INTERPERSONAL MORAL CONFLICTS

By: Terrance McConnell

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Article:

Part I

A moral dilemma is often characterized as a situation in which an agent ought to do each of two acts, but he cannot do both. This characterization is too narrow, however, because it erroneously suggests that dilemmas are limited to situations in which only one agent is involved.[1] It is just as plausible, though, to suppose that there might be multi-person moral dilemmas, of which the two-person case may be taken as typical. In such a situation, one agent, P_1, ought to do a certain act, say *A*, a second agent, P_2, ought to do a different act, say *B*, and though each agent can do what he ought to do, it is not possible both for P_1 to do *A* and for P_2 to do *B*. The following is an example of such a dilemma (taken from Sophocles' *Antigone*): Antigone's familial and religious obligation to arrange for the burial of her brother, Polyneices, conflicts with Creon's obligations to keep his word, to preserve the peace, and thus to prevent the burial. In my discussion of multi-person moral dilemmas I shall focus on the two-person case and I shall call such situations "interpersonal moral conflicts." To the best of my knowledge, Ruth B. Marcus is the first to distinguish explicitly between single-agent and multi-person dilemmas.[2] What I shall argue here is that the importance of this distinction has been overlooked. Indeed, I shall claim that the problems that single-agent dilemmas generate for moral theories are different from and more serious than the difficulties created by interpersonal conflicts.

While interpersonal moral conflicts may seem to be common enough, I mean to restrict this phrase to designate only certain cases. I shall say that a situation is a *genuine* interpersonal moral conflict only if the conflicting moral requirements of the two (or more) agents are generated by the *same* moral system (or theory). Thus, though each of two enemy soldiers may regard himself as obligated to kill (or to capture) the other, this will not be a genuine interpersonal moral conflict *unless* the same moral system gives rise to these obligations .

The existence of moral dilemmas and, by extension, of interpersonal moral conflicts has been thought to be troublesome for moral theories. Ethicists as diverse as Kant, Mill, and Ross have tried to show that their moral systems do not allow for genuine dilemmas. And, at least in part, these theorists seem to have been motivated by the belief that a theory which does allow for dilemmas is inconsistent. This fear, however, is unfounded, as Marcus has shown. Mirroring the classical definition of consistency for a set of sentences or propositions, Marcus suggests that we "define a set of rules as consistent if there is some possible world in which they are all obeyable in all circumstances in *that* world." Thus, "rules are consistent if there are possible circumstances in which no conflict will emerge," and "a set of rules is inconsistent if there are *no* circumstances, no possible world, in which all the rules are satisfiable."[3] So even if circumstances are such that my promise to meet with a student conflicts with my duty to help an accident victim, the theory generating these requirements need not be inconsistent.

Dilemma-generating theories, then, need not be inconsistent, though they may conflict with fundamental principles of deontic logic.[4] But even if such theories are consistent, I suspect that many would nevertheless be

disturbed if their own theories allowed for such predicaments. If I am correct in this speculation, it suggests that Kant, Mill, Ross, and others thought that there is an important theoretical feature that dilemma-producing theories lack (a feature which they may have incorrectly identified as consistency). And there seems to be something to this. It is no comfort to an agent facing a moral dilemma to be told that the rules which generate this predicament are consistent. Consider, for example, the situation of a criminal defense attorney. This individual is said to have an obligation to hold in confidence the disclosures made by a client and to be required to conduct herself with candor before the court (where the latter demands that the attorney inform the court when her client commits perjury).[5] It is clear that in this world these two obligations often conflict. It is equally clear that in some possible world (for example, one in which clients do not commit perjury) both obligations can be satisfied. Knowing this is of no assistance to defense attorneys who face a conflict between these two obligations in this world.

This suggests that ethicists who are concerned that their theories not allow for moral dilemmas have more than consistency in mind.[6] What is bothersome is that theories that are dilemma-producing fail to be uniquely action-guiding. A theory can fail to be *uniquely action-guiding* either by not recommending any action (in a situation that is a moral one) or by recommending incompatible actions. Theories which are dilemma-producing fail to be uniquely action-guiding in the latter way. Let us say that a theory, if there are any, that does *not* allow for moral dilemmas possesses the characteristic of *harmony*. Since there are two kinds of moral dilemmas, there are two types of harmony. I shall say that a moral theory that does not allow for single-agent moral dilemmas possesses *internal harmony*; one which eliminates interpersonal moral conflicts has *social harmony*. By contrast, theories that allow for single-person dilemmas do not resolve all *internal* conflicts; and systems which generate multi-person dilemmas do not resolve all *interpersonal* conflicts.[7]

Having made these distinctions, we can now say that the questions to be addressed are these. Can any moral system possess internal harmony? And if so, is this really a strength of a system? Can any moral system possess social harmony? And if so, is this really a strength of a system? Those arguing *against* the reality of dilemmas must show that some moral systems can possess internal (social) harmony *and* that possessing such a feature is a desirable theoretical attribute. Those arguing *for* the reality of dilemmas must claim either that no moral system can possess internal (social) harmony *or* that possessing such a feature is not a strength of a theory. Here I shall restrict myself to questions pertaining to interpersonal moral conflicts.

