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# MORAL RELEVANCE AND MORAL CONFLICT

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*Relevance and  
Conflict Problems*

THE RESOLUTION of the more difficult moral problems and the more sharply controverted moral issues often requires us to make determinations about which considerations are relevant, and, when the relevant considerations conflict with one another, to determine what course of action the stronger reasons indicate. In dealing with actual problems, making such determinations can be very hard indeed. Often, this is the problem.

There is very general agreement, for example, that it is morally wrong to hire someone to kill a person to advance one's career, to ease financial burdens, or to relieve oneself of a burdensome dependent. It is a matter of great controversy, however, whether this consideration is relevant to the question of whether it is morally wrong for a pregnant woman to hire someone to destroy the fetus within her to advance her career, and so on. This is an example of what I will call a "relevance problem," and it is a particularly difficult relevance problem. Conflict problems, on the other hand, are engendered by situations in which two or more relevant considerations indicate contrary courses of action. Public officials, for example, have a

responsibility to preserve public order and safety. They also should protect individuals who are innocent of any offenses from arrest and judicial punishment. In a time of widespread rioting, looting, and disorder, measures necessary to control disturbances that threaten public order—mass arrests and summary trials, for example—may also substantially increase the possibility that innocent individuals will be arrested and punished. In this situation, to what extent is it justifiable to risk punishing innocent people in order to control riots? How far may public officials risk the public's safety to protect individuals from miscarriages of justice? The answers to these questions will require a determination of the relative importance of these considerations in the particular situation.

Existing theories in moral philosophy are of less help than one would like in solving difficult normative moral problems. One reason for this is that such theories, for various reasons, do not in a useful way address the question of how the determinations necessary to solve relevance and conflict problems properly are made. Most theories, in one way or another, deny the existence of the problem. Classical utilitarians hold that there is but one moral consideration and that this consideration admits of quantitative determination and comparison. Some theorists who follow Kant suppose that since they recognize but one fundamental principle, conflict problems do not arise. Theorists who recognize several moral principles or considerations either suppose that we can simply see (intuit) which consideration takes precedence in particular cases where these conflict, or make it a requirement for a satisfactory set of principles or considerations that these not conflict in actual cases. A number of theoretical devices are used to forestall such conflicts. All these theories are open to serious objections, and actual moral controversy remains embroiled with relevance and conflict problems.

Such at any rate is my contention. Relevance and conflict problems are real—no theoretical conjuring will make them

disappear. Further, moral relevance and conflict problems are ubiquitous; their solution is a crucial task of practical reason. If it should turn out that such problems do not admit of solution by rational means, then it is not clear why moral considerations should be of great concern to those committed to seeking intelligent, reasoned solutions to the problems of living. We might choose for sentimental reasons to cherish the ways of our ancestors, like atheists celebrating Christmas, but the body of considerations loosely gathered under the heading of "morality" will fail too often to serve as resources for the intelligent conduct of life.

Western moral philosophy since Plato is substantially concerned with responding to a certain sort of moral skepticism. From our present perspective within this philosophical tradition, the most important things in the ethical theories of Plato, Aristotle, Hume, and Kant are connected with their efforts to show why moral considerations matter at all. For various reasons, we get little help from these philosophers with the questions of what to do in a particular case when the relevance of these considerations is in dispute or where relevant considerations conflict.

The failure of these theories to address these questions in a satisfactory way actually undermines the effectiveness of the theories as refutations of moral skepticism. In the eyes of thoughtful individuals, the difficulty of the intellectual task of determining relevance and harmonizing conflicts of considerations in controversial and complex moral problems lends a certain plausibility to the claim that there are no right solutions to such problems. Unless the skeptical claim that there is no way to determine objectively which solutions are correct is met head on, the suspicion will remain that it is impossible in principle to resolve important moral disagreements by rational means.

