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Universalizability as Necessary for Objectivity in Morality

Angelos Timotheatos

A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Philosophy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

UNIVERSALIZABILITY AS NECESSARY FOR OBJECTIVITY IN MORALITY

Angelos Timotheatos

Ethical objectivism is the view that the objects of the most basic concepts of ethics (which may be supposed to be values, obligations, duties, oughts, rights, or what not) exist, or that facts about them hold, objectively and that similarly worded ethical statements by different persons make the same factual claims (and thus do not concern merely the speaker's feelings). To say that a fact is objective, or that something has objective existence, is usually to say that its holding or existence is not derivative from its being thought to hold or exist.

-Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy

In this dissertation, I wish to defend the claim that ethics, and more properly, morality is involved with providing one with guidelines for action and resolving conflict between people's interests in an objective manner through the universalizability principle.

In chapter one I shall argue against charges of triviality, vacuousness, and the charge that the generalization principle presents one with vague criteria of what would stand for 'criteria of relevant similarity.' Contrary to what others would contend, Singer's generalization principle does not claim to present one, on its own, for what would stand for 'criteria of relevant similarity'; this is why Singer used the principle of consequences, the generalization argument, the reiterability and invertibility clauses among others in order to supplement the generalizability principle. This is because the generalizability principle is a *necessary* but *non-sufficient formal principle*.

In chapter two I shall argue that Singer's generalization principle is best for objectivity among the different versions of the universalizability principle especially when taken within the context of Singer's complete moral theory. The Golden Rule,

Kant's Categorical Imperative, Hare's Universalizability Principle, and Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency will be examined within the backdrop of their complete moral theory.

In chapter three I shall examine how it may be possible for Singer's generalizability principle to overcome charges of being too rigid to be applicable, by allowing for exceptions to its rules, and yet still maintain its level of objectivity, and universality. I shall go through the various types of agent-relative reasons and how Singer's theory could account for these while still remaining objective.

I will conclude that Singer's generalization principle and indeed his entire moral theory is the most plausible, and the most necessary, for providing us with practical and objective guidelines (even if the generalization argument is invalidly derived). If Singer's moral theory were to be combined with Gewirth's Argument from Sufficient Agency and his definition of morality, it would be capable of properly answering, not only the distributive and substantive questions in morality, but the authoritative question as well, and it would therefore become the best theory for providing objectivity in morality in terms of completeness and applicability.

In dedication
With my heart-felt love and thanks,
To my wife Christine,
My parents and family,
And my supervisor, Professor Christopher B. Gray
Without whom
This thesis would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I wish to defend the claim that universalizability, and more specifically, the generalization principle, is necessary for objectivity in morality. I decided that the best way to do this is to define the three basic terms (universalizability, objectivity, and morality) involved in the above claim, through conceptual analysis, and their relationship to one another in a short introduction.

In my opinion Alan Gewirth presents us with the best definition of morality, in the broad sense, to date. “As these questions suggest, from among the diverse meanings of 'morality' and 'moral' a certain core meaning may be elicited. According to this, a morality is a set of categorically obligatory requirements for action that are concerned with furthering the interests, especially the most important interests, of persons or recipients other than or in addition to the agent or the speaker.”¹ “Two aspects of this meaning have been invoked by different philosophers; they bear, respectively, on the distributive and the substantive questions of morality. According to one aspect, morality is inherently egalitarian and universalistic, so that it follows from the meaning of 'moral' that ‘moral rules must be for the good of everyone alike.’”² “According to the other aspect, a moral consideration is one that, from the very concept of 'moral,' is concerned with the attainment of well-being and the avoidance of harm. This view is suggested by such a statement as the following: ‘A moral system seems necessarily to be one aimed at removing particular dangers and securing certain benefits, and it would follow that some things do and some do not count as objections to a line of conduct from a moral point of

¹ Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1.

² Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958), 200-201, quoted in Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 9.

view.”³ I will be dealing with this definition of morality throughout the dissertation. It includes all of the elements, which I deem to be essential to morality, namely, altruism, egalitarianism, and obligation.

Every time one claims that it is morally right to do such an act, one is saying, by conceptual analysis,⁴ that it is right for anyone in exactly the same circumstances to perform the aforementioned act. Morality has as its main purpose the prescription and/or prohibition of acts through rules, for the attainment of everyone’s well-being within a community. These rules, if they are either arbitrary or prejudiced, cease to be *moral* rules in that they stress the importance of one person or group of persons over another *without valid reason for doing so*,⁵ thus becoming non-egalitarian. If moral rules are *not* arbitrary, in the sense that arbitrary means without justification, then by deduction, they must be based on reason or intuition. Intuition, if it is not backed up by reasons, however, is reduced to a pre-reflective hunch, and upon deliberating about why one had this intuition about this judgement, or about why one’s intuition is the correct one over someone else’s intuition, one is once again reduced to using reason in order to

³Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 9. The quote within the quote can be found in Philippa Foot, *Morality and Art*, Proceedings of the British Academy 56 (1970), 132.

⁴ All definitions have been arrived at by conceptual analysis either by the person quoted or by me. They were not arbitrarily chosen. I agree with Gewirth’s claim that conceptual analysis is to be ‘construed on the model of deductive logic, in that when a complex concept A is analyzed as containing concepts B, C, and D, these concepts belong to A with logical necessity so that it is contradictory to hold that A applies while denying that B, C, or D, applies.’ (Alan Gewirth *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 22. All characteristics of the terms defined within this paper are arrived at in this manner, thus presenting us with necessary (not sufficient) parts of the terms defined. Any reference to these characteristics is therefore not circular in the sense that I am arbitrarily positing them in order to conclude something either implied by them or something similar to them in the conclusion of my arguments.

⁵ It is plausible to prescribe that we adopt special treatment for handicapped people, but the fact that they have special needs is a valid reason for implementing such a rule. It is also important to note that the rule would apply to everyone if they were to become handicapped, and would thus still be egalitarian in the sense that the rules are applied equally to everyone. (this theme will be more fully developed in the later chapter entitled “Justifying Exceptions While Remaining Objective.”

back up one's point of view.⁶ If intuition is not backed up by reason, it is said to be arbitrary since nothing can be left with which to justify the adoption of one intuition over the adoption of another. We can then safely say, by deduction, that what makes moral judgements (and conclusions in general) non-arbitrary is the application of reason where reason is synonymous with the proper application of logic. If morality is non-arbitrary, then it is dependent upon reason and reason is objective since there are objective rules for the application of the logical rules.

Not all justificatory reasons are moral reasons in that one may very well rig up reasons in order to influence judgement to one's favor thus creating bias which is *prima facie* immoral. Similarly one set of reasons cannot be arbitrarily chosen for one situation and then another for judging a case where all of the relevant factors are the same. The set of justificatory reasons which determine that act 'a' is morally right will logically *always* determine act 'a' to be morally right as long as the set is not altered either by addition or by subtraction of relevant reasons to the set, just as once we have determined that cause 'a' causes effect 'b', it means by definition that cause 'a' *always* causes effect 'b' given an identical set of causes.⁷ It would be safe to say that the justificatory reasons *cause* the moral judgement of the said act 'a' in persons in a way which is similar to the way that cause 'a' causes effect 'b' in the sense of entailment. Where 'a' entails 'b' whether it be physically entail or simply entail the judgement the entailment always pertains as per the law of implication. If we make one judgement about one set of reasons we are then

⁶ Upon asking the intuitionist why he/she thinks the intuition to be correct, the intuitionist *intuitively* produces reasons to justify the judgement. Intuition if it is to be accepted as a truth indicator also points to the use of reason for obtaining truth. It is therefore self-contradictory for the intuitionist to deny the use of reason.

⁷ By identical I don't mean that they are the same with regard to temporal-spatial identity. As Hare has pointed out amongst others this is logically impossible. Instead, I mean to say that the set of cause types includes no more and no less cause types than in the first cause and effect reaction.

logically bound to make the same judgement about future cases which involve an identical set of reason types. In the final analysis, the justificatory reasons either logically *imply* the judgement or they do *not* in the sense that any argument which can be *validly* made from *objective* and therefore *sound* reasons entails the judgement. It may well be that, as Robert Nozick pointed out, a circumstance has degrees of both, but each degree of right-doing or wrong-doing is arrived at through *logical operations which conclude about the consequences of an action upon one's welfare* (once again assuming Gewirth's definition of morality). The circumstance implies the reason or reasons and each reason brings forth its degree of right or wrong-doing which taken as a set in turn entail the judgement. This implies a rule from a particular set of reason types to a particular judgement or judgement type either way (as long as the *set* of justificatory reasons types remains unchanged).⁸

All logical implications are objective in that they do not depend on any particular person's point of view (the role which they play in the moral dilemma) and also that they apply regardless of the agent's and the patient's identity (Angelos Timotheatos I). If the problem is not the *validity* of arguments that account for the variation of judgement then the *soundness* of the premises wherein lies the valuation, such as the value of having food to eat rates a nine on the scale of needs as opposed to, say, the need to have a good education which only rates a seven, must be what accounts for diversity in judgements.⁹

⁸ Reasons $a+b+c \Rightarrow$ morally right (or acceptable,) or reasons $a+b+c \Rightarrow$ morally wrong (or unacceptable) but the addition of reason 'd' may or may not alter the situation depending on its weight in the situation.

⁹ This brings up the point of whether or not logic tells us what we should value and in order to defend this I would need a separate thesis. But, for the sake of brevity, the answer to this is yes, (although it does not tell us exactly how it rates compared to other goods and it is in this sense in which I like Hare am a prescriptivist) for it is only logical that we should value that which we need in order to live as a social rational animal or as humans. It is an empirical fact that we possess at least the minimum rationality necessary to evaluate what is needed in order to withstand the processes of natural selection. If we were unable to make the necessary logical deductions and inductions we would not know such basic truths as the

When viewed in relation to the purpose of morality the valuation isn't very relativistic, however, since morality has as its purpose to ensure people's well-being as opposed to people's happiness, which was a commonly held belief of old and which for obvious reasons was very subjectivistic.¹⁰ By this I mean to say that morality aims at the fulfillment of people's basic needs, but for morality to aim at people's happiness instead, as a goal in morality, would be to needlessly set an unrealistic goal for society. In ordinary usage of the term "obligation" we say that society may be obligated to help supply Joe with his basic needs (in the case where he is unable to do so himself) but it is not obligated to supply him with his every desire in order to make him happy. As fellow human beings we would feel obligated to help Joe buy food, but we would not, however, feel obligated to help Joe buy a luxury item such as a Porsche. It is for this reason that I have opted to deal with the fulfillment of the objective category of *basic human needs*¹¹ as the purpose of morality, instead of the fulfillment of vague 'interests' as the purpose of morality, which is used in Gewirth's definition of morality and Hare's 'limited veil of ignorance.'¹²

fact that food is valuable, what kinds of actions lead to what consequences, and what consequences are desirable in terms of ensuring one's life and ensuring a quality of life. Our incredible advances in the sciences constitute further evidence toward the conclusion that we are not irrational or non-rational animals who survived through other factors.

¹⁰ By this I mean that the meeting of people's basic needs is necessary to morality (by conceptual analysis) whereas satisfying people's lucrative desires and interests is not part of the role of morality. If it is agreed that such a thing as basic needs exists it must be the case, analytically, that they are common to all humans whereas people's interests and desires vary from person to person as well as from time to time.

It would then seem that having people's happiness as a goal is a *subjective* goal and *non-necessary* for morality, since it can't recommend something in general, whereas having people's well-being as a goal is *objective*, in that the basic needs for well-being are the same for everyone and everyone's needs bear equal weight in the calculation of action, as well as *necessary* for morality.

¹¹ I believe that Maslow's category of what constituted a basic human need is adequate for my purposes of distinguishing between needs and interests. This, however, does not mean that I agree with his hierarchy.

¹² According to Hare the venture of developing a system of ethics according to basic human needs has so far been unfruitful, however, in my mind this does not make it wrong. We cannot deem it wrong to go about ethics in this manner simply because we don't know how to do it yet.

But why is the emphasis in morality on *other* people's needs? Kant made this distinction through the use of his hypothetical/categorical distinction and Singer readily agrees with this distinction, though even *he* mentions it almost as an after-thought. Morality by conceptual analysis, according to Singer, Kant, and Gewirth has to do with categorical imperatives, to paraphrase Kant this means that these are maxims (subjective propositions about how one should act) which pass the test of the Categorical Imperative¹³ and which are therefore universalizable and objective in nature, and as such deals very little with self-interest or prudential motives. Morality may, however, deal with self-interests in prioritizing the two types of interests where they do conflict and the same goes for prudential acts. One may object that one may have an obligation to one's self such as the obligation to educate one's self, but one cannot ever hope to impose such an obligation because even if self-duty did exist the right to self-determination always overrules any form of self-duty. The fact that self-duty is always over-ruled by the agent's right to self-determination (and this includes the right to release one's self from one's duty) makes self-duty a moot point.¹⁴

Finally, as a moral criterion, universalizability is better illustrated through its various formulations. It is my contention that the generalization principle is the most important of all of these formulations of the universalizability principle. Other important variations

¹³ See the glossary for the differentiation of a categorical imperative as opposed to the Categorical Imperative.

¹⁴ The only apparent exception of which I can conceive of would be the case of suicide. The reason why it *might* constitute an exception would be because it conflicts with the main goal of morality, which is to ensure not only one's life but also a decent quality of life. But since the harm that it does others is negligible, however, compared to the harm that remaining in life does to the agent, it does not fall within the scope of morality in that it is neither prohibited nor an obligation towards others. The point also holds that even if one did have an obligation to one's self one could release one's self at any time from this obligation since it is he or she himself who binds him/her self in obligation, so that even if the obligation to one's self did exist it would have no utility. If it doesn't serve a function it does not help guide people's actions and is therefore useless to morality.

of the universalizability principle include Kant's Categorical Imperative, Hare's Universalizability Principle, The Golden Rule, Singer's generalizability principle, and Alan Gewirth's "logical principle of universalizability."¹⁵

The universalizability principle is a formal feature of morality, which through its use advocates egalitarian moral rules, as well as objective reasons for the valuation of people's needs and also in the equal application of the moral rules to people in general. It is a formal feature as opposed to a substantive feature in that the recommended course of action is not directly suggested by any formulation of this principle; the Categorical Imperative is an exception to this claim. The fact that the universalizability principle ensures equality through its objective formal requirements makes it indispensable for egalitarianism in morality.

Objectivity is essential to morality in that morality is an egalitarian concept and egalitarianism requires objectivity. To be moral is to be objective by necessity for one cannot be biased in the applications of the moral rules or choose the reasons arbitrarily to suit his/her own purposes and then change these reasons so that they apply to no one else) or one's judgements in general,¹⁶ and act morally at the same time with respect to the same situation.¹⁷ An ethical theory is objective if the principles and rules which make up the ethical theory are objective in their application. An ethical principle or rule is objective if the soundness of its reasons is independent (ontologically as well as in the

¹⁵ For the abbreviations that I will be using for these various forms of the universalizability principle please refer to the glossary at the end of this thesis. Please note that in order to distinguish between the universalizability principle and Hare's version of it I have used capital letters for Hares version of it. I will discuss later whether they are the same principle or not. Hare himself does not use capital letters when referring to it and I am led to believe that he is in fact depicting his view of the universalizability principle as the only true one and I am inclined to agree, we will, however discuss this more fully in the section devoted to Hare.

¹⁶ We will see important exceptions to this general rule about bias, in the later chapter entitled "Justifying Exceptions While Remaining Objective."

regular sense of the word) of the identity of the person who uses this sentence (Angelos Timotheatos I), the time at which he uses it (4:23 p.m. on Wednesday the third of April), and the particular place where he uses it (spot 'a' in Angelos Timotheatos' den). Another way in which an ethical statement can be held to be objective is if it holds intersubjectively. "A fact holds, or an object exists, intersubjectively if somehow its acknowledgment is binding on all thinking subjects (or all subjects in some specified group), although it does not hold or exist independently of their thinking about it."¹⁸

The universalizability principle and more specifically Singer's generalization principle, ensures objectivity in morality through its dictum "What is right (or wrong) for one person is right (or wrong) for any relevantly similar person in a relevantly similar situation." In effect what is right for one person is right for any person regardless of their identity, time or place, unless the *logical* parameters of the case deem that such considerations are logically relevant to the case in question. In other words these reasons may not arbitrarily be deemed to be relevant. "Because moral judgements have to be made for reasons, the reasons being the facts of the situation, it is irrational to issue one having no regard for the facts....Moral and other normative judgements by contrast cannot be arbitrary in this way. They have to be made because of the facts. This does not mean that the moral judgement *follows logically from* the facts (H 1963b; sec. 8). The facts do not *force* us logically to make one moral judgement rather than another; but if we make one about one situation, we cannot, while admitting that the facts are the same in another situation, in the same breath make a conflicting one about another situation in

¹⁷ It is a necessary feature of morality but it is not sufficient for morality.

¹⁸ *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Gen. Editor Robert Audi (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244.

the same breath make a conflicting one about the second situation.”¹⁹ “Anyone who thinks that in this sense consequences are irrelevant to moral decisions cannot have understood what morality is about: it is about actions; that is, about what we do; and that is, what we are bringing about—the difference we are making to the course of events. These are facts we have to know.”²⁰ They must be deemed to be relevant to the case by objective standards namely, logical standards, but what weight they will carry forth in conflicting situations with other values cannot be determined as objectively or measured accurately in accordance to standards which apply to everyone.²¹ The measure of value given to actions is neither precise or accurate for interpersonal comparison and therefore interpersonal agreement for its value. Logical operations, on the other hand determine whether or not a reason is relevant or not, there are no degrees of relevance, and always pertain regardless of the identity of the speaker, the place or time at which it is spoken. They are, by their axiomatic nature, unbiased principles.

In that morality is objective and therefore egalitarian by definition I hope to prove in my dissertation that the universalizability principle (the generalization principle being its best formulation) is indispensable to morality, but, however, not sufficient to morality, and it therefore cannot be the supreme principle (which is both necessary and sufficient) that ethical thinkers have been dreaming of discovering throughout the passage of time. The generalization principle is, however, impossible to avoid when we discuss what is

¹⁹ R. M. Hare, *Sorting Out Ethics* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 12. It is important to note that Hare held that the moral judgement does not follow logically from the facts whereas I contend that in general, at least, they do.

²⁰ R. M. Hare, “The Structure of Ethics and Morals” *Essays in Ethical Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 181.

²¹ Logical standards are of course objective standards in the first sense in that they pertain equally to everyone.

right and wrong, and hence my claim that Marcus Singer's generalization principle is the single most fundamental principle in morality.