Before concluding this section, two points about the nature of the issue should be made. The main question to be addressed here is this: Must an adequate moral theory allow for or must it eliminate the possibility of moral dilemmas (interpersonal moral conflicts)? In effect, both sides to this dispute put forward a condition of adequacy for moral theories. Since the dispute is about conditions of adequacy for moral theories and since the discussion is often placed in the context of deontic logic, some believe that the question at issue is metaethical. I believe that this is incorrect. Metaethics is usually characterized as being concerned with the analysis of ethical terms, their meanings, and their logical functions; often it is said that a mark of metaethical principles is that they are normatively neutral.[8] The debate about whether an adequate moral theory may allow for dilemmas is *not* metaethical in *this* sense. If those *against* moral dilemmas are correct, then two ought-statements which cannot be jointly satisfied cannot both be true; if those *supporting* the reality of moral dilemmas are correct, two such ought-statements can both be true. The two parties to this dispute, then, disagree about whether certain ought-statements—namely, jointly unsatisfiable ought-statements—can be true in an adequate moral system. I claim that such a dispute is normative. It is not, however, the familiar dispute between consequentialists and deontologists; instead, it is at a higher level of generality. Advocates of conflicting deontological theories might agree that an adequate moral theory must accommodate the reality of dilemmas. And some consequentialists and some deontologists may agree that a correct moral theory must eliminate dilemmas. Nevertheless, the dispute is normative, at least insofar as what is at issue is whether certain ought-statements can be true in an adequate moral system.

The second point concerns how the debate should proceed. Some who argue against single-agent dilemmas say that moral dilemmas are not possible. Some who argue for the reality of single-agent dilemmas try to show that

such quandaries are possible, that they are a part of our normal lives, are abundant in literature, and the like. Both approaches are somewhat misguided. Since ought-statements are generated by moral theories, it seems clear that some theories do allow for dilemmas and that some do not. The crucial issue is whether excluding dilemmas is a condition of adequacy for moral theories. When the debate is understood to take place at this level, we can see that the two sides look at the "data" differently. Those supporting the reality of dilemmas regard dilemma-eliminating theories as unrealistic and out of touch with common sense; for them, *allowing for* dilemmas is a condition of adequacy for moral theories. Those in the opposite camp regard dilemma-producing theories as defective in some way, falling short of a theoretical ideal, and so in need of repair (at best). Parties to both sides of this dispute, then, can grant that there are some theories which generate dilemmas and others which do not. The source of their disagreement is about what features make a moral theory a good one.

Part II

Some may think that there are no significant differences between single-agent dilemmas and interpersonal moral conflicts. I shall argue, however, that there are important differences between them. First, it is well-known that if there are single-agent dilemmas, then some of certain widely held principles will have to be given up. For example, it has been shown that the existence of such dilemmas compels us to deny either (i) the principle that "ought" implies "can" or (ii) the principle of deontic distribution, namely: $(OA \,\&\, OB) \rightarrow O(A \,\&\, B)$ for every A and every B.[9] These principles are normally understood to apply to individual agents; that is, (i) is understood to mean that if *an agent* ought to do something then it must be within his power to do it, and (ii) is taken to mean that if *an agent* ought to do each of two acts then he ought to do both. Thus, the existence of interpersonal conflicts does not directly challenge these principles in the way that single-person dilemmas do.

Of course, some will argue that analogues to (i) and (ii) can be developed that apply to multi-agent cases, and thus the same problem will re-emerge. It is doubtful, however, that the appropriate analogues can be constructed; the multi-person analogues of (i) and (ii) do not make sense. This is because the ought-to-do operator of deontic logic is best understood to apply to entities about which decisions can be made; and while an individual act involving one agent can be the object of choice, a compound act involving multiple agents is such that it cannot be chosen by a single agent. [10]

There is another reason for saying that there are important differences between single-agent dilemmas and interpersonal conflicts. It can be shown that two moral theories which are often praised for eliminating single-agent dilemmas generate interpersonal conflicts. These two theories are universal ethical egoism and act utilitarianism. Showing this will demonstrate what already may be clear in the abstract, namely, that the features of internal and social harmony are logically distinct.