I CLAIM that relevance problems are real and very common. Most moral theorists, however, ignore relevance problems and maintain that conflicts among moral considerations are only apparent, that upon a careful scrutiny the conflicts disappear. Very generally, there are two different and incompatible theoretical bases for denying the reality of conflict problems. One type of view holds that although there appear to be many different moral considerations that from time to time conflict with one another, actually this appearance is misleading. There is really but one relevant consideration in any moral problem, according to such views; the many apparently different considerations are somehow reducible to a single consideration. According to classical act-utilitarianism, for example, there is but one valid practical consideration — maximizing utility. Anything else that seems to be a consideration really matters only insofar as it contributes to such maximization. On the second sort of view that denies the reality of conflict problems, many irreducibly different moral considerations exist, but these considerations never really conflict. They only seem to conflict because our conceptions of the considerations are vague, imprecise, or incomplete. Clarity and definiteness also clear up any difficulties about the relevance of these considerations.

It is tempting to suppose that on *any* single-consideration moral theory there cannot be conflict problems and that relevance problems are simplified because one need worry only about the relevance of the single consideration. If, however, one counts as single-consideration views ethical theories that recognize but one (ultimate) principle, not all such views escape serious difficulties with relevance and conflict problems. This will be apparent to anyone who has attempted to apply to a selection of actual moral problems the "supreme principle of morality" as Kant sets it out in the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*.<sup>1</sup> Kant's principle encounters difficulties with relevance

1. G. E. M. Anscombe pointed out that Kant's principle about universal

and conflict problems not because of some feature unique to it, nor is this a problem only for "formalist" single-principle theories. Consider Ruth Barcan Marcus's example: "Under the single principle of promise keeping, I might make two promises in all good faith and reason that they will not conflict, but they do, as a result of circumstances that were unpredictable and beyond my control."<sup>2</sup>

THUS THE theoretical expediency of recognizing but one ultimate or overriding practical principle will not necessarily exempt us from difficulties with relevance and conflict problems. Classical utilitarianism, however, is a kind of single-

izing maxims—one formulation of the supreme principle—is "useless without stipulations as to what shall count as a relevant description of an action with a view to constructing a maxim about it" ("Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 [1958], 2). Kant is able to argue with some plausibility that if my maxim is to refuse help to a person in desperate need who asks me for help, I cannot will that my maxim hold as a universal law—such a law would rob me of help in such circumstances. Suppose I make it my policy (i.e., my maxim) to refuse to help children. I, an adult, would not be robbed of help by the currency of a law that permitted refusing to help children. Of course, a child is a person, but why for the purposes of describing my maxim is it not relevant that the person who asks for my help is a child? Answers suggest themselves, but developing a plausible answer on Kant's behalf is a difficult business. What one seeks here is a criterion of moral relevance.

Kant claimed that when I tell a lie, I cannot will my maxim to become a universal law. I consider a situation in which the only way I can help someone in serious difficulty is by lying. Here two duties supposedly derivable from the same principle conflict with each other. Kant's discussion of this particular conflict is notoriously implausible. (See Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives," in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, ed. and trans. T. K. Abbott [London: Longmans, Green, 1909].) The distinction between "perfect" and "imperfect" duties, together with the claim that the former always take precedence over the latter is an unpromising basis for an account of how conflicts between duties are properly resolved. Several problems for Kant's moral philosophy intersect at this point.

2. Ruth Barcan Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Moral Consistency," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), 125.

consideration view that apparently precludes conflicts. In a particular situation, each of two contrary alternative courses of action may promote utility, but this does not create a conflict for utilitarians. Their principle does not tell them to promote utility wherever the opportunity presents itself; the principle prescribes maximizing utility. Utility is quantifiable wherever it occurs. The only consideration that indicates acting is that an act is reasonably expected to produce more utility than any alternative. If two contrary alternative acts will produce equal amounts of utility, the choice between them is morally indifferent. That a possible act will produce more utility than any alternatives is always a relevant consideration; on this view, there are no other candidates for the status of relevant consideration.

The ease with which this sort of utilitarianism avoids difficulties with relevance and conflict problems is a very attractive feature of the view, and some people are drawn to the theory despite the fact that the claim that there is but one overriding moral consideration contradicts appearances—that is, there do seem to be many different such considerations. For one thing, if one surveys the arguments of serious individuals for their positions on such vexed moral issues as disarmament, the insanity defense in the criminal law, and infanticide for neonates with severe defects, a great many different considerations appear to be involved. Stuart Hampshire's general observation is an eloquent description of how things seem.

