

HOSPERS' "ULTIMATE MORAL EQUALITY"

JOHN O. NELSON
University of Colorado

In this paper I want, first of all, to point to a serious contradiction that poses itself in Hospers' moral reasoning in *Human Conduct* (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York 1961; unless otherwise stated, references will be to this work). This came contradiction, it might be added, is almost sure to pose itself in the thinking of almost anyone who attempts, on the one hand, to support the claims of moral responsibility as ordinarily understood and simultaneously investigate the sources of human action and conduct. Thus, the topic of this paper ought to be of interest to anyone engaged in moral speculations and not just to those engrossed in the particular philosophizing of John Hospers.

Secondly, I shall attempt to locate the mainsprings of this same contradiction and show how their seemingly irresistible force can be checked and even negated, thus allowing us without running into contradiction both to support the claims of moral responsibility as ordinarily understood and to investigate the sources of human action and conduct. So far as I am aware, neither in *Human Conduct* nor in his subsequent works has Hospers himself addressed any thought to the present undertaking. Therefore, if we are correct in the claims we have so far made and if our undertaking proves to be successful this paper might be viewed as a friendly attempt to make a minor but important repair in the foundations of Hospers' moral philosophy.

THE CONTRADICTION REFERRED TO ABOVE

In *Human Conduct* Hospers tells us that "folk ethic," which is a "childhood concept of morality, which strains at the gnat and swallows the camel," is a "grossly insufficient one" and "the sooner we get rid of it, the sooner we shall be in a position to evaluate impartially where our studies lie." (p. 19) Here, by his own statement of aims,

Reason Papers No. 13 (Spring 1988) 35-47
Copyright © 1988.

Hospers announces (a) that moral duties exist and (b) that, implicitly at least, moral responsibility exists. For not only is it an obvious moral truth that (c) if duties exist then moral responsibility exists but Hospers' very exhortation "that we evaluate impartially where our duties lie" as much as says, being an exhortation to us, that we are in effect morally responsible to make such an impartial evaluation. Later on he says (d) that "as we daily use the term 'free'" (p. 505) we are free in at least some of our actions and conduct. But, again, it is an obvious moral truth that if we are free as "we daily use the term 'free'" then we are morally responsible. Hence, Hospers in *Human Conduct* grants on the very face of it that moral duties, moral responsibility, and freedom exist. But it is also an obvious moral truth that if either moral duties exist or moral responsibility exists or freedom exists then (e) a person, who is being punished for some crime that he has committed, can "deserve what he is getting." Indeed, it would contradict the very meaning of "moral duties," "moral responsibility," and "freedom" to affirm their existence and deny that a person who was being punished could ever deserve what he was getting. Hence, in all fairness I think we can say that at least up to page 505 of *Human Conduct* Hospers' *prima facie* agrees that a person who is being punished for a crime can deserve what he is getting.

Yet, subsequently, this proposition (e) is denied by Hospers. As a consequence of the notion of "ultimate moral equality" (p. 521, of which more later) Hospers maintains that a person who is being punished for some crime can never "deserve what he is getting." (p. 521) Presumably, in the last analysis, there can never be a "he deserves what he is getting"—not only with respect to punishment but reward also (of which, again, more later). Consequently, what Hospers calls and advocates as "ultimate moral equality" stands in direct contradiction to other moral claims that he makes or is committed to in *Human Conduct*, namely, (a), (b), (d), and (e). For short, we might say that moral responsibility is both affirmed and denied. And this is as both we and Hospers presumably understand the term "moral responsibility" in its daily use (see Hospers' explicit appeal to the "daily use" of the term "free" in (d)).

THE SOURCE OF THIS SERIOUS CONTRADICTION

Prima facie Hospers could eliminate the contradiction that we have been describing either by rejecting (a), (b), (c), and (d) or by rejecting not-(e). But to reject (a), (b), (c), and (d) would patently be to swallow a much larger camel than any folk-ethnic asks us to swallow. Might he not, then, simply reject not-(e)? Would not minimal moral sense itself approve of his (and our) doing so? It would, no doubt. But that exit is blocked by the notion of ultimate moral equality and the arguments which seem to require our acceptance of that notion.