Consider first universal ethical egoism (UEE). According to UEE, each person ought to do what will most advance his own self-interest. Thus, if I am a UEE I will judge that I ought to maximize my self-interest, you ought to maximize your self-interest, and so too for every other agent. That UEE leads to interpersonal moral conflicts is what I take to be the upshot of Kurt Bakes well-known criticism of this theory.[11] Suppose that it will most advance P_1's interests if he gains sole possession of a certain piece of land. Suppose too that it will most advance P_2's interests if she gains sole possession of that same piece of land. If this is the case, then UEE implies that P_1 ought to gain sole possession of the land and that P_2 ought to gain sole possession of the land. But since this is impossible, UEE has generated an interpersonal moral conflict.[12] And because conflicts of interest are so numerous, UEE will be plagued with interpersonal conflicts in abundance. On reflection, this is not surprising. What is curious, though, is that UEE is often praised for eliminating single-agent moral dilemmas. Yet surely it is just as important for a moral theory to assist several agents in coordinating their behavior as it is to provide a single agent with uniquely action-guiding recommendations. A theory that is concerned with internal harmony but not social harmony "cannot be designed to coordinate the activities of those whose activities it is designed to direct."[13]

Let us turn now to act utilitarianism (AU). According to AU, an act is right just in case it produces consequences at least as good (for all affected parties) as the consequences of any alternative act open to the

agent. AU is often praised for eliminating dilemmas.[14] But I shall argue that AU does not rule out interpersonal conflicts. The direct way to demonstrate this is to show that there are situations in which P_1's doing *A* will produce better consequences than any alternative open to him, P_2's doing *B* will produce better consequences than any alternative open to him, and it is not possible both for P_1 to do *A* and for P_2 to do *B*.

Before demonstrating this, however, a further refinement of AU is needed. Recently there has been much discussion of whether AU is more plausibly interpreted in terms of actual consequences or foreseeable consequences. According to the foreseeable consequence account of AU, an act is right just in case its expected desirability is at least as good as the expected desirability of any alternative act, and the expected desirability of an act is the product of the desirability of its foreseeable consequences and its probability.[15] In explaining actual consequence AU, one must be careful. Since only actions that are actually performed have actual consequences and since AU determines the rightness of actions by making *comparative* judgments, there is an interpretation of actual consequence AU which renders it incoherent. This construal requires one to compare the actual consequences of alternative acts. Marcus Singer so interprets actual consequence utilitarianism, and argues that it is incoherent because it "requires you to know the actual consequences of acts never performed, to compare with the actual consequences of the one performed."[16] But there is a more charitable interpretation of actual consequence AU according to which an act is right just in case its consequences which actually obtain or would have actually obtained are at least as good as the consequences of any alternative, which consequences obtain or would have actually obtained. [17] I cannot resolve this dispute between those interpretations of AU here. I shall proceed on the assumption that the foreseeable consequence account if more defensible, but I must rely on the arguments of others to support this claim.[18]

Now let us consider a slightly frivolous case to show that foreseeable consequence AU allows for interpersonal moral conflicts. (More serious examples can be generated.) Suppose that Sally has promised to buy her daughter a Cabbage Patch doll for her birthday. Frank has made a similar promise to his daughter. We can imagine circumstances in which foreseeable consequence AU will yield the judgment that Sally ought to buy her daughter a Cabbage Patch doll and that Frank ought to buy his daughter one too. Each parent has created certain expectations, each can satisfy those expectations without violating another of his or her obligations (we may suppose), and so it is easy to envision that each ought, on AU grounds, to buy the daughter a Cabbage Patch doll. But now suppose that the only store in town that carries these dolls has but one left (and each daughter's birthday is tomorrow). We may suppose too that neither Sally nor Frank knows of the other's situation. Given this, if Sally is a proponent of foreseeable consequence AU, she will rightly conclude that she ought to buy the doll for her daughter; and if Frank advocates the same theory, he will correctly conclude that he ought to buy the doll for his daughter. But it is not possible for both to fulfill the promise.

Several objections might be raised regarding this example. First, some might protest that one ought not to promise more than one can deliver. But even so, it is within the power of *each* to buy the doll; and in any case, AU must tell an agent what he ought to do *given* the situation as it is. Second, some will object that once Sally buys the doll for her daughter, Frank is no longer required to buy it for his daughter. This assumes that ought-statements can change their truth-value over time; and though I agree with that, I am doubtful that it will help in this case. Even if one accepts this, there is still a time—namely, before either has bought the doll—when AU has an interpersonal conflict on its hands. And third, some may claim that what AU says is that either Sally ought to buy the doll for her daughter or Frank ought to buy the doll for his daughter, but who actually does so does not matter. Foreseeable consequence AU does not say this, however. By hypothesis, of the options open to Sally , buying the doll for her daughter foreseeably produces the best consequences; and Frank's best option, foreseeably, is to buy the doll for his daughter. It is because this conflict is not reasonably foreseeable that foreseeable consequence AU provides no resolution to it.[19] It seems, then, that a plausible version of AU generates interpersonal conflicts.

