to say that they are wrong is not identical with saying that they are so forbidden.

And it is important also, as an argument against views of this class, to insist upon the reason why they contradict the principle which we are considering in this chapter. They contradict this principle, because they imply that there is absolutely *no* class of actions of which we can say that it always *would*, in any conceivable Universe, be right or wrong. They imply this because they imply that *if* the non-human being, whom they suppose to exist, did not exist, nothing would be

right or wrong. Thus, for instance, if it is held that to call an action wrong is *the same thing* as to say that it is forbidden by God, it will follow that, if God did not exist, nothing would be wrong; and hence that we cannot possibly hold that God forbids what is wrong, *because* it is wrong. We must hold, on the contrary, that the wrongness of what is wrong consists simply and solely in the fact that God does forbid it—a view to which many even of those, who believe that what is wrong is in fact forbidden by God, will justly feel an objection.

For these reasons, it seems to me, we may finally conclude that, when we assert any action to be right or wrong, we are not merely making an assertion about the attitude of mind towards it of any being or set of beings whatever—no matter what attitude of mind we take to be the one in question, whether one of feeling or thinking or willing, and no matter what being or beings we take, whether human or non-human: and that hence no proof to the effect that any particular being or set of beings has or has not a particular attitude of mind towards an action is sufficient to prove that the action really is right or wrong.

But there are many philosophers who fully admit this—who admit that the predicates which we denote by the words 'right' and 'wrong' do not consist in the having of any relation whatever to any being's feelings or thoughts or will; and who will even go further than this and admit that the question whether an action is right or wrong does depend, in a sense, solely upon its consequences, namely, in the sense, that no action ever can be right, if it was possible for the agent to do something else which would have had *better* total consequences; but who, while admitting

all this, nevertheless maintain that to call one set of consequences *better* than another is the same thing as to say that the one set is related to some mind or minds in a way in which the other is not related. That is to say, while admitting that to call an action right or wrong is *not* merely to assert that some particular mental attitude is taken up towards it, they hold that to call a thing 'good' or 'bad' *is* merely to assert this. And of course, if it be true that no action ever can be right unless its total effects are as *good* as possible, then this view as to the meaning of the words 'good' and 'bad' will contradict the principle we are considering in this chapter as effectively as if the corresponding view be held about the meaning of the words 'right' and 'wrong'. For if, in saying that one set of effects A is *better* than another B we merely mean to say that A has a relation to some mind or minds which B has *not* got, then it will follow that a set of effects precisely similar to A will *not* be better than a set precisely similar to B, if they do not happen to have the required relations to any mind. And hence it will follow that even though, on one occasion or in one Universe, it is right to prefer A to B, yet, on another occasion or in another Universe, it may quite easily *not* be right to prefer a set of effects precisely similar to A to a set precisely similar to B.

For this reason, the view that the meaning of the words 'good' and 'bad' is merely that some being has some mental attitude towards the thing so called, may constitute a fatal objection to the principle which we are considering. It will, indeed, only do so, if we admit that it must always be right to do what has the *best* possible total effects. But it may be held that this is self-evident, and many persons, who hold this view with regard to the meaning of 'good' and 'bad' would,

I think, be inclined to admit that it is so. Hence it becomes important to consider this new objection to our principle.

This view that by calling a thing 'good' or 'bad' we merely mean that some being or beings have a certain mental attitude towards it, has been even more commonly held than the corresponding view with regard to 'right' and 'wrong'; and it may be held in as many different forms. Thus it may be held that to say that a thing is 'good' is the same thing as to say that somebody *thinks* it is good—a view which may be refuted by the same general argument which was used in the case of the corresponding view about 'right' and 'wrong'. Again it may be held that each man when he calls a thing 'good' or 'bad' merely means that *he himself* thinks it to be so or has some feeling towards it; a view from which it will follow, as in the case of right and wrong, that no two men can ever differ in opinion as to whether a thing is good or bad. Again, also, in most of the forms, in which it can be held, it will certainly follow that one and the same thing can be *both* good and bad; since, whatever pair of mental attitudes or single mental attitude we take, it seems as certain here, as in the case of right and wrong, that different men will sometimes have different mental attitudes towards the same thing. This has, however, been very often disputed in the case of one particular mental attitude, which deserves to be specially mentioned.