The ways of life which men aspire to and admire and wish to enjoy are normally a balance between, and combination of, disparate elements; and this is so, partly because human beings are not so constructed that they have just one overriding concern or end, one overriding interest, or even a few overriding desires and interests. They find themselves trying to reconcile, and to assign priorities to, widely different and diverging and

changing concerns and interests, both within the single life of an individual, and within a single society.<sup>3</sup>

Yet despite the fact that there appear to be many different moral considerations, the advantages of a single-consideration theory such as utilitarianism make such views highly attractive. Although the various versions of utilitarianism seem in a number of ways a bad fit with generally accepted moral beliefs and practices, these existing beliefs and practices are by no means beyond criticism. It is thus possible for utilitarians to fault the data rather than their theories for certain discrepancies. The appeal of utilitarianism lies in its promise to provide for the humane, tough-minded individual a way of resolving complex moral problems and disagreements by rational means. All considerations involved in a problem can be reduced to a single consideration that is sufficiently quantifiable to make possible direct comparisons of the quantity of good to be expected as the outcome of each alternative. Utilitarianism has its difficulties, but if one accepts the view that there is in the last analysis but one relevant good and that this comes in quanta, the conclusion that the best thing to do is to produce as much of it as possible is irresistible. The notion that goods are irreducibly multiple, on the other hand, seems to the utilitarian to entail the existence of moral conflict that is irresolvable by rational means. When irreducibly different moral considerations conflict, there is apparently no way rationally and objectively to compare, weigh, and balance them against one another to determine which is properly more compelling. It is the view that conflicts between irreducibly different moral considerations cannot be resolved by rational means, together with the con-

3. Stuart Hampshire, *Two Theories of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 17-18. See also Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods," in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 129-144.

viction that a morality worthy of an intelligent person's respect and allegiance must offer the possibility of reasoned solutions to problems and disagreements, that underlies the adherence of many people to utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism is criticized on a variety of grounds; it is a beleaguered theory. Critics argue that various versions of utilitarianism fail to square in too many ways with existing practices and beliefs. The ingenious and often complicated devices used by utilitarians to bring their theories more into harmony with the data often seem ad hoc and unconvincing. Particularly troubling to many is the fear that utilitarianism advocates abandoning certain precious goods when the consequences of so doing will maximize utility. So, it is feared, such things as the murder of the innocent, the betrayal of friends, and the commission of injustices will be justified in the eyes of utilitarians when by such means the general welfare can be increased.<sup>4</sup>

Modifications in classical act-utilitarianism designed to make the view less incongruous with actual moral beliefs may have the result that the revised view can no longer give the classical utilitarian answer to the question of how conflict problems are properly resolved. It has been suggested recently that we can retain the principle that we should maximize overall good, while allowing the possibility of a plurality of irreducibly different goods. It is also proposed that this revised view, a form of "consequentialism," should allow that there are certain constraints upon this principle that enable us to take into account how good is distributed and to pursue projects other than max-

4. See for example Alan Donagan, "Is There a Credible Form of Utilitarianism?", and H. J. McCloskey, "A Non-Utilitarian Approach to Punishment," in Michael D. Bayles, ed., *Contemporary Utilitarianism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968). See also John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 14, 22-27, and Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in J. J. C. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

imizing the overall good in certain circumstances.<sup>5</sup> The utilitarian who abandons the classical view to move to such a position pays a price. The revised view can no longer offer the utilitarian response to the question of how conflict problems are properly resolved. What is relinquished here is one of the most attractive features of utilitarianism. It is not clear, moreover, how this revised view will deal with conflicts between the various different considerations it recognizes.

THE OBVIOUS theoretical means of guarding against the possibility of the unwelcome results of utilitarianism which its critics fear is to lay down a number of different principles that explicitly prohibit such outcomes. These principles might be given one of several different philosophical bases. In the context of a broadly utilitarian view, these principles might be thought to be justifiable by reference to a single, quantifiable good. The result would be rule-utilitarianism. On the other hand, those several principles might be given a deontological basis, or they might be thought of as protecting a variety of irreducibly different goods.<sup>6</sup>

However we conceive the basis of these several principles designed to guard against the possible unwelcome results of act-utilitarianism, it is clear that by adopting such principles we are committed to recognizing a multiplicity of different practical considerations. How, in particular cases, are we to establish the relevance of such considerations, and how are we to resolve conflicts among them?