Let me here reproduce Hospers' own philosophizing on the subject. I should hazard the guess that when we view this philosophizing of Hospers' we are as apt to be convinced by it as of the truth of not-(e) as Hospers' himself was. I quote from page 521:

Most of the time, of course, we do not view human conduct from the point of view of ultimate moral equality. We are too much involved in human affairs, not as spectators but as participants. And as participants we find it needful to encourage, blame, exhort, judge, advise, and condemn. But when we plumb deeply (as psychiatrists do) into the ultimate cases (what Hume called the "secret springs") of human conduct, we shall become aware that people are what they are and do what they do because of circumstances outside the control of their will and that although the will itself is a causal circumstance, it in turn was fashioned by external circumstances which made it what it is. When we view other people's frailties and shortcomings in the light of this perspective we shall no longer say, "He deserves what he's getting." Instead, we shall say, "There but for the grace of God (and a favorable environment) go I."

Seemingly unanswerable, this cluster of arguments says: My actions issue from the sort of person I am, the desires I have, the strengths and weaknesses I have; these I was born with or adopted according to the desires, etc. that I found myself endowed with or imposed by my environment. In short, myself, which is the source of my actions, duly considered, is not something that I am responsible ultimately for. Thus, whatever I may do can not really be held, blame-wise or praise-wise, for or against me. And what I have just said regarding myself holds for everyone else. Hence, what obtains in truth is an absolute moral equality: one person morally is no better or worse than another. Indeed, no one deserves either blame and punishment or (to consider the matter deeply) praise and reward. No one is responsible for what he is or does except in the blameless, praiseless way that a carburetor might be responsible for a car back-firing or not back-firing.

SOME RANDOM THOUGHTS ON THIS "MORAL EQUALITY"

It is a "perspective" and supporting considerations like those delineated above that have on the face of it shaped much contemporary legislation and judicial judgment having to do with crime and criminals, welfare, and so on. What Hospers calls the notion of absolute moral equality and the arguments seeming to require its acceptance are also, I should venture, at the bottom of the equalizing strains in the social theorizing of philosophers like John Rawls. But for all their seeming incontrovertibility, this perspective and its supporting considerations propose not only a state of human affairs

that is grossly impracticable but practically abhorrent. Even if we could relate to others in ways bare of praise and blame, reward and punishment, how empty and hateful life would become. Indeed, how morally repugnant! Think of looking indulgently on the rapist in his raping, as required by the dogma of absolute moral equality, or treating thieves and murderers no differently from their victims! Being a person of good sense it is no wonder that, having been led by seemingly irrefutable arguments to accept the monstrous dogma, Hospers in his subsequent writings nowhere (so far as I know) resurrects it, even though (so far as I know) he has nowhere refuted it or its supporting arguments. As long, however, as it and its supporting arguments remain unrefuted, persons of less good sense than Hospers are likely to be victimized by them, witness, again, the many contemporary legislators, jurists, and philosophers who in fact aver, "There but for the grace of God (and a favorable environment) go I." But obviously their refutation is easier said than done. In fact, as will be seen, unless certain methodological concessions are made their refutation is *ab initio* impossible. The philosophical enterprise by its very nature militates in favor of the arguments supporting the notion of absolute moral equality. In a manner of speaking, to get at the truth—for the truth is the existence of moral responsibility and not moral equality—we shall have to saw against a good deal of intrinsic philosophical grain.

The Refutation of the Claim of Absolute Moral Equality

The two mainsprings generating the superficial plausibility of absolute moral equality are certainly subtle, philosophical misapplications of the term "cause" and the view that also issues naturally from the philosophical enterprise that a person is either an object among other objects or, terminating objective analysis, a whole that is no greater than the sum of its parts. I shall commence our assault upon absolute moral equality with an assault upon the last two contentions, for only if successful here can we sustain our claim concerning philosophical misapplications of the term "cause."