I shall conclude this section with two brief remarks. First, it is curious that two theories that are often praised for eliminating single-agent dilemmas can give rise to interpersonal moral conflicts. It is particularly noteworthy that the system of an act utilitarian who argues at length that one of the advantages of AU is that it excludes

single-agent dilemmas openly allows for interpersonal conflicts.[20] This is odd because the natural rationale for regarding the elimination of single-agent dilemmas as a theoretical virtue also suggests that the elimination of interpersonal conflicts is desirable. A theory which eliminates dilemmas is uniquely action-guiding and provides the agent with harmonious ends to promote. Analogous things might be said about a theory that eliminates interpersonal moral conflicts. As Kurt Baier puts it, "It is plain that a theory which does not aim at satisfying this requirement [to eliminate interpersonal moral conflicts] cannot be designed to *coordinate* the activities of those whose activities it is designed to direct. For to direct people so as to frustrate one another cannot be to coordinate their conduct."[21]

My second remark is to emphasize that it is not only consequentialist theories which can generate interpersonal moral conflicts; a simple rule-oriented theory can do so too. It seems easy to imagine that Antigone and Creon were operating from the same moral system, a system that put each at odds with the other.[22] Indeed, once one sees that consequentialist theories are burdened with interpersonal conflicts, one is tempted to conclude that *no* moral theory can avoid such quandaries.

Part III

Some will argue that an adequate moral theory must eliminate interpersonal moral conflicts. In order to defend such a claim, proponents will have to do at least two things. First, they will have to show that eliminating interpersonal moral conflicts is possible. And second, they will have to show that eliminating interpersonal moral conflicts is desirable.

Completing the second of these tasks seems easier. If all other things were equal and one had to choose between a theory which possessed social harmony and one which lacked it, surely one would choose the former. A theory which eliminates interpersonal conflicts coordinates the behavior of those bound by its requirements, and eliminates a source of moral frustration.

It is the completion of the first task that many doubt can be accomplished. But if in the statement of this task "possible" means "is logically possible," then it too can be completed. Clearly, no theory will generate interpersonal conflicts in a world that contains only one agent. Or if there were few enough agents distributed over a large enough territory so that interaction among agents never occurred, again no theory would generate interpersonal conflicts. Finally, even if interaction among agents occurred, a theory which posited only modest requirements might be able to avert interpersonal conflicts. Suppose, for example, that the only requirements posited were that each agent remain silent and celibate. In *this* world, however, there are many agents and they do interact frequently. Moreover, it seems that there is a multitude of moral requirements, many of which involve interaction with others. This leads us, then, to the principal argument of those who deny that an adequate moral theory must eliminate interpersonal conflicts.

This argument is an extension of one given to support the reality of single-agent moral dilemmas. The major claim is that any theory which is rich enough to capture most of the requirements that we think people have and that is applied to a world remotely similar to our own will generate interpersonal moral conflicts. One could give examples, but no particular example is essential. Given the multitude of agents, the frequency of their interaction, and the richness of our moral requirements, contingencies are bound to arise which produce interpersonal moral conflicts. This does *not* say that the production of social harmony is impossible, but rather that it can be purchased only at a price of simplicity so extreme as to be implausible. This appeal to common sense seems credible enough to grant that the burden of proof has been shifted to those who maintain that an adequate moral theory must exclude interpersonal conflicts. I shall, then, consider replies that might be made to this argument. (I shall call those who oppose this argument""no dilemmas" theorists".") One approach that "no dilemmas" theorists might take is to argue that in cases of interpersonal conflicts one of the conflicting requirements takes precedence over the other. Several ways might be taken to effect this. One possibility, favored by John Rawls, is to arrange moral precepts of a system in lexical order.[23] Another possibility is to argue that there are certain features of a moral system which are structurally necessary and which entail that some requirements may not be discharged at the expense of others. Alan Donagan argues that such a structural

feature is present in rationalist moral systems and claims that this feature ensures the elimination of (single-agent) dilemmas.[24] Donagan appeals to Kant's distinction between perfect and imperfect duties and the relationship that obtains between such duties to illustrate this point.

Though these moves may differ in several ways, either might be employed to try to show that some theories have the resources to resolve interpersonal conflicts (though to the best of my knowledge Donagan makes no such claim and Rawls limits his contention to principles of justice). Even if one is impressed with these as ways of resolving single-agent dilemmas, however, it is doubtful that either can be successful in eliminating interpersonal moral conflicts. First, many interpersonal conflicts are such that neither agent can know of the conflict until after one has already acted. The case of the two parents, each of whom promised his or her child to buy a certain doll, illustrates this. It is of no use to learn after acting, that the moral requirement of one agent overrides the requirement of another agent. And second, it may be exactly the *same moral precept* which gives rise to the conflicting requirements, as the case of the parents' promises illustrates. Of course, in the case of single-agent dilemmas in which each requirement is generated by the same precept, some have argued that the agent is required to do one or the other but that the choice between them is not a moral one.[25] However, extending this point to the multi-person case does not seem plausible. Even when two agents, P_1 and P_2, are required to do acts of the same type and it is not possible for both to do the required act, it seems false to deny that the choice of who is to fulfill his requirement is a moral one; certainly P_1 and P_2 will regard it as a moral choice. And if a third party were empowered to determine which agent fulfilled his requirement, it seems implausible to say that the decision of this individual is not a moral one.

