enlightened is entering the awful doubt that precedes the enlightenment of simplicity and innocence: innocence conscious, determined and possessed. We know the Nemesis that materialism has brought upon itself, the scientific disintegration of material things: we know the threat that that portends. Hundreds of years may be spent in chaos, and all that time the demand upon every individual who would serve society will become more imperative. A social conscience is not enough. Perhaps the next distinctive phase of progress can only be the achievement of heroic sanctity.

MORALS AND LANGUAGE

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IN his study of the tradition of thought in the early Middle Ages, a distinguished historian (Mr Richard Southern) remarks that it should be easier for us today than it was a hundred years ago to understand the fascination of logic for scholars of the eleventh century; for them as for us, 'Logic was an instrument of order in a chaotic world'. Mr Southern speaks as a historian and a humanist, for whom thought is more immediately apprehended as an orchestral scoring of the themes of human need and of moral concern than in its own proper cogency. Yet the paradox of moral philosophy lies in just this incommensurability of the humane and the analytic: the task of moral philosophy is somehow to mediate; to explore the complexity of the humane and to map it with a disciplined fidelity.

It might very well seem that the scholastic metaphysical tradition exhibits its inadequacy more patently here than anywhere else, with its manuals of moral theology, its solutions of problems of conscience by the numerical assessment of probable opinions, its approximation of moral philosophy to a demonstrative science, and more radically, with just this very metaphysical character itself. It is this last reproach which will specially concern us here.

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How, it may be felt, can a metaphysics, admittedly taking its point of departure in a physics, practise a fidelity to the complexity of a moral sensibility? Such a metaphysics can only be a bogus physics, setting up a fictitious world of quasi-physical entities, the behaviour of which could only serve as an excessively crude model for the delicately particular moral decisions and options of our humane activity. Surely an analysis of our moral language, the language we use for choosing, advising, exhorting, persuading, would serve as a more sensitive instrument of exploration.

I don't know whether Mr Nowell-Smith would in fact put an objection to scholastic moral philosophy in these terms; it is very probable that he simply isn't interested in scholastic philosophy, and, not surprisingly, he certainly betrays no acquaintance with it in his excellent book [1]; but it is an objection which anyone concerned to recommend and renew the scholastic tradition needs to put himself and answer as fairly as he can. On the face of it, a method of linguistic analysis not unrelated to, shall we say, Dr Leavis's critical evaluations of George Eliot or Henry James, is much more appropriate to morals than any ponderous metaphysics; but as I hope to indicate, though hardly to show, in so brief a discussion, a careful study of Mr Nowell-Smith's book in the light of scholastic moral philosophy, while certainly of the greatest profit to the scholastic philosopher, makes it clear that the humane is preserved in its integrity precisely by such a metaphysical philosophy and not by an analysis of moral language.

First we must establish some sort of communication between a philosophy beginning with a physics and a philosophy beginning with the language we use in our everyday discourse. There is a kind of archetypal philosophical image which is relevant here. We often want to compare knowledge to a mirroring; and not only because the mirror-image is like its exemplar, but because it finds a place in the mirror-world, a world defined by the frame of the mirror: the mirror-world is a world within a world. (This archetype reveals some of its ubiquity in Heidegger's remark in *Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung: 'Die Dichter stiften das Sein'*, 'The Poet founds Being'. In the human *Dasein*, Being is established as Presence.) The metaphor needs a twofold correction, based on a single metaphysical truth: firstly, the mirror-image merely represents its exemplar, while human thought and language is

1 *Ethics*. By P. H. Nowell-Smith. (Penguin Books; 3s. 6d.)

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creative; secondly, the boundaries of the mirror-world are fixed, while the boundaries of human thought and language are infinitely open to fresh determination; as Mr Nowell-Smith remarks, contradiction is the limit of language. This twofold correction helps to show the distance traversed by Wittgenstein from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*; and the single metaphysical truth or reality on which it is based is that of the *transcendental* (as transcending categories) unity of the self—a point to which we shall return.

In the light of these considerations, Mr Nowell-Smith's extremely valuable discussion of what he calls 'contextual implication' takes on what may seem a surprising metaphysical importance. The notion of *context*, as used by him and by Mr Strawson, in his *Introduction to Logical Theory*, corresponds to the frame of our knowledge, in general defined by the exclusion of contradiction, and on any actual occasion by what we are in fact thinking or talking about. For Mr Nowell-Smith, contexts differ for theoretical and practical discourse; while language in a theoretical context is controlled by logical implication of the kind realized in its purest form in mathematics, language in a practical context is controlled by a much 'looser' kind of implication, depending on the use of what he calls 'A(ptness)-words' (e.g. 'sublime') and 'G(erundive)-words' (e.g. 'good', 'ought'). We have to ask about these A- and G- words not what they mean, but 'For what job is the word . . . used?' and 'Under what conditions is it proper to use that word for that job?' Contextual implication is a kind of propriety in the connected use of A- and G-words, a propriety the rules of which Mr Nowell-Smith analyses brilliantly in our actual use of language.

Now as Aristotle pointed out at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*[2] we cannot hope for as much certainty in the study of ethics as in other sciences, for ethics is a *practical* science while physics, say, is a *theoretical* science; and it may seem that he has in mind a distinction like that being made here by Mr Nowell-Smith (and by Toulmin and Hare, all following Hume) between the theoretical and the practical. The distinctions are similar, but they are not identical, certainly not for St Thomas's Aristotelianism, and very improbably for Aristotle himself. Mr Nowell-

2 It is pleasant to see that Sir David Ross's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* has now been brought out in the *World's Classics* series. (Geoffrey Cumberlege; 5s.)