Now philosophical, as aiming to establish hidden truth, takes as its task the arrival at conclusions on the basis of objective argument, and that is to say, argument which permits inter-subjective confirmation or disconfirmation because it appeals to common objects or supposed objects. When, therefore, as part of our philosophizing, we consider ourselves as a person we naturally do so in the posture of observational knowledge or the observation of an object or objects. Under this lens ourself appears as either one object among other objects or, in final analysis, a whole which resolves ontologically into and hence is no greater than the sum of its parts. For instance, when we turn observation inward upon ourselves we seem to find that ourself as person resolves into a whole consisting and reducing to such fancied psychological parts as desires, motives, understanding, will, and so

on. Thus, we have seen Hospers referring to the "will" as one of the action-responsible parts of the self. (p. 521) "...although the will itself is a causal circumstance, it in turn was fashioned by external circumstances which made it what it is".

As illustrated in the same place, the supposition that ourself is an object among other objects or a whole reducing to the sum of its parts commits us immediately to determinism. Our actions issue as effects from the causal interplay of external circumstances upon ourself or the causal interplay of its parts. Our only escape from determinism is then to introduce chance; for example, to claim that some of our parts (e.g., "our will") sometimes act or respond without cause. The question therefore becomes: which of these Hobbsonian alternatives are we to opt for?

To accept the determinist alternative is to suppose not only that ultimately there exists no moral difference between human beings but none between human beings and robots. In short, morality as ordinarily conceived has to be jettisoned. The valuation of aspiration, self-esteem, or whatever other aspects of being human we may cherish, has to be jettisoned also, for now a valuation is itself no more than the final effect in a blind causal chain. Our own most considered judgments have to be re-interpreted as mere end-effects of blind causal chains and any judgment concerning them but one more blind end-effect of blind causal chains. Thus, there eventuates a deterministic night in which all judgments are sightless. These conceptual and evaluational inroads of determinism naturally leave us aghast. But where to fly for refuge? When we seek refuge in indeterminism we find but injury added to insult. We have to forfeit all that we had to forfeit under the ministrations of determinism; but where determinism at least permitted some sort of predictability in human action, corresponding or seeming to correspond to the predictability that we actually find, indeterminism would seem to rob us of even that. If the parts of myself responsible for my now sitting at this desk sometimes operate by mere chance or without cause or if I do why should not my next action be to shout as if I were at a football game or jump out the window or something else just as irrelevant to my environment or contrary to my past behavior? Chance, after all, is just chance. But whether indeterminism is less acceptable than determinism or not—and, like Hospers, most philosophers have thought that it is—neither, it is clear, is a position that we can want to accept or even can, as a matter of expressing a considered judgment, self-consistently accept. Our refutation of absolute moral equality will, therefore, have to take us, among other things, safely between the Scylla of determinism and the Charybdis of indeterminism. But what other alternative is there?

As long as we remain in the observational posture that seems to belong inherently to the philosophical enterprise, the answer is "none." Certainly, however, not all knowing is observational knowing.

We know, for example, that we have a pain by *being* in pain, not by a process of observation (thus, by what we might call "knowledge by being"). We know and conceive the existence of force, not on the basis of observation, but through acting on things and being acted on by them (thus, by what we might call "knowledge by participation"). These avenues of knowledge do not confine knowledge to objects. Thus, strictly speaking, pain and force are not objects; indeed, cannot be intelligibly construed as objects; nor, for the matter, can *person* be. Therefore, these "knowledges" may possibly not commit us, as knowledge by observation does, to either determinism or indeterminism. Indeed, I should want to contend that it is through knowledge or knowing by *being* and knowing by *participation*, as substrates of knowledge by observation, that we all know, as we all do, that we and other persons are morally responsible beings, that we can have duties, but we are free, that we can deserve punishment, and so on. But because these avenues of knowledge cannot be objectified, being in this respect like the *notions* of Berkeley or what Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* calls *showing* (as opposed to *saying*), one cannot provide theoretic structures of them, as one would have to in answer to such a question as to *how* they operate. And for the same reason, one cannot provide theoretic structures describing what otherwise and misleadingly we should call their "objects": pain, force, person, and so on.