A second approach that "no dilemmas" theorists might take is to argue that interpersonal conflicts arise (even for the correct moral theory) only because at least one of the agents has failed morally in some way. For example, one agent may have promised something which he knew (or should have known) that he could not deliver. In effect, this is to appeal to a distinction drawn by St. Thomas Aquinas and to extend it to the case of interpersonal conflicts. The distinction is between perplexity *simpliciter* and perplexity *secundum quid*. Alan Donagan explains this distinction as follows.

> A moral system allows perplexity (or conflict of duties) *simpliciter* if and only if situations to which it applies are possible, in which somebody would find himself able to obey one of its precepts only if he violated another, even though he had up to then obeyed all of them . . . By contrast, a system allows perplexity (or conflict of duties) *secundum quid* if and only if situations to which it applies are possible in which, as a result of violating one or more of its precepts, somebody would find that there is a precept he can obey only if he violates another.[26]

The idea is that an adequate moral system cannot allow for perplexity *simpliciter*, but "there is nothing logically wrong (*inconveniens*) with a moral system according to which a person in mortal sin can find himself perplexed."[27] Thus, those who argue that eliminating single-agent dilemmas is a condition of adequacy for moral theories can grant that self-imposed dilemmas will arise. But they will continue to insist that dilemmas not the result of previous wrongdoing cannot arise in an adequate moral system. One could extend this point and argue that an adequate moral theory may only allow for interpersonal conflicts that result because of previous wrongdoing of one of the agents.

There are, however, at least two problems with this approach. First, it does not seem credible to say that *every* interpersonal moral conflict arises because of previous wrongdoing. Many, no doubt, can be so explained, but not all. Given the multiplicity of agents and moral requirements and given the frequency of interaction, it seems likely that conflicts will arise independent of previous wrongdoing. Examples given previously in this paper need not have arisen because of prior wrongdoing.

The second problem requires more explanation. One who appeals to the distinction between perplexity *simpliciter* and perplexity *secundum quid* assumes that the generation of dilemmas is a defect of the theory that produces them. But he suggests that if the conflicts are due to the fact that an agent has violated the theory, then

the existence of such conflicts is not evidence that the theory itself is defective; only conflicts not traceable to previous wrongdoing provide such evidence. The difficulty is that the rationale for thinking that a theory ought to eliminate dilemmas not dependent on previous violations also suggests that it ought to eliminate those that are dependent on such violations. Dilemma-producing theories are said to be defective, in part, because they are not uniquely action-guiding. They give an agent conflicting directives. But dilemma-producing theories are defective in this way whether or not the conflict is the result of previous wrongdoing. We expect a theory to tell us how to resolve conflicts, regardless of the origin of those conflicts. This is one of the lessons that can be gleaned from Chisholm's discussion of contrary-to-duty imperatives.[28] If critics of dilemma-generating theories admit that such views are not inconsistent simply because they produce dilemmas, then they must locate the defect of such theories elsewhere. The most natural candidate is the failure of such theories to be uniquely action-guiding. But this defect is present regardless of the origin of the conflict; so the critics may wish to think twice before endorsing the reality of irresolvable dilemmas brought about by past wrongdoing.

A third approach, related to the first, should be considered briefly. Some will argue that if a moral theory initially instructs one agent to do *A*, a second agent to do *B*, and it is not possible both for the first to do *A* and the second to do *B*, then from the point of view of the theory it is indifferent which of *A* or *B* is performed as long as one is.[29] In effect, this suggests that in a situation of conflict there is a disjunctive requirement: either P_1 ought to do *A* or P_2 ought to do *B*. Whether this approach works for handling single-agent dilemmas is an interesting question; but it does not seem adequate for resolving interpersonal moral conflicts. One difficulty is that in some cases it does not seem to be indifferent which of the two agents fulfills his moral requirement because the requirement of one agent can be far more important than that of the other.

Even if the conflicting moral requirements are roughly equal in strength, however, there is a second problem for this approach. The agent facing the interpersonal conflict who fails to discharge his requirement can hardly be satisfied simply because the other agent to the conflict has discharged his. Rather, the agent is likely to feel a sense of moral failure, and this feeling does not seem to be inappropriate.[30] The case of the conflicting promises made by the two parents indicates this. Of course, the mere fact that the agent who does not discharge his duty experiences what seems to be an appropriate sense of moral failure does not prove that the other's action did not relieve him of his requirement. But those who wish to argue that the actions of the other do release the agent from his requirement must explain why these feelings of moral failure seem so common and appropriate. The point here goes beyond a simple appeal to moral sentiments. Even if two agents knew in advance that they were entangled in an interpersonal moral conflict, it would not help; unless their sole concern were with the value of the states of affairs produced, neither could agree to sacrifice his own integrity just so the other might preserve his.[31]

It is also worth noting that one who accepts this third approach as it is applied to single-agent dilemmas can reject it as a way of resolving interpersonal conflicts because there is a significant difference between the two. In the single-person case the agent himself can decide on which requirement to act and so can take some credit for the fact that he himself satisfied a moral requirement. This is not the case when one is the second party involved in an interpersonal conflict and it is the other agent who has satisfied his requirement. This asymmetry is so sharp that one might reasonably expect different attitudes in the two cases.