CHAPTER ONE
UNIVERSALIZABILITY AS NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT IN
MORALITY

I intend to begin the dissertation by examining whether or not the generalization principle (GP) is truly the supreme principle of morality. It has been claimed by philosophers such as Alan Gewirth that Singer claimed his dictum “what is right (or wrong) for one person must be right for any relevantly similar person in relevantly similar circumstances” to be the supreme principle in morality. By a supreme principle both Gewirth (he devoted a whole chapter to it in Reason and Morality) and I mean a principle which is both necessary and sufficient for morality. Singer states:

It is at the heart of moral reasoning. The generalization principle, I shall argue, is involved in or presupposed by every genuine moral judgment, for it is an essential part of the meaning of such distinctively moral terms as “right,” “wrong,” and “ought,” in their distinctively moral senses. It is also an essential feature of moral reasoning, for it is presupposed in every attempt to give a reason for a moral judgment. It thus determines what can count as a moral reason. At the same time, it is the reasons that are given in any particular case that determine the application of the principle, for they determine the scope of the qualification “similar persons in similar circumstances.”²²

This means that he takes the GP to be a necessary principle; but it is not, as we shall later see, a sufficient principle. As a matter of fact, it is but one of the principles which he uses to justify a rational basis for morality. Singer uses what he calls the

²² Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics; An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred, A. Knopf, 1961), 34.

generalization argument (GA), the reiterability principle, the invertibility principle, as well as a negative form of the principle of consequences (PC), as but a part of his arsenal.

He is right, however, in asserting that the GP is indispensable to morality it being a form of the universalizability principle.²³ The dictum known as the generalization principle (GP), “What is right for one person must be right for any relevantly similar person in relevantly similar circumstances” has affinities to Sidgwick’s justice principle and can be traced back to the Golden Rule (GR), the Categorical Imperative (CI) and other similar principles. Had this principle been new, Singer may have had more problems asserting it as necessary, but since being necessary to morality implies that the GP or the universalizability principle in general²⁴, regardless of its form, always has and always will correspond to morality due to the meanings of the words “ought”, “right”, and “should” in their moral sense, it is *necessary* that it have always existed within morality. Had it not existed in one form or another, then this would lead us to believe that it was not necessary before, and then one could ask ‘what has changed in morality to necessitate something similar to the GP?’. It is worthwhile to note, however, that the GP and other forms of universalizability principles in general are moral principles as opposed to moral rules, and this in itself means that it is not subject to radical change in its basic form²⁵, so that in effect if it is to exist it must have always existed within morality. The essential difference between moral principles and moral rules is that moral rules may

²³ It is important to note that when I will be speaking of a particular form of the universalizability principle I shall either refer to it as such or limit it to sections reserved to the author. In all other cases the GP and the universalizability principle may be safely interchanged.

²⁴ I equate the universalizability principle in general with the GP because the GP, regardless of Hare’s contention that it is misnamed implying generalization instead of universalization, is still an adequate definition of the universalizability principle in the form which is common to all other *complete* forms (as opposed to the GR) of the universalizability principle.

²⁵ The base meaning of moral principles is a necessary feature in morality, although it may be formulated differently or applied differently.

come to be through the introduction of new circumstances such as advance in technology, but moral principles “hold in all circumstances and allow of no exceptions; they are invariant with respect to every moral judgement and every moral situation. They are thus ‘indefeasible.’ A further point of difference between rules and principles is that principles are always *relevant*, whereas rules are not. For example, the rule against lying is not relevant to a situation in which lying is not involved, and the rule against killing is not relevant where killing is not involved. Moral principles, however, are relevant in every moral situation, in every situation in which a moral question arises.”²⁶ The GP is part of the logical structure of morality due to what the word “ought” implies, and as such, it applies to all moral judgements, seeing how moral judgements deal exclusively with how one ought to act.

The GP has existed as long as the concept of morality, since morality cannot exist without the GP,²⁷ and its most common instance “is invoked whenever we test a moral claim by citing analogous cases. Moreover as the principle of justice or impartiality it is presumed by every appeal to precedent, as in the common law. The point in appealing to analogies and precedents is that what is right in one case must be so in another, unless they can be shown to be materially different.”²⁸

Formality, Triviality, and Relevance

The GP is involved implicitly in every moral judgement, but the GP has no moral content in and of itself, since it is but a formal requirement of morality. The

²⁶ Ibid., 103.

²⁷ Please note that at this point in the discussion the GP is interchangeable with the universalizability principle.

²⁸ Wick Warner, “Generalization and the Basis of Ethics”, *Ethics* 72, (July 1962): 288-298 (Pg. 289).

universalizability principle “is said to be ‘purely formal’ to follow directly from the ineluctable logic of moral discourse.”²⁹

Lycan goes on to say that “Hare, Singer, and Gewirth differ in their attempts at providing their purely formal ‘supreme’ principle with normative content. We must, after all, have some moral judgements to universalize.”³⁰ For Hare, also, the universalizability provided by the GP serves only to provide “the logical framework provided by the word ‘ought.’”³¹ Wick Warner says, when speaking of purely formal moral principles; “It is a peculiarity of such principles that, while they are infinitely fertile, they are incapable of producing any determinate judgements from their own resources alone. They are only formal.”³²

The fact that the GP is only formal, however, does not render the GP trivial. Rules of logic also do not yield determinate facts about the way the world is; they too are formal and in need of content. They too, nevertheless, are indispensable, and therefore not trivial.

If a certain form of argument is valid (or invalid) in one instance, then an argument of that form is valid (or invalid) in every instance. Just as this logical principle helps determine what can count as a logical reason for a logical conclusion, so the generalization principle purports to determine what is to count as a moral reason for a moral judgment. We seem, then, to have spotted a purely rational moral principle, like the principles of ordinary logic in its formal generality but unlike them in applying only to

²⁹ Gregory W. Lycan, “Hare, Gewirth and Singer on Universalizability,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 19, (April 1969): 135-144 (Pg. 135).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Wick Warner, “Generalization and the Basis of Ethics”, *Ethics* 72, (July 1962): 288-298 (Pg. 292).

the moral field where, moreover, it lays down conditions for the rational treatment of any moral problem.³³

C.D. Broad contended that the universalizability principle is “extraordinarily trivial,”³⁴ but yet both the rule of implication and the GP state something extremely important about the relation between ideas. Broad deemed the GP to be trivial mainly due to the fact that what counts for “relevantly similar circumstances” in the universalizability principle is vague and therefore inapplicable. Gewirth, too, in his article “The Generalization Principle” contends that what is to count as “relevantly similar circumstances” is vague and may be manipulated in order to produce biased judgements.

What is relevant, however, is an objective matter which is to be decided by logic. Relevance is also intentional in that it has an object, for something is relevant *to* morality, relevant *to* a situation, *to* an argument or *to* an explanation. A circumstance is relevant *to* the moral situation and therefore the moral judgement if it logically serves to establish the moral judgement in a valid and sound argument.

One of the GP’s purposes is to point to similar cases within morality and to make possible analogous judgements in relevantly similar moral situations. It uses relevant similarities in order to categorize judgements. The GP, in categorizing relevantly similar cases, makes objective rules which apply to everyone and thus forces the onus probandi on the person wishing to be exempt from that rule. If the GP were to be trivial, it would be trivial because it could be manipulated in such a way as to make exceptions or draw similarities based on non-relevant moral reasons or non-moral reasons, i.e., prudential

³³ Ibid., 289.

³⁴ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: an Essay in the logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a system of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 18; C.D. Broad, quoted from *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Paul Kegan, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1930), 223.

reasons, but it certainly cannot be trivial in that it has no utility. The GP cannot be so manipulated without arbitrarily changing the rules of the moral constructs involved, since the logical structure of the GP and morality itself does not permit this.

The GP is used to *illustrate* how the circumstances of the second case entail reasons similar to the reasons in the first case, which in turn entail a moral judgement which is similar to the moral judgement in the first case. The analogy and therefore the check in reasoning go all the way back to the derivation of reasons. One cannot easily integrate non-relevant moral reasons since the circumstances leading to the reasons (non-moral reasons in this case) would have to already be deemed to be morally relevant, where morally relevant means both objective (in form) and relevant to the goals of morality and this is clearly impossible. Errors can be made to the effect that non-relevant reasons can be included in moral reasoning, but the system itself does not allow for such manipulations. Similarly it is not the fault of the syntax of logic operations if one gets the wrong results due to a misapplication of the logical constructs or an unclear understanding of the constructs, or misinformation. Any ‘manipulation’ of such principles including the GP is a misapplication of the principle, for the principles when properly applied do not allow for such moves. One would be committing a logical error in claiming that one’s clapping one’s hands (to make use of Foot’s example) is relevant to whether one should lie to the murderer in order to protect an innocent life. How does one fit this or a claim such as my name is Angelo Timotheatos into an argument about whether one should lie or not? If one can’t, then one also can’t adopt as a principle that only people named Angelo Timotheatos can lie to murderers seeking to kill innocents, for

what does this have to do with the definition of morality? How is it relevant to morality? Using Gewirth's definition of morality it is evident that it is not.³⁵

The GP serves to *illustrate* and categorize the relationship between two or more cases. Though it does not *make* them similar, it is as non-trivial as the principle of causality which also serves to *categorize* and *illustrate* various relationships between various causes and effects within the physical sciences and which itself does not cause the cause to bring about the effect. These principles are both guidelines to predicting outcomes, one in terms of physical effects and the other in terms of moral judgement. Similarly to the principle of causality, which can not tell us what kind of effects some totally new cause will have, since it has no precedent in this category, the GP or the universalizability principle, too, has no substantive content in that without some kind of precedent it cannot tell us anything about the moral judgement on its own. Once the valuation and deliberation process is done (correctly) it can then judge that all of the following relevantly similar cases will have similar accompanying moral judgements. Like in the principle of causality the cause needs to have already brought about the effect in at least one case before it can then be used to successfully predict similar effects in relevantly similar cases. The moral reasons in other words need to have already brought about the moral judgement and only then can it be used to predict a similar judgement in relevantly similar cases. The GP is a formal feature, which serves as a guideline to predicting judgement, and it does not contain anything within it for weighing and valuing

³⁵ Perhaps one of Singer's greatest drawbacks is that he does not elaborate on what morality is and this evidently leaves a gap for objections as to what is undesirable for morality, and what is relevant to morality. On the other hand if we use Gewirth's definition of morality as I am doing in my dissertation, coupled with a definition of relevance it becomes more apparent.

reasons for and against a moral judgement other than weighing them in terms of their objective form.³⁶

Copi states the objective criteria of relevance in the following way: “An analogy is relevant to establishing the presence of a given attribute... provided that it is drawn with respect to other circumstances affecting it. One attribute or circumstance is relevant to another, for purposes of analogical argument, if the first affects the second, that is, if it has a causal or determining effect on that other.”³⁷ This applied to ethics would mean that a reason may be claimed to be valid if it causally affects the judgement, where causally means that if it were to be integrated into a *sound* argument it would bring about the conclusion that the judgement were true also, or in the case of most inductive arguments,³⁸ most probably true. Consequently, a moral situation is relevantly similar to another if the similarity is drawn with respect to the reasons which entail (cause) the judgement.

If this claim is true then it is not simple at all to pass off as logically relevant that which is arbitrarily decided to be relevant or to manipulate the circumstances of the case in order to create the illusion that something which has very little or nothing to do with the case, is relevant to the case in question. Singer, himself, also provided us with criteria for the application of the GP, which serve to prevent this type of abuse of the “similar circumstance” criterion. On page 21 he states that “The criteria for ‘all similar cases’ are contained in the ‘general grounds’ or reasons on the basis of which an act is, or is said to be, right or wrong. These reasons determine who are similar and who are not in a certain

³⁶ Singer uses the GA and other consequentialist principles to fill in the content of that which GP mirrors onto similar cases.

³⁷ Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, seventh ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986), 414.

³⁸ By reference to most inductive arguments, I mean arguments which are not analytically true.

context. All those to whom the reasons apply are similar to each other and relevantly different from those to whom the reasons do not apply."³⁹

As Gewirth interprets Singer, it is not possible to correctly apply the term "right", without reference to the GP. "On Singer's formalist interpretation it does not seem possible to specify, at least in part, the criteria for the application of 'right' in a particular case apart from the GP."⁴⁰ Gewirth seems to overlook the fact that just like in the case of the causal principle, there *is* some criterion in morality which is ontologically independent of the GP. For to find out whether some reason C is the cause of some particular judgement E, we may first inquire whether C occurs temporally prior to E, whether C is relevant to E, whether E occurs in the absence of C, and so on. These specific tests do not, of course establish the entailment of the judgement but they are at least part of the criteria (or examples of the criteria) that are applied in the particular case ontologically independently of applying the GP that similar reasons in similar situations produce similar judgements. The fact that there is a criterion of something's being a reason which is ontologically independent of the GP means that we are not here caught in a circle and that the GP is not tautologous.⁴¹ The GP doesn't cause similarity, it illustrates it between cases. Nor does the GP cause the reason to produce a given judgement. It simply predicts that it will, due to its similarity with other reasons which caused a similar judgement. The similarity of reasons and situations causes us to predict a similarity of ensuing moral judgements; and these are three very distinct relations of

³⁹ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: an Essay in the logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a system of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 21-22.

⁴⁰ Alan Gewirth, "The Generalization Principle," *Philosophical Review* 73 (April 1964): 229-242. (Pg. 233).

⁴¹ Compare this argument to Gewirth's rebuttal of the causal principle's being tautologous. They have the exact same form of argument. Alan Gewirth, "The Generalization Principle," *Philosophical Review* 73 (April 1964): 229-242. (Pg. 233).

similarity. (To say that similar reasons are equivalent to similar reasons is, evidently a tautology, but this is not what the GP is about.)

Gewirth goes on to later state that the criterion of temporal priority, and spatial contiguity provide substantive content which allow the causality principle to escape charges of being tautologous. If this is true, then it is also true of the GP that the aforementioned criteria (which are related the GP) provide it with substantive content, therefore releasing it from charges of being tautologous. However, Gewirth is not using 'substantive content' correctly if this is his claim, although the ontologically independent criteria do just fine for the purposes of rebutting charges of being tautologous. These criteria provide certain necessary attributes for the substantive content, but do not comprise substantive content themselves. They provide necessary attributes for being a cause but do not in themselves link a type of cause with a given effect just as the GP doesn't cause the link between a type of reason and a type of judgement.

Relevance must have substantive content to work with, however, even if it doesn't come from the GP, because we always ask "to what is it relevant? - Morality- What kind of morality? Intuitionist?" This answer will determine the source of the substantive content.⁴²

The GP, like the principle of causality, does not provide us with substantive content. Nearly any maxim may be universalized (providing that it has no questionable mention of particulars), and once it is universalized it adopts an objective form. The GP is necessary for morality because its application provides reasons and moral rules with objectivity which is necessary for morality. This universalizes the application of the

⁴² Gewirth, himself, states that the substantive question is about what interests are to be valued. Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 3.

moral rule (if this is judged to be good in this case it is also good in similar cases) and objectifies reasons in order to make them valid for every one (if this reason was a valid reason in this case for this it is also a valid reason for this similar case). This makes the GP the most useful means of determining whether reasons and judgements are objective and whether the accompanying rules can be applied to every one equally. It is very efficient in its role in filtering out non-objective rules and reasons.

On page 18 Singer has already rebutted the objection that the GP doesn't provide guidelines within itself for the use of 'similar persons in similar circumstances' by stating that "this sort of objection to the generalization principle assumes that it pretends or is supposed to contain within itself the criteria for 'similar persons in similar circumstances,' while it most emphatically does not. And the fact that it does not is not a defect in it." What may confuse this point is what Singer says on page 34:

The generalization principle, I shall argue, is involved in or presupposed by every genuine moral judgement, for it is an essential part of the meaning of such distinctively moral senses. It is also an essential feature of moral reasoning, for it is presupposed in every attempt to give a reason for a moral judgement. It thus determines what can count as a moral reason. At the same time, it is the reasons that are given in any particular case that determine the application of the principle, for they determine the scope of the qualification 'similar persons in similar circumstances.'

It follows from this that there can be no genuine moral judgement apart from reasons, and no moral reasons apart from the generalization principle. This, incidentally, provides all the proof or justification this principle requires. Supposing, what is not obvious, that it requires any.

If the generalization principle is presupposed in every moral judgement and in all moral reasoning, there is no sense in demanding any further proof of it.⁴³

The main contention in this argument is that the GP is a *necessary* part of every genuine moral judgement, due to its essential role in the definition of “right” “wrong” and “ought” in their moral sense. In that moral reasons are objective by the definition of what it means to be moral, they too must be universally applicable (at least in theory⁴⁴) and so the GP applies to moral reasons necessarily. Reasons must be universalizable in order to count as *moral* reasons since moral reasons must, by the nature of that which is moral, be objective. The collective moral reasons of a particular case can also be predicted to be relevant to other cases which are similar, based on them having similar relevant circumstances. Thus a case with morally relevant circumstances ‘a¹’, ‘b¹’ and ‘c¹’, can be seen to yield the judgement that it be right to do ‘x’ since a case having morally relevant circumstances ‘a’, ‘b’ and ‘c’ yields the judgement that it be right to do ‘x’. It yields the judgement ‘x’ based on moral reasons ‘p’, ‘q’, ‘r’. These moral reasons ‘p’, ‘g’, ‘r’ are based on the morally relevant circumstances ‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’ that are mirrored in the first case by ‘p¹’, ‘q¹’, ‘r¹’ and circumstances ‘a¹’, ‘b¹’, ‘c¹’. In order to leap directly from a similarity in the circumstances to a similar judgement we need the GP. Without the GP as a formal tool one would have to draw out the moral reasons for each individual case and weigh them against each other, weigh the alternative actions, predict

⁴³ Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics; An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred, A. Knopf, 1961), 34.

⁴⁴ One exception is the privileges and obligations of presidents where only one person has them but yet it can be *any* one person. To quote from R. M. Hare’s “Relevance” *Essays in Ethical Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 195; “A term does not stop being a universal term just because it logically can apply to one thing. The thesis of universalizability, therefore, rules out only individual references, not all unique (even logically unique) references. Put more informally, that it was I who did it could not be a

future consequences, and go through a valuation of each of these consequences over and over for each case. Even with the use of the GP there is still plenty of moral deliberation to occupy a moral agent.

The similarity of moral reasons that are given in certain cases directly entails the similarity of that first judgement with the judgement of the second relevantly similar case. What counts as a moral reason depends on the reason's objectivity and/or the reason's ability to be universalized (apart from the substantive aspect) while the scope of what judgement is similar to what other judgement depends on a common set of moral reasons and circumstances which determine the scope of the qualification "similar persons in similar circumstances". Moral reasons or objective reasons are necessary so that moral judgement may be universalized in order to apply equally to everyone. Consequently, the GP is necessary to test reasons for objectivity, for it is objective reasons and not arbitrary or egoistic reasons that are necessary for morality.

