Chapter 2
Cooperation

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§2.1  Agents and Actions

The Moral Sciences are concerned with actions. Actions matter. Our universe is not a completely deterministic one, and we cannot always find antecedent physical causes for actions which would explain without remainder why they had to happen, and did happen. But actions may be explained by giving the reasons for which the agent decided to do them. In such cases the centre of initiative, the originating cause, the ἀρχή τού κινείν, (arche tou kinein), in Aristotle’s terminology, is the agent’s decision. Unless we are willing on occasion to take cognizance of the decisions of agents, we cannot give an adequate account of the course of events.

1. The choices a man makes make a difference
   (as against determinism: it is not all foreordained; it is up to us what we do).
2. Not all outcomes are equally good:
   some are worse than others; so . . . some are better.
   So . . .
3. It sometimes matters what we do.

Agents decide. And they can decide differently. It is up to me what I do. Many actions are ruled out by legal, social, prudential, or moral, prescriptions, which constitute good reasons—provided I am reasonable—for not doing them. But I do not have to be reasonable; that is, if I were not reasonable, no law of physics or physiology would be falsified. Although I am due to give a lecture in an hour’s time, read a paper in London tomorrow, and later in
the week attend a committee meeting and prepare party games for my daughter's birthday party; I could catch a bus to Heathrow, fly to Paris, and stage an art exhibition in a public pissoir. If I did, people would shake their heads sadly at yet another instance of the fickleness of friends and the frailty of human flesh, but they would not have to revise their views of natural necessity, as they would if I started being able to levitate at will.

The ability to make up one's mind differently provides the key to personal identity. Ordinarily we recognise people by their faces, voices, gait and self-avowals. But features are not unique, and identical twins sometimes pass themselves off each as the other. According to Locke, it is memory that really individuates: I remember doing things; you may remember my doing them, but cannot remember having done them yourself. But memory claims, like features are not necessarily unique. Bernard Williams imagines the case of two people, identical in all respects, each claiming to be Guy Fawkes, each apparently having the same memories of trying to blow up Parliament, and of having been discovered, tortured and executed. The Lockean position fails to guarantee uniqueness. Just as physical appearance and behaviour can be duplicated, so memory claims, character traits, and avowals of identity can, in principle, be duplicated too. If ever we were presented with grounds for identifying someone as Guy Fawkes, it is logically possible that there could be another candidate with exactly the same features, and therefore equally worthy to be identified as Guy Fawkes. Having unreservedly accepted the first as the genuine Guy Fawkes we should be deeply embarrassed on encountering the second, and should be impelled either, like Buridan's ass, to conclude that since they cannot both be, they neither of them can be, the real Seventeenth-Century assassin, or else to seek some further surety for uniqueness.

Every characterization of a person in terms of memory claims about the past or present mental features, habits, can be duplicated. We, therefore, must look to the future, and consider not only actual intentions, but possible ones. Tweedledum and Tweedledee were more than ordinary identical twins: they shared consciousness and experiences. Each knew what the other was doing.

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felt the other’s pains, and remembered what the other had done. We might be tempted to say that there was only one person, Tweedle, but with two bodies. So long as there was unity of control, and one body could not act to frustrate the intentions of the other, it would be right to regard the two bodies as having but a single mind, and therefore as being just one person. It would be quite different if there was, or at least potentially could be, some conflict. Then there would be two persons, perhaps in very close telepathic communication, and often of one mind on matters of importance, but not necessarily agreeing on all things. If, as Alice was assured, Tweedledee can quarrel with Tweedledum, then they are indeed two separate centres of decision-making, and not two arms of one bilocated Tweedle. Tweedledee has a mind of his own, different from Tweedledum’s, since he can make it up differently. Even if they always in fact agree, they could differ, and so are different. Having a mind of one’s own is being able to make it up differently.

The future encompasses many possibilities, whereas the present consists of only one actuality, and the past of only one unalterable course of events. In talking about the future, therefore, we have to consider all possibilities: if Tweedledee and Tweedledee can decide to attempt different things, then, whatever the harmony hitherto, there is some future possibility in which one is trying to counter what the other is trying to do; if Tweedledee and Tweedledee cannot decide to attempt different things, then among all the possible future courses of events there is none that represents the one trying to thwart what the other is endeavouring to achieve. And since we are already in the realm of possibility, there is no room for a further appeal to possible duplication to confuse identity. If we are faced with someone plausibly claiming to be Guy Fawkes, it is always possible that there should be someone else, with the same features and same memory claims, also a plausible candidate for being Guy. But then let them meet each other. If one denounces the other as an impostor, then we can be at least sure that they are not both the same person in the way that Tweedle, were it not for the possibility of battle, might be: they are not both Guy Fawkes; one of them at least is an impostor; we may not be able to tell which, and we may have another Tichborne case on our hands. But that will be good news for the lawyers rather than bad news for the philosophers. If on the other hand, each treats the other with fraternal affection, taking him for granted as a fully accredited and completely appraised fellow worker in the Fawkes
field of endeavour, we have a bilocated person enjoying two bodies but with only one will. When we survey the future, either there is a possible course of events in which the two putative Fawkes fight, or there is not: if the former, they are different persons, not both Guy Fawkes; if the latter, there is only one person we are dealing with. There is no third possibility: having considered all possibilities already, there are no further ones to generate further putative persons. Moreover, the all-or-none character of all possibilities secures the all-or-none character also of individual identity. When dealing with individuals, there is no room for a nicely calculated less or more: each someone is definitely a one, as well as necessarily not anyone else. By considering all the possible actions of an agent, we secure that each agent is of conceptual necessity one and only one.