One of the chief differences between the views which have been held with regard to the meaning of 'good' and 'bad', and those which have been held with regard to the meaning of 'right' and 'wrong', is that in the former case it has been very often held that what we mean by calling a thing 'good' is that it is *desired*, or

desired in some particular way; and this attitude of 'desire' is one that I did not mention in the case of 'right' and 'wrong' because, so far as I know, nobody has ever held that to call an action 'right' is the same thing as to say that it is desired. But the commonest of all views with regard to the meaning of the word 'good', is that to call a thing good is to say that it is desired, or desired for its own sake; and curiously enough this view has been used as an argument in favour of the very theory stated in our first two chapters, on the ground that no man ever desires (or desires for its own sake) anything at all except *pleasure* (or *his own* pleasure), and that hence, since 'good' means 'desired', any set of effects which contains more pleasure *must* always be better than one which contains less. Of course, even if it were true that no *man* ever desires anything except pleasure, it would not really follow, as this argument assumes, that a whole which contains more pleasure must *always* be better than one which contains less. On the contrary, the very opposite would follow; since it would follow that *if* any beings did happen to desire something other than pleasure (and we can easily conceive that some might) then wholes which contained more pleasure might easily *not* always be better than those which contained less. But it is now generally recognized that it is a complete mistake to suppose even that *men* desire nothing but pleasure, or even that they desire nothing else for its own sake. And, whether it is so or not, the question is irrelevant to our present purpose, which is to find some quite general arguments to show that to call a thing 'good' is, in any case, *not* the same thing as merely to say that it is desired or desired for its own sake, nor yet that any other mental attitude whatever is taken up towards it. What arguments can we find to show this?

One point should be carefully noticed to begin with; namely, that we have no need to show that when we call a thing 'good' we *never* mean simply that somebody has some mental attitude towards it. There are many reasons for thinking that the word 'good' is ambiguous—that we use it in different senses on different occasions; and, if so, it is quite possible that, in *some* of its uses, it should stand merely for the assertion that somebody has some feeling or some other mental attitude towards the thing called 'good', although, in *other* uses, it does not. We are not, therefore, concerned to show that it may not *sometimes* merely stand for this; all that we need to show is that *sometimes* it does not. For what we have to do is merely to meet the argument that, if we assert, 'It would always be wrong to prefer a *worse* set of total consequences to a *better*', we *must*, in this proposition, mean merely by 'worse' and 'better', consequences to which a certain mental attitude is taken up—a conclusion from which it would follow that, even though a set of consequences A was *once* better than a set B, a set precisely similar to A would not always necessarily be better than a set precisely similar to B. And obviously all that we need to do, to show this, is to show that *some* sense can be given to the words 'better' and 'worse', quite other than this; or, in other words, that to call a thing 'good' does not *always* mean merely that some mental attitude is taken up towards it.

It will be best, therefore, in order to make the problem definite, to concentrate attention upon one particular usage of the word, in which it seems clearly not to mean this. And I will take as an example that usage in which we make judgements of what was called in Chapter II '*intrinsic* value'; that is to say,

where we judge, concerning a particular state of things that it would be worth while—would be 'a good thing'—that that state of things should exist, *even if nothing else were to exist besides*, either at the same time or afterwards. We do not, of course, so constantly make judgements of this kind, as we do some other judgements about the goodness of things. But we certainly *can* make them, and it seems quite clear that we mean *something* by them. We *can* consider with regard to any particular state of things whether it would be worth while that it should exist, even if there were absolutely nothing else in the Universe besides; whether, for instance, it would have been worth while that the Universe, as it has existed up till now, should have existed, even if absolutely nothing were to follow, but its existence were to be cut short at the present moment: we *can* consider whether the existence of such a Universe would have been better than nothing, or whether it would have been just as good that nothing at all should ever have existed. In the case of such judgements as these it seems to me there are strong reasons for holding that we are not merely making an assertion either about our own or about anybody else's attitude of mind towards the state of things in question. And if we can show this, in this one case, that is sufficient for our purpose.

What, then, are the reasons for holding it?

I think we should distinguish two different cases, according to the *kind* of attitude of mind about which it is supposed that we are making an assertion.