For the purposes of philosophy this, of course, will not suffice. Thus, it hardly suffices as philosophy to simply assert, as one only can on the basis of either knowledge by being or knowledge by participation taken neat, "But we *are* morally responsible for our actions and everyone knows we are!" What we can do, though, is draw on partial analogies, somewhat in the manner of Bergson when trying to conceptualize *time*, and thus partially satisfy the philosophical commitment to objective knowledge. Furthermore, we are certainly entitled to connect these partial analogies with whatever truths knowledge by being and knowledge by participation vouchsafe us. Where, in my opinion, such connections are being drawn I shall insert in brackets a KB for *knowledge by being* and a KP for *knowledge by participation*. I shall not, however, attempt to justify these insertions. To do so would be the topic of another and much longer paper.

As correcting the analogy that knowledge by observation forces upon us, that the person or self is a whole which reduces to the sum of its parts, it will be essential to propose the counter-analogy that the person or self is a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts: greater in this way—not merely as something not reducible to its parts, but ontologically greater. In the tradition of the classical philosophers that is to say, *superior in substantial enduringness* and *superior in dependence relations*. It is the last property that will especially concern us.

What superiority in dependence relations comes to with respect to the self and its parts is that, the function of the latter being to serve the former, the actions of the parts conform to the actions of the self without causal interaction, just as the surface of the hand conforms to the movement of the hand without causal interaction. This seamless conformity obtains, of course, only where that natural harmony obtains which constitutes the person's being a whole that is ontologically greater than the parts which it includes. Thus, normally, when I walk down the street I am not causing the motions of my legs and their muscles, although they conform seamlessly with my walking, nor are the motions or muscles of my legs causing me to walk down the street, although, obviously, if I possessed no legs or muscles I would not be walking down the street. On the other hand, where for one reason or another I am not, with respect to my parts, an ontologically greater whole, efficient causality obtains logical space and can take place in either direction between my self and its parts. If my leg is paralyzed, for example, I may try with great exertion to effect a motion in it. Again, a tumor in my brain may cause me to jump up and down to my own intense astonishment. These exceptions, however, cannot be taken to be the rule. To posit the normal actions of the self and its parts as causes and effects is finally to relegate that very posit to the limbo of a blind effect and thus, as we noted before, render it void of any title to our assent.

When parts of the self or person become causally related to the self or person they fall outside the latter's wholeness and become a part of the external environment. It does not follow, however, that the external environment in general is causally related to the self or person. The spatially external environment in fact is a cause upon the self or person only in those unusual cases where it completely preempts the actions of the self. A breeze blowing in my face does not, as an efficient cause, cause me to stop walking, though it may influence my decision to stop walking. A tornado does, though, cause me to fly up into the air and whirl around. Decision here plays no role. It is also true that the external environment is constantly causing effects in my parts; for example, excitations in my retina, physiological variations of one sort or another, and so on. But while the productions of effects upon my parts by the external environment is normal, that does not mean that effects are thereby being caused upon my self or person. On the contrary, since no efficient causality obtains between the parts of a person and the person as an intact whole, the external environment normally has no causal effect upon my person and my actions. But if neither the environment nor my parts are normally causes upon my self as an intact whole it follows that the actions that I engage in are not things that issue from a self or person that I am because of what I was born with the way of parts or the environment in which I was born. I am not required, therefore, to assent to that deadly chant, "There but for the grace of God (and a favorable environment) go I." All that I am entitled to say that

I had no control over was the fact that I was born and that my parts were such and such and my environment was such and such. With respect to the person I am these data may be considered conditions or even influences but not efficient causes, except in those necessarily abnormal cases where they entirely preempt the actions and wholeness of the self. And certainly in our KB and KP understanding of things, these exceptions are acknowledged and morally taken into account.