In practice we do not need to go to metaphysical extremes. Our ordinary criteria work well enough in all ordinary circumstances. But the account given of what it essentially is to be an individual agent is important, because it focuses on possible choices. The value of money lies in its being encapsulated choice. Many economists mistakenly think it is a thing, making unrealistic assumptions about the quantity of money, and misunderstand the nature of credit. Once we realise we are dealing with possibilities, not things, we can get a grip on the concept, and can come to understand liquidity and credit, and appreciate the importance of trust in economic affairs.
§2.2 Ego ergo A go

Actions and possible actions provide the key to personal identity. They also are its most characteristic feature. I am, therefore I act. To be a person is essentially to be an agent, not just a sentient recipient of sense-data. Contrary to a long Empiricist tradition, experience is not passive reception of sensations imprinted on our consciousness, but, rather, feedback on our activities, often on our probings, listenings, watchings, even our sniffings. Sense-experience is not a matter of sense-data being given us, but of information being elicited by our senses. And granted I am not completely paralysed, I not only try to find out what the world is like, but I seek to alter it in accordance with my wishes. I act.

Actions have two aspects. They are causes and they are manifestations. They are causes, typically causes of events; they make a difference to what happens in the public world. But they are done for reasons, and therefore manifest the mind of the agent. Sometimes this is their prime function, as when I give a gift as a token of gratitude or goodwill. Even when they are primarily causes of events, we need to be ready to construe them as having meanings as well as being causes. They make a statement.²

Actions as causes look to the future. St Augustine’s characterization of time as \textit{distentio animi} captures the sense of the agent’s stretching out to the future in his thought,³ and Gregory of Nyssa’s doctrine of \textit{epiekeia} (\textit{epidekeia}) is even more oriented to the future in our leaving behind the things that are past.⁴ To live entirely in the present, simply seeking immediate pleasure, \textit{πό σαρπὶ ἡπὶ} (\textit{to harm hēdē}) is to live a limited life. In order to make rational decisions now, I must not only be aware of myself now, but envisage my situation and feelings in the future too. I must be able to imagine myself at some future time, and re-assess things from that standpoint. In particular, actions have consequences, and I need to consider consequences before undertaking an action; sometimes because it is the favourable consequences that give me reason to do it, sometimes in case there are adverse consequences that would constitute a reason for not doing it. Most, though not all, reasons for doing something are concerned with the future, and even when I act, for instance out of gratitude, entirely on account of past events, I still need to be aware of possible consequences, so as to avoid potential embarrassment: even when the prime reason looks to the past, the duty of care requires me to have some thought for the future. I must not only be aware of myself now, but envisage my situation and feelings in time to come. Prudence is a necessary concomitant of rationality.

² See more fully, next section, §2.3, p.*23*.  
³ \textit{Confessions}, XI, XXVI, xxxii.  
2.3 The Theory of Games

If we are to be fully rational, we shall need to conjugate not only over the future tense, but over number, person, other tenses and moods too. Although the moral sciences are centred on the first-person singular, they are under pressure to widen their scope to the first-person plural. This is possible, because we can empathize and share values. Much as we project ourselves into the future, and, in assessing the consequences of our actions, imagine ourselves Prime Minister, or Pope, or Emperor of the World, so we can project ourselves into other men's shoes, and understand their reasons for acting as they did.