The Generalizability Principle Amongst Other Principles Used by Singer

On its own this simply argues that the GP is necessary for morality and why it is so, but not, however, that it is sufficient. "Apart" in the quote from page 34 in Singer, signifies that the GP is necessary for morality, not sufficient for morality. In my interpretation the quote should read there can be no genuine moral judgment which is without its reasons and there can be no moral reasons which are non-universalizable, "for if this is a valid reason for one person it must also be possible for it to be a valid reason for other persons." A reason which has already been given in order to justify an act

reason for a moral judgement about an act; but any universal property of the act could be a reason, even though his possession of it rules out anybody else's possession of it.

cannot be deemed arbitrarily to be invalid for others in similar circumstances, for this would be a miscarriage of justice.⁴⁵

Universalizability has two functions that are necessary for objectivity in morality. One function is to check against bias and arbitrariness in the constitution of their judgements (i.e. if the reason is valid for me it can be valid for anyone in relevantly similar circumstances.) The other is to check judgements against bias in their application. (If the rule is applicable to me it should logically be applicable to anyone in relevantly similar circumstances or risk logical inconsistency.) Universalizability changes rules through the elimination of particulars in order to ensure that the rules are objective and apply equally to everyone. Its role of ensuring that the rules apply equally to everyone and that judgements remain objective is anything but trivial, it is in fact *necessary* for objectivity, but if morality is not objective then universalizability is not needed, but this would change the meaning of what it means to be moral.⁴⁶

Gewirth states “Singer provides no ways outside of the GP of checking whether in a particular case something is right, then the tautological character of the GP is complete: the criterion of persons’ and circumstances’ being similar is that the same thing is right for them; the criterion of something’s being right for one person is that it must be right

⁴⁵ In reference to the term ‘justice’, please note that I am using the term in a general sense and not in any technical sense.

⁴⁶ I do not mean to be advocating a radical egalitarian point of view for morality but simply contend that morality, through conceptual analysis must be objective in the ways already discussed, namely, in what constitutes a reason and to whom the moral rules apply. Morality is objective with respect to whose and what needs are to be valued, with everyone being given equal importance in terms of their basic welfare. To stress one person’s welfare over another’s without valid reasons is to be arbitrary and therefore clearly immoral.

for all similar persons in similar circumstances; and the criterion of things' being right for all or many persons is that the persons be similar to one another..."⁴⁷

On page 21 Singer clearly states that "The criteria for 'all similar cases' are contained in the 'general grounds' or reasons on the basis of which an act is, or is said to be right or wrong. These reasons determine who are similar and who are not in a certain context. All those to whom the reasons apply are similar to each other and relevantly different from those to whom the reasons do not apply."

If these reasons are not derived by the GP and are only slightly altered to a universalizable form by the GP instead, then where do they come from? Singer uses other principles apart from the GP, and two of them precisely in order to prevent the dishonest manipulation of the moral rules. These are the invertibility rule and the reiterability rule, which complement the GP and the PC, the GA and the principle of suffering, among others.

Gewirth concedes that "if the undesirableness of the consequences of a *particular* act is sufficient to determine the act's moral wrongness or rightness (as the principles of consequences and of suffering imply), then Singer does indeed provide a criterion of moral rightness which is independent of the GP, so that its tautological character is removed in a way parallel to that which we saw in the case of the general causal principle."⁴⁸ The PC is independent of the GP and it is precisely this principle which gives us the reasons why an act is said to be wrong or right. (Actually Singer uses the negative utilitarian form of the PC which states that "If the consequences of A's doing x would be undesirable, then A ought not to do x"). The reasons are then checked to be

⁴⁷ Alan Gewirth, "The Generalization Principle," *Philosophical Review* 73 (April 1964): 229-242. (Pg. 233).

sure that they are truly objective reasons by testing them for universalizability, so that “if these reasons are valid for any person, they are valid for all persons.”⁴⁹ The moral reasons that are given are valid for all persons given that they face similar circumstances. If these reasons were not granted validity under similar circumstances for similar people then this would indicate bias in the reasons and logical inconsistency.

On logical inconsistency Hare states; “Next, let us consider the requirement of impartiality. It is impossible for a person without logical offence to make different moral judgements about cases which, after observing the requirement just mentioned of knowledge of the facts, he knows to be exactly similar.”⁵⁰

The PC derives the reasons but in order for them to be moral reasons they must be universalizable and consequently objective.⁵¹ So in effect moral reasons are ontologically independent from the GP but the moral reasons are always indirectly dependent on the GP for their validity as moral reasons. They are dependent on it for their objectivity, which is necessary to moral reasons, but not for their existence qua reasons.

While the universalizability principle is necessary in order to check for objective reasons, and in order to produce objective judgements in morality, the universalizability principle is not sufficient. Nor is it necessary for the universalizability principle to produce criteria for what “relevantly similar persons in similar circumstances” means or to provide morality with substantive content. The objection that the universalizability

⁴⁸ Ibid., 235.

⁴⁹ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed.; London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1907), 485. Quoted in Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1961), 21.

⁵⁰ R. M. Hare, “Relevance” *Essays in Ethical Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 209.

⁵¹ I can have a subjective reason for not going to the store and it would not have to be universalizable, but nor is this a moral situation that is being discussed. If I said that I ought to go to the store in order to help my mother I am saying that for the same reasons for which I should help my mother anyone else should

principle should itself provide criteria for what counts as ‘relevantly similar persons in similar circumstances’ cannot possibly be a legitimate objection since it is tautologous to explain the universalizability principle in terms of itself. As Gewirth himself pointed out, it should be defined by some independent criteria. The GP may, however, provide a clue as to what form these criteria should take (objective, universalizable form.) Singer states that the criteria of persons and or circumstances being similar are derived from the moral reasons and the reasons are derived from the PC (or the GA according to Singer). The PC is necessary for content (for it supplies content directly and indirectly, for the GA is derived from the PC and the GP together) while the GP is necessary for the form of the content. By this alone we can conclude that the GP is necessary but non-sufficient principle in morality.

The GP is supposedly necessary in order to eliminate bias and injustice in general, yet it is not sufficient even in Singer’s view. He, therefore, added the GA, the PC, and the reiterability and invertibility clauses.

Thus the argument is reiterable whenever it is applied to some action arbitrarily specified, as part of its description, as taking place at some particular time, or at some particular place, or by some particular person, or in relation to some particular person or thing. To take an another example: ”If everyone were to eat at this restaurant it would get so crowded that no one would be able to do so... Therefore no one ought to eat in this restaurant. The

help their own mother. Their objectivity comes from the universalizability of the moral judgement and the universalizability of the reasons is necessitated due to the meaning of the words “ought” and “should.”

reference to this restaurant is not essential here; the same argument would apply to that one and to any other one.⁵²

The reiterability is invoked when something specific is introduced into the argument, which is not relevant to the moral judgement. It is another formal feature, which supplies criteria as to how general a moral judgement has to be when it is to be universalized. Reiterability makes sure that the moral judgement cannot be too specific to *arbitrarily* exempt someone in particular from performing the moral act or to *arbitrarily* accord privileges where they are not due. It has been claimed that the reiterability clause is inadequate for eliminating particulars because when we say that ‘only John Smith the Third has the right to do ‘x’’ it is not reiterable for everyone who has a name, but means instead that it is only reiterable for everyone who has *that* name.

The fact of the matter is that *that* particular name is irrelevant to that which is moral, since no sound argument can be devised in order to go from this particular name to what this name has to do with furthering the well being of people in general (and this means people in addition to the aforementioned John Smith the Third.) One must therefore proceed to the next level of generalization. This is because there must be an explanation as to why we have limited this particular right to John Smith the Third, because morality as a concept must be egalitarian.

Due to the fact that *that* particular name is irrelevant, the name “John Smith the Third” can be replaced by any other name or any other irrelevant feature such as having six toes, while maintaining the same soundness of the argument for action (or in the case

⁵² Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred, A. Knopf, 1961), 81.

of John Smith the Third the same degree of absurdity.) We proceed in degree of generality by asking “Is it *this* name that is important to this moral dilemma, or is it the attribute of having *a* name which is important? Is it the case that *any* feature may be used to replace this name as long as it is irrelevant, while maintaining the same degree of soundness and relevance (or in certain cases like this one, preposterousness.) That it leads to a preposterous conclusion may be more clearly seen by a magnification of the consequences, through an increasing degree of generality. In varying the degree of generality in order to find the relevant degree of generality it makes arbitrary reasons for exemption of moral rules available, in theory, to everyone. It reduces the rule that none should ‘x’ except for John Smith the Third to everyone should ‘x’ and this is clearly a *reductio ad absurdum*.

The fact remains that this particular name’s importance to morality is insignificant and as such it can be replaced by any other name or any other irrelevant feature at all while maintaining the same level of soundness, form, and relevance. In adjusting the level of generality in this case, one does away with the feature altogether since it leads to the inane conclusion that anybody possessing any feature at all has the right to do ‘x’, thus including absolutely everyone and leaving no room for exceptions at all. In adjusting the level of the generality, one searches for the level of generality that such a rule should adopt in order to be relevant to morality until one arrives at the relevant level of generality required for the particular case.

It may be, for example, that the name John Smith the Third is not relevant to the moral situation but instead the fact that John Smith the Third is the president at this time that gives him the right to make decisions for the rest of the country. This in turn is

generalized over the subject to state the general rule that “*the president* may make choices for the rest of the country” (regardless of his name.) This rule can be made even more general to include all presidents stating that “*any* president of a country may make choices for his or her country.” It would be wrong for us to say, however, that “*any* president may make choices for *any* country.”

The invertibility clause, in contrast with the reiterability clause, is invoked when the act is described too vaguely for it to be determined whether the act is right or wrong. It works in conjunction with both the GP and the GA, but it derives its force from the GA. This is because the consequences of the act are magnified in the GA where everyone is performing the social act. “To put it another way, the question ‘What would happen if every one broke a promise to aid a friend in order to give one’s children a good education?’ is invertible. For one can ask the counterquestion, ‘What would happen if everyone deprived his children of a good education in order to keep a promise to aid a friend?’ In each case the consequences would be undesirable.”⁵³

“When the act is in this way made determinate or more specific, then the question whether it is right or wrong can be answered, and the generalization argument will be applicable to it. However, the test of whether an action is morally determinate *is* whether the generalization argument is applicable to it.”⁵⁴ This means that if the argument is invertible then the course of action in question is acceptable for anyone in a context similar to that and it is only in making the act more specific that one may arrive at a conclusion. This particular application of the GA makes the GA a useful formal feature of morality, even if it is only for reasons of determining what is a moral issue, and I shall

⁵³ Ibid., 78.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 79.

later argue, for determining whether an action with threshold effects⁵⁵ is right or wrong, and at what point it is right or wrong, as well as for the evaluation of the utility of a moral rule.

Generalizability and Altruism

Yet even with the addition of reiterability as a tool the GP is not sufficient in and of itself. It is not sufficient for the elimination of ethical egoism, which is an amoral system, for the maxim “Every person should seek that which is in his/her interest” is in proper form. The principle of consequences needs to be called upon (this is where the GA⁵⁶ comes in as a derivative of the PC) as well as a proper definition of morality, which explicitly includes altruistic goals in order to rebut an egoist’s claims.

The GP then can be safely claimed to be a non-exclusive principle since the egoist maxim is in proper universalizable form. The GP is a non-exclusive, non-sufficient principle with no content of its own. Isn’t this enough to claim that it is trivial or vacuous? What does the GP do that makes it so necessary that it has appeared throughout history under so many forms? In other words what is it that makes it so necessary when it seems to do so little? What does the GP do through its universality that makes such a difference? Let us picture for a moment what it would be like without generalizability.

From the first glance the GA is underivable and one would have to do a case by case analysis until the point where the act obtains really dire consequences in order to claim that the said act is wrong. This conclusion, however is based upon yet another rule (the PC). Any rule, in being a rule, (which applies to more than one person or case,) is

⁵⁵ Threshold effects are such that are encountered when some type of action has cumulative effects over time or at one time which may not be perceived at first but become more noticeable with the repetition of the action.

analytically required to apply to everyone and every case equally. This means that the scope of the agents that follow this rule encompasses everyone, and the scope of those acting upon the aforementioned rule is the set of agents whose circumstances fulfill the antecedent of the rule.

A rule by its very nature treats similar agents similarly for a rule must by definition include a description of who will act, upon what or whom one will act, in what way one will act and under what circumstances one will act. Logically who will act connotes a set of persons ranging from the null set (as in the case of prohibitions) to the set of all persons (as when the case is obligatory for everyone.) Rules indicate the class of agents they pertain to by means of a description and since rules are made to be followed by more than one person,⁵⁷ in order to be useful; this will include a general description and not a particular one.

If every rule does this by definition there can be no rules in a world without the generalizability principle. A world with no rules is chaos, because no one in this case would know how anyone else would act, since there are no guidelines for the agent to follow and also no guidelines for cooperation. There would be no rules through which one can predict the agent's action in order to avoid being either harmed by them or to ensure one's welfare in general. From these two facts alone there can be no morality. If

⁵⁶ Please note that the GA is an integral part of the invertibility clause so that when we are using the invertibility clause we are using both the PC and the GA.

⁵⁷ A rule which pertains to only one person is a personal rule. It is only when one tries to externalize this rule to expand it into society, telling them what *they* should do and how *they* should act upon that person that it becomes a society rule as such. This takes once again objective reasons to which everyone can assent and a general description of which people the rule applies to and this would generally be more than one, in order to be of any use to someone wanting to protect their rights, and thereby, their needs. One cannot protect one's rights by only limiting the actions of but one person. It takes restraint on bad actions in general and on behalf of society in general to protect one's rights.

It is also interesting to note that even in personal rules one generalizes the set of circumstances under which one applies a rule, and this in itself indicates that universalization is essential to rules since one

there are no rules each person acts upon their inclinations. But does this rule out altruism or cooperation? Can't one be *inclined* to be altruistic or cooperative in a world where there are no rules? The answer to this is yes. The probability of an altruistic person arriving in a world with no generalizability and therefore no rules, however, is extremely low. Even if the altruistically inclined person meets other people who are likewise altruistically inclined their only advantage over others would come from their mutual cooperation.

Their altruism and their cooperation, however, are not restricted to being applied to altruistic persons. An altruistic person cares about everyone whereas the egoist is not restricted in his/her choices by whom he/she may harm in acting upon their choices. While the altruist is busily tiptoeing around being careful with how one's actions have impact on the other and whether one is justified in doing others some retributive harm, the egoist would unhesitatingly stick a dagger in the altruist's back and take what one wanted. The egoist might keep the altruist around if able to use him to advantage but sooner or later the altruist's needs would conflict with someone else's and the altruist would not survive long. Altruism itself would be extremely short-lived without generalizable rules.

If enough altruists banded together they might survive. It is only natural for altruistic people to cooperate with one another and this would give them a great advantage over the egoist. The altruists, however, would value each life equally, both with regard to quality and quantity of life. In their equal valuation of all life it is only logical that the action of which they approved be approved when a relevantly similar

cannot have rules without general parameters of the circumstances under which this rule is to be applied. For if these are particular parameters it severely limits its usefulness as well as its ability to be taught.

agent in relevantly similar circumstances performs it. The altruist applies reason to determine what would be most beneficial to the quantity and quality of life for each and every altruist. The deduction of what the best course of action would be would be derived from logic. The altruist could deduce what other altruists do by inferring what any given altruist would do given a certain set of circumstances in order best to achieve altruistic goals. The altruist would infer, from the fact that their goal is the same (namely, everyone's welfare) and that logically, the *best* way to maximize that goal is act 'a,' then the other altruist should do 'a'. This solution is *best* for any similar altruist under similar circumstances, and the fact that it is the *best* solution is what makes it right for anyone similar under relevantly similar circumstances. To be altruistic is to be moral, and so we have seen, to be moral is to necessarily apply the GP.

The Similarity Criteria in the Generalizability Principle

Gewirth states that:

The GP as Singer interprets it is a tautology. For the criteria of persons' being relevantly 'similar' already involve that what is right for the one is right for the others, so that it is logically impossible that persons and their circumstances be similar, and yet what is right for one not be right for the others. 'What is impossible is for it to be right for A to do x and not right for anyone similar to A to do x in similar circumstances'. Hence, whenever one points out a case in which what is right for one person is not right for similar persons in similar circumstances, the rejoinder can always be made that in such a case the persons or circumstances are really not similar in the relevant respects.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Alan Gewirth, "The Generalization Principle," *Philosophical Review* 73 (April 1964): 229-242. (Pg. 232).

Singer can similarly claim that causation is tautologous in that for the criteria of a cause 'a¹'s being similar to the cause 'a', already involves that what is caused by one is caused by the other, so that it is logically impossible that causes be similar and yet what is caused by one is not caused by the other. Hence, whenever one points out a case in which that which is the effect of one cause is not the effect of a similar cause given similar circumstances, the rejoinder can always be made that in such a case the causes are not really similar in the relevant respects.

Implicit generality whether it be in the GP or in causality has the effect of seeming tautologous in this way, however, both have a very important role to play in their domain. This apparent tautology is a characteristic of attempting to define similarity of any kind. Plato ran into this problem and attempted to resolve the problem he called 'the third man argument' through the use of the Form of the Good. Gewirth points to a similar problem, which may arise within the GP and/or within the causal principle.

If the idea of "cause" were defined solely in terms of the general causal principle and had no specific substantive content of its own (such as is supplied by temporal priority, spatial contiguity, and the like), then any attempt to establish a causal connection would be involved in an infinite regress.⁵⁹

Implicit generality depends on similarity and similarity has this particular problem with it, but this should not make these principles any less important. The question of defining causality is tantamount to searching for the cause of causality. Causation is perceived not caused just as similarity is perceived and not caused. If Gewirth were to concede to this

⁵⁹ Ibid., 233.

point then one could point to similar properties as perceived and needing no further proof. There remains but the problem of 'relevant similarity'.

Both parts of this expression are relational properties and it is important to note that each refers to four things. Relevant refers to (a) morality and to (b) the deliberation of this case. In addition to this, the scope of the GP becomes even narrower since the GP involves the logical property of addition. In order for the GP to be true it must be that (a) and (b) apply to both the circumstances and to the characteristics of the agents involved in the relational property of similarity. Furthermore, the addition extends to relevant features, which must be 'similar to both cases.'

Singer rightly claims that: "the phrase '(relevantly) similar persons in (relevantly) similar circumstances' cannot be translated or defined or made more specific in abstraction from any definite context. If a more definite term were substituted for it, we should have a particular application of the generalization principle, and not the principle itself. However, it is not impossible to formulate criteria or a general set of directions for determining whether or not certain persons or their circumstances are to be regarded as similar in various contexts; that is, whether or not the similarities between them are relevant in the context."⁶⁰

Generalizability, Singularity and Causation

The question of what is and is not relevant in morality leads Singer to the conclusion that "a difference in what is right for two individuals cannot be justified on the ground that they are *two* individuals, that A is A and B is B."⁶¹ Particulars are therefore not relevant to morality and therefore not relevant to what constitutes relevant

⁶⁰ Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1961), 20.

similarity. What is relevant to morality limits what can count as criteria of similarity. What is similar between cases also limits criteria of what can count as 'relevant similarity' between cases both in terms of reasons, circumstances and therefore judgements. By addition then, what is relevantly similar between two moral cases is even more limited and therefore not easily manipulated.