5. See Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), for a discussion of such a view.

6. For a brief discussion of the distinction between act- and rule-utilitarianism, with further references, see J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, pp. 9-12. For an example of a multiple-principle deontological theory, see John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

It may seem that a rule-utilitarian can have recourse to the principle of utility to resolve relevance and conflict problems: A consideration is to be relevant in a particular case just in case utility is maximized by taking it into account; when two considerations are in conflict, the principle of utility is used to determine what to do. When we consider, however, that the rule-utilitarian adopts those several principles in the hope that certain foreseen unwelcome results of the use of the principle of utility will be forestalled, the use of the utilitarian principle in this way to solve relevance and conflict problems is seen to be at odds with the rule-utilitarian enterprise. It is not surprising that some rule-utilitarians look to other means to explain how relevance and conflict problems are properly resolved.<sup>7</sup>

A common response from perspectives that recognize many considerations to the question of how relevance and conflict problems are properly resolved is to deny, in effect, that such problems occur. So, for example, it might be held that morality consists in a collection of hard-and-fast rules, which are actually very complicated, with a great many conditions and exceptions built into them. Thus, many cases that appear to engender a conflict of rules would turn out upon scrutiny to be cases in which one (or more) of the apparently conflicting rules does not apply, because of an exception built into the rule itself. On this view, what I describe as the ubiquity of situations posing relevance and conflict problems is to be understood as the way things appear to one who has a vague and crude conception of moral rules. A more precise and sophisticated understanding—one that has the rules right in all their complexity—will enable one to see that it is clear when the rules are and are not relevant and that the rules actually do not conflict in such cases. Another related view holds that the rules of morality are ranked in order of precedence, so if two

7. See, for example, R. B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 286-296.

rules do conflict in a particular case, the higher-ranking rule takes precedence.<sup>8</sup>

Attempts to articulate unexceptionable moral rules or systems of hard-and-fast moral principles ranked in order of precedence have not to date met with notable success. This by itself does not show that such programs are unfeasible. It is appropriate, however, to ask the proponents of such programs how we are to know when they have succeeded in producing correct (valid, true) formulations of unexceptionable moral principles. How is one to know that *this* particular set of principles, applied in an invariant order, will always, in every circumstance, prescribe exactly what one should do? If the principles in question are many and complicated, these questions will be especially troublesome. That a principle strikes one upon reflection as being in accord with one's experience and one's understanding of morality—that the principle accords with one's intuitions (however 'intuition' is understood)—does not establish that the principle really is correct. Someone with a lively sense of the complexity of practical affairs and an appreciation of his or her own fallibility in judgment will not confidently accept the claim that a certain set of complicated practical principles is correct solely on the grounds that on reflection the principles seem correct. It does not take much reflection on the extent and depth of disagreement among people on moral matters to convince us that there is no reasonable hope for a consensus that a given complicated set of moral principles invariably gives the correct result in concrete situations.

One response to the difficulty of establishing that a particular set of many complicated moral principles is correct is to attempt to show that these many principles can be deduced from a very few general principles that are thought to be fundamental. Different theorists favor different fundamental prin-

8. For a discussion of this theoretical device, see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 40-45.

ciples, and, again, there is little progress toward agreement in this enterprise. Lack of unqualified success so far is not a conclusive argument against the feasibility of such programs, but we might turn the question around and ask what reason there is to suppose that such a program can succeed. Underlying these efforts, often, is the assumption that moral principles form a deductive system. This is an extraordinary assumption. Why should it be supposed that our knowledge of what ought to be, unlike our knowledge of what is, takes the form of a mathematical system? Why should we be Pythagoreans in ethical theory?<sup>9</sup>