To understand the actions of another agent is to empathize; I put myself in his place, and seeing what he did from his point of view, come to realise what his reasons must have been. Reasons are shareable, and usually shared, so that although it is I who make up my mind what I am going to do, my reasons can be shared by others in my circle, who may endorse them to such an extent that my action is not mine alone, but ours, or his, or theirs. Although we, as individuals, are necessarily unique and different from one another, we can act for the same reasons. Values, reasons for actions, concerns and interests have a different logic from possessions, which are private; whereas my possessing a car excludes its being possessed by others, my having a reason does not. If I share my possessions with you, they are no longer totally mine, but if you and I share a concern, for neither of us is it in any way diminished. You and I can both share a concern about global warming, we can both have the same interest in train spotting. We often engage in joint activities. Each member of the cricket team plays his part in

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5 It is difficult to talk about reasons for action at the highest level of generality, because no one word is adequate. 'Reasons' is too unspecific. There are all sorts of reasons, not just reasons for actions, and we need to exclude those other reasons from our account. 'Consideration' is suitably specific as a reason for or against an action, but covers also the activity of considering. 'Concern' is often appropriate, but looks towards future consequences, and it is not only concern for results that guide my actions: actions are often bearers of meaning more than causes of results. 'Values' describe well the high-level reasons that guide our most important choices, but sound too grand to explain my train-spotting. Nevertheless, 'values' in spite of their grandeur, are the least bad general term for the considerations that guide agents in deciding what to do.
winning the match, and can be proud that our team won. Because we can share reasons, move from the first-person singular to the first-person plural is possible. It is also necessary.

Such a claim runs counter to the received wisdom of the present age, according to which each agent is supposed to survey the options open to him, and to choose those that will suit him best, and then acting so as to bring about the results he wants, often assumed to be maximising his wealth. Economists have seen their discipline as a study of what happens when different wealth maximisers do business together, taking it for granted that it is rational to maximise. They are wrong. Although often, of course, we do consider only our own preferences, and act so as to achieve our own most preferred state of affairs, nevertheless and contrary to expectation, a maximising strategy can fail, even according to its own standards. Protagoras, Plato and many thinkers since have sensed that a general policy of πλονεξία (pleonexia), me-have-more is unsustainable. This is shown by “The Prisoners’ Dilemma”.  

The argument is expressed in the abstract terminology of the Theory of Games, which gives a general understanding of reasoning when we make decisions involving more than one agent. Each “player” (that is to say decision-maker, or agent) has a number of choices, yielding a large number of “outcomes” according to the choices made by himself and other players. Each outcome is evaluated by each player according to his own set of preferences, and the value he assigns to it, is his “pay-off”.  

In the matrix we represent two decision-makers, me on the left-hand side and you on the

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6 Due to A.W. Tucker. His formulation did not come out in a research paper, but in a classroom. As S.J Hagenmayer wrote in The Philadelphia Inquirer (“Albert W. Tucker, 89, Famous Mathematician,” Thursday, Feb. 2, 1995, p. B7) “In 1950, while addressing an audience of psychologists at Stanford University, where he was a visiting professor, Mr. Tucker created the Prisoners’ Dilemma to illustrate the difficulty of analyzing certain kinds of games. “Mr. Tucker’s simple explanation has since given rise to a vast body of literature in subjects as diverse as philosophy, ethics, biology, sociology, political science, economics, and, of course, game theory.”

7 The pay-off is normally expressed in numerical terms, with the suggestion that we are dealing with the cardinal, interpersonal utilities that utilitarians believe in: but there is no need to assume that they are always cardinal and interpersonal; for most purposes it is enough that each player can decide his order of priorities as between the various outcomes that may result from his and others’ choices.
## Cooperation

### The Prisoners' Dilemma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>You Play fair</th>
<th>You Maximise</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I Play fair</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both fined</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I Maximise</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I go free:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you spend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ten years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>in gaol</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

We each have two choices, yielding four possible outcomes, each of which has its pay-off for me (shown by the numeral at the bottom left of the outcome), and its pay-off for you (shown by the numeral at the top right of the outcome). The Prisoners' Dilemma establishes the irrationality of my always seeking to have more, or “more-for-me-ism”, where each individual seeks solely to maximise his own pay-offs. The best joint outcome is only available if we both stick to our joint strategy, which in turn is only possible if we each can trust, and be trusted by, the other to stick to it.\(^8\)

With every man for himself, life in the jungle, Hobbes said, would

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\(^8\) This may be the evolutionary reason why we are good at recognising faces. We need to know whether the person we encounter can be trusted. If we can recognise him, we can remember whether he proved trustworthy in previous encounters. If he was, we trust him again. If he let us down then, we shall know better this time. In either case “Do as you were done by” is the wisest maxim.
be solitary, poor, nasty brutish and short; and so he argued for there being a State having coercive power to restrain individual self-aggrandisement. Other lessons have been drawn: Protagoras argued that it showed the need for conventions which we all agreed to keep; Plato concluded that we should be governed by selfless guardians, who had wives and children and all their possessions in common; modern utilitarians likewise teach that everyone should selflessly aim to secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Each of these responses takes account of the fact that a maximising policy in this situation yields worse outcomes than could be obtained if each took a less self-centred outlook, and considered what was best for us all. We do better if we cooperate with one another, than if I, and everybody else likewise, thinks only for himself: "Only for himself" not "only of himself". It is easy to conclude from the Prisoners’ Dilemma, as Plato did, that our troubles are all due to some original sin of selfishness, and that the remedy is altruistic self-denial; but this is a mistake, as can be seen if we consider the Altruists’ Dilemma, where He does what She wants, and She does what He wants, with the consequence that they both end up with the worst possible outcome.

