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MORALS  
AND  
INDEPENDENCE

AN INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

*by*

JOHN COVENTRY, S.J., M.A.

*with a preface by*

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LONDON  
BURNS OATES  
1949

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY THE THANET PRESS  
FOR BURNS OATES & WASHBOURNE LTD.  
28 ASHLEY PLACE  
LONDON, S.W.1

*First published 1949*

## PREFACE

FR. COVENTRY has asked me to write a preface to his book, and this I am very glad to do, quite apart from my personal regard for him.

“Morals and Independence” seems to me an example of that rare species of philosophical work, the good introductory book. Too often where moral philosophy is concerned the student is offered as an introduction a work that he can too easily use as a substitute for a first-hand study of the subject. All teachers know introductory books to which students turn when the imminence of their final examinations induces a death-bed repentance on the state of their “morals”; and the trouble is that very often the works are of such a kind that the students in question “get away with it”. Now it is a supreme virtue in Fr. Coventry’s book that it just cannot be abused in this way. It is in the proper sense an introduction.

I quarrel with the author on many points both of interpretation and doctrine: but as I read his book, again and again I was conscious how effectively and subtly the argument opened up the great questions, the questions discussed at length by the authors whom Fr. Coventry might properly call his masters. The reader isn’t given the impression of a spurious simplicity, as if moral philosophy were something he could take easily in pills; the author most effectively introduces his readers right into the real subject. For that reason I hope they will be many in number, as curious and as argumentative as I know he would like them to be.

D. M. MACKINNON

King’s College, Old Aberdeen.

14th September, 1948.

**DE LICENTIA SVPERIORVM ORDINIS**

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**NIHIL OBSTAT: EDVARDVS MAHONEY, S.T.H.D.  
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WESTMONASTERII: DIE XIII AVGVSTI MCMXLVIII**

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## I. WHY SHOULD I BE MORAL?

PERPLEXITIES of all kinds seem to arise the moment one tries to discuss ideas of right and wrong. It is not merely that one person, one class or one nation, tries to justify different lines of conduct from another, but there is the underlying difficulty of getting to grips with what lies at the bottom of it all. However much we may feel the need of an absolute morality, a certain standard of judgment, it is not at all easy to arrive at such a fixed norm and basis of ethical ideas. This book developed out of an attempt to answer the question which heads this chapter—Why should I be moral? It might seem that some apology was needed for writing so much to answer an apparently simple question. But really the reverse is the case. The least reflection on what is being asked shows at once that there is here a demand for a whole, coherent and certain theory of ethics. The question is simple, with that devastating simplicity of something ultimate and fundamental, and although it may in the end receive a simple answer, such an answer could only commend itself when set in a wide context of ideas.

It seems necessary, then, to apologize rather for trying to cram so much into so small a space. But it is worth while trying to lay the foundations of ethical theory in a reasonably short and untechnical compass; worth trying to steer between the dangers of superficiality on the one side, and congestion on the other, in order to arrive at the essential ideas that lie behind the question: "Why should I be moral?"

What, then, is being asked? It will be well to begin by making an attempt to separate out the various strands of thought which might go to make up the question, the different frames of mind possible in one asking it.

The question might be asked in a purely utilitarian mood by a person who was looking no further than his own immediate interest. What advantage is there to me in being "good"? What

do I get out of it? Or perhaps the frame of mind is more speculative. Why *should* I be good? Just what is the *nature* of this obligation which a moral judgment imposes? Or again: Whence this "ought" and "should", this pressure or constraint put upon me? Is it, so to speak, from outside or from inside? What is the *source* of moral obligation? The speculation might go further and frame itself thus: What relation do moral judgments bear to judgments of other kinds? Do they tell me anything real about myself or the surrounding world in which I live? Is there any metaphysical basis of morality?

Or there might lie behind the question a merely rebellious mood, not particularly anxious for a speculative answer, perhaps not anxious for an answer at all. "Why shouldn't I be bad if I want to? Am I not a free agent? Go away and leave me in peace!" Of course, the best answer here is provided by the questioner himself. It is his own mind that will not leave him in peace. He carries the importunate mentor about with him, conscience, which will eventually make him want some sort of answer to his question. The best proof that we are saddled with a conscience is to experience it; but often the very violence with which a man protests that he is free from such "childish inhibitions" is a clear enough indication that he is not.