If what I have argued is correct, there are strong considerations supporting the reality of interpersonal moral conflicts. "No dilemmas" theorists have had responses to similar arguments for the reality of single-agent dilemmas, and here I have considered how three such approaches, suitably modified, can be employed against the claim that interpersonal moral conflicts are genuine. I have argued that those approaches, when applied to interpersonal conflicts, fail. In the final section of this paper I shall examine the implications for moral theory of acknowledging the reality of interpersonal conflicts.

Part IV

The multitude of moral agents and the frequency of their interaction suggest that any theory rich enough to capture our common sense conception of moral requirements will generate interpersonal conflicts. But the

implications of acknowledging the reality of such conflicts seem less serious than the implications of holding that there are genuine single-agent dilemmas. As was noted earlier, the existence of single-agent dilemmas forces us to give up either the principle that "ought" implies "can" or the distribution principle of deontic logic; but the reality of interpersonal moral conflicts forces no such concessions. In addition, other central tenets of deontic logic threatened by the existence of single-agent dilemmas are not challenged by the presence of interpersonal conflicts.[32] And given that systems that yield moral dilemmas need not be inconsistent, we can be confident in saying the same of systems which produce interpersonal conflicts.

In spite of the arguments for the reality of interpersonal moral conflicts and in spite of the fact that they need not signal a system's inconsistency nor compel us to alter the basic tenets of deontic logic, it seems that theories which generate such quandaries are lacking in some way. It seems that social harmony is an ideal for which moral theories ought to strive. Baier's argument against UEE seems convincing in part because it calls to our attention just how prevalent interpersonal conflicts are in that system. It is as if we take the possibility of attaining social harmony as a condition of adequacy for moral theories, yet we see that interpersonal moral conflicts are inevitable in an appropriately rich theory applied to our world. The apparent tension between these two attitudes can be lessened by making (and explaining) two observations.

The first observation concerns the locution "conditions of adequacy for moral theories." This expression can mean two different things. Construed strongly, conditions of adequacy for moral theories state necessary conditions for correctness; failure to satisfy any such necessary condition shows that a theory is incorrect. Construed more weakly, conditions of adequacy call our attention to favorable characteristics, features the possession of which is an advantage for a theory. On this weaker interpretation, failure to satisfy several conditions of adequacy does not in itself warrant dismissing a theory as incorrect (or false).[33]

The second observation is that even if no plausible theory possesses social harmony, theories can be disharmonious in different degrees; that is, some theories are likely to produce far more interpersonal moral conflicts than others. Again, Baier's argument against UEE demonstrates this.

If we take the possession of social harmony to be a condition of adequacy only in the weaker sense and if we recognize that among the theories which fail to possess social harmony some are far more disharmonious than others, then we can make sense of the apparently inconsistent attitudes described above. Eliminating interpersonal conflicts is one of the important tasks that moral theories are expected to handle. While no plausible theory performs this job perfectly, some do it better than others. The less socially disharmonious a theory is, the better that theory is. But harmony is only one of many features that we look for in moral theories. For most of the characteristics which serve as conditions of adequacy, failure to possess that feature is not a sufficient reason for dismissing the theory in question.[34] So even if all appropriately rich theories are socially disharmonious, they are so to different degrees. Recognition of this enables us to say consistently that the possession of social harmony is a condition of adequacy for moral theories, while at the same time acknowledging that the best theories probably will not be socially harmonious.

What I have tried to do in this paper is to examine the importance of the distinction between single-agent and multi-person moral dilemmas. I believe that this distinction has a significance that has been overlooked by those who have contributed to the literature on moral dilemmas. I have hinted that the case for claiming that even the correct moral theory will allow for interpersonal conflicts is stronger than the case for claiming that the correct moral theory must allow for single-agent dilemmas. I have argued that there are important differences between single-agent dilemmas and interpersonal conflicts, and that admitting the reality of interpersonal conflicts causes fewer and less serious problems for moral theory than acknowledging the reality of single-agent dilemmas. Of course, this latter point may simply indicate that moral philosophers and deontic logicians have been fixated on moral principles as they apply to single agents and have ignored interpersonal problems. If that is so, perhaps some of these basic principles need to be re-thought.[35]