The Altruists’ Dilemma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He gardens</th>
<th>She shops</th>
<th>She gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good garden</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>super garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good food</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>poor food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He shops</td>
<td>super food</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor garden</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>poor garden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the matrix above we represent two decision-makers, He on the left-hand side and She on the top. Again, each has two choices, yielding four possible outcomes, each of which has its pay-off for

9 See further, §7.1.
Him (shown by the numeral at the bottom left of the outcome, and for Her (shown by the numeral at the top right of the outcome). He would rather get the garden looking good than go shopping, and would like to have her around to empty the wheelbarrow; She would rather get the shopping done than garden, and would like to have him around to carry things. If they each did what they wanted, the result would be quite good, though not as good for either as it would be if the other were there to help. But He, knowing that She would like to get the shopping done, insists on doing the shopping, while She, knowing that he wants garden to look nice, is determined to do gardening; so that each has a miserable time doing alone the least favoured option. What the Altruists' Dilemma shows is that it is not our each wanting our own good that is the root of trouble, but our each maximising according to our own lights. Plato was right about the πλεον (pleon), more, but wrong about the ἐξία (exia) from ἐχω (echo) I have, I possess. It is not what I seek to have—money, kudos, power, sanctity, or even my spouse's enjoyment—but my seeking to maximise it without regard to anyone else's priorities, that gives rise to both the Prisoners' and the Altruists' Dilemmas. Both can be avoided if we each choose with an eye to what each person values. Thus the lesson to be learned from the two Dilemmas is that it is not each decision-maker having his own values and being guided by them that gives rise to the paradox, but rather their each doing so regardless of what other decision-makers may be wanting. One should not attempt to maximise either a revised set of pay-offs, or some total of them, but should evaluate outcomes by taking into account not just one's own pay-offs, but those of other decision-makers as well, seeing them not only from his own point of view, but from theirs also. Just as reason bids us see things both from the present and from a future point of view, so it bids us move from the first-person singular to the first-person plural.
§2.4 Conventions and Manipulation

The Prisoners’ Dilemma is by far the most important insight given us by the Theory of Games, but two other configurations lead us to understand the rationale of conventions, and the danger of being manipulated. The Rule of the Road reveals the importance of the third person plural, and hence of conventions—“Coordination Norms”—in enabling decision-makers to concert their decisions so as to secure results they all prefer. In driving, in communicating, in dancing and in many other social activities, we need to coordinate our actions with one another, so as to avoid collisions, breakdown of communication and trodden-on toes.

Two motorists, Mr Knight and M. Chevalier are approaching each other, and needing to move over in order not to run into each other. They are represented by the matrix (with Mr Knight’s pay-offs in top right of each outcome, and M. Chevalier’s in bottom left). Provided both go right, or both go left, they will pass each other safely; but if Mr Knight insists on being English, and driving the English way, and M. Chevalier insists on being French, and driving the French way, there will be a smash; and so too, if Mr Knight wants to be courteous to the Frenchman, and drive on the right, and M. Chevalier wants to be courteous to the Englishman, and drive on the left.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mr Knight</th>
<th>Mr Knight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>goes right</td>
<td>goes left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M. Chevalier</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>à droite</td>
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<tr>
<td>each passes each other</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>collision</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>M. Chevalier</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>à gauche</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>collision</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>each passes each other</td>
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What is essential is that each does not decide to do what he, on his own, thinks best, but both abide by some convention, or rule, or law, or mutual agreement. That is to say, I should not attempt to do whatever seems to me to be productive of the best consequences, but should reliably act in the way that other people expect me to act. I should drive on the left and not cut corners, give way when the other driver has the right of way, and press forward when I have, so that other drivers know where they are with me, and can plan their own movements accordingly. There is a necessary imperfection of information about the future actions of free agents: a simple maximising strategy is impossible, and each decision-maker (or "player") must keep in step with others, usually by means of their all abiding by some relevant convention. Whatever the apparent attractions of consequentialism for the single operator, they are shown to be illusory, even by consequentialist standards, once the agent sees himself to be not a solipsistic loner, but one person among many, each needing to recognise others as initiators of action with minds of their own whose decisions can be anticipated only if they adhere to some specific agreement, or well-known rules.