So far the questioners have not denied that there is such a thing as moral obligation; they are prepared to admit that being good really is being good, and that being bad—cruel, say, or avaricious—really is being bad. Even the rebellious gentleman did not cast any doubt on the reality of this distinction; only he demands: "Why shouldn't I be bad if I want to?" But the question may be intended to imply such a denial. Conscience, it is argued, can be explained away: the awareness which man has of moral good and evil is a mere superstition left over in the individual from the things his nurse told him to keep him in order; or it is a sort of racial hangover lingering still from the dark, pre-scientific ages when men were intoxicated by fear of unseen powers which have since been brought out into the daylight and inoculated by

science; or it is a product of the Unconscious, or of instinct, or what you will—something irrational which is at best a protective barrier against social dissolution, thrown up by some unseen biological force and conventionally accepted by the human race, at the worst a monstrous hoax imposed on the feeble-minded by generations of ambitious priests or despots. All these things have been said at some time or other.

Perhaps no single one of these frames of mind exists in any one questioner quite in isolation from the others. But as each represents a distinguishable question, we may find that each needs a different answer. The following pages are an attempt to sort out and harmonize the ethical notions which are involved in this whole complex of questions.

## II. HAPPINESS

### 1. *Our aim in life*

“THE end of man is happiness.”

This is an age-old saying of no very certain origin, perhaps due to an interpretation of Aristotle which is a misunderstanding of Aristotle as the remark is usually understood. But, understood in some form or another, it represents a hope still widely clung to. The dictum is not here accepted as an evident truth, or even as a truth at all, but as a starting-point; for whatever objections may be raised to being good, the most obvious one is that I frequently don't want to: that my duty (so-called) appears to conflict with my personal interest and happiness. The question, “Why should I be moral?” would not arise if I always and inevitably wanted to: if duty and self-interest were seen to coincide,\* that in itself might seem a sufficient reason for being good—though there would no longer be any “ought” about it. It seems a good plan, then, to devote a chapter professedly to examining these ideas of happiness and self-interest, and then in the next chapter to examine the notion of duty, and so to compare results. We should then have a clearer idea of where we stand.

The first obvious comment, if we take for a starting-point the dictum that the end of man is happiness, is that it is by no means the same to *have an aim* in life and to *exist for* a purpose. The former is something of my own making or adoption, the latter would be something imposed on me—from outside, as it were.

\*The term “interest” is used throughout in the sense of personal advantage; it is not intended to carry with it any stigma of meanness, narrowness, exclusive selfishness, but simply covers the sum of my hopes and wishes. I am, of course, interested in (intimately concerned about) my interest; so the noun bears something of the flavour of the adjective.

And let it be said once and for all, to avoid wearisome repetitions, that when the question is raised whether duty and interest coincide, we are not asking whether the terms *mean* the same: obviously they do not; but whether they coincide in fact, whether the lines of action which present themselves to me as duties are also to my advantage.

Though, of course, it would be possible to adopt personally an end imposed on me, and to make it my own aim. To medieval thinkers it was a fundamental principle that we do exist for a purpose, for an end which is the natural goal of human nature; and from this it followed that we are most truly and most fully men, when we voluntarily adopt this purpose of our nature, and conform our actions to its fulfilment. It is, however, no longer fashionable to speak this language of teleology—to speak of people and things as existing for a purpose. Human beings, certainly, are capable of purposive action, of shaping the course of their lives to some extent according to their hearts' desire: whether they exist for a purpose is quite another matter. And indeed the old teleological way of speaking brought unnecessary discredit on itself by applying to animals, or even to inanimate things, the language of purpose and desire, without sufficient justification for the transference. It is obvious that you and I desire various things; but it is by no means obvious that a cauliflower or a coal-scuttle conceals secret tendencies and urges of its own.

It may be that we exist for a purpose, whether we are conscious of it or not—whether we have grasped it with our minds and formulated our desires to embrace it, or not. The idea, be it true or false, is hardly separable from that of a controlling Mind bringing us into being, shaping us as this particular kind of creature, for the purpose in question. It may be: but we certainly cannot identify the awareness of having quite specific desires with the knowledge that we exist for a purpose: we cannot conclude, because we want to be happy, that we exist for happiness. And yet this latter conviction persists in strange ways and in unlikely places. The rationalist world which debunked the idea of God as a creative and purposive Mind, promptly substituted Evolution and Progress—the latter a notoriously blind god: certainly there was progress, but no one could quite say where to.

The fashion changes again. Few after the first World War could speak so light-heartedly of progress and the looming

millennium. Now, after the second, the disillusionment is shattering. We have only to compare the furore in the English Press about the bombing of open towns in the Spanish Civil War with the measures our own Air Forces were forced to take. The contrast is not a sign of any sharp deterioration, within a few years, of our national morality; it is just one of the many symptoms of the general decay of that civilization which so many centuries have gone to elaborate. Barbarism seems to be returning to the lands from which the highest human endeavour evicted it, even as the sea encroaches remorselessly on lands tilled and made fair by human effort. There seems, to put it at its worst, a blind force at work leading to a disaster which the best intentions are powerless to avert—we have come full circle from the idea of a controlling Mind, working all things together unto good.