NOTES

1. Among those who seem to restrict moral dilemmas to single-agent cases are Terrance McConnell, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency in Ethics," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 8 (1978), pp. 269-87, Earl Conee, "Against Moral Dilemmas," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 91 (1982), pp. 87-97, and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Moral Dilemmas and Incomparability," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 22 (1985), pp. 321-29.
   Various definitions of moral dilemmas disagree about how strong the conflicting "oughts" must be. Some say that a conflict between any two ought-statements, even prima facie ones, is enough to constitute a moral dilemma. Others insist that the "oughts" be "ought, all things considered," or "overriding oughts," or "nonoverridden oughts." I avoid this dispute here.
2. Ruth Barcan Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77 (1980), p. 122. Of course, others have discussed the case from *Antigone* as an example of a dilemma; but typically the focus is on the conflicting obligations faced by Antigone, and not on the interpersonal conflict highlighted here. See, for example, Hector-Neri Castaneda, *Thinking and Doing* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 26-31.
3. See Marcus, p. 128 and p. 129. Emphasis in the original.
4. For a discussion, see E. J. Lemmon, "Deontic Logic and the Logic of Imperatives,"Logique et Analyse, vol. 8 (1965), pp. 39-71, Bernard Williams, "Ethical Consistency," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. 39 (1965), pp. 103-24, Bas C. van Fraassen, "Values and the Heart's Command," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 70 (1973), pp. 05-19, and McConnell, *op. cit*.
5. This example is taken from Monroe Freedman, *Lawyers' Ethics in an Adversary System* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), Chapter 3.
6. I do not mean to suggest that Marcus is not aware of this; she clearly is aware of it (see pp. 130-31).
7. David Wong, in *Moral Relativity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 38, suggests that morality is a social creation and that moral rules are designed to resolve both internal and interpersonal conflicts.
   Three points should be emphasized here. First, I am using the phrase "social harmony" in a technical sense; I realize that in ordinary discourse its connotation is much broader. Second, some may question whether social harmony has any practical importance. It might be pointed out that because factual disagreements in society are so prevalent, even if people subscribed to the same moral system and even if that system possessed social harmony, there would still be moral disagreements (rooted in factual disagreements). I do not deny this point; but I do contend that *unless* a system possesses social harmony, even agreement about factual matters will not bring about the desired result. And third, my talk about theories being uniquely action-guiding may erroneously suggest that I am concerned about interpersonal moral conflicts in an epistemic sense; my interest, however, is ontological.
8. The point that I make is also discussed in my "More on Moral Dilemmas," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 83 (1986), pp. 345-51. Recently the alleged normative neutrality of deontic logic has also been challenged by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Deontic Logic and the Priority of Moral Theory," *Nous*, vol. 20 (1986), pp. 179-97.
9. For a discussion of this, see the papers cited in note 4 above. Other principles of deontic logic are threatened too. For example, single-agent dilemmas force us to deny either (iii) OA → PA or to deny (iv) PA → -O-A. Of course, (iii) and (iv) are embedded in standard deontic logic; but that is just to say that standard deontic logic, whether by design or not, rules out moral dilemmas. And, with Sayre-McCord, *op. cit.*, I think that this shows that it is not normatively neutral.
10. I take this point from Holly M. Smith's "Moral Realism, Moral Conflict, and Compound Acts," The Journal of Philosophy, vol. 83 (1986), though here she is discussing the concept of rightness rather than the ought-to-do 10. I take this point from Holly M. Smith's "Moral Realism, Moral Conflict, and Compound Acts," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 83 (1986), though here she is discussing the concept of rightness rather than the ought-to-do operator. Smith argues that "it is actually built into the concept of rightness that it applies only to entities about which decisions can be made." She goes on, "Although my act of returning your lost wallet is right, and your act of thanking me is right, the compound act of my-returning-your-wallet-and-your-thanking-me cannot be right. It cannot be right because there is no

single agent who could decide to do this act. Thus rightness may be possessed only by entities that are controllable by a possible *single* choice" (p. 342).
A similar point about the ought-to-do operator is made by Richmond Thomason in "Deontic Logic and the Role of Freedom in Moral Deliberation," in Risto Hilipinen (editor), *New Studies in Deontic Logic* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 183-84. For other problems connecting the normative status of a group action with that of its components, see Fred Feldman, "The Principle of Moral Harmony," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77 (1980), especially pp. 171-74.

11. Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), pp. 189-91. Baier actually tries to show that UEE is inconsistent. As several have pointed out, however, Baier's argument for the inconsistency of UEE rests on the additional premise that no one can be required to do something which prevents someone from doing what he is required to do. Baier himself, in "Ethical Egoism and Interpersonal Compatibility," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 24 (1973), pp. 357-68, suggests a broader notion of consistency. He advances four "consistency conditions," one of which includes the "Interpersonal Compatibility Requirement" [which is that if agent P is morally required to do act *A* at time T_1, then no other agent can be morally required to prevent P from doing *A* at time T_1 (p. 364)], and he argues that UEE violates this requirement.
12. One might try to rescue the UEE by claiming that what each agent is required to do is to try to gain sole possession of the land, and each agent *can* do that regardless of how the other behaves. What is at stake here are two different conceptions of morality, what one might call a morality of trying versus a success morality. I believe that moral requirements range over *actions* and not mere attempts, but that requires argumentation not provided in this paper.
13. Baier, "Ethical Egoism and Interpersonal Compatibility," p. 364.
14. For the claim that a strength of utilitarianism is its elimination of moral dilemmas, see Rolf E. Sartorius, *Individual Conduct and Social Norms* (Encino: Dickenson Publishing, 1975), pp. 10-11.
15. See Bart Gruzalski, "Foreseeable Consequence Utilitarianism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 59 (1981), p. 164.
16. Marcus G. Singer, "Actual Consequence Utilitarianism," *Mind*, vol. 86 (1977), p. 72.
17. See Gruzalski, p. 165.
18. The best defense of the foreseeable consequence version of utilitarianism with which I am familiar is presented in Gruzalski, *op. cit*.
19. From this, some may conclude that actual consequence AU is more plausible. Two comments are appropriate here. First, I am not convinced that actual consequences AU eliminates all interpersonal moral conflicts (though I do not argue the point here). But second, even if actual consequence AU does eliminate all interpersonal moral conflicts, it is significant that this issue drives the AU to that position. Given the weakness of actual consequence AU (see Gruzalski, *op. cit.*), the proponent of AU may do better to tolerate interpersonal moral conflicts.
20. I have in mind the defense of AU developed by Rolf Sartorius in *Individual Conduct and Social Norms*.
21. Baier, "Ethical Egoism and Interpersonal Compatibility," p. 364. The requirement to which Baier alludes is the Interpersonal Compatibility Requirement, stated in note 11 above.
22. What I say here about Antigone and Creon is too simplistic. Martha C. Nussbaum, in Chapter 3 of her excellent book, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), argues that both Creon and Antigone are distorting the morality of their society; each focuses on one part of the system at the expense of another. Nussbaum suggests (see, e.g., pp. 75 and 81) that one must choose between harmony and richness, and that a sufficiently rich system will of necessity lack harmony.
23. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), sections 8, 39, and 46.
24. Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), Chapter 5 and "Consistency in Rationalist Moral Systems," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 81 (1984), pp. 291-309.

25. Donagan, "Consistency in Rationalist Moral Systems," p. 307.
26. *Ibid*., p. 306.
27. *Ibid*.
28. Roderick M. Chisholm, "Contrary-to-Duty Imperatives and Deontic Logic," *Analysis*. vol. 24 (1963), pp 33-36.
29. In handling single-agent moral dilemmas, Earl Conee takes a similar approach. See his "Against Moral Dilemmas," especially pp. 93-94.
30. For arguments that appeal to such moral emotions as remorse and guilt to lend credence to the claim that there are genuine moral dilemmas, see Williams, "Ethical Consistency," and Marcus, "Moral Dilenunas and Consistency." For criticisms of this type of argument, see McConnell, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency in Ethics," and Conee, "Against Moral Dilemmas." That I criticize such arguments in the single-agent case but endorse them in the interpersonal case suggests that I think there are significant differences between the two; and I do not think this.
31. This attitude toward discharging one's own moral requirements seems more warranted in some cases than others. For example, the attitude may be warranted in the case of perfect duties, but not imperfect duties. Note how inappropriate it would be for an agent who had planned to help another in need to be upset because someone else provided the aid first.
    For an illuminating discussion of the centrality of moral integrity and character in certain non-consequentialist theories, see Stephen L. Darwall, "Agent-Centered Restrictions from the Inside Out," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 50 (1986), pp. 291-319.
32. For some of the principles of deontic logic threatened by single-agent moral dilemmas, see McConnell, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency in Ethics," pp. 272-73.
33. Jane Singleton, in "Moral Theories and Tests of Adequacy," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 31 (1981), pp. 31-45, suggests an even weaker notion, namely, that various theories posit their own conditions of adequacy. This seems too weak.
    For a discussion of the form of argument that assesses moral theories by appealing to conditions of adequacy, see my "Metaethical Principles, Meta-Prescriptions, and Moral Theories," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 22 (1985), pp. 299-309.
34. The reason for the qualification "most," of course, is that some features are conditions of adequacy in the *stronger* sense, for example, the feature of consistency.
35. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at an ethics discussion group in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and at a symposium, "Marcus on Moral Dilemmas," at the Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association (May 1986). I would like to thank members of those audiences for their comments. I am especially indebted to Christopher Gowans and Gerald Paske, each of whom sent me detailed comments and criticisms of this paper.