The Rule of the Road requires us to conjugate into the third person plural, and to recognise a rational limit to rationality. I have to allow that they signify, and that I must on occasion go along with what they do irrespective of my own better judgement. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." And the Romans' decisions may well be opaque to my understanding. There is no correct side of the road that a rational agent could identify as the correct side. We may be able to achieve some historical understanding of how a society came to have the mores that it has, but whether we can or cannot is irrelevant: their way now is the way things are, and we must simply accept it. If I am able to make up my mind differently from everybody else, other people are likewise able to make up their minds differently from me. And the Rule of the Road shows that it is rational for me to go along with the decisions of others, even though I cannot myself see the rationale of them, rather than presume that my reasoning is so rational that everybody else will agree with it.

The Rule of the Road is not only an argument against maximising one's own interest, but also an argument for a rational heteronomy of the will. It is sensible in many situations to do not what I will but what they will. The paradigm example is language. Words do not, *pace* Humpty Dumpty, mean what I want
them to mean, but what everybody else wants them to mean. In a non-solipsistic world I have to wrap my tongue round other men's syllables if I am not to be an *incommunicado* barbarian. Similarly in many social situations, I must conform, if I am to get anywhere. It is not up to me, as an angry young man, to decide whether I accept society or not. Accepted or not accepted, society exists, and if I won't cooperate, I shall forgo the fruits of cooperation. It is unrealistic not to take account of the third person plural.

We need to conjugate over the past tense too. Modern thinkers often make out that the past is water under the bridge which we cannot do anything about, and should not take into account in deciding what to do. But that is a mistake, as is shown by the Battle of The Sexes.

In the Battle of the Sexes He and She want to spend their holiday together, but He would prefer to go mountaineering in the Alps, whereas She would rather they both spent it sunbathing by the sea. Since for either of them the second best is so much better than the third or fourth alternatives, it would pay either to settle for that if the very best appeared unattainable. And therefore it would pay the other to make it seem so. If She can throw a fit of hysterics and say she cannot abide the Alps and will not go there at any price, then He, if he is reasonable, will abandon his hopes of an Alpine holiday, and settle for the sea, which he would like twice as much as solitary mountaineering. But equally He may see that the moment has come to take a firm masculine line, and let the little woman face up to the realities of the situation, and either come along with him or go her separate way. And if once it becomes clear that this is the choice, She will have no option but to cave in, and buy a knapsack instead of a new bikini.

It is irrational to be guided only by the pay-offs of the outcomes that are available at any one time, because that enables the other to manipulate one's choices. If I am to retain my autonomy, I cannot be altogether a direct consequentialist. Once you know that I am guided by consequences alone, you can induce me to do whatever you want by rigging the situation in such a way that by the time I come to make a decision the least bad outcome available to me is to fall in with your plans. The strategy of Mutually Assured Destruction only worked provided both sides believed that the other was not governed solely by consequentialist considerations, and really would retaliate if attacked, even though there would be then no
The Battle of the Sexes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>She goes to Alps</th>
<th>He goes to Alps</th>
<th>She goes to sea</th>
<th>He goes to sea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lovely for him: good for her</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“wish you were here too”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beastly for him: beastly for her</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>lovely for her: good for him</td>
<td>10</td>
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advantage in doing so. In order to reinforce this expectation, mechanical devices were constructed which in the event of a nuclear attack would operate automatically without the possibility of being switched off by any consequentialist survivors. In a less grisly way the whole logic of making and keeping promises is to ensure that some actions of an agent need not be altered simply by reason of factors, which had been future, becoming, by the effluxion of time, past. If we discount all past considerations we not only lay ourselves open to manipulation, but give only a partial account of the context in which our decisions are made, and from which they obtain their significance. I cannot be coherently oriented towards the future alone, once I recognise that all my futures will one day be past. Rationality requires that we extend our consideration over time past as well as time yet to come, that is to say that we conjugate over all tenses as well as numbers and persons.

The wider range of conjugation reinforces the pressure to move from the first-person singular to the first-person plural, which is not only logical, but physiological and psychological too. The
physiological pressures are obvious. I have to sleep. For one third of the time I am vulnerable to predators and attackers. If I am to be safe, there must be others who will protect me while I am asleep. They and I must form some sort of community with sufficient community of values that my life will be dear to them. There are many different forms of such community, from the soldiers with sentries posted to the master with loyal household servants, but in every case I must trust other people while I am asleep. Moreover, sooner or later I shall die. If there are to be any successors to come after me, some cooperation will be needed. I cannot procreate alone. Samson needs some Delilah or other if there are to be Samsonets. And this being physiologically necessary, we have evolved to feel it psychologically compelling also. Sex has been the undoing of many a strong man, but sexless men leave no descendants.