So far, one might say, so good. But does not our analysis leave the self, *qua* an ontologically greater whole, a perfect blank (as it were) and how in terms of that perfect blank are we to charter a course between the Scylla of determinism and the Charybdis of indeterminism that yet allows for the sort of predictability that we in fact discover in both our own actions and the actions of others? Without departing from our analogy of the self's being a whole that is ontologically greater than its parts let us see how far we can proceed in surmounting this second Socratean wave.

Now for one thing a person is born with mental and physical capacities which have limits. He is born in a particular cultural and physical environment that also prescribes limits and impossibilities. Thus, typically we know to begin with many things that a person will not do because he cannot do them. In his own case, for instance, a child discovers that he cannot fly like Peter Pan after trying to. Having discovered this he will not, unless he goes stark mad, attempt to fly like Peter Pan. Here is one toe-hold upon predictability that both he and we now possess. These toe-holds based on intrinsic limits and impossibilities are legion.

Another sort that are legion are the habits and routines persons as such engaged in. These, except where in exceptional instances they entirely preempt the actions of the self, are not causes of what we do. Rather, it is more accurate, although not completely accurate, to say that we typically go along with our habits and routines. Indeed, it would be impossible for us not to. We should be paralyzed in our actions if we did not. Thus, our knowledge of our own and other persons' habits and routines provide a basis for predictability.

We also typically discover that doing certain things ends up in pains or pleasures for ourselves. Predictably we will avoid the one and seek the other. We possess this or that character—which is like a habit of doing certain things; we possess desires, ambitions, phobias, and so on: all of which provide bases both for ourselves and others for predicting what we will or will not do. At the same time, except in exceptional cases, none of these things are efficient causes with respect to our actions (KB and KP, and as above). A desire may nag us, for example. But even if it is given into—as the very expression “given into” indicates, that outcome is not the effect of a cause, nor the effect of anything, but the following out of a decision.

All that I have so far said is common knowledge that at least leaves unimpaired the claim that the relationship between the person taken as an ontologically greater-than-its-parts whole and those parts is not one of efficient causality and yet is one that allows predictability. Moreover, the sort of predictability allowed is clearly not that which pertains to efficient causality. For in each of the above cases the person can be completely unpredictable. He can and sometimes does do what he knows will bring pain to him; he can and sometimes does act counter to his character, desires, and ambitions, and so on. He may even try to do what he knows that he cannot do, nor in these cases can we always ascribe efficient causality or some other non-decisional basis. Thus, duty can lead (not cause) a person to try to do what he knows he cannot do: he has promised to be a certain place at a certain time; he knows he cannot be there at that time; nonetheless, he tries. He feels it is his duty to try and decides to. In spite of all these things being known, however, we want, as philosophers, an answer to the question, "If the self is the blank it is portrayed to be in our analogy of the whole and its parts, how can even this weak predictability of a person's actions be accounted for?" In other words, what theoretic structure can be advanced to explain it?

Let us, in the way of another partial analogy, relate the panoply of a person's desires, ambitions, character, conceived duties, habits, perceptions, and so on to the person as we might to the map a car-driver is using to the driver. On the map of the car-driver are marked routes, towns, distances, and so on. The driver is not caused by the markings on the map to take this road at a fork rather than that. Rather, using the map as a guide, he predictably chooses, his destination being so-and-so and the map distances such-and-such, to take this road at a fork rather than that. On the person-driver's map are marked in the person's desires, ambitions, and the rest of his parts making up the aforementioned panoply. Might we not, in partial explanation, they say that the person-driver chooses to pursue his desire rather than that, his ambition being so-and-so, with the case of the roads at a fork?

But are we not in this model of ours cheating conceptually in the following way. The person as a whole is our driver. The map he is using consists, content-wise, of such things as his desires, perceptions, ambitions, decisions, and so on. Using these as a guide our person-driver decides so-and-so or such-and-such, exactly like our car-driver. But as our car-driver possesses motives, desires, perceptions, and so on must not our person-driver, as he views *his* map, possess motives, desires, perceptions, and so on? But if he must, then our model's map is irrelevant and immaterial or else it involves us in a vicious infinite regress. Another person-driver and his map of parts will have to be constructed representing the desires, perceptions, and so on of the person-driver and for its person-driver a new map, and so on *ad infinitum*.