If it is held that what we are asserting is merely that the state of things in question is one that we or somebody else is *pleased* at the idea of, or one that is or would be *desired* or *desired for its own sake* (and these are the views that seem to be most commonly held),

the following argument seems to me to be conclusive against all views of this type. Namely, a man certainly can believe with regard to a given thing or state of things, that the idea of it *does* please somebody, and *is* desired, and even desired for its own sake, and yet *not* believe that it would be at all worth while that it should exist, if it existed quite alone. He may even believe that it would be a positively bad thing—*worse* than nothing—that it should exist quite alone, in spite of the fact that he knows that it is desired and strongly desired for its own sake, even by himself. That some men can and do make such judgements—that they can and do judge that things which they themselves desire or are pleased with, are nevertheless intrinsically bad (that is to say *would* be bad, quite apart from their consequences, and even if they existed quite alone) is, I think, undeniable; and no doubt men make this judgement even more frequently with regard to things which are desired by others. And if this is so, then it shows conclusively that to judge that a thing is intrinsically good is not the same thing as to judge that some man is pleased with it or desires it or desires it for its own sake. Of course, it may be held that anybody who makes such a judgement is wrong: that, as a matter of fact, anything whatever which is desired, always is intrinsically good. But that is not the question. We are not disputing for the moment that this may be so *as a matter of fact*. All that we are trying to show is that, even if it is so, yet, to say that a thing is intrinsically good is not *the same thing* as to say that it is desired: and this follows absolutely, if even in a single case, a man believes that a thing *is* desired and yet does *not* believe that it is intrinsically good.

But I am not sure that this argument will hold against all forms in which the view might be held,

although it does hold against those in which it is most commonly held. There are, I think, feelings with regard to which it is much more plausible to hold that to believe that they are felt towards a given thing is the same thing as to believe that the thing is intrinsically good, than it is to hold this with regard to the mere feeling of pleasure, or desire, or desire of a thing 'for its own sake'. For instance, it may, so far as I can see, be true that there really is some very special feeling of such a nature that any man who knows that he himself or anybody else really feels it towards any state of things cannot doubt that the state of things in question is intrinsically good. If this be so, then the last argument will not hold against the view that when we call a thing intrinsically good we may mean merely that *this special feeling* is felt towards it. And against any such view, if it were held, the only obvious argument I can find is that it is surely plain that, even if the special feeling in question had *not* been felt by any one towards the given state of things, yet the state of things *would* have been intrinsically good.

But, in order fully to make plain the force of this argument, it is necessary to guard against one misunderstanding, which is very commonly made and which is apt to obscure the whole question which we are now discussing. That is to say, we are not now urging that anything would be any good at all, unless somebody had some feeling towards *something*; nor are we urging that there are not many things, which *are* good, in *one* sense of the word, and which yet would not be any good at all unless somebody had some feeling towards them. On the contrary, both these propositions, which are very commonly held, seem to me to be perfectly true. I think it is true that no whole can be intrinsically good, unless it *contains* some feeling towards

something as a part of itself; and true also that, in a very important sense of the word 'good' (though not in the sense to which I have given the name 'intrinsically good'), many things which *are* good would not be good, unless somebody had some feeling towards them. We must, therefore, clearly distinguish the question whether these things are so, from the question which we are now discussing. The question we are now discussing is merely whether, granted that nothing can be intrinsically good unless it *contains* some feeling, a thing which *is* thus good and *does* contain this feeling cannot be good without anybody's needing to have *another* feeling towards *it*. The point may be simply illustrated by taking the case of pleasure. Let us suppose, for the moment, that nothing can be intrinsically good unless it contains some pleasure, and that every whole which contains more pleasure than pain is intrinsically good. The question we are now discussing is merely whether, supposing this to be so, any whole which did contain more pleasure than pain, *would* not be good, even if nobody had *any further feeling* towards it. It seems to me quite plain that it would be so. But if so, then, to say that a state of things is intrinsically good cannot possibly be the same thing as to say that anybody has any kind of feeling towards *it*, even though no state of things can be intrinsically good unless it *contains* some feeling towards *something*.

But, after all, I do not know whether the strongest argument against any view which asserts that to call a thing 'good' is the same thing as to say that some mental attitude is taken up towards it, does not merely consist in the fact that two propositions about 'right' and 'wrong' are self-evident: namely (1) that, if it were once the duty of any being, who *knew* that the

total effects of one action would be A, and those of another B, to choose the action which produced A rather than that which produced B, it must *always* be the duty of any being who had to choose between two actions, one of which he knew would have total effects precisely similar to A and the other total effects precisely similar to B, to choose the former rather than the latter, and (2) that it must always be the duty of any being who had to choose between two actions, one of which he *knew* would have *better* total effects than the other, to choose the former. From these two propositions taken together it absolutely follows that if one set of total effects A is once *better* than another B, any set precisely similar to A must *always* be better than any set precisely similar to B. And, if so, then 'better' and 'worse' *cannot* stand for any relation to any attitude of mind; since we cannot be entitled to say that if a given attitude is once taken up towards A and B, the same attitude would always *necessarily* be taken up towards any pair of wholes precisely similar to A and B.