Psychological considerations also reinforce logical ones. In theory it should be possible to practise minimal acceptance of first-person plural identities, but in practice we cannot cast them off as easily as we might wish. Plato argued that first-person-singular maximisation fails as a life strategy, because the corporate identities we acquire in the course of living with other people conflict with the tenets of self-aggrandisement a consistent maximiser seeks to adopt, thus causing psychological stress and ultimately disintegration of the whole personality. In order to survive in society the individual must be thought by others to be keeping the rules—else he would be treated as an outcast, punished, exiled, or in some other way excluded from social institutions. He must seem to conform. He must, therefore, sometimes actually conform, and so must know how to conform, understanding the reasons for conforming, and to some extent sensitive to their force. And when in pursuit of his maximising strategy he breaks the rules, he will know it. He may be successful in deceiving others, but himself he cannot deceive. He may be able to maintain his reputation of law-abidingness, but he will know what he is doing, and also why it is wrong. Having internalised the precepts of common morality enough to be able to pass for a moral person himself, he will be unable to externalise them entirely, so as not to feel discomfort at flouting them. There will be war in his soul, and he will suffer psychologically. It is a counsel of prudence, and not just an imperative of morality, to be moral, in order to enjoy psychological health and peace of mind. Plato buttresses this argument, which he gives in book four of the Republic, with the converse account, given in
book nine, of the misery of the autistic autocrat, who is doomed to a lonely life on account of his repudiation of all social bonds, and a fearful one by reason of his attributing to others the same uninhibited pursuit of personal advantage as he practises himself. The only decision-maker who can fearlessly pursue an unbridled strategy of maximisation is one for whom no unwelcome outcome can come from any other decision-maker’s choice, guided solely by self-interest.

Social psychological pressures reinforce the logical pressure to identify. I am an Englishman, an Oxford man, a Christian, a philosopher, an academic, a traditionalist, a Royalist, a Wykehamist, and many other sorts of -ist. I feel it deeply if my country or my university is attacked, and I take pride in the academic successes of my school and my college. Others feel similarly. Moreover, although the ultimate anchor of first-personality is one’s own agency, the degree of participation can be minimal in some group identities. If I take part in the decision-making of a group, I naturally see its decisions as my own, but I may still do so when I have no effective voice in what shall be done by us. After the Nazis came to power, ordinary Germans had no voice in what Germany did, but many enthusiastically identified with the Nazi programme all the same. Group rallies, patriotic expression, national festivals, all contribute to a sense of national identity. The pervasive pressure of the Rule of the Road is often enough to lead the individual to construe the rules he has to comply with in order to collaborate with others as rules that he makes his own. This is especially true of language. Typically, a common language goes together with a common national identity. Compliance and conformity constitute acceptance and ownership. It can go too far. In our present age nationalism is by many too keenly felt, and the history of the Twentieth Century might have been happier if fewer men had believed that dulce et decorum est mori pro patria. Nevertheless, some patriotic loyalty is essential if civil society is to survive; and other group-identities are equally necessary for a robust sense of self and psychological

10 See previous section, 2.3, p. 31.

11 Elinor Ostrom won the Nobel Prize in Economics for showing, contrary to the received opinion of professional economists, that small social groups often managed to avoid “The Tragedy of the Commons” by social cooperation, establishing sensible rules for the use of common facilities. Here, as in many other cases, small is not only beautiful, but effective.
well-being. I need to be able to use the first-person plural naturally, if I am to be comfortable with my use of the first-person singular.

Physiological vulnerability and psychological pressure impel us to be sociable, but the underlying logic is that of the Theory of Games, which shows that excessive egocentricity is self-defeating. The Prisoners' Dilemma articulates the insight that two exclusively self-regarding decision-makers would fare worse than two who were ready to forgo individual advantage for the sake of their joint good. If I am to be one of we, I must be prepared on occasion to act in accordance with our values rather than my own exclusive ones. So there must be some possible occasions when I acknowledge an obligation to do what we want even though it be to mine own hindrance. The paradigm example is when I have given an undertaking. Only if I keep promises can other people regard me as fellow members of their society. Marx scoffed at the bourgeois morality of honesty, but it is the exemplar of all corporate morality: even among thieves there has to be honour.\textsuperscript{12}

More pervasive pressure is exercised by the Rule of the Road, where no great sacrifice is called for, but great costs are suffered by those who do not keep to the rules and conventions observed by others. I cannot communicate unless I abide by the rules of a common language, rules that I cannot alter arbitrarily by my sole diklat. I may feel aggrieved at words not meaning what I want them to mean, and may think I ought to be master of them, rather than the other way round, but I shall not be understood as I sound off syllables according to my rules rather than those recognised by my hearers. Although it is up to me to decide what to do, it is, then, sensible for me to take into account not only my interests, but ours as well, and sometimes to forgo those that are exclusively mine for the sake of those that are jointly ours.