The thesis that most or all conflicts of moral considerations are only apparent because moral principles have an invariant order of precedence or because unexceptionable moral principles have enough conditions built into them that they do not conflict, involves the assumption that all soluble moral problems are, in the principles of morality themselves, decided in advance. How could a set of practical principles anticipate the continual and extensive changes in the human condition? Only *very general* principles could, with any plausibility at all, be said to apply in all of the diverse cultural and physical circumstances that have obtained throughout human history. But these are not the sort of principles envisioned by the absolutist. Someone who claims to have discovered such principles as the absolutist requires is claiming to have found principles that auto-

9. In the course of criticizing certain arguments for the thesis that there must exist very general exceptionless moral principles, J. B. Schneewind points out that some of these arguments depend upon the assumption that "the reasoning needed in morality is purely deductive." Schneewind makes the point that it is possible to construe moral principles and their inferential relations to one another on other models than that of axioms in a deductive system. See "Moral Knowledge and Moral Principles," *Knowledge and Necessity*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures 3 (1968-69), 249-262. This essay is reprinted in Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds., *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 113-126.

matically provide the correct solution for every soluble moral problem, past, present, and future. How could anyone have sufficient grounds for such a claim?<sup>10</sup>

THE TAXONOMY or classification of philosophical theories is a difficult business, and it is unfortunately apt to lead to misunderstanding and confusion rather than illumination. I am embarked upon this, however, and I want to be as clear as possible. I have distinguished two types of views, common in moral theories, that pertain to the question of how conflicts among considerations are properly resolved. I will call these the "Utilitarian Response" and the "Absolutist Response" to this question. These are natural labels to use for a distinction I make for a philosophical purpose. It is important to bear in mind, however, that not every moral theory that might be classified as a utilitarian moral theory offers what I call the Utilitarian Response to the question of how to resolve conflicts.

I want to distinguish kinds of responses by moral theorists to the following question:

Q. In a concrete practical problem, when one relevant consideration indicates one course of action and other relevant considerations indicate contrary courses, how does one properly determine which consideration(s) is (are) decisive — i.e., which course of action is supported by the strongest reasons?

In brief, what I call the Utilitarian Response to Q is:

In any practical problem, there is but one relevant consideration, utility, and utility comes in quanta. The course of action that is reasonably expected to result in the most utility — more

10. On this point see Arthur E. Murphy, *The Theory of Practical Reason* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967), pp. 206-208.

utility than any of the alternatives — is the course of action indicated by the strongest reason.

What I call the Absolutist Response is, briefly:

There exists a variety of irreducibly different practical considerations. These considerations, however, properly understood, never conflict with one another in actual practical problems. The problem described in Q never really arises.

Here, then, are two ways in which ethical theorists respond to the question, what should a reasonable person of good will do in a situation in which relevant considerations indicate contrary courses of action? Both responses rest upon the assumptions that (1) *genuine* conflicts between irreducibly different moral considerations could not be resolved by rational means, and (2) all or most moral problems can (in principle) be solved by rational means. Both responses claim that vexing moral problems that appear to involve conflicts really do not — that on a closer scrutiny of the considerations, the conflict disappears. Both ways of dealing with these problems involve such profound difficulties and are open to such serious objections that a search for a viable alternative is indicated.

When struck by the multiplicity of different practical considerations and the implausibility of the idea that there exist ready-made, hard-and-fast rules that in every case tell us the right thing to do, we may be tempted by what I will call the "Intuitionist Response" — the account of how to deal with conflict problems that was defended by W. D. Ross.<sup>11</sup> On this view, there exist many moral considerations that may at times be in genuine conflict with one another. The determination of which considerations should yield when two or more considerations conflict is not governed by any rule or principle. That

11. W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), chap. 2.

certain things are in general moral considerations is, on this view, self-evident. Reasonable, well-brought-up individuals are able to judge in particular cases which considerations are decisive, although no general principle can be cited to justify the judgment and no general account can be given of how this properly is done. This, then, is the Intuitionist Response to Q:

There exists a variety of irreducibly different considerations that do come into conflict with one another in practical problems. There are no general principles that indicate which considerations prevail in these problems, and no general account can be given of how properly to determine which considerations prevail. It is possible, however, to judge or intuit *correctly* which considerations are the stronger in a particular situation.