I shall grant so much: as long as we retain the perspective of observational knowledge, the criticism just leveled cannot be refuted. We said originally, however, that our car-driver model was only a partial analogy. And clearly it is no more than that. The car-driver and his map are, for one thing, spatially separate entities. A person as a whole and his parts are not spatially separate entities. And in many other ways the present model is clearly inadequate as a representation of ourself as a person or whole and our constituent parts. But this was true of even our analogy of a whole and its parts. According to our initial claims, all theoretic structures have to be inadequate and they have to be because they attempt to objectify what is not a mere object—the person.

But for that very reason we may justifiably refuse to fill the head, as it were, of our person-driver with a new set of desires, motives, perceptions, and so on, corresponding to what we fill the head of the car-driver with. We shall insist that the map being used by our person-driver contains as its features his very desires, motives, perceptions, feelings, and so on. Consequently, we shall not accede to the request to provide a new set of these desires, feelings, and so on. Nor does refusing this request leave our person-driver without desires, feelings, perceptions, and so on, and hence a perfect blank deciding on no grounds at all or purely at random, as in the case of indeterminism. There they are, there on the map. Thus, according to our present analogy, the person as a whole is both a blank (as it were) and not a blank.

This paradox or contradiction justly projects the inability of any object or objects to stand proxy for a subject or person. Nonetheless, our car-driver model does, I think, preserve the relationship obtaining between a person and his parts insofar as that relationship is neither deterministic nor indeterministic and yet provides the sort of predictability that pertains to human beings. And that was all that it was intended to do.

A final question, however, might be raised at this point, which needs answering. We have described human predictability as including unpredictability. A person may do the unpredictable. If he is free, though, to do the unpredictable what is to prevent him from doing at all times the unpredictable? Thus does not freedom, like indeterminism, leave human action simply unpredictable?

If a person were able in all things and at all times to be unpredictable in his actions, human freedom would no doubt have the unpalatable consequence described. Such unpredictability, however, would have to rest upon decisions to do what was not predictable. Otherwise, habit, character, and so on would ensure predictability. But deciding to do the unpredictable, when essayed, soon, like a great pain, proves unbearable and hence impossible.

Nonetheless, even should everything I have so far said be agreed to, certain misapplications of the term "cause" can still drive us back

into the hideous embrace of determinism or indeterminism and hence amorality. It is easy, in a philosophically careless reverie, to say, for instance, "I am the cause of my actions." If taken to mean anything more than that I am responsible for my actions—if taken at face value to mean that I am literally the cause of my actions and they an effect, this statement, in spite of its innocuous appearance, ineluctably commits one to determinism. For in construing myself as a causal agent with respect to my actions I construe myself as a causal agent with respect to my parts and that is to place myself formally on the same plane of power. Thus, if I can affect them causally they can affect me, as a person, causally. The next move is to say, of course, that they do and hence that I as a person am no more than a transmission link in causes and effects. I shall then want to intone that deadly chant, "There but for the grace of God (and a favorable environment) go I."

The most insidious misapplication of the term "cause," however, has its source, I would contend, in our ordinary speech and it is this source, I believe, that leads Hospers, quite against his will and good sense, to adopt determinism and hence the notion of absolute moral equality. I say, "against his will," because though Hospers wants to maintain that, as the only alternative to indeterminism, what we are and what we do must be held to have causes, he strives mightily to sustain the claim that we must distinguish between two kinds of causes: those that compel and those that do not. Thus, he says, concerning his decision to take a holiday in June instead of August: "Doubtless my decision was caused (would anyone wish to deny it?), else my long process of reflection would be pointless. But was it compelled?" And to the last question he delivers an emphatic "no." (p. 504; see also p. 505) Yet, in spite of this emphatic "no" he finally, as we have seen, abandons ship a few pages later (p. 521) and speaks of our conduct emanating from causes beyond our control, our will itself being "fashioned" by external circumstances. What has happened to lead Hospers first to ascribe causes to all of human conduct and next, after having tried to limit these causes to "non-compelling" ones finally to treat them as "compelling" ones?