Although psychological and social pressures are, as a matter of fact, important in sustaining the fragile grasp on rationality that we have, egocentric maximiers that we naturally are, it remains the case that even if we strip away all human attributes and weaknesses and consider decision-making as a pure exercise in the Theory of Games, excessive egocentricity is self-defeating. Each of the arguments is a \textit{reductio ad absurdum}. We start by assuming, as the Rational Choice Theorists do, that rationality can be defined in

\textsuperscript{12} Compare Plato, \textit{Republic} I, 351-352.
terms of maximising one's own preferences—usually one's own future pay-offs—and then show that even within its own terms, such a definition is self-contradictory. The Prisoners' Dilemma shows that I should take into account not only the existence but the interests and ideals of other people, and that it is irrational to ignore the collective point of view. The simple maximising strategy would leave us all worse off than we should be if each thought of himself as one of us. Once I acknowledge that other people, as well as I myself, are decision-makers, the Prisoners' Dilemma and the Altruists' Dilemmas show the irrationality of simply maximising one's own preferences, regardless of those of others. The same lesson is taught by the Rule of the Road, which shows that it is better to keep to the rules than to try, as the Act Utilitarians counsel, to perform the act that will have the best consequences: each of us should recognise that he is not the only pebble on the beach, that it is not always for him alone to choose which course of events shall occur, and that often the best he can do is to fit in with what other people are likely to do. Rule Utilitarianism recognises this, and the need generally to abide by established norms, but still professes principled unconcern with the past. The Battle of the Sexes shows that it is irrational to have regard only to future outcomes; an agent has a past as well as a future, and should make up his mind what he is going to do with regard to what he has decided in the past as well as what will ensue in the future.

This lesson is one that modern thinkers are extremely loth to learn. They subscribe to Rational Choice Theory as an axiom, allowing of no exceptions. They try to accommodate objections by extending the concept of what is being maximised: I may make another's priorities my own; I may profess Rule, rather than Act, Utilitarianism; I may ascribe to people in general retributive sentiments which would justify my punishing malefactors for what they have done, rather than to alter what they will do. But these ad hoc modifications will not work. By extending the concept of preference to accommodate every counter-example, they empty it of empirical content; all they are left with in the end is that a person's preferences are revealed in the decisions he makes, and that when they say he is maximising his preferences, what they are really saying is the he does what he does. Of course, Rational Choice Theory can be made axiomatically true, if the Rational Theorist's concerns have no specific empirical content, and simply mirror whatever it
is that he does. This may lead to illuminating insights in theology or psychology, but not in economics, which is concerned with tangible, and pre-eminently pecuniary concerns.

The attraction of theories such as Utilitarianism and Rational Choice Theory is their simplicity. They purport to give a key to understanding, and if necessary correcting, our often muddled thinking about what to do. But as they are modified to take account of some of our actual thinking, we find they need to be modified further and further, and thus will lose all claim to be providing a new sweeping insight. It is their simple, unmodified claims that need to be evaluated. And the Prisoners' Dilemma, the Altruists' Dilemma, the Rule of the Road, and the Battle of the Sexes reveal internal inconsistencies in the claims.

The arguments from the Theory of Games are primarily negative, but of great importance in delineating the mind of an agent. They defeat the widely held and deeply entrenched doctrine of selfish consequentialism which understands rationality exclusively in terms of maximising desired consequences. It is important, therefore, to prove that this is wrong, and that rationality cannot be explicated in terms of maximising desired consequences. Contrary to the static, solipsistic, future-oriented, exclusively individualistic standpoint of the classical economists and their successors, we are forced to recognise that rationality is dynamic, leading us to take a longer temporal and wider personal view of what is involved in the decisions we are called on to take.
§2.5 Cooperating

We cooperate. Often it comes naturally. We like having meals together. The Rule of the Road enables willing cooperators to cooperate successfully. It is no imposition, as we gossip, to have to use the same language as our fellow networkers. Similarly, the customs of our social group help us to accommodate our behaviour to one another, often, as with a common language, expressing and reinforcing the group identity we value as part of ourselves.

Although there is a essential egocentricity in agency, it is an egocentricity nuanced by conjugation, which leads us to move, as we have seen, from a first-person singular to a first-person plural standpoint, and indeed to conjugate generally, not only over number, but over person, tense and even mood. We can cooperate because we can share values. We may share many or few. Lovers share many, making themselves vulnerable to each other, confiding guilty secrets and confessing weaknesses. They come to constitute an item, and can achieve together what neither could do unaided. The mutual trust and affection between parents and children and between brothers and sisters enhances their economic effectiveness as well as their emotional lives. But we can cooperate even if we share only fairly few values. It is the merit of business transactions that they can take place between parties who have relatively little in common. They play a dominant role in the modern State, which protects the individual, giving him a veto over personal matters and securing to him the ability to act as an independent agent in bilateral transactions with possible partners drawn from a wide range.

