I am going to be as brief and as clear as I can, and in the attempt to do so may seem provocative, though that is not my main intention. Besides commenting on certain issues raised by Mr Dearden’s and Miss Telfer’s papers, I shall say some things which are relevant to Mrs Warnock’s and Mr Norman’s; for it is thought by many people (perhaps rightly) that autonomy and neutrality are two sides of the same coin. And indeed I shall be saying things which have a bearing on a lot of the other topics of the conference.

It may have occurred to you to ask, when reading Mr Dearden’s paper, what the connexion is between the psychological state, state of mind, state of character, or whatever, which is called ‘autonomy’, and what Mr Dearden, speaking of Kant, calls ‘the logical autonomy of moral discourse’ (p. 3f.). We are accustomed in philosophy to slip back and forth between logical and psychological ways of speaking; but all the same the transitions need to be explained. I am going to try to do this, and shall maintain in the course of my explanation that at least one of the issues about autonomy is an issue in philosophical logic.

Autonomy, as an educational ideal, seems most often to mean a disposition to think in a certain way. Even when it is action that is called autonomous, it is called that because of the nature of the thinking which has led up to it. By ‘thinking in a certain way’, I mean of course, not ‘thinking certain things’ but ‘doing one’s thinking in a certain manner’. The manner is characterised, as Mr Dearden has brought out, by two features corresponding to the two parts of the word ‘autonomy’: the thinking has to be done by a man for himself (autos); and he has to do it in accordance
with some regular procedure (nomos). I should not be thinking autonomously as a mathematician either if, instead of calculating for myself, I looked up the answer at the end of the book, or if, instead of employing arithmetical procedures, I picked the answer by jabbing a pin into the table of logarithms. However, we must not exaggerate the second point into requirements which are not part of autonomy. As Miss Telfer rightly says (p. 24) it is not a necessary part of autonomy that the thinking should be done correctly. A man may be thinking autonomously (for himself and applying a regular procedure), but he may not have mastered the procedure, and so may get the answer wrong. Nor do I like Mr Dearden’s use (which Miss Telfer takes over) of the word ‘criterion’; regular procedures do not involve the matching of results against criteria; in mathematics, again, we do not tell whether someone is really doing the sums for himself autonomously by seeing whether he checks his results against criteria, but by seeing whether he arrives at them by certain procedures which he himself follows.

Next (and this is important when considering Mrs Warnock’s paper) the procedures will differ with the subject matter. I was therefore a bit suspicious of the slide which she seemed to be trying to institute from Latin, French and mathematics via science and history to morals. If the procedures of these kinds of thinking are all different, it may be that some of them do, and some of them do not, require submission to the discipline of (for example) empirical facts. Empirical science does require this — and in empirical science we must perhaps include linguistics and therefore Latin and French; so if the teacher knows that this is not the way native speakers of French would express a certain thought, of course he can tell his pupils so, and invite them if they disbelieve him to ask a Frenchman. All of these procedures are subject to the discipline of logic — and mathematics to that alone. Art, which is also taught in schools, is not subject even to logic, but perhaps has its own disciplines. We have therefore to ask separately in each case in what autonomy, and therefore in what neutrality, will consist.

Professor Elliott may disagree with this; for he thinks that the same ‘powers of the mind’ fit us for engaging in all