To put it another way, the judgement that A ought to do x implies that everyone similar to A ought to do x (or an act of the same kind as x) in similar circumstances. Thus the particular judgement that A ought to do x can be said to imply a general rule, though just what the rule is that it implies cannot be stated with any definiteness apart from the reasons adduced for the claim that A ought to do x, since apart from these reasons it cannot be determined what persons or circumstances are to be regarded as similar. This is what is meant by saying that moral judgements are governed by the generalization principle.

This characteristic of moral judgements, that of implicit generality, is by no means a trivial one. Not every particular judgement or statement implies a generalization. That it is fallacious to infer from "some" to "all", or from "this case" to "all cases", is well – established logical doctrine, and with regard to most kind of statements it certainly holds. But it is simply false that no particular statement whatever implies a generalization. Not only do moral judgements have this characteristic, they are not unique in this respect.⁶²

When we say that act 'x' is right we mean that much like the causes bring about the effects in the causation principle, the circumstances of 'x' combined with the features of the agent which are relevant to 'x' being right bring about reasons which cause 'x' to

⁶¹ Ibid., 22.

be right. That is to say that the circumstances and the features of the agent cause the act 'x' to be right, through the reasons, which they entail. According to the consequentialist theories, the reason which makes John's lying to Jack in order to save Mary's life right is that the consequences of lying to Jack are not as bad as telling the truth and having Mary murdered. The violation of the rule against lying, as an exception to not lying under general circumstances, does not have bad enough consequences to be worth the loss of an innocent life.⁶³ In another case the Zodiac Killer is in search of a Libra to kill and he openly tells John, who is a Scorpio and is therefore in no danger, that he is the Zodiac Killer and openly brandishes a loaded gun, asks if Angelo is a Libra. John should similarly lie to Mr. Zodiac since the reasons are the same for lying and there are no reasons in addition to the previous set even though the circumstances differ in ways which are not relevant to what counts as a reason for or against the said act. For instance, the peoples' names differ, one killer is well known while the other recently went insane, Angelo is a man while Mary is a woman, etc. All of these reasons are not relevant to the fact that an innocent person will die if the agent does not lie or otherwise deceive the killer. It does not matter who the killer is, where it takes place, or whom the killer is about to murder. Whether it be a man or woman, John's life or Angelo's life at stake, an innocent person's right to live is the same. They are valued equally.

Causal relations in the physical sciences follow the same reasoning. Paolo is pushed from a plane from a height that is great enough to kill a man in free fall. Paolo has nothing to break his fall and is not going to die from a cardiac arrest or any other such

⁶² Ibid., 37.

⁶³ Some may argue directly from the ends justify the means that the end behind lying to the murderer is to deceive him and that this cannot be universalized. The end behind deceiving him, however, is to save Mary's life, and there can be many such links until the final end is found but it is the final end which can be

thing on the way down. Paolo will therefore die from his fall. If John were to fall out of a building from a height that was great enough to kill a man after free fall, had nothing to break his fall, and is not going to die from anything such as a cardiac arrest on the way down, then he too will die. All of these circumstances directly or indirectly provide reasons for the conclusion that John would (similarly to Paolo) die from his fall.⁶⁴ The difference in names, place, things that did not break his fall, are not going to change the fact that anyone in exactly this set of circumstances that are relevant to this circumstance of the physical sciences will always die from his fall. If all of these reasons were not present such as a parachute breaking his fall, or other relevant circumstances such as this it could change the outcome, and the moral case has this in common with the causal case.

Being riddled full of bullets on the way down will change what would have otherwise necessarily occurred. If he had only been hit by one bullet this may still not change the outcome and yet, it would still be relevant to whether he survives or not. Similarly, additional relevant reasons or the absence of reasons may change the outcome of what is morally right. If Mary had stolen something from Jack, she is no longer innocent and in addition, there is *some* reason, (though insufficient) for harming Mary; so, we say that Mary's theft *is* relevant to whether one should reveal Mary's whereabouts or not, though it does *not* change the judgement that it would be morally wrong to do so.

To summarize, then, the problems that Gewirth claimed rendered the GP tautologous, are equally problems about the causation principle. Furthermore, if the action's being right can properly be attributed to being caused by the circumstances, the

directly linked to the definition of morality which is the one at issue and not intermediary ones because they too are essentially means to an end, and thus justifiable themselves.

⁶⁴ Similarly to this causal relation it is the circumstances of a moral situation which provide one with reasons for the conclusion that John would be similarly right in lying to Mr. Zodiac.

characteristics of the agent, and the reasons entailed thereby, then it is also possible to specify, at least in part, the criteria for the application of "right" in a particular case independently of the GP. It is indeed possible to find out whether some reason C is the cause of some particular judgement E. We may first inquire whether C occurs temporally prior to E, whether E occurs in the absence of C, and so on. These specific tests do not, of course, definitely establish a causal connection between the reason and the judgment; but they are at least part of the criteria that are applied in the particular case independently of applying the GP to the judgement,⁶⁵ in such a manner that similar relevant reasons produce similar judgements. In fact, if these specific criteria were not independently applicable, we should not know what to look for in applying the GP, in a particular case, with its reference to reasons and judgements.⁶⁶ The fact that there is a criterion of something's being a reason (not necessarily a moral reason in that it may not be capable of passing the generalizability criteria), which is independent of the GP means that we are not here caught in a circle; that is assuming that Gewirth's rebuttal is sound.

In accepting tautology as a valid charge against the GP Gewirth implies that a supreme moral principle is impossible in that in order to be self-sufficient it must be self-defining and therefore tautologous. Though he himself uses the GP in his derivation of the PGC (Principle of Generic Consistency), he still claims that the PGC is self-sufficient and necessary; and is therefore the much sought after supreme principle in morality. Singer on the other hand uses the PC, the reiterability clause, the invertibility clause, the GA and the principle of suffering in order to provide his moral theory with substantive

⁶⁵ The GP's application to the reasons in order to see whether or not these reasons are universalizable or not are independent of the GP's application to the judgement.

content and in order to complete his moral theory and can therefore clearly not make that claim. Though it is clearly not sufficient the GP is the single most important principle for objectivity in morality, and the fact that philosophers like Gewirth cannot avoid using it in morality without taking away from what it is to be moral only serves to prove this even further.

⁶⁶ Compare this to what he says about causal principles on page 233, Alan Gewirth, "The Generalization Principle." *Philosophical Review* 73 (April 1964): 229-242. Where he contradicts himself by claiming that it must in itself provide the criteria.

CHAPTER TWO
DIFFERENT FORMS OF THE UNIVERSALIZABILITY
PRINCIPLE

The Generalization Principle vs. the Golden Rule

Singer defines the Generalizability Principle as “What is right for one person must be right for any similar person in similar circumstances.”⁶⁷ This principle goes as far back as formulations of the Golden Rule but exactly how Singer views the relation between the two is a little unclear. The most common formulation of the Golden Rule would be “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. Singer states that the Golden Rule (GR) is at the source or at the basis of the Generalizability Principle (GP);⁶⁸ again, he says that the Golden Rule is an “immediate consequence“ of the GP.⁶⁹

Singer maintains that:

It should be noted that such expressions as ‘right for’ and ‘wrong for’ are ambiguous. Something may be right for someone in the sense (1) that it is right for him to do it, or in the sense (2) that it is right for him to be treated in that way.⁷⁰

One difference between the GP and the GR would be that GP deals with that which is right for one to do, and the GR deals simply with how it is right for one to be treated. In the GP that which is right (or wrong) for one person to do (or not to do) is also right (or wrong) for *similar* persons in similar circumstances. For the GR, if it is right (or

⁶⁷ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 14.

⁶⁸ Marcus G. Singer, *The Golden Rule*, (1963).

⁶⁹ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

wrong) for one to be treated in a certain manner then it must be the case that it is right (or wrong) for one to treat *similar* others in the same manner under similar circumstances.⁷¹ Singer added the italicized ‘similar’ to a previous formulation of the GP. In its earlier version the GP stated that: “What is right for one person must be right for anyone in the same or similar circumstances.”⁷² This was then reformulated as “what is right for one person must be right for any *similar person* in similar circumstances”⁷³ in order to indicate a particular class of persons; this reformulation excludes certain persons due to particular traits having to do with their identity. This reformulation would make exceptions, exceptions to the class of those who must act upon the moral rule, due to relevant differences that stem from features of one’s identity, as opposed to circumstances *external* to one’s identity. John, for example, may be exempted from diving in to save a drowning victim if he lacks limbs, where the lack would prevent him from swimming. This exception does not arise from circumstances that are *external* to John but instead arise from particular aspects of *his identity*, namely, the fact that he is missing a limb that is essential to swimming. Applying the GP to the moral rule that one should always try to save people from drowning, we say that the people who are under an obligation to act on this moral rule are those who are similar in that they belong to the class of moral agents who are *capable* of swimming to drowning victims. John, in the case mentioned, obviously does not belong to this class of people since he is incapable of swimming to save a drowning victim due to his missing limb. As Singer quotes Samuel

⁷¹ In my opinion this is the formulation of the GR, which comes closest to the GP. This closely resembles Samuel Clarke’s “rule of equity” which Singer mentions on page 16.

⁷² Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Alexander,⁷⁴ “The good act . . . may vary according to the nature of the individual and the place he holds in the society.” One may note that even on this point the two principles are similar, in that they make exceptions in relation to features of the person’s identity.

The GR, however, still serves a particular purpose in that it suggests one put himself in the other person’s shoes. It does this by making the agent think about whether or not he/she would like to be treated in this manner, when the agent contemplates doing something wrong to someone else. It in fact suggests a form of empathy in that one tries to imagine how one would feel if one were treated in the way one thought of treating the other. The difference between the GR’s form of empathy and real empathy is that real empathy does not allow for Sidgwick’s counter example.⁷⁵ In empathizing with the other, one tries to imagine one’s self with the other’s external and internal circumstances. Real empathy includes one’s attitudes, one’s particular sensitivities and other characteristics, as far as one can imagine them from various bits of data one may have about the other⁷⁶. One draws the similarities as well as the contrasting features of one’s self and the imagined ‘recipient’ of the particular act. One tries to imagine what the other will feel from the ‘recipient’s’ point of view, and this is exactly what makes for the difference between the GR’s sense of empathy and real empathy. Real empathy asks how the ‘recipient’ would feel if the agent were to subject the ‘recipient’ to bad treatment, while the GR asks how the *agent* would feel if the roles were to be reversed. The GR allows for a sadomasochistic agent’s projection of pleasure to the ‘recipient’ of the bad treatment, thus from a consequentialist’s point of view, providing reasons for the poor treatment of all individuals. The Golden Rule’s form of empathy still leaves the opening

⁷⁴ Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1920), vol. 2, 275.

⁷⁵ The crux of this being that people may will to be treated in really bizarre and unreasonable fashion.

for Sidgwick's response that we could then justify in this manner the beating of sadomasochists since from what we know this would bring them pleasure.

Justifying the beating of sadomasochists in this way may be viewed as a manifestation of what is often called Hume's Law. It states that one cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is'; in other words, simply because sadomasochists derive some form of pleasure from poor treatment it doesn't necessarily mean that we must treat them so. There are strange things that people who are not thinking very rationally would desire as treatment. This will cause problems, in any form of ethics which takes what one individual desires and prescribes it to all. This is why there is such a need for objectivity. Morality involves more than just adopting my point of view or Mary's or John's point of view, it is the adoption of "the view from nowhere."⁷⁷ In adopting the most objectively detached point of view that we as humans can adopt we arrive at imagining what people in general would feel if they were subjected to the particular treatment. If the person's being a sadomasochist can be excluded because it is irrelevant then this is the level of objectivity to be attained. If one were to only take into account the sadomasochist's tendencies then the class of people to whom this moral rule would apply would be altered to become the class of sadomasochists; the rule would apply strictly to them and not to people in general since it is relevant only to sadomasochist and irrelevant to the treatment of the common person. The sadomasochists compose a very small part of the population and their particular treatment cannot be reasonably applied to the general population without violating the needs and welfare of the general population. In universalizing or

⁷⁶ One moral theory containing this form of empathy is Hare's limited veil theory in chapter two.

⁷⁷ Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.)

applying the GP we usually prescribe to the general population therefore it is necessary to adopt a general point of view instead of a sadomasochist's point of view.

The sadomasochist John Payne (JP) must, to be fair in his treatment of others, treat them according to how it is right to treat people in general. When JP is to be subjected to *others'* treatments it is important to decide whether it would be fairer to treat his case as a sadomasochist or as a simple general human being. We can then imagine how sadomasochists similar to JP should be treated or simply imagine how a person in general should be treated in the particular circumstances. How people like JP feel when they are subjected to such a treatment (would they think it fair or not to be treated in this manner by such a person as the person treating them) will play a major role in deciding how JP should in fact be treated according to the GP.

In summary, (1) we judge whether or not JP's sadomasochism is relevant to the particular dilemma,⁷⁸ (2) we then try to estimate how any person would feel about the treatment they are about to receive, (3) and finally weigh one against the other in order to decide how in fact persons similar to and cases similar to JP's should be treated. Once we have decided how JP should be treated, it is also decided by the same token how one should act towards JP.

Each and every moral action has both an agent and a recipient.⁷⁹ The treatment of a person is a compound consisting of both the agent's *action* and *the action's effects* upon the recipient. It consists of both the *doing* and that which is *the accompanying effect of*

⁷⁸ This is in fact the question of what facts are relevant to the case. In later versions of the GP, Singer formulated the principle as "What is right for one person in certain circumstances is right for any relevantly similar person under relevantly similar circumstances." The GP corresponds to real empathy while the GR corresponds to the weaker version of empathy. The GP is more complete in that it has in real empathy the more objective version of what constitutes a reason to act. It is not only that this is valued by JP but instead what is rationally valued by most people which is the basis of relevant reasons for acting.

the doing or that which is *unto others*. It is in fact the *effects of the action* and not the treatment as a whole that is the *consequent* of a given action. In changing the treatment of the recipient we change how we act towards the recipient; our actions. In changing our actions we change their effects.⁸⁰ By changing the effects we consequently change the treatment of the patient, since the treatment is a combination of both action and effects, for in changing a part of the whole we necessarily change the whole.

There is ambiguity in the common usage of the word ‘treatment’. When we say that a person’s treatment is a direct consequence of the agent who renders that treatment we are using the word ‘treatment’ in two different ways. ‘A person’s treatment’, in this sentence, stands for the effects, while in the term “renders that treatment” what is meant by the word ‘treatment’ is the combination of the act and its effects. The GR is not the GP’s consequent in this way; but how then, can it possibly be considered to be the case by Singer?

The GR is the GP’s consequent in that it is derivable from the GP. Singer notes that in the GP “‘right for’ and ‘wrong for’ are ambiguous.”⁸¹ He goes on to say:

Something may be right for someone in the sense (1) that it is right for him to *do* it, or in the sense (2) that it is right for him to *be treated* in that way . . . It is a generalization of, and consequently entails, the following two propositions: (1) It is right for A to act in a certain way if and only if it is right for any one similar to A to act in that way in similar circumstances; (2) It is right for A to be treated in a certain way if and

⁷⁹ This assumes, of course that morality necessarily involves two or more people and that there are no duties to one’s self. I will deal with this briefly elsewhere in this dissertation.

⁸⁰ Not always, but generally this is so. It is true, however, that two different actions can cause similar effects.

⁸¹ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 15.

only if it would be right for anyone similar to A to be treated in that way in similar circumstances.⁸²

The GR's maxim 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (under similar circumstances)' deals explicitly with one sense of the usage of the expression 'right for' (or 'wrong for') and deals only implicitly with the other sense of the term 'right for' (or 'wrong for') which stands for the agent's act. In this sense the GR is a subset of the GP. It is derivable from the GP in the sense that 'b' is derivable from the proposition 'a and b'. It is in this sense that the GR is a consequence of the GP. The GR is an incomplete version of the GP in that it flows in the same direction as the GP, and yet falls short of accomplishing as much as the GP itself.

Kant's Categorical Imperative

Kant's Categorical Imperative is another form of universalizability that pre-dates the generalizability principle. It was found to be much too rigorous for application in every day moral predicaments by philosophers such as W.D. Ross.

Kant's Categorical Imperative (CI) states that one should "act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."⁸³ Kant maintained that moral rules, which pass the two tests of the Categorical Imperative, should be conceived as categorical imperatives themselves. Jesse Kalin eloquently states these tests:

First, it must be possible that when generalized the maxim can be a law of nature, in the same way that Newton's laws of motion are laws of nature.

Second, ... one must be able to will that the maxim of one's action be a

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 88 [421/52].

law of nature; one must be rationally able to agree that everyone including oneself behave or be treated according to the maxim in question.⁸⁴

In contrast to categorical imperatives, hypothetical imperatives are simply followed for prudential reasons.

It is, basically, nothing more than the distinction between prudential and moral rules or judgments.

As Sidgwick has pointed out, "It is important to take separately the two species of judgments ... distinguished as 'moral' and 'prudential.' ... In ordinary thought we clearly distinguish cognitions or judgments of duty from cognitions or judgments as to what 'is right' or 'ought to be done' in view of the agent's private interest or happiness..."⁸⁵

Kant claimed that categorical imperatives or universal laws should be followed out of one's respect for the law. This means that if the maxim attains universalizable status, the fact that it can achieve this status proves that it is a moral maxim, and should in and of itself compel the moral person to act upon it as moral law. Such action would be done out of recognition that it is one's duty to do so, and not simply out of one's inclination to do so, or out of prudential reasons, or because it is profitable to do so. This means that a universalizable law such as the law that "one should not lie" should be obeyed regardless of the consequences for one's self.

W.D. Ross criticises Kant's universalizability principle based on its inadequacy in the face of the dilemma where a would-be murderer asks if one has seen that intended murder

⁸⁴Jesse Kalin. "A Note on Singer and Kant," *Ethics* 78, (April 1968): 234 –236 (Pg.235).

⁸⁵ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics; An essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 219. Also within quotations, Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (7th ed.; London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1907). 25-6.

victim. In this case the moral agent must weigh the consequences of one's actions. More specifically the agent must weigh the consequences of violating the maxim that states that one should not lie against the beneficial consequences of protecting the intended victim. The moral agent's choice after having weighed the consequences would most evidently be to lie and save the victim's life, says Ross, whereas according to common readings of Kant, Kant would expect the moral agent to uphold the law that one should never lie.⁸⁶

Marcus Singer claims that such counter examples are only possible due to a misapplication of the universalizability principle. He claims that the universalizability principle should be applied to the particular situation, taking into account all the relevant circumstances of the concrete situation. If this were so, then the universalizability principle would yield results exactly the same as the moral agent would produce.

Now the question Kant should have raised in his treatment of this question is, "Could it be willed to be a universal law that everyone should lie in this sort of situation?" But he did not in fact do this. Instead of raising such a question, he simply assumed that his previous applications of the categorical imperative established the duty of veracity as "an unconditional duty which holds in all circumstances." Instead of applying the categorical imperative to these particular circumstances, he applied this hard and fast rule.⁸⁷

Ross agrees that if one were to apply the universalizability principle at that level, it would yield results identical to the morality which seems intuitive and which is in practice.