In ordinary speech, when asked why we did something or why we made such-and-such a decision we typically say things like, "I decided such- and-such because when I considered so-and-so I realized that I should" or "The thought of his punishment made me change my mind" or "The look on his face caused me to drop the project." Since to be unable to present the above "because," "made mes," and "caused mes" is to convict one of acting or deciding out of mere senseless whim or randomness it is tempting, when addressing the same sort of query to oneself, as one is especially likely to do as a philosopher investigating one's self and one's actions, to give the same sort of answer; that is to say, a causal one. Thus, as a first step in one's "psychiatric-like" investigation, one wants to say that all one's actions and decisions are caused (thus Hospers'

“Doubtless my decision was caused would anyone wish to deny it?”). Nothing could seem plainer. Yet, as I shall now show, nothing could be more mistaken.

Hospers is quite correct in maintaining that there are two kinds of causes, compelling ones and non-compelling ones. In its primary sense, the term “cause” is used to designate grounds of explanation for the occurrence of changes and other happenings where these grounds are impartially accessible to intersubjective detection and apprehension (through a combination of knowledge by observation and knowledge by participation). Let us therefore call such grounds of explanation “public grounds.” Paradigmatically, public grounds are efficient causes or what Hospers describes as “compelling” causes.

Derivatively, the term “cause” (and its cognates) is also used to designate grounds of explanation for a person’s conduct and actions, where such grounds are accessible in the last resort only to the person whose conduct or actions are being explained; and to him, through a knowledge by being (as being in pain I know that I am in pain), they are immediately known. Let us therefore call such grounds of explanation “private grounds.” These private grounds are Hospers’ “non-compelling causes.” They consist of the sorts of items that we entered in upon the person-driver’s psychological map: pains, pleasures, perceptions, feelings, motives, conceived duties, and so on.

The matter is actually more complicated than I am depicting it. Any private ground, for instance, can become a public ground. It does so when it becomes a compelling cause. For our purposes, however, the distinction without its complications suffices. The point of it is that the citation of private grounds to oneself has no first person present tense role to play. I cannot inform myself of what I already know. The first person present tense citation of non-compelling causes is, therefore, logically restricted to the consumption of others. When I cite private “because,” “causes,” “made mes” to other persons I inform them of something they did not already know and in the last analysis could not know, namely, the private grounds of my decisions and those decisions themselves.

Since I cannot meaningfully cite to myself non-compelling causes in my own case, I draw a meaning-blank (as it were) when, as a philosopher, I attempt to. It only seems that I can and even must because, in the present philosophical enterprise, I am treating myself as simply another observational object (which, of course, I am not) or a person external to myself (which I am not).

As nature is said to abhor a vacuum, so, it would seem, does meaning. Since the word “cause” as meaning a non-compelling cause cannot meaningfully be applied to the items of my psychological map for my own consumption (and that in effect is what I am trying to do in the present philosophical enterprise) but “cause” as meaning a public ground or compelling cause can meaningfully be applied in

the present context (as I can meaningfully think to myself, "Can it be that a brain-tumor is causing these dizzy spells of mine?"), "compelling-cause" rushes in to fill the meaning-gap left by Hospers' self-application of "non-compelling cause." Thus, illusion begetting illusion, enter determinism and in its train, among other moral monstrosities, that most hideous of them all, "absolute moral equality."

In order to preserve both good sense and moral responsibility we need, first of all, to refuse to look inwardly upon ourselves as if carrying out some sort of empirical, psychiatric investigation into the parts comprising ourself. We are given grounds for this refusal by the realization that, closer to the truth, the person is a whole which is ontologically greater than the sum of its parts.

If, though, we succumb to the beckoning of philosophic temptation to provide theoretic explanations and hence objectify the self, as we do in speaking of it as an ontologically greater-than-its-parts whole, we must resolutely refuse to speak self-referringly of causes in the context of private grounds. If we do, the distinction between compelling and non-compelling causes, however, justified, will avail us nothing, just as it availed John Hospers nothing.