This view, however, provides only the appearance of an account of how conflict problems are properly resolved. One simply judges or intuits on such a view which consideration properly is decisive. No basis is provided for distinguishing between arbitrarily declaring a consideration decisive and correctly judging it decisive. This view is in the end indistinguishable from the view that genuine conflict problems are not resolvable by rational means.<sup>12</sup>

Not every intuitionist moral theory offers the Intuitionist Response to Q. Intuitionist *theories* are characterized by their appeal at crucial points to the self-evidence of certain claims. They maintain that certain things are known to be true independently of any external evidence or any argument. Certain truths, on such theories, proclaim their truth directly to the understanding. So an intuitionist theorist might hold that a number of different moral principles are self-evident, but give the Absolutist Response to the question of what to do if such moral principles conflict.

12. This is the conclusion of D. D. Raphael in "The Standard of Morals," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 75 (1974-75), 1-12.

The Intuitionist Response to the problem of conflicting considerations has seemed attractive to moral theorists who are impressed by the difficulties with the Utilitarian and Absolutist Responses. Thus Ross offers his account as one that fits the facts better than either "Kant's view" (interpreted as offering the Absolutist Response) or the utilitarian views of "Professor Moore and Dr. Rashdall."<sup>13</sup> J. O. Urmson concludes an article entitled "A Defense of Intuitionism" with these words.

If it be recognized that there is a plurality of primary moral reasons for action, the complexity of many situations seems to me to make it implausible to suppose that we are guided (presumably unwittingly) by any decision-procedure when we weigh up the pros and cons. I also doubt whether our moral beliefs have the internal harmony requisite for a decision-procedure to be even theoretically possible. This leaves us with the need for an intuitive weighing up of reasons; since this seems to be not an irrational anomaly but our ordinary predicament with regard to reasons in most fields, I find this conclusion neither surprising nor unduly distressing.<sup>14</sup>

There is something to be said for the claims of Ross and Urmson that their account is more congruent with what actually goes on in the practical thinking of reasonable people than the accounts employing the Utilitarian and Absolutist Responses. Actual practice is far too complex to be accommodated to the simple picture offered by the latter accounts. The response that actual practice is confused and inconsistent might have force if either of these latter accounts seemed adequate on its own. When one considers the serious philosophical difficulties that beset these views, however, this response is weak. In the mood generated by these reflections, the Intuitionist Response

13. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 17-19.

14. J. O. Urmson, "A Defense of Intuitionism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 75 (1974-75), 119.

can be tempting.<sup>15</sup> Yet the accounts offering the Intuitionist Response are in a crucial respect perilously thin. What, on these views, is the difference between “intuitively weighing reasons for and against” and *arbitrarily* selecting one reason over another? What is the standard for doing such weighing *correctly*? Unless there are answers to such questions, a remark made by Ludwig Wittgenstein, in a different but related context, is apt: “In the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: Whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can’t talk about ‘right’.”<sup>16</sup>

It is not by oversight that the proponents of the Intuitionist Response provide no answer to the question of how one distinguishes between correct and incorrect determinations of which reason is stronger. The matter looks this way to the proponent of the Intuitionist Response: If an argument could be produced to *make a case* for the superiority of one solution to a conflict problem over another, the argument must involve an appeal to one or more *general considerations* or *principles* that imply that one of the conflicting considerations takes precedence over the others. If we allow the existence of such general principle(s), however, the Intuitionist believes, we find ourselves in the end embracing either the Absolutist Response or the Utilitarian Response.

If the possible views about how conflict problems are properly resolved are exhausted by the Intuitionist, the Absolutist, and the Utilitarian Response, and if (as seems to be the case) none of these views is satisfactory, then we must conclude that solutions to conflict problems cannot be defended before the court of reason. This conclusion, given the ubiquity and impor-

15. For a discussion of the conception of reasoning in the views of Raphael and Urmson, see Frederick I. Will, “Pragmatic Rationality,” *Philosophical Investigations* 8 (1985), 120-142.

16. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), Part I, Sec. 258, p. 92c.

tance of conflict problems in our lives, would constitute a significant victory for skepticism and irrationalism. It is worth considering, then, why these three responses seem the only possible answers to question Q and inquiring whether there might not be other, better responses.