Although cooperation is possible when many values are not shared, some must be. In the Odyssey, Nestor asks Telemachus “Are you here on business, or do you roam at random like pirates on the sea, who risk their lives inflicting harm on men of other lands?” Business is possible, only if force is altogether out of the question. Economists recognise this, and state explicitly

13 See further below, §4.3.
14 Odyssey bk.3 ll.71-74; tr. Richard Wilding, The Odyssey of Homer, Brighton, 2011. The same question is asked of Odysseus and his companions by the Cyclops (Odyssey bk.9 ll.252-255).
15 Indeed, even in warfare there are often recognised laws of war; in ancient Greece, after every battle there was a truce for each side to bury their dead; and the Geneva Conventions lay down rules for the treatment of non-combatants and prisoners of war.
that economic activity presupposes the rule of law, which does not just prohibit the use of force, but typically includes some requirements of honesty and fair dealing (even currency dealers rely on one another to keep promises and not to try to pass off forgeries). These requirements tend to grow with the relationship between the parties.\textsuperscript{16} Economists, however, are disposed to resist this, and seek to keep to a minimum the values that must be held in common, if business is to be possible. That is a mistake. Togetherness requires trust,\textsuperscript{17} and although some aspects of trust can be formulated in formal rules, rules are inadequate in articulating all that trust involves. Although cooperation is possible when only few values held in common, this a 'possible' not a 'necessary': many—perhaps most—business transactions take place between parties who share more, and need to share more, than the bare minimum of values.

Between the extremes there is a gradation between currency dealers, who share only honesty and respect for the law, and families, who have much in common, but still have individual bank accounts, and sometimes make payments to one another. Cooperators need to be able to think of themselves as 'we', but there are many different 'we's'. Since almost every social interaction involves some shared values, each individual in the course of his life is a member of some group holding some values in common. Many are transient, but some are long-lasting, and give rise to group identities of social and economic significance. In the Middle Ages craftsmen formed guilds: they competed with one another, but were collectively concerned to protect the good name of their trade. Modern shop-keepers sometimes combine to establish and maintain the good name of their street or town as one where the customer can count on helpful service and reliable goods. Bankers now are only too well aware of how they all suffer in consequence of the bad behaviour of some. Most business transactions take place between parties who share some important values, but do not share many others. In spite of there being values they do not share, they cooperate in accordance with values they do share, in order to bring about outcomes they both want. In this way, in business as in other walks of life, an individual is able to cooperate with and identify with different groups, and thus acquires a corona of values that provides the ground for the various obligations that should guide him in his social and business transactions.

\textsuperscript{16} See above, §2.3, p.19.

\textsuperscript{17} See above, §2.6, p.35.
Cooperation can be costly. I forgo taking your possessions as the price of not having mine taken by you or someone else. Much more so when the underlying structure is not the Prisoners' Dilemma but the Battle of the Sexes. As She trudges up the mountain path, She feels that He has got the best of the bargain. She may still feel it is worth it in order to be with Him, as I may resist the temptation to take your bike when I cannot find mine, but there is some tension in our psyches, and a consequent instability in the arrangements. Each could have done better by getting in first with an unalterable decision that would have let the other with no alternative but to submit. The Battle of the Sexes has an inherent tendency to degenerate into Mutually Assured Destruction, in which fruitful cooperation gives way to a grudging truce. Although often they do maintain themselves, they occasionally break down, and the possibility that they might is itself a weakening factor. What is called for in the Battle of the Sexes is a compensatory incentive to equalise the pay-offs. If He is carrying her rucksack, and is looking out for a secluded lake where She can go swimming, She will climb the mountain path more cheerfully. But they may never find a secluded lake where She can go swimming, or the sun will have gone in when they reach it, or She may be too tired to enjoy it. If the bond of mutual attraction is strong, the holiday will survive none the less. But in many cases it is not. In Ambridge and in many real-life communities the trading of favours plays quite a large part, but is inevitably limited in scope. There are very many cases where cooperation would be feasible, but the benefits fall unevenly, and there is no strong bond to reconcile the one who stands to lose out to the resulting imbalance. He will not cooperate unless there is some way of evening up the outcomes, so that, although the other gets the lion’s share of the naturally occurring fruits of cooperation, some of the benefit comes his way too. But how to bring this about?

The answer is money.

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18 See above, §2.3, p.26
19 See further below, §3.3.