⁸⁶ Proof of this can be found in W. Hastie, *Philosophy of Law*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1887), 256-7, and 176-7 also in Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns* trans. James W. Ellington, (3rd ed.; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 63-67 [425-430/45]. He does however seem to waiver in his opinion in Louis Infield, *Lectures on Ethics*, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1930), 227-8.

⁸⁷ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 232.

The only safe way of applying Kant's test of universalizability is to envisage the act in its whole concrete particularity, and then ask, "Could I wish that everyone, should tell a lie exactly similar to that which I am thinking of telling?"⁸⁸

Ross maintains that Kant's error lay in applying the universalizability principle on too abstract a level. He claimed that Kant arbitrarily applied the principle to "lies" in general instead of applying it to the sub-species "lies told to murderous persons," the sub-species "lies told to murderous persons in order to save an innocent's life", or to take the opposite extreme he did not choose to apply it to the genus "statements." The test of universalizability applied at one level of abstractness condemns the act; applied at another level of abstractness it justifies the act. And since the principle itself does not indicate at what level of abstractness it is to be applied, it does not furnish us with a criterion for the correctness of maxims, and for the rightness of acts that conform to them.

This means that there is no indication in the categorical imperative of the level of abstraction at which maxims should be universalized. Kant must have had a reason for choosing his particular level of abstraction, and Ross certainly had reasons for choosing the level of abstraction that he deemed might correspond to the common moral agent's point of view, however, there is no indication of where to draw the line within the meaning of morality and moral expressions. Kant stopped where he did because he deemed that this level of abstraction carried all the information that would be relevant for the resolution as to what would be right to do. Ross, on the other hand, believed that the sound judgement should involve more details of the concrete situation, because he believed them to be

⁸⁸ C. D. Broad, *Criticism of Kant*, in *Introductory Readings in Ethics*, eds. William K. Frankena and John

relevant to the making of the moral decision. Ross then criticised this more flexible level of universalization, for being too specific to provide us with a shortcut to knowing what is right, thus leading us to the conclusion that the CI is either trivial in its arbitrarily chosen level of application, or too impractical for everyday use.

Kant's goal in implementing the universalization principle, however, was misunderstood by Ross. Kant's goal in implementing the universalization principle was twofold. The standard that demands that a principle be able to be willed to become universal law is a formal requirement. One must examine any foreseeable consequences of universalizing the law before one does indeed universalize the law, therefore making it applicable to everyone without bringing about bad consequences in general. (Kant claimed that we do this as a consequence of contemplating the implementation of a maxim as a universal law, or in other words in the first step of the CI test as depicted by Jesse Kalin.) Where Kant differs from Ross is that he bulked all lies, for instance, into one package and judged them regardless of the circumstances. The second reason why he asked us to subject our maxims to this form of scrutiny is so that our judgements can be made without bias toward our individual preferences or inclinations. This, like the first reason, is also a formal requirement for judging whether or not a maxim should be universalized. The former requirement filters out undesirable consequences while the second filters out undesirable egoistic biases (even before their consequences are considered) by interchanging the roles of the agent and the "victim" or "patient" when imagining everyone acting upon the new law.

Psychologically we gain much. So long as I consider the act as one, which I may or may not do, it is easy to suppose that I see it to be right when I merely see it to be convenient. But let me ask myself whether it would be

T. Granrose, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1974), 123.

right for everyone else; their advantage does not appeal to me or cloud my mind as my own does. If the act is wrong, it will be easier to see that it would be wrong for them; and then I cannot reasonably resist the conclusion that it is wrong for me.⁸⁹

The main goal for the universalizability principle is to produce fairness, justice, and objectivity by eliminating these biases. It forces one to view a problem from a detached point of view, or rather from no particular person's point of view. My peculiar needs do not function from this point of view; in adopting this point of view we concern ourselves with the multitude of needs that we share as people in general. This means that one must weigh everyone's needs and welfare equally. This also means that the moral rules, which would be a product of Kant's categorical imperative, must apply to everyone, so that if it is right for me to defend my rights and needs under such and such circumstances then it is also right for everyone else to do so. No moral agent can be exempt from the application of the universal laws that are the products of Kant's categorical imperative, for if this were to be the case it would make it inherently unfair and therefore immoral. According to the categorical imperative, there can be no right for one person, which is not right for everyone else. There can be but one right or wrong and it applies to everyone.

The Prudential / Moral Distinction

Singer maintains that in addition to having applied the universalizability principle too strictly Kant also confused the ambiguity in the definition of a categorical imperative. The categorical imperative started off as being simply the distinction between the prudential and the moral.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 124.

Now skill in the choice of means to one's own greatest well-being can be called *prudence* in the narrowest sense. Thus an imperative concerned with the choice of means to one's own happiness-- that is, a precept of prudence-- still remains *hypothetical*: an action is commanded, not absolutely, but only as a means to a further purpose.⁹⁰

It is upon this very conditional that Kant based his hypothetical/categorical imperative distinction. A categorical imperative is a good in itself, while a hypothetical imperative is always dependent upon the ends desired by the agent, and is therefore acted upon simply as a means to an end. Kant claims that in the hypothetical imperative "we can always escape from the precept if we abandon the purpose."⁹¹

While Kant had grounds for establishing this distinction, he did not have grounds to subsequently leap from this distinction to the second sense of categorical for which Ross and Singer criticize him.

He did not always use the term in the way in which he defined it. From a sense of "categorical" in which a categorical imperative is simply a moral imperative, as contrasted with a prudential one, he shifted to a sense in which a categorical imperative is one that is inviolable, one that holds under all circumstances or conditions and admits of no exceptions . . . From categorical as opposed to "hypothetical" it is a short step to "unconditional" as opposed to "conditional." And from an unconditional rule it is but a short step to an unconditional duty, one that holds irrespective of conditions or circumstances, which is what Kant asserts the duty of veracity to be. But when Kant first speaks of a categorical imperative, he says that it is not conditioned by, or conditional upon, any purpose of the agent, and he distinguishes it from a hypothetical

⁹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 83 [416/43].

imperative precisely on the ground that the latter is conditional upon some purposes of the agent.⁹²

It seems that Kant wanted to argue from the fact that categorical imperatives are not agent relative, to the conclusion that they are not relative to anything at all at least according to Singer (though I do agree with him). They must be followed because they pass the test of universality, and in passing the test, they establish themselves as categorical imperatives and therefore as our *unconditional* duties. But then, he contradicts himself in Critique of Practical Reason, for as Singer points out, Kant in distinguishing between “perfect” and “imperfect duties” says that “We distinguish the law that merely furnishes a principle of obligation from that which is really obligatory; as, for instance, the law of what man’s *wants* require from me, as contrasted with that which their *rights* demand, the latter of which prescribes **essential**, the former only **non-essential duties**...”⁹³

How can Kant claim that duties are inviolable, and then claim that non-essential duties exist, which may allow for exceptions? One possibility is that Kant maintained that only “perfect duties” are absolutely inviolable, since “imperfect duties” may be violated, and so can what he calls “indeterminate duties”. It might be that only perfect duties pass the test of universality (the indeterminate duties for instance would produce self-contradictory results if they were universalized.⁹⁴) Modern thinkers like Ross and Singer

⁹¹ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 221.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 223-4.

⁹³ Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, T.K. Abbott (6th ed.; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909), 309-10. Quoted in Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 225.

⁹⁴ Universalizing the maxim that one should always give to charities would lead to self – contradiction. The universalized version of the maxim would be that ‘Everyone should give to charities’. One cannot

would not be satisfied with this concession even if Kant *did* make it. This is obvious in that twentieth century philosophers keep bringing up the lying example against Kant, and Kant defended it rigorously.⁹⁵ It is apparent that modern philosophers want to make exceptions even in Kant's "perfect duties" category, as in the case of 'the lying to the murderer case'.⁹⁶ Philosophers such as Singer want to add categories such as "lying in order to save an innocent's life without taking or seriously damaging someone else's life", and judge these particular cases in relation to what would be relevant to this particular class of acts. They would hold the general rule for quick reference that lying is generally wrong, but would still add many more sub-classes and search each one in case there are exceptions to the greater set. The *onus probandi* falls upon the person vying for the exception to be granted to prove through valid sound and relevant argument that he or she is indeed exempted from acting in the manner which is usually prescribed.

Alan Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency

Although Alan Gewirth's PGC makes use of the GP itself in its unaltered form, the PGC does not properly account for the substantive aspect of ethics; it is thus incomplete.

specify which charities, how often, or to what extent. This would mean that no charities are exempt, there are no limits to how much one should give, and how often one should give to charities. As a consequence one should give to every charity as often as one is asked and no matter how much is asked of one. The effects of this would impoverish all moral agents thus creating *other* poor people. Since its purpose is to combat poverty it contradicts itself by impoverishing the agents.

⁹⁵ For proof of this refer to T.K. Abbott's *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, 6th ed.; (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909) as well as Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns*, trans. James W. Ellington, (3rd ed.; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

⁹⁶ In the aforementioned case it is only rational that we lie in order to save a life. Whatever argument Kant made was strictly an emotional argument with no facts and full of rhetoric.

Singers' moral theory achieves this objective through its use of the PC and its derivative the GA.

The PGC cannot properly account for morality in cases where someone bribes a police officer to be released from charges of speeding. The PGC also lacks in that it cannot prevent someone from buying stolen goods. This is because the PGC only takes into account direct violations of one's right to have one's needs fulfilled and not to take away from the fulfilment of one's needs. The PGC is related to the GR in that they both have the same weakness. They only deal with direct violations of the right to the fulfilment of the needs of the people interacting directly. The PGC cannot foresee the consequences of future speed violations and the cumulative effects of lying, bribery and other factors which do not directly violate the right to the fulfilment of one's needs or take into account past violations.

The PGC makes direct use of the GP in two instances. The PGC uses the GP in order to tackle the authoritative question 'why should one be moral?' Gewirth states that any agent is necessarily free and purposeful. Necessary purpose and ends for action are the goods needed for continued well being. Well-being is necessary for both action and purposiveness, as well as the fulfilment of one's purposes through action. If it is necessary for me as an agent it must be necessary for all agents, by generic implication. If I have a right to act, I must have a right to all the necessary goods or fulfilment of needs. If I have these rights, all other acting agents must also have them since these facts apply to any agent, through the GP.

The PGC shares the same weakness as the GR but goes beyond Singer's GP, in that it accounts for the step from 'is' to 'ought' but this piece of Gewirth's theory is not

incompatible with Singer's. The PGC is not inconsistent with the PC either, in fact it would contribute greatly to it.

Hare's Universalizability

Hare's ethical theory is very similar to the GR also, in that we are supposed to put ourselves in the other's shoes and imagine that we were in the place of the victim. We are supposed to imagine exactly the same situation including the victim's state of mind, his/her likes and dislikes.

While this system of ethics overcomes the apparent 'vagueness' of 'relevant similarity' criteria of Marcus Singer's GP it is substantively inferior to Singer's combination of the GP and the PC.

“For Hare, Universalizability is “common to all judgments which carry descriptive meaning”: so not only normative claims (moral and evaluative judgments) but also empirical statements are universalizable. Although Hare describes how such universalizability can figure in moral argument, for Hare “offenses against . . . universalizability are logical, not moral.”

-Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Hare's view of the Universalizability Principle is that it is derived from the meaning of the moral words such as 'ought,' 'right,' and 'wrong.'

“When I say that a man acted rightly I imply that there is some universal moral principle according to which his act was right.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ R.M. Hare, “Some Confusions about Subjectivity” *Essays in Ethical Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 28.

When I say of something that somebody has said, that it was right, I am not merely expressing my agreement with him, or associating myself with what he has said – as I would be if I repeated his words after him. I am implying that his utterance conforms to some principle or standard, which I am invoking.⁹⁸

These principles which are invoked “are universalizable because a moral judgment made about one situation commits us, on the pain of logical inconsistency, to making the same judgement about any precisely similar situation.”⁹⁹

This is precisely where Hare differs from Singer. Hare claims that his ‘veil of ignorance’, in which we imagine ourselves in the victim’s place with his interests and feelings, avoids the pitfall of explaining ‘relevant similarity’ criteria. Hare claims that imagining one’s self in *precisely* the same situation but in different roles one avoids defining what one means by a similar situation.

Although Hare does manage to sidestep it somewhat, it comes back to haunt him in the Nazi objection. For even if we were to ask the Nazi what rule to prescribe for the treatment of Jews he would still maltreat them. His imagining being a Jew and foreseeing his suffering and possibly his own death as a Jew would not shake his conviction that he should die for being a Jew, and a scourge, to society.

The Nazi views the world as being better off without Jews, and some select others, just as we view the world as being better without murderers. The question is, though, what makes the harm that murderers cause relevant and “the harm” that Jews cause irrelevant? Hare’s veil of ignorance doesn’t help here for a Nazi would prescribe the elimination or imprisonment of a Jew as easily as we would prescribe the elimination or

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 44.

imprisonment of a murderer even after imagining the murderer's pain and fear of this treatment. It all comes down to the same question as to what kind of harmful consequences are relevant to morality?

I, just as Singer, would like to contend that the great majority of people would realize that killing people is obviously harmful whereas being extremely competitive for making money is not and it should even be encouraged as good behavior. Hare, however, wants to avoid this explanation out of fear of being challenged with explaining the words "undesirable consequences", and delineating the expression's limits.

Hare's 'limited veil of ignorance' is insufficient for eliminating bias. Any racist who is convinced that a race is harmful must on pains of logical inconsistency embrace that race's being restricted, either to imprisonment, or in the extreme case, death. That morality is concerned with people's well being is uncontroversial. The avoidance of harm to society in general is logically consistent with morality and is in fact demanded by morality. The avoidance of harm is demanded in exactly the same way that truth statements are demanded for our survival in the process of natural selection. For if we are to survive as a race and enjoy a quality of life we must maximize true beliefs about indexicals as well as consequences which pertain to people's well being. (This is important because in morality just as in natural selection, true beliefs may or may not impact on one's well being. Black skin on its own does not impact on one's well being. Other factors such as the innate evil or lack of humanity of the race (some claimed that blacks were literally animals or demons) would affect the moral judgement. What remains is to show that these beliefs are false.

That which is now at issue is a matter of logic. Are the indexicals accurate enough to produce true claims? Are the premises sound? Are the argument forms valid? Is the argument a verbal or genuine argument? Do we have justifiable beliefs about future consequences based on past experiences? Most of these can be easily agreed upon. It is when we come to weighing quality of life vs. quantity of life, the individual's welfare vs. the collective's welfare, and such situations where what hangs in the balance is just about equal, that difficulty arises.

We would like to refuse a psychopathic killer the intense pleasure of his kill, on the basis of his motivation, which is purely evil, even in the case where the person to be killed is suicidal. Hare's 'limited veil of ignorance,' however, doesn't deal with good or bad but instead with the intensity of that which is willed and that which is willed itself. Hare's 'limited veil of ignorance' depends on what can physically be willed and weighs what is willed, when different people will different things, according to their intensity. Singer can weigh the consequences of encouraging or approving of such a kill, whereas Hare has no grounds for refusing the murder. Both the killer and the victim are willing for the deed to be done, and both in incredible intensity, and yet the act is *prima facie* wrong.

Try as he may Hare cannot avoid the vague term 'undesirable consequences'. This is because there are reasons why one wills or refuses to will that an act be performed. These reasons depend on the desirability or undesirability of the consequences of the act.¹⁰⁰ Hare's method deals with subjective reasons which may depend on irrational views of the consequences. In order for Hare's method to become objective, reasons

would have to depend on objective desirability criteria. Hare's only objectivity comes through the Universalizability Principle (for him too what is right in one case is also right in relevantly similar cases.¹⁰¹) However, Hare tries to complement this by adopting a substantive source similar to the GR but whose only objectivity is empathizing with what the others who are directly involved, will, and then objectively assessing them for the intensity of the feelings.

Singer's method doesn't deal with what is willed but instead simply with what can't logically be willed to be universalized. It eliminates interests such as killing for pleasure through its undesirable consequence criteria which includes future consequences for people who are not immediately involved in the situation such as the people who will have to face the killer in the future.

On page 215 of "Essays in Ethical Theory" Hare clearly states that "I am not, however, going to put my theory in terms of benefits and the reduction of harms, because this leads to difficulties that I wish to avoid." He thus eliminated his only chance to avoid the Nazi problem as well as the killer and the suicidal example.

However Hare decides to frame things, the meaning of morality has to do with the harms and benefits of actions. If these were unnecessary to moral theory then clapping one's hands could be relevant to morality. Morality's main goal is to guide action. Of what use would it be to guide actions if they neither harmed nor benefited us? In Hare's own words "It is from this rational point of view (in the prudential sense of 'rational') that I have to give my universal prescriptions. In other words, it is qua rational that I

¹⁰⁰ Hare's method deals with subjective reasons, which may depend on irrational views of the consequences. For Hare's method to become objective one would have to demand objective reasons which would have to depend on objective desirability criteria.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 10.

have no judge, and this involves at least judging with a clear and unconfused idea of what I am saying and what the actual consequences of the prescription that I am issuing would be, for myself and others.”¹⁰²

In view of this, the Nazi problem should fade away, for to clearly understand the consequences one must also understand whether they are harmful/undesirable (to be taken synonymously) or of benefit/desirable. There is no valuation apart from clearly understanding the consequences, and what is entailed by morality. To understand that act ‘a’ brings about the death of an innocent is to know that it is wrong. It is wrong because morality’s main tenet is the avoidance of harm. If it is pointed out that Jews do not harm society any more than any other race and that to kill them is to exceed “the harm” that they do, the Nazi must logically concede. Now his need to kill a Jew is abated. This much can be accomplished through Hare’s ‘veil’ and a clear understanding of the circumstances as well as some knowledge about the nature of morality.

The same can be done for the killer, assuming that morality is concerned with harms and benefits and that the killer is fully aware of the consequences of his actions. Hare, however, tries to avoid any such definition of morality (he actually avoids defining its purpose stating that it is ineffable or vague in the literature I’ve read.) He says that what makes an action right or wrong is its accord to a principle. But where does the principle that it is wrong to kill come from? Hare says that we simply accept or reject it.¹⁰³ But what the principle’s implementation would concretely involve is consequences. Every act has consequences. How do we differentiate between right and wrong acts?

¹⁰² Ibid., 217.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 46-47.

Morality is not just about consequences but about types of consequences; good and bad consequences. Morality is about desirable and undesirable consequences.

Even if we grant the dubious contention that a sufficient amount of “imagination” could enable two people of very different sorts their way into each other’s shoes, nothing guarantees the moral justifiability of the relevant inclinations themselves.¹⁰⁴

Hare, Singer, and Gewirth agree that universalizability is a logical feature of statements containing descriptive meaning. Gewirth thinks it is to be tautologous, but all three agree that it is a formal feature which is indispensable to ethics. It is Hare, however, who distinguishes between generality and universality, which in my mind is a brilliant distinction. Singer doesn’t but should.