Smith's distinction between theoretical and practical discourse is based on a bifurcation of *fact* and *act*: now *fact* and *act* only appear to determine distinct worlds because 'fact' is a word which belongs to the language of logical grammar and not of description. There *are* no facts: facts are what are asserted by statements. *Things* are; but things and acts belong to the same world. Things can be considered as *acts*, as the achievement of a *finality*; acts can be considered as *things*, as being *formally* of a certain kind. The importance of this revised distinction is that while practical discourse may be seen to have a logic proper to itself (rather, in Aristotle's sense, a *dialectic*), practical discourse and moral behaviour require and achieve re-insertion in a world only comprehended metaphysically, as including acts and things, ends and forms: meaning is not to be restricted to 'D(escriptive)-words' but to be allowed—obliquely—to A- and G-words. For while A- and G-words do not *describe*, they still *mean*: they mean an X as engaged in a context with the speaker, an X as referred to the frame of the mirror, and might thus well be called 'E(ngagement)-words' or even 'transcendentals' (compare St Thomas, *de Veritate*, 1, 1).

Just how necessary it is to vindicate the claims of metaphysics at this first stage of Mr Nowell-Smith's and our inquiry becomes quite painfully clear at its last stage, in his two chapters on 'Freedom and Responsibility'. Frequent re-reading, even with a sympathy excited by the good sense and expertness of the preceding chapters, has failed to disclose anything but muddle and triviality here. The two chapters in fact constitute Mr Nowell-Smith's attempt to distinguish the properly moral from the generally practical. And the conclusion?

> Traits of [moral] character, then, are dispositions to do things of which a spectator (including the agent himself) approves or disapproves and which can be, if not implanted or wholly eradicated, at least strengthened or weakened by favourable and adverse verdicts. (p. 306.)

This is only saved from being complete nonsense by being supported on a trivial relativism:

> Moral philosophy is a practical science; its aim is to answer questions in the form 'What shall I do?' But no general answer can be given to this type of question. The most a moral philosopher can do is to paint a picture of various types of life in the manner of Plato and ask which type of life you really

want to lead. . . . But the type of life you most want to lead will depend on the sort of man you are. (p. 319.)

Once practical discourse has been severed from theoretical discourse it must be supposed to function with complete indifference to any defined 'Good Life', as selected by each individual on the basis of his own tastes. Mr Nowell-Smith has had no difficulty in exposing the inadequacy of the familiar 'objective' kind of morality, whether Intuitionist or deriving from a view of Natural Law which makes this merely a supreme *rule*; the only alternative would then appear to be the modified 'subjective' view he proposes, where the moral language we use remains 'objective' as the empirical fact of the way we talk, but where the impulse which animates this language is arbitrary and 'subjective'. But 'objective' and 'subjective', rather like 'theoretical' and 'practical', are not exclusive alternatives. The objectivity traditionally claimed for morals is a *transcendental* objectivity: it is the Law of Motion of the will—spontaneity. St Thomas defines Natural Law as an *inclination*, the inclination to the perfection proper to a nature: in human natures this inclination is a spontaneity which transcends any determinate end by being directed to it precisely as end; and it is just this infinite openness to ends (corresponding to the infinite contextual determinability of thought) which specifies the objective moral sense (*Sinn*) of the will. Further, since this spontaneity is God-given, it is God-ward, not determinately (God is not determinate; he is not just another fact) but transcendentally; that is, it is directed to ends as partial perfections—an 'implicit love of God'.

This theme cannot be developed here, but it should now be sufficiently clear that only a metaphysics could claim to satisfy the first demand of a humane moral philosophy—the *seriousness* of moral concern; for the moral life would be quite meaningless if it merely depended on our own dispositions, the 'sort of men' we each were. And only a metaphysics which is not a pseudo-physics can at the same time afford to recognize the *openness* to determination of the moral life; in scholastic philosophy this openness is safeguarded by the affirmation of the transcendental character of the will. Mr Nowell-Smith disposes easily of the 'billiard-ball' theory of the self, the theory that the self is a kind of billiard ball acted upon by desires, and only distinguished from a billiard ball in that, in the special case of conscientious actions,

the self is capable of spontaneous action. But the spontaneity of the self depends on its transcendental character, its openness to desires at all; it is not categorically distinct from the desires but only transcendentally; for the self is not a quasi-physical entity but the very entity of a human creature as entity. It is curious that Mr Nowell-Smith should remark, in the context of the discussion of the self, 'Perhaps metaphysics is just what is needed here' (p. 281). He cannot mean this very seriously, since he makes no attempt to investigate metaphysical characterizations of the self other than Professor Campbell's; and yet, humanely speaking, the self, the *I*, is the very source of moral concern: the *I* uttering itself not only as mind but as will. Once this is granted, it becomes clear that the sanction temporarily given, in the first paragraph of this essay, to the metaphor of *mapwork* for the practice of moral philosophy, must now be withdrawn. Ethics is a practical science not because it maps scattered bits of practice, rather like organic chemistry and the carbon compounds, but because its very exercise is practical: in disclosing the rhythms of our inner growth it releases and articulates them; moral philosophy is itself a moral exercise, a discipline of love.

It seemed worthwhile to suggest, however inadequately, the kind of treatment scholastic moral philosophy can give to the question discussed by Mr Nowell-Smith, since a Pelican book on *Ethics* is bound to have a wide sale, and since a book the greater part of which is as excellent as the present one is bound to have considerable influence. It is extremely unfortunate that this influence, in consequence of the lack of seriousness of the last chapters of the book, is likely to contribute to the current depreciation of moral and humane values.