Hare’s veil closely resembles Rawls’ veil which focuses on extended GR whereas Hare focuses on other’s interests and feelings, Rawls focuses on agents’ feelings in other’s positions. Hare places too much emphasis on imagining the intensity and this is simply as unprecise and as manipulable as estimating the objective desirability of a consequence. Hare gives too much validity to all inclinations. There is no way outside of the harms and benefits of consequences to justify inclinations and principles. To say that we just adopt them is simply false. We do so in order to protect our universal welfare or out of what is called universal prudence¹⁰⁵ and to be prudent is to avoid harm and seek out benefit.

¹⁰⁴ Gregory W. Lycan, “Hare, Gewirth and Singer on Universalizability,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 19, (April 1969): 135-144. (Pg. 136 -137)

¹⁰⁵ By ‘universal prudence’ I mean that “in prescribing (albeit universally) I cannot, if rational, ignore prudence altogether, but have to universalize this prudence.” This quote is taken from R.M. Hare’s “Ethical Theory and Utilitarianism” *Essays in Ethical Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). 217.

I would be the last to trivialize the importance of empathy however, since empathy is necessary for morality in order to understand the full consequences of one's actions and the intensity of one's desire to seek out that which benefits and equally to avoid that which harms one.

CHAPTER 3

JUSTIFYING EXCEPTIONS WHILE REMAINING OBJECTIVE

One should not find it unusual that a law is universalizable and that it should allow for exceptions, because the exceptions are universalizable themselves. Examples of this are common enough in our everyday lives and are analogous to the moves in a game of chess. The game has a set of rules that are universal to all chess players. These rules guide the chess players' actions, by providing the same set of rules to each and every player. This provides everyone with the same movements for every piece. Depending upon the circumstances, however, a piece may either be given the exception of additional or unusual movement, or the piece may be prevented from moving to occupy a square which its movement rule generally allows. A pawn, for instance, has a movement of one square forward, but it has additional movement of one square as long as it has not yet been moved. It also has the unusual movement of a diagonal advance if and only if doing so allows it to remove an opponent's piece from the board. Furthermore, a king's general movement rule is the movement of one square in any direction, but it gains the additional move of castling under very particular circumstances, but it cannot occupy a square which places the king in check. So each piece has a general movement rule, but it also has exceptions to its movement according to the surrounding circumstances. If one finds this too disturbing, one can reconstruct its movement rule to incorporate the universalizable exceptions, such as; the pawn may only move one square forward except if it has not been moved, or in a forward diagonal square, which is only one square away from the aforementioned pawn and which is occupied by an opponent's piece. This rule

applies to every pawn as well as to every player. It is thus universalizable and not contradictory or prejudicial or unfair.

Moral rules are similar in that by stating the general rule and including its exceptions within it, one can usually overcome any apparent contradiction. One can, for instance, say that one should always save a person from drowning except when attempting to do so would place a person's life in danger, and then this rule of conduct would then become universalized under this modified form.

This is more clearly illustrated in Hare's rebuttal to Anscombe, pages 49 through 65 in his article entitled "Principles" in the compilation Essays in Ethical Theory. Hare states that Anscombe like many philosophers confuse generality with universalizability. "Generality is the opposite of specificity and is a matter of degree. Universality contrasts, rather, with particularity, and is not a matter of degree. The two prescriptions 'One ought never to tell lies' and 'One ought never to tell lies to business partners' are both equally universal, in that any act which falls under the description 'lies' or 'lies told to business partners' (and note that these descriptions are in universal terms) is prohibited by the respective prescriptions. But the first is much more general, much less specific, than the second."¹⁰⁶ According to Hare, "Any attempt to give content to a principle involves specifying the cases that are to fall under it; only a contentless principle, therefore, can be 'absolutely general', in the sense of 'entirely unspecific'."¹⁰⁷ By increasing the specificity of a rule though, one may include more and more exceptions to the rule. These exceptions, however, must be based on universal descriptions (and as

¹⁰⁶ R.M. Hare, *Sorting Out Ethics* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 96.

¹⁰⁷ R.M. Hare "Principles" *Essays in Ethical Theory* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1989), 54.

such must be applicable in theory to more than one person), relevant to morality in general and the moral situation at hand, as well as non-reiterable.

One essential difference between moral rules and chess rules is that the exceptions to the rules (as well as the rules themselves) in chess were created arbitrarily in that there is no real reason why they were decided to be so and not otherwise, while in morality there can only be an exception to a rule if the surrounding circumstances and the application of reason dictate that it should be so. Every exception to a moral rule of conduct should be based on facts that are morally relevant, or else the exceptions are arbitrary and reiterable. If, for example, one were to argue that one should not attempt to attempt to save a person's life because one has to go to work, then this argument can be reiterated for every other activity and hence no one should attempt to save anybody's life since practically everyone has something else to do. This, then, reduces the act of saving someone's life to an act which is performed if one has nothing better to do, whereas it seems to be a prima facie duty instead. The argument for the exception to the moral rule of conduct must not be reiterable with respect to the class of persons or circumstances selected. "Otherwise, the class in question which should be an exception to the rule of conduct would be "distinguished by a characteristic in terms of which everyone would be an exception and hence not really distinguished at all."¹⁰⁸ If the reasons for implementing an exception to a moral rule are essentially arbitrary then a multitude of arbitrary reasons can be given thus making everyone exempt from that rule of conduct. Thus, the argument "I couldn't save that person's life because I had to go to work" can be reiterated as "I couldn't save that person's life either then because I had to wash my hair." Both

¹⁰⁸ Marcus G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 83.

reasons for not saving the person's life are equally irrelevant and thus if we accept the first argument we must also accept the second argument and all other arguments citing various irrelevant reasons for not saving someone's life.

One may claim that the exception to the moral rule may be construed so specifically that it may be manipulated to exempt one's self from an unwanted obligation. It is important to note, however, that if one lists specific descriptions that pertain to one specific person, such as a specific time, place, action, etc., and these details are so specific for no particular reason, then a multitude of other such specific arguments may be created by using other irrelevant descriptions of time, place, action or relations to specific things or people, thus exempting everyone from that rule of conduct.

Thus the argument is reiterable whenever it is applied to some action arbitrarily specified, as part of its description, as taking place at some particular time, or at some particular place, or by some particular person, or in relation to some particular person or thing.¹⁰⁹

In order to correctly justify an exception to a moral rule one must “justify acting in such a way (in which it would be undesirable for everyone to act) by showing that one is a member of a certain class of persons (has certain characteristics) such that if every member of that class (everyone with those characteristics) were to act in that way the consequences would not be undesirable, or by showing that the circumstances of one's actions are such that the consequences of everyone's acting in that way in those circumstances would not be undesirable. This would be to show either that there is a

¹⁰⁹ Marcus, G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 81.

relevant difference in the characteristics of the agents involved, or that there is a relevant difference in the circumstances.”¹¹⁰

This statement is correct because every rule of conduct (not only moral rules of conduct) is created with a scope as to for what class of people it would be desirable to perform or not perform an act ‘s’. It also has a scope as to a class of circumstances under which people of that class must perform or not perform the said act ‘s’. In sum, all moral rules of conduct apply under a set of circumstances which defines the moral agent as well as the predicament under which it would be right for the type of agent to perform or not perform act ‘s’. This set of circumstances define the class ‘K’ as the class of moral agents to whom this rule is applicable and the general circumstances under which it would be right to ‘s’ or not to ‘s’. The set of circumstances ‘C’ will denote classes and not particular individuals, due to the argument against reiterability, because anything too specific will be reiterable and thus of no use to ethics at all. To say that John and only John should act in this way is just as reiterable and just as useless as any other argument which is too specific for exceptions. When the argument is reiterated, it either applies to all moral agents, thus becoming universally applicable, which is what it should have been from the start, or if the circumstances were arbitrarily chosen, it then becomes applicable to any and every situation.

In order to be justifiably exempt from doing ‘s’ one must prove that if all those exempt from the said class ‘K’ were not to follow that rule of conduct, that the consequences of their not doing so would not be undesirable. One can also be exempt from a certain general moral rule if one can prove that the actual circumstances of their own predicament are materially different from class ‘C’, or such that if every member of

¹¹⁰ Ibid. .83.

'K' under the said circumstances were to do 's' in those circumstances, that the consequences would be undesirable. In short, one must show either that their circumstances have some relevant differences with the set of circumstances 'C', or else that the circumstances 'C' are the wrong set of circumstances.

Thirdly, one can show that, although one is a member of the class 'K', one is also a member of the class 'L', and if everyone in the class of 'L' were not to do 's' it would not be undesirable. This would consequently show that the differences between the class 'K' and the class 'L' have morally relevant differences, at least in relation to the said act 's'.

Class and Universality

Hare's distinction between generality and universality which illustrates how exceptions can be made without jeopardizing objectivity in morality is brilliant. A moral rule (he referred to them as principles) contains both generality and universality. A moral rule also states who is obligated to do act 'x', or for whom it is right or wrong to do act 'x', and to this I shall refer as the class of agents. Universality simply means that the rule applies to all agents denoted¹¹¹ by sentences containing descriptive meaning describing under which circumstances an agent is to perform the act's' or in other words universal descriptions (depending upon who you are currently reading). What is meant by descriptive meaning is the properties which can be held to be attributable to a subject in a given class and thus, in order to preserve logical consistency, to all other members of that class, even if it is logically limited to one subject at a time. Thus, 'the president of the

¹¹¹ I am here using the term denote in the sense that "the intension or connotation of the term 'skyscraper' consists of the attributes common and peculiar to all buildings over a certain height, while the extension or denotation of that term is the class containing the Empire State Building, the World Trade Center, the

United States has the obligation to be a role model' indicates a logical possibility of there only being one such president at any one time, but it also implies that it could have been *any* one who occupies this position and also accounts for the fact that many different people will occupy it at different times.

The thesis of universalizability, therefore, rules out only individual references, not all unique (even logically unique¹¹²) references. Put more informally, that it was I who did it could not be a reason for a moral judgement about an act; but any universal property of the act could be a reason, even though his possession of it rules out anybody else's possession of it.¹¹³

Such rules as 'the president of the United States is obligated to be a good role model for his citizens' is specific in that it applies only to one person at any given time. A more specific rule would be that the president of the United States should abstain from sexual indecency in order to be a good role model for his citizens. It can then be decreased even further in its generality by going into specific acts which the president of the United States is obligated to abstain from in order to be a good role model for his citizens or for his younger citizens in order to be even more specific. This rule maintains its universality regardless the decreasing generality and the uniqueness of the agent. This is because it could apply to any president of the United States regardless of their identity. It

Wrigley Tower, and so on." The quotation in this footnote is taken from Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, (7th ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 148.

¹¹² By logically unique Hare meant that logically speaking there could only be one, and not that logically speaking it could only be this one.

¹¹³ R.M. Hare, "Relevance" *Essays in Ethical Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 195. By universal property Hare meant a property which pertains to a class of acts or a property which can be described universally across members of a class of acts.

is important to note that every one of these rules is universal by virtue of the fact that the scope of the moral agents denotes a *class* of people (presidents of the United States.)

Returning once more to the drowning person example, all handicapped people for whom the attempt to save Mary from drowning would be dangerous would be exempt from the obligation to attempt to save Mary. One famous example of the circumstances leading to exceptions to a rule of conduct is the example of a murderer arriving at one's doorstep while one is hiding the innocent person, which he/she wishes to murder. When the murderer asks if one is hiding the person whom he seeks, one opts to lie even though one knows that lying is generally wrong. This exception, however, does not simply allow for one singular act of lying or for one person to lie that one particular time. It allows for anyone to lie under similar circumstances. It allows an exception for the entire class of people who face the choice between not lying and saving someone's life, and this is neither biased nor in violation of universality, for "a principle with a built-in exception does not have that exception outside of it."¹¹⁴

The essential role that universalizability plays in morality is to ensure that things will be dealt with objectively or impartially. With the safeguard of the reiterability clause in place universalizability ensures that its allowance for exceptions does not allow for biased judgements to seep through. It does not allow for racial prejudice either, in this form, because any prejudiced judgement is clearly reiterable to any reasonable person. Skin colour is not morally relevant even though it is a universal property because it is irrelevant to morality. It is not enough for a property to be a universal property in order for it to be morally relevant.

¹¹⁴ Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), 477.

Religion is also not morally relevant in that it lies outside the scope of reason and directly in the domain of blind faith. Consequently, people have equally good or bad reasons for holding that their religion is the one true religion, and yet despite these reasons, the most credible religion is the religion which most closely approximates morality. The credibility of religion depends on its relation to what we judge to be right. If what we hold to be right is violated by the rules of a religion, we tend to balk at the prospect of embracing a religion wholeheartedly. Those who follow religion pre-reflectively and are incapable of making their *own* value judgements or are unwilling to do so, are those who lack the reason to do so. Even then, their sermons will lack credibility to rational persons in that any rational person will ask for facts and objective reasons to be shown before embracing the religion. In effect, one values something because it is judged to be right in accordance with the rational reasons and valid arguments for holding that it is right or else one risks being called irrational. God's valuing something cannot make it right if it was deduced invalidly to begin with, because in His supreme goodness and supreme rationality, God simply cannot value something that is wrong to begin with. It must therefore be, that religion is dependent on morality and not the other way around.

Since what a religion holds to be right is reiterable with regard to other religions (in that that which is right in one religion can be added to in terms of what is right with respect to other religions so that it is indeed the case that at the end of the process everything turns out to be right) it cannot, logically speaking, have relevance for morality, and skin colour or any other physical aesthetic aspect is irrelevant to morality as

well; in that the preferred skin color is reiterable with respect to the point of view of the different races.

In addition to this, any of the remaining multitude of physical attributes can be reiterated with respect to other preferences, although this is not really necessary in order to see that having blonde hair and blue eyes is not logically relevant to what rights should belong to all humans. Reiterability, in effect neutralizes most biases which are not based on logical reasons and or reasons which are relevant to morality. It illustrates the irrelevance through analogy instead of doing it the long way of proving to someone that their argument is invalid.

The same thing can be said of personal values or interests. One cannot impose one's personal values or interests, such as Nagel's example of climbing Kilimanjaro, on others. There is no real reason for anyone else to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro; the choice is arbitrary in relation to others, so one would have just as much reason to claim that one ought to do a multitude of other activities. The universalization of a certain personal interest degenerates through its reiterability to the point where the principle simply states that everyone ought to indulge in all activities. Since one can't indulge in all activities due to time constraints, people would have to start their reasoning again in that they still have to decide based on personal preference in which activities they will participate during their limited time. The reiterability constraint simply ensures that one cannot impose agent-relative values on others but it does not prohibit holding one's personal interest dear to one's self. It is important to note, however, that not being able to enforce an obligation to participate in any personal activity has as a consequence that the participation in personal interests in morality cannot override obligations which arise from objective

value. And so, personal interests will have to concede to anything of objective value (at least within the realm of morals) since the former is reiterable while the latter is not.

So it seems that anything that is agent-relative is dismissible through the reiterability clause as not being obligatory. Stating that this is right or wrong simply because my religion says so is reiterable with regards to anyone and everyone else's religion. The same thing applies to all personal biases; thus seemingly eliminating all agents' relative reasons and values within the realm of an objective morality.

RELATIVISM

According to the universalizability principle there can be but one right or wrong in any particular case and it applies to everyone who is in a relevantly similar case. The question then arises, as to how the morality which is the product of the universalizability principle, and which includes such goals as objectivity, can possibly produce moral decisions, which coincide with those more contemporary moral decisions, which are for the most part relativistic. This is answered by noting the two ways in which a moral decision can be relativistic. A moral decision (in the broad sense of the word which means a decision whose content is related to morality) can be made in relation to the circumstances which are relevant to a moral dilemma, or alternatively in relation to a person, a group of persons, or usually to a culture. The first form of relativism claims that if there is a significant change in the circumstances, (from the first case to the second), that is relevant to that situation, then this may alter the moral decision. Thus, what in one case may be right for John to do may not be right for Mary to do, based on the fact that there has been a change in the relevant circumstances, even though the circumstances in general still show a certain degree of similarity between the two cases. This form of relativism makes the moral

decision relative to the circumstances¹¹⁵ that are relevant to the moral predicament (it is most commonly referred to as consequentialism.)

The second form of relativism claims that moral decisions may be right or wrong based upon one's cultural background, or more particularly, based upon the individual identity of the moral agent. The latter form of relativism implies that there may be a particular situation in which an action is right for one person, and yet wrong for someone else, even under similar relevant circumstances. The situation may involve the same relevant circumstances and still produce such radically different outcomes as the case where cannibalism may be right for John and yet wrong for Mary under exactly the same circumstances.¹¹⁶ The act of cannibalism would then be right and wrong at the same time under the same set of circumstances, except for the individual identity of the agent. This directly defies the notion that one should be able to will that one's maxim become a universal law. What universal law means is that it should apply to everyone. In order for the maxim to retain the meaning it wants to retain, the maxim would have to be stated as; "It is right for John Payne and only John Payne to cannibalize (because he is John Payne)". This, however, is only the *subjective maxim*, and still remains to be universalized. The subjective maxim under the reiterability clause would be universalized as "Everyone should cannibalize."¹¹⁷ The second type of relativist would want to avoid the universalization at all costs in order to be arbitrarily exempted from not cannibalizing, and he/she is therefore directly and purposely defying the universalizability principle, and is guilty of logical inconsistency.

¹¹⁵ Note that 'circumstances' also includes present and future circumstances.

¹¹⁶ In using the term "exactly the same circumstances" I am allowing for hypothetical cases where the place of John can be substituted for Mary's without changing the surrounding circumstances.

¹¹⁷ The GP would universalize it as "Everyone named John Payne should (be allowed to) cannibalize." This would then be found to be reiterable therefore making everyone an exception. The reason why it is reiterable is that the class of people is not relevant to the moral situation.

According to Kant, one cannot universalize exceptions at all. One's maxim cannot be *universal* law and not be applicable to *certain* people. By definition, it certainly cannot be applied to *different* people providing *different* results based solely upon their culture as a differentiating factor, or simply based upon their individual identity *qua* John Doe. To make someone exempt from the application of the law based upon his or her identity, or based on his or her culture, would be unfair and would show a clear disregard for one's duty. Morality does not care about one's name or culture *qua* Angelos Timotheatos or Greek culture, even though one's culture is a universal property in that others could belong to that culture because they are both irrelevant and reiterable as a consequence. According to Singer, however, morality may take into account various *relevant aspects* of a culture or *relevant parts* of our identity. John may be exempt from swimming to save a drowning person because of the fact that he can't swim. Analogously, the overpopulation problem of a certain culture can be relevant, if not exclusively determinative, to problems dealing with reproduction or abortion.

The second type of relativism may, at times, have the same extension as the first type of relativism, but need not always do so. This means that it is right for John not to swim to save Mary from drowning, whether it be because he can't swim and is scared of deep waters, or whether it be due to John's identity *qua* John.¹¹⁸ Applications of either principle would yield the same results but for different reasons. The aspects of identity, culture, or social group, that are *relevant* to the moral decision and which properly denote the set of moral rules and actions are distinct from the personal or cultural identity itself. What makes aspects of

¹¹⁸ Note, however that in the first case of relativism if John were to learn how to swim and overcome his phobia of deep water he would be morally obligated to save Mary. This is not true for the second case of relativism, however, since the decision is made relative to the identity of the agent regardless of the

identity or culture relevant, is the fact that when a sound argument is made while using them as its premises these personal or cultural aspects will sway the moral decision one way or another.¹¹⁹

The real enemy of universalizability is the second type of relativism. The second type of relativism contradicts one of the main tenets of universalizability, which is fairness, or objectivity. Universalizability is a tool used to insure that evaluative judgements are morally right. Universalizability is a constraint that is prescribed within the principle for action, in order to insure that the formal requirements of objectivity are met. In turn, objectivity is only the product of a method that, through its detachment (achieved via inter-subjectivity and empathy), ensures everybody's fair treatment. Since everybody's fair treatment is an integral part of morality, universalizability is also an integral part of morality, in that it is the best tool at our disposal to ensure everybody's fair treatment. While universalizability may take on different forms, it is all related to the one general principle, which is referred to by Singer as the generalizability principle.

The question then arises as to how a system of ethics which claims to be based upon universalized judgements can make exceptions and still claim that the rules apply equally to everyone. According to common readings of Kant, Kant for one would never agree that ethics could do this. As we have already seen Kant universalizes judgements in a more general form, using the CI, than the way Singer universalizes using the GP. The main difference between Kant and Singer is that Kant doesn't believe that the circumstances alter moral decisions. This in turn affects the way that they universalize maxims. The definition of morality points at what should be deemed relevant to a moral decision and therefore

relevant circumstances. In the second case then, even though he overcame the obstacles he could still avoid making the effort to save Mary since the exception is based *solely* on his identity.

indicates along with the reiterability clause what level of generality and therefore objectivity is required for the particular moral dilemma. Singer's ethical theory makes certain that morality maintains the required level of objectivity through generality in order to maintain fair play.

Three Types of Agent Relative Reasons

Personal Preferences

Values stemming from personal preferences are not moral values as such, but since morality is said to guide conduct it must have something to say about us acting or not acting upon them. But we would still like to claim that a father should protect the welfare of *his* child in preference to any non-family member. There is such a thing as over-objectification. In reference to over-objectification Nagel says that "ethics is not based solely on impersonal values like those that attach to pleasure and pain. We can no more assume that all values are impersonal than that all reality is physical."¹²⁰

In chapter IX of his book *A View from Nowhere*, Thomas Nagel differentiates between three types of agent-relativity. The first is concerned strictly with personal preferences in terms of "desires, projects, commitments, and personal ties of the individual agent"¹²¹ that were chosen and created by the agent himself. The second type of agent- relativity deals with " relative reasons for each individual not to maltreat others him/herself, in his dealings with them"¹²² or prudence. The third type of agent-relativity, which he distinguishes " stems from the special obligations we have towards those to

¹¹⁹ Whether or not they can carry enough weight to change the outcome is a totally different issue.

¹²⁰ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 163.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹²² *Ibid.*

whom we are closely related: parents, children, spouses, siblings, fellow members of a community or even a nation."¹²³

I shall argue that the first of these agent-relative types of values is neither right nor wrong, but it is simply acceptable. One can neither say that it is right for everyone or wrong for everyone to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro. Neither can one state that it is either wrong or right for *no one* to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro. This is because there are no repercussions good or bad on others within society once the deed is done, other than the satisfaction of that person's desire to do so. The satisfaction which is derived from this activity, can be generalized so that anyone can inter-subjectively relate through empathy with the satisfaction which is derived from both having the freedom to indulge in one's desire and the general satisfaction of indulging one's personal preferences or desires. Thus, we will be able to relate the personal satisfaction of a certain person's particular preference or desire, by relating it to the personal satisfaction of a particular preference of *ours*, through empathy. This may be said to obtain some objective value for the satisfaction of personal preferences via inter-subjectivity, but yet the best results that it may have for morality, is to yield the rule that the agent must not interfere with one's freedom to indulge in the satisfaction of one's personal desires, without good reason. It simply states that it is wrong to interfere with people's right to freedom if the freedom to fulfill one's desires has no bad consequences for the community.

Self-regarding Entitlements

The second type of agent-relative reasons consists basically of acquisitive reasons for fulfilling one's obligations. Robert Hazo's categories of mixed acquisitive and mixed benevolence both fall within this category as well as the category of pure

¹²³ Ibid.

acquisitiveness.¹²⁴ Hazo designed his categories according to the motive behind the action. Thus, a purely acquisitive act is one whose sole aim is to profit personally from a situation; a purely benevolent act is a purely altruistic act; and a mixed acquisitive act would be based on both types of motives but mainly out of personal profit. Last but not least, a mixed benevolent act is one which is performed mainly out of altruistic motives but yet it still takes into account the personal reward in the decision making process. Acquisitive acts¹²⁵ may give acquisitive or egoistic reasons such as not missing the opportunity to gain something or prudential reasons such as the prevention of harm to one's self.¹²⁶ Acquisitive acts are not limited solely to the acquisition of something material. These reasons have no place, however, in morality since acquisitiveness is the predominant factor in making the decision, while morality is concerned solely with altruistic motives.¹²⁷ Morality is concerned with caring about others welfare, it has nothing to do with what is advantageous for me, and many times it goes against what is advantageous for me to do. The moral act and the prudential act often conflict with one another. It is, for instance, morally right to go late to work in order to help a stranger who is in dire need, although it is imprudent to do so since one risks angering one's boss to the point where the employer might fire one for being so late, and of course being unemployed does not help one's welfare. It is, however, a logical consideration to be taken into account since it goes towards the harm of the agent's welfare and every agent's

¹²⁴ Robert Hazo, *The Idea of Love*, (New York: Praeger, 1967), 11-36.

¹²⁵ Note that 'acquisitive' is used synonymously with 'egoistic'.

¹²⁶ Egoistic reasons is a greater set which contains within it the subset of prudential reasons. Prudential reasons exclude certain reasons in the set of egoistic reasons such as personal desires or interests.

¹²⁷ Note that by altruistic I mean that act which prevents others from being harmed. I am using it in the negative sense much like the way in which Singer defined his principle of consequences. This in effect prevents one from having to take into consideration everything which may be considered to be good such as John Doe's various personal interests.

welfare counts equally, whereas other acquisitive or egoistic reasons such as personal desires do *not* count.

With regard to acquisitive acts there remains the question of whether or not acquisitive acts can be universalized. Ethical egoists argue that acquisitive acts can be the basis upon which one can form a system of ethics for an egoistic morality, and this is based in part on their claim that these acquisitive acts can be universalized. Acquisitive acts can be universalized under the form which states that everyone should act in the manner which is most advantageous to him or her. The obvious problem with this principle is that it does not suggest a way to resolve conflict.¹²⁸ As a matter of fact the principle perpetuates conflict. It suggests that even when the other person has better objective reasons for wanting something that conflicts with the agent's own reasons, that agent should do what the agent wishes to do regardless of that fact, thus giving rise to unreasonable conflict. The egoist may suggest that one allow for an exception similar to those which Singer held to exist for his moral theory. The manner in which such an exception is dissimilar to Singer's, however, is of greater importance than the respect in which it is similar. Exceptions have been allowed in morality based on relevant, objective, altruistic reasons, for these reasons are the basis of morality. For ethical egoism, however, such exceptions are not warranted by morality or even its own basic tenets which hold only subjective, egoistic, reasons to be of any ethical merit. So the egoist ethical system would have no basis from within for permitting any exceptions based on objective reasons. The only objective feature about ethical egoism is its universalizable maxim, which states that everyone should do what is best for him or her.

¹²⁸ One of the main goals of morality is to reduce conflict in society in order to ensure people's basic human needs.

As in the first type of agent-relative reasons the observer can understand the agent's want to act upon agent-relative reasons through empathy because we all hold such reasons ourselves. The reasons which give rise to agent-relative values, are values which are held to a lesser degree in that they may be over-ridden by objective reasons or values. This is because agent-relative values are reiterable thus failing to resolve conflicts of interest. The most that can be said of agent-relative reasons is that if there is no objective impact on the community due to the pursuit of one's acquisitive acts then it is acceptable and understandable that one pursue one's own benefit over that of another so long as it does not cause the other harm. Since this is an acceptable course of action it means that everyone has the right to pursue these ends and thus does not have the right to prevent the pursuit of these ends without a valid reason, for it is a freedom which must be allowed to everyone.

With regard to fulfilling obligations in order to prevent harm to one's self, a moral person will fulfill an obligation, not because of a fear of being harmed, but because of the recognition of the obligation itself and because of its repercussions on *others*. For the moral person it is an act of altruism first and foremost and only after these reasons and values have been weighed will the moral person consider the prudential reasons, i.e. the previous example of going to work late and risking losing one's job in order to help someone who is drowning.

Prudential reasons arising out of the need not to be harmed differ from other egoistic reasons in that prudential reasons may not be overlooked. Prudential reasons are not reiterable. 'We should look after my life because it promotes the good' can be reiterated without contradiction as 'We should also protect *my* life for the same reason

and thus *everybody's* life for the same reason' since this argument is reiterable for every person. This does not lead to contradictory or absurd consequences and as such we can safely generalize the moral rule to say that we should look after every one's life and welfare, (and as a matter of fact it concurs with the basic tenet of morality.) Such prudential reasons are real reasons that lead to very real values and they will oftentimes outweigh the value of upholding one's obligations to others. One cannot be expected to dive into the sea in order to save Mary (unless one is a person that has a special obligation such as a bodyguard) if one does not know how to swim and will probably perish in the futile effort (and even then the bodyguard must know how to swim in order to be able to save the victim as well as himself; it is part of a bodyguard's duty to do so.) Moral people recognize their obligation to help a fellow human being, but if this is going to cost John his life no one has the right to blame him for not doing so, even if John were a terrible person.¹²⁹ This is because everyone is allowed to decline a life saving attempt in order to preserve his or her life, regardless of how miserable a life it may be. The quality of one's life holds a special value to that particular individual which cannot be arrived at completely through objectivity. One always values one's life more than it is objectively valued by people in general. A life's value is first and foremost what it is judged to be by that person him/her self. Saving it or expending it will affect no one else nearly so profoundly as it will that individual. In this respect his/her life is as valuable to him/her as mine is to me, and they are therefore equal in terms of value. In cases of conflict, then he should protect his own life and I should do my best to protect my own life. The maxim can be universalized thus due to the fact that the relation of the person to his own life is a

¹²⁹ The obvious exception to this case is one where the agent has a special obligation to risk his/her life such as a policeman must, or such as a fireman or personal bodyguard.

universal property in that anyone can have a similar relation with regards to their life, namely that of ownership (for lack of a better word): One has the right to protect his/her life to the best of their ability.

Heroism is by definition an act that puts the agent's life at great risk in order to save another. It is *not a rational act*, for one's own life is always expected to be more important than anyone else's by virtue of the fact it is by definition one's existence, and therefore, one cannot exist without it. The loss of someone else's life, however, may have a profound impact on one's life, but it will not totally extinguish one's existence, and this is an objective fact. When this fact is calculated into the equation it is only *reasonable* that one wouldn't perform an act of self-sacrifice. The same holds true when similar losses or benefits are weighted. No one can more deeply appreciate your losses than you yourself can, and so it is expected that one would want to prevent one's own loss over someone else's loss, or that one would prefer one's own benefit over anyone else's. Anyone and everyone can easily empathize with the emotions and the needs of someone who does something to prevent harm to one's self, and furthermore, it is *rational* to do something to prevent harm to one's self or to prevent the loss of an opportunity since it goes towards the welfare of that individual, namely one's self. It is in fact universalizable in Kant's sense in that universalizing the maxim that everyone should protect their lives is rational, and the contrary is contradictory in Kant's sense. It can, thus, be said to be a rational and valid reason for acting and it must therefore be included as one of the reasons, which we must use to deliberate about our moral conclusion. The moral deliberation, however, will take into account everyone's welfare and will weigh one's own welfare against the altruistic motives which must exist and must at times take

precedence over the prudential motives. This is because in morality, altruistic motives bear more weight, because the moral person is by definition an altruistic person. The altruistic person, however, must not be confused with the saint who will always sacrifice his or her needs, wants and welfare in the name of supererogatory virtue. So while the prudential motives can and must be accounted for as moral people we must take the other person's welfare into account so the prudential notions cannot be the person's *sole* reason in one's deliberation of how to act.

Preferred Persons

The next question is how one can integrate the third source of agent-relative reasons into an objective morality? How does one absorb the subjective practice of giving preference to those to whom we are closely related: parents, children, spouses, siblings, fellow members of a community or even a nation? This practice of giving such people special care or giving their needs and welfare more importance than others is related to the fact that we tend to be more empathetic with these people and their special needs and situation. A community denotes a set of individuals who have shared interests, purposes, needs, wants, and a common existence. This sharing generally leads to a better, more in depth understanding of the extenuating circumstances. This leads to the fact that we bear a stronger emotional attachment to those people in particular. If those who are closest to us hurt, we hurt along with them. We care so much about them and because we empathize more easily with them, we understand them and their situations better and a great part of empathy is understanding the person and their situation.

What does empathizing with these individuals, however, have to do with giving their welfare and their needs and wants more value when being objective means giving

everybody's welfare equal weight? Are there any rational objective grounds for allowing a person to give these people preferential treatment?

Though most parents *need* not be obliged to love their child, the institution of parenthood explicitly poses this obligation. Being a parent means taking care of your children for a parent is not judged by giving birth to a child but by taking care of that child. Being a parent in the moral sense not the biological sense means loving the child entails providing for its welfare and freedom. This includes tending to all of its needs including its need for health, security, integration, love, etc. This means that the parent, not only has a psychological obligation, a socially imposed obligation, but is also rationally speaking the best choice to defend the welfare of the child, since the parent feels a bond for the child and will thus empathize with all of the child's needs. Just as morality's role is to provide for human welfare, and freedom of their children. Until children can fend for themselves, they need someone to pay special attention to those children's needs. Morality guides adults' actions for the protection of their welfare. Parents tend directly to children's needs because it is necessary for the normal development of children. Husband/wife relationships tend specifically to particular needs such as sexual needs, romantic love, and the help and company needed when raising a family. Loving each other likewise entails providing for their welfare, and freedom. Love imposes a psychological need, both on their behalf as well as the child's or spouse's and society's in general, to tend to that loved one's welfare. They have a socially imposed obligation to do so in order to promote the general welfare which is a basic tenet of morality and they as their soulmates should, logically speaking, be the person who best

empathizes with their mate and their every need. They are therefore the rational choice for this role.

The main objection to this point of view lies within the universalizability thesis itself in that it seems to deny any such special care for anyone for whom we would seem to have such a special obligation. According to the critic I can't give my loved one's welfare more weight than any other person, since this special treatment is based solely upon my identity which constitutes the basis of my special relation to this particular person and no other. According to the universalizability principle one cannot bestow special privileges to any particular person either because of one's identity as an agent or because of one's particular identity as someone about to receive these privileges. This is more clearly illustrated in Hare's "Essays in Ethical Theory" but a somewhat similar argument was rebutted in Singer with regards to kissing one's wife.

It is thought that if there is some individual who is related to me by a relation which logically can tie an individual to one other individual and one only, the relation in question cannot figure in a moral principle. For example, it is thought that I cannot have duties to my mother as such, because it is logically impossible for a man to have more than one mother, and because of the occurrence to the individual reference 'my' in the expression 'my mother'.¹³⁰

These principles properly stated pertain to every agent who stands in precisely the same relation (being married to his wife, or being a mother's son, or being a child's father) has the very same general duties and obligations that any one such person has, with the exception being that it is related to a different person of that class. The relation,

¹³⁰ R.M. Hare, "Relevance" *Essays in Ethical Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 195.

however, is universal in that it could have been anyone in this relation, and anyone could have a similar relation with other persons, but it just happened to be so and so, who is in a relation with so and so.

It is true that I cannot have duties to my mother just because she is my mother (duties which other people in similar circumstances do not have to Their mothers). The thesis of universalizability establishes that much. But it is not true that I cannot have duties to my mother just because she is my mother (duties which any son has to his mother in circumstances just like mine). If anybody stands in just this relation to any woman, then he ought to treat her in such-and-such a way. Sentences of this form:

$(x)(y)(R1x,y \rightarrow OR2x,y)$

(where 'O' is the obligation sign of deontic logic) are properly universal and contain no individual references. Another even more obvious example, intuitively, is the duty to fulfill one's own promises, but not other people's.¹³¹

Children and mates need preferred treatment in order to feel loved in the special way they need. They need to have priority over others in relation to a select few family members, in order to feel special and in order to feel loved. They need this special treatment and not everyone can be treated specially or else no one is special in that case. Yet every one can be treated specially by few and yet have no special weight given to their particular welfare in relation to society in general. This special treatment is objectified in the general rule stating that 'everyone in such a special relationship should give priority to his or her loved one.' Even such special obligations may be overridden by

¹³¹ R.M. Hare, "Relevance" *Essays in Ethical Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 195.

other people's more pressing needs. Saving someone's life would take precedence over a second order need for a loved one. Given an equal need, however, such as when one is faced with a choice between saving a neighbor and saving your wife (given that the surrounding circumstances are equal) one should save one's wife. Morality rationally imposes this obligation upon the husband, psychologically one feels a heart wrenching need to act so. In addition to this, the wife needs this special treatment in order to live a healthy life and the husband vowed in love to perform it in order to fulfill his wife's need to be loved romantically. One is obligated to give this special treatment due to logical reasons going towards the general welfare of society, one is faced with his own and his/her spouse's psychological need to have him /her fulfill this obligation, and he/she is also obligated by the institution of making a vow to fulfill this obligation. It is therefore in every sense of the word a true moral obligation and even though it be a very specific one, since it concerns a relation in its descriptive meaning, it is most effectively universalizable. Morality being a global provider of people's welfare logically demands that everyone have a right to this special treatment since it goes toward people's welfare.

CONCLUSION

Marcus Singer's theory is the most complete theory of all and is efficiently used in today's legal system and day to day moral dilemmas. This, however, does not necessarily imply that Singer's theory cannot be improved upon.

Singer's ethical theory doesn't have any of the disadvantages of the other theories mentioned. It justifies its moral rules based on reasons (consequences and their relation to morality) as well as people's inclinations, as opposed to the GR and Hare's theory. It legitimately allows for exceptions to moral rules as opposed to Kant's theory and overcomes the shortsightedness of Gewirth's and Hare's theories, which are limited to those already directly involved and present consequences.

It is said that Singer's theory doesn't overcome the Nazi problems,¹³² however, one need only point out that the Nazi has unjustified beliefs, and unjustified reasons for this act of killing. No consequences can balance the act of killing an innocent person and even at that any wrongdoing must be proven beyond a doubt (which racists hardly bother with since this is what makes them racist to begin with.) Killing an innocent person contradicts the basic tenet of morality, which is to protect one's basic welfare. Such an act would violate one's freedom (the right to self determination,) one's security (the innocent should enjoy a decent level of security,) and the principle of sanctity of life (the only end which may or may not justify the death of a person is that it would save lives.¹³³) Killing a Jew for being a Jew would violate all of these needs and correlated

¹³² Gregory W. Lycan, "Hare, Gewirth and Singer on Universalizability," *Philosophical Quarterly* 19, (April 1969): 135-144. (Pg. 138).

¹³³ Whether killing or letting a person die is a thesis in itself and is beside the point here. The point is that even when it is in order to save a life, it is still a subject of great controversy whether it is right to kill a

rights. It violates a Jew's right to self-determination, it violates our security since the Nazi may arbitrarily decide that brown-eyed people are a threat, if there is no proof that they kill people and is arbitrarily decided to be the case. It violates the sanctity of life principle for obvious reasons and does nothing to protect life.¹³⁴ Since none of these criteria can be met Singer's theory denies the Nazi on the grounds of the consequences and their relation to morality.

It has been claimed that Singer can't give a definition of what is relevant or similar. Defining similarity has been a problem since the time of Plato's theory of Forms and the third man argument. It can hardly constitute a charge against Singer. Similarity and relevance are relations which can be perceived and not easily defined.

I am aware that this makes it somewhat subjective yet one can arrive at what is truly similar via inter-subjectivity and at what is relevant through the framework of logic and inter-subjectivity. When I speak of inter-subjectivity I mean the point of view of people in general minus their particular biases.

The possibility is also open for the recognition of values and reasons that are independent of one's personal perspective and have force for anyone who can view the world impersonally, as a place that contains him. If objectivity means anything here, it will mean that when we detach from our individual perspective and the values and reasons that seem acceptable from within it, we can sometimes arrive at a new

person whether it be an innocent person or not i.e. capital punishment. It is very difficult to provide arguments especially moral arguments to argue for the killing of innocent persons. I have already argued for why in the extreme case where one must sacrifice one innocent life in order to save all of humanity it would still be immoral to do so.

¹³⁴ Remember moral arguments must be sound as well as valid. It must be true that the Jewish people kill people and that killing the Jews would protect life.

conception which may endorse some of the original reasons but will reject some as false subjective appearances and add others . . .¹³⁵

The world of reasons, including my reasons, does not exist only from my own point of view. A more accurate version of what is can be ascertained by removing mistaken perceptions and grasping what one may have overlooked. It can easily be used in all fields in physics to correct physical perception, in psychology to correct non-moral behavioral problems such as ticks, obsessions and the like, as well as in ethics in order to determine what is perceived to be similar, as well as relevant, to the degree that logical syntax may be insufficient.¹³⁶

This method's use for the goal of directly objectifying moral rules, however, would lead us to the pitfalls of descriptivism. We can't logically go from an "is" (valued) to an "ought" (to be valued). If they may be justified we must go to their root; i.e. reasons. Reasons are themselves constituted by circumstances (facts), consequences (conjecture by induction of similar cases) and their relation to morality. These are in turn assessed for their relation to morality (relevance, for the most part assessed by logical syntax for their logical relation to morality or their inter-subjectively perceived relation to morality, in cases where logic is insufficient). After passing all of these objective checkpoints, whatever little descriptivism is used in order to assess the relevance of some reason would not disturb the balance of the normative claim.

Similarity is simply perceived point by point. It is relevant similarity, which the critics argue may be manipulated. As I have already stated relevant similarities are

¹³⁵ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 140.

¹³⁶ I am referring here to cases where the element to be assessed for relevance barely moves the scale. I can't think of such a case offhand but I am sure that one can come up with one if one reads through enough exercises in logic books.

existent if and only if one may use them in a valid argument either for or against the judgement.

As for what constitutes desirable consequences in morality, one need only check for positive relevance to morality. The same process is repeated as above thus yielding the same accuracy as above.

Where is this indeterminacy though that Lycan and other of Singer's critics speak of? Using Gewirth's definition of morality and the above method I don't see Singer's method's as being indeterminate whatsoever. In addition to this Singer's ethical theory is the best ethical theory to date even if it is a compilation of years of others' and his own previous work. Using the ASA to provide a more detailed denotation of morality one can extrapolate on what is relevant to morality and desirable according to the correlated human needs of the rights that an agent simply as an agent and not 'that agent' demands for himself, i.e. freedom, security, well- being in terms of quality and quantity.

The GA may or may not be valid but this is not the point. The point is that the GA is still an indispensable device which magnifies the consequences of a case. It is useful in separating the moral from the amoral in cases where it is invertible, or undesirable for all to 's' and undesirable for none to 's'. It has too many uses to dispense with it altogether. I do, however, concede that the GA states that no one may do 's' without a justifying reason if the consequences of everyone doing 's' is undesirable and the fact that this nth person doing it does not cause undesirable consequences *is* a justifying reason.

Singer does not state that because there are no undesirable consequences that the act must be right. The GA purports to prove the contrary. Singer seems to be arguing

from a collective 'everyone' in the antecedent of the GC 'if the consequences of everyone's doing 'x' would be undesirable, then not everyone ought to do 'x' ¹³⁷ and in the antecedent of the GA 'if the consequences of everyone's doing 'x' would be undesirable, then no one ought to do 'x' (without a special reason)'. ¹³⁸ In the consequent of both the GA and the GP, however, 'everyone' is used distributively (in the sense that 'no one ought to' is equivalent to 'each and every one ought not to'). If this is the case the argument does appear to commit the fallacy of division.

Moreover if Singer holds the GP to be true he does have the clause of relevant circumstances to contend with for what is right for one person is right for any relevantly similar person under *relevantly similar circumstances* is the full formulation of the GP. I contend that this expression points to the threshold effects in all instances where Singer tries to bypass the lack of undesirable consequences as a means of justification for doing 'x' where there would be undesirable consequences if 'x' were done collectively. He contends that the dissimilarity between the collective consequences and the individual consequences are irrelevant to the morality of the individual case. This is precisely where Singer errs: "Now one is not shown to be an exception by the fact that the consequences of his acting in a certain way would not be the same as the consequences of everyone's acting in that way."¹³⁹

He says that this is because everyone can argue in the same way thus making everyone an exception to not doing 'x'. If it were the case that everyone is an exception to not doing 'x', it makes the prohibitive rule null and void and everyone would be

¹³⁷ Marcus, G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 65.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 65-66.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 91.

allowed to 'x' (though Singer doesn't say this). This, however, would not be nonsense or lead to contradiction like reiterable arguments are supposed to, but instead it would simply negate the rule since no one would ever act on this prohibitive rule. Since the argument for exemption can logically be applied to everyone this means that the prohibitive rule won't ever have an application and it is thereby useless for guiding action or null and void.

Is it really true, though, that everyone can argue that the consequences of his acting in a certain way would not be the same as everyone's acting in that way? This is clearly not the case. If a certain bridge's capacity is 40 persons the 41st person would destroy that bridge just as 42 persons being on it would and just as everyone being on that bridge would. The same thing applies to everything with a threshold effect. Threshold effects "occur if everybody or enough people perform an act (supposedly immoral one) together i.e. In the same "place" and/or at the same "time". It may take 600 people to tread one's lawn into oblivion but yet it would die just as surely as if everyone had done so. In the first case the 41st person cannot argue that his consequences differed in a relevant matter with the consequences of everyone's having stepped onto the bridge (at least not in respect to whether his action brought about undesirable consequences or not). The same can be advocated in the lawn example as well as in lying. It really doesn't take everyone's lying to eliminate trust in the world. All it takes is an abundant amount. If one crosses the threshold, however, one can no longer argue for being an exception. This argument, therefore, is *not* reiterable for everyone.

Is it relevant though that what I do does not produce undesirable consequences? Singer states that the presence of undesirable consequences indicates that it is wrong to

do act 'x' but he does *not* say that the absence of such consequences means that they are right. In the absence of such consequences, however, one must conclude that they are either right or acceptable to do. They are in fact right to do only if it would be undesirable to not do the said act 'x'. If each act 'x' is examined individually before the threshold effects it must be viewed as acceptable. Any act past the threshold must be viewed as wrong according to Singer's substantive principle; the PC.

If the consequences of A's doing 'x' entails threshold effects and the consequences of B's doing 'x' don't are they relevantly similar cases? The answer to this must be no by virtue of the fact that consequences are relevant to morality and more particular in this case, in the case of A, it is the determining factor, for without the threshold effects, A's act would not be wrong (it may not necessarily be right but it is not wrong without further reasons). Case B is not relevantly similar to case A since it is missing the determining factor present in A (the threshold effects). The GP cannot be applied to bridge the gap from case A to case B since they are not relevantly similar cases. For case A would have the negative weight of the threshold effects to weight against any positive consequences and this is clearly not the case for B. If they are not relevantly similar cases, the GA breaks down, for the GP can no longer be applied to bridge the gap between case A and B and this is clearly essential since it is the GP's application that brings the wrongness of case A to case B. The wrongness of case A depends on the threshold effects and the error can be clearly seen in that to import the wrongness of case A to case B would be to import the threshold effect, and there is no logical basis for such a move. In effect the GP may not be applied to an argument if it is not already determined that they are relevantly similar cases, and the GP's use in the GA

is clearly begging the question by presupposing that the first case is relevantly similar to the threshold case and thus presupposing that the prohibition should logically apply to both the threshold case and any other case

The GA itself is still indispensable, or at least the question “what if everyone were to do this” is indispensable in magnifying the consequences of certain acts. The fact of the matter is that it is more beneficial to have the rule entailed by the GA than not to. It is better not to allow people to walk on the lawn than not to have a rule against it and have no lawn. Morally speaking it is better to have a rule against lying than to risk having so many people lie that we can no longer tell truth from fiction. This is not so in invertible cases such as the bridge. We can't have 41 people or more on the bridge just as we can't have everybody avoid the bridge altogether. So we compromise and say that only 40 people may be on the bridge at any one time.

Other compromises can be made as well within threshold cases. If it is highly improbable that sufficient people will do such a thing as act 's', such as teaching philosophy I would have to agree with Sesonky that there would be no use to develop such rules. So I would have to say that at least in some cases it does make a difference whether everyone would do that or not.

The GP in the GA is misapplied if it is used in threshold cases since in the case of the first person doing 'x' there are no circumstance for deeming them wrong, whereas in the nth case the only circumstances which solely determines it to be wrong is the threshold effect and its consequences on one's welfare.

Sidgwick goes on to say (pg.486) that the principle of justice means 'that an act, if right for any individual, must be right on general grounds, and therefore for some class of persons.' Now the importance

of these two statements is that they provide the clue to the interpretation of “similar” as it appears in this principle. The criteria for “all similar cases” are contained in “the general grounds” or reasons on the basis of which an act is, or is said to be, right or wrong. These reasons determine who are similar and who are not, in a certain context. All those to whom the reasons apply are similar to each other and relevantly different from those to whom the reasons do not apply.¹⁴⁰

The GP like the justice principle (under my interpretation, basically the same principle) generalizes from one particular case to other cases, but with the important restriction that they be relevantly similar cases. But as we have seen this is clearly not the case between the 1st case and the nth case where the threshold effects take place. According to Singer himself, one cannot validly apply the GP to cases where one situation has wrongness criteria of the threshold effect and the other doesn't. The reasons for the nth person not doing 'x' do not present themselves in the first case. Consequently, the two cases, by virtue of Singer's own similarity criteria, deemed to be morally dissimilar, and the GP cannot validly be applied to such cases.

Getting back to the GA, Singer cannot sidestep such a difference since one can't apply the GP in the derivation of the GA at all, since the first case and the nth case are relevantly dissimilar. No such derivation can be made without the GP and no leap can be made from distributive to collective terms without it. It is in fact the misapplication of the GP which made this leap, and since we cannot validly use this principle in the GA, there cannot even be a question of whether the leap in the GA is valid or not since there can be no GP application in threshold effect cases, and therefore no GA at all as an argument (since the GP doesn't make sense in its application here.)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.,21-22.

Even though the argument form is wrong altogether, the GA may still be used as a magnifying glass by asking “what if everyone were to do act ‘x’? The veil of ignorance, the GR, and many others are just such tools in ethics even though they aren’t deduced from basic principles. The GA may be used but one must also look at such factors as ‘will everyone do it,’ the invertibility of cases, the reiterability of cases, as well as the utility of implementing a rule as entailed by the GA, and the complexity of the cases involving threshold effects.

Regardless of these points upon which I conflict with Singer, I still maintain that Singer’s contribution to ethics is extremely valuable. His defense of the GP is just as intense as his defense of the GA. His ethical theory taken as comprehending the GP, the GA, the CI, the PC, the invertibility and reiterability clauses, can serve as the basis of a well developed ethical theory when complemented by Gewirth’s argument from sufficient agency (in order to go from what is (needs) to what ought to be done (rights and what one should do in view of these rights).

The ASA adds an authoritative aspect to Singer’s theory, which Singer had previously lacked, claiming that it needed no defense, and that logically speaking none could possibly be given. It is true that to ask ‘why should I be moral?’ is contradictory in that “It is, rather to ask ‘Why ought I to do what I admittedly ought to do?’ and to ask this is, on the one hand, to agree about what one ought to do, and to accept the reasons from which this follows, while, on the other had, it is to demand a further reason for accepting this and for so agreeing. The question thus contradicts its own implications.”¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Marcus, G. Singer, *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 319.

The ASA is meant, rather, to answer the question of “Why (prudentially) ought I to do what I (morally) ought to do?”¹⁴²

As complex as morality may get one thing remains consistent: the GP is an absolutely necessary principle which may not be overlooked (not because it is necessary for the GA). It is necessary regardless of whether we make exceptions or not. Its universalism, in Hare’s terms, is indispensable for objectivity and some level of generality is necessary for universalism. I have shown it is possible to apply the GP even in cases that involve agent-relative reasons while maintaining universalism and therefore objectivity. I have equally rebutted some attacks concerning the GP’s being too rigid, manipulable, trivial, vacuous, or as being presented as the supreme principle in ethics. I have shown that a world without generalizability is a world without rules, and this of course leads to relativism in the strictest sense and ultimately anarchy.

¹⁴² Ibid., 324.

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GLOSSARY

The glossary identifies the formulations and the abbreviations of the moral principles used in Singer's discussion, and in this thesis.

A categorical imperative: A moral rule which has passed the test of the Categorical Imperative.

The ASA (The Argument from Sufficient Agency): This argument states that "the fact of being a prospective agent who has purposes he wants to fulfill provides for any agent a sufficient (as well as necessary) justificatory reason for his implicit claim to have the generic rights."¹⁴³

The CI (The Categorical Imperative): "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."¹⁴⁴

The EQ (The Rule of Equity): "Whatever I judge reasonable or unreasonable that another should do for me; that by the same judgment I declare reasonable or unreasonable that I should *in the like case* do for him."¹⁴⁵

The GA (The Generalization Argument): "If everyone were to do that, the consequences would be disastrous (or undesirable); therefore no one ought to do that."

Or

Any argument of the form "The consequences of no one's doing that would be undesirable; therefore everyone ought to do that."¹⁴⁶

Or

If the consequences of everyone's acting or being treated in a certain way would be undesirable, then no one ought to act or be treated in that way *without a reason*.¹⁴⁷

Or

(a) If the consequences of A's doing x would be undesirable, then A ought not to do x *without a reason or justification*. (PC)

(b) If the consequences of everyone's doing x would be undesirable, then not everyone ought to do x. (GC) (from (a) by generalization)

(c) If not everyone ought to do x, then no one ought to do x. (GP)

(d) If the consequences of everyone's doing x would be undesirable, then no one ought to do x.¹⁴⁸ (from b and c, by implication)

¹⁴³ Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 110.

¹⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Meta physics of Morals*. Trans. H.J. Paton, (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1964), 88 [421/52].

¹⁴⁵ Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics; An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).Ibid., 16.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 65.

The GC (The generalization from the principle of consequences): “The following principle (GC) is what I called a generalization from C: If the consequences of everyone’s doing x would be undesirable, then not everyone has the right to do x.”¹⁴⁹

The generalized principle of consequences: If the consequences of doing x would be undesirable (in general, or usually), then it is wrong (in general) to do x.¹⁵⁰

The GP (The generalization principle): “What is right (or wrong) for one person must be right (or wrong) for any *relevantly* similar person in *relevantly* similar circumstances.”¹⁵¹

(The principle of generalization is also known as **the principle of fairness or the principle of justice or the principle of impartiality or the generalizability principle.**)¹⁵²

The GR (The Golden Rule): “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”¹⁵³

The IC [(The) invertibility (clause)]: An argument, which is invertible, does not provide grounds to support a given judgment. The argument that no one ought ever to break a promise to aid a friend in order to give one’s children a good education, because of what would happen if everyone did, can be met by the counterargument that no one ought ever to deprive his children of a good education in order to keep a promise to aid a friend, because of what would happen if everyone did. This would make the question “What would happen if everyone broke a promise to aid a friend in order to give one’s children a good education?” invertible. For one can ask the counterquestion, “What would happen if everyone deprived his children of a good education in order to keep a promise to aid a friend?” In each case the consequences would be undesirable. Arguments such as the above are said to be morally indeterminate under the current form. The context needs to be filled in in order for the generalization argument to apply to it. However, the test of whether an action *is* morally determinate is whether the generalization argument is applicable to it.¹⁵⁴

The PC (The principle of consequences): If the consequences of A’s doing x would be undesirable, then A ought not to do x. This is equivalent to “If the consequences of A’s *not* doing x would be undesirable, then A ought to do x.”¹⁵⁵

Or

If the consequences of A’s doing x would be undesirable, then A ought not to do x without a reason or justification.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 67.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 5; the ‘relevantly’ adjunct is on page 19.

¹⁵² Ibid., 5.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 78.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 65.

The PGC (Principle of Generic Consistency): The principle which states that “every agent is logically committed to the acceptance of certain evaluative and deontic judgments... which requires that he respect his recipient’s necessary conditions of action.”¹⁵⁷ The principle was explicitly stated as “Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself.”¹⁵⁸

The RC [(The) reiterability (clause)]: If an argument is reiterable it is because the argument is

“applied to some action arbitrarily specified, as part of its description, as taking place at some particular time, or at some particular place, or by some particular person, or in relation to some particular person or thing. To take another example: ‘If everyone were to eat in this restaurant it would get so crowded that no one would be able to do so. . . ; therefore no one ought to eat in this restaurant.’ The reference to this restaurant is not essential here; the same argument would apply to that one, and to any other one. The argument can obviously be reiterated for every restaurant, and its consequence would be not just that no one ought to eat at this or that restaurant but that no one ought to eat at any restaurant. And the same argument would apply not only to restaurants but to any place or location whatsoever. Hence in this case also the implication would be that no one ought to eat.”¹⁵⁹ Reiterable arguments therefore do not provide grounds to support a given judgment.

¹⁵⁷ Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), x.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁵⁹ Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics; An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 81.