As with affairs in general, so with the individual. We have our desires; some of them are specific and clear, and for these we can formulate definite objects, and devise definite means of attainment; but some of them are nameless, shifting and restless: they seek to co-ordinate the specific aims into something rounded and coherent, and often they fail. How widespread is that mood of scepticism—or despair, perhaps; they are close neighbours—when all specific aims turn sour and insipid for lack of any general directing purpose. We seem to have lost our anchor-hold, or to be without any firm roots to steady us, so that we drift aimlessly, losing our sense of values, despairing of any but the most passing worth in anything we do. For without a clear aim in life, which is at once an incentive to add zest to our efforts and a norm by which to judge their value, it is inevitable that we should yield to a mood of cynicism, knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing. What, we will ask, is all this life about? Why go on striving and succeeding, or striving and failing, only to strive again in either case? What is the point of it all? Life is a road we find ourselves travelling, but in this mood it seems to start from nowhere and to lead to nowhere: we have lost our sense of direction.

“The end of man is happiness.” Is it a jest in bad taste, or does it express a hope which, though it may be vain, we can never entirely shake off?

To come to closer grips with this question we had better shelve for the time being the teleological notion of man existing for a purpose, and elaborate further the idea of an aim in life of our own making, a purpose formulated for ourselves. We have seen that an end or aim may be specific (such as health, wealth, traveling to foreign lands, prowess in some particular art, etc.), or it may be comprehensive and general, uniting into coherence all specific aims. It is with this latter notion that we are here concerned, and we have seen so far that, however vainly, mankind does in fact find itself groping after some such comprehensive aim. The nature of this groping may become clearer by two observations.

There is first of all the strange phenomenon of the “nameless longing”, perhaps a perquisite more of youth than of age, but which most of us must have experienced at some time. It cannot be ruled out as a purely emotional state, which is therefore quite irrational and in no way indicative of the stretching out of reason after a comprehensive purpose. It may, indeed, be induced by an emotional state; probably it usually is; but it passes up into and is adopted by reason. It is our whole being, our conscious, rational self (which does not function in watertight compartments) that gropes out after something vast and vague—nameless precisely because we know its object to be none of the particular, specifiable things which we desire at other times, nor any assignable combination of them. It is as if there were a spring of energy coiled and compressed within us, a noble animal crouched and ready to pounce—but with no prey to leap upon.

Secondly, we come to a similar conclusion if we reflect on how our desires work: there seems to be a root or *capacity* of desire in us which extends wider than any of the specific objects which attract us. In a sense I am benevolent even when I am not actually wishing to be kind, or being kind, to anyone in particular. This

is only to indicate the accepted fact of character, those constant features of a man's mind which constitute his personal traits, and distinguish him from other people.\* Again, I go on being a music-lover when I am not thinking of music, or when I am listening to music, or when I have just been wrapped in music. I may say that I could listen to a certain musician "for ever", knowing very well that I couldn't in practice, for other desires would soon intervene, but trying to express the fact that no specific object could ever fully satisfy even this one category of desire—indeed, that some measure of satisfaction increases rather than cancels out that longing.

To sum up: the general fact of desire, on analysis, is only inadequately explained by reference to any number of particular, specifiable objects; to complete the explanation there needs to be added the notion of an inner force within us, constantly seeking release, apparently inexhaustible. It seems that complete satisfaction could only come from something which satisfied, not this or that desire, but my whole *capacity* of desire.

If man can have an "end", an ultimate aim, it could only be something which fulfilled this function. Whether he can formulate for himself, or whether he has willy-nilly such an end, and can be said to exist for it, are questions that remain undecided. But unquestionably he gropes for it, and most often he clothes it with the name of "happiness". It is time, then, that we explored this latter notion. Its examination may prove inconclusive, since such a motley array of ideas marches under the name of happiness; but it will bring us nearer to some decisive ideas about that interest of ours to which it seems that duty is opposed.

\*To the medieval philosopher it was natural that there should be this universal character in our desires. For him the primary function of intellect is to form universal ideas, to grasp the abstract universal in the concrete instances and the specific objects which exemplify it: hence the will, too, would naturally be comprehensive and universal in its grasp, unsatisfied by the particular, the partial, the concrete individual.

## 2. *The nature of happiness*

Perhaps one of the first distinctions that we learn to draw is that between happiness and pleasure. Neither notion is very precise or very easily definable, but there are certain marked differences in our general, unreflective use of the terms. We think of pleasure primarily as a feeling or emotion which can be short and sweet, but of happiness as an enduring and more radical state, to which all the powers of a man contribute. Pleasures can be lower or higher: most would agree that the pleasure of eating is in some sense lower than that of reading, and the criterion seems to be that one attends upon the exercise of a man's animal functions, while the other involves his "highest" faculties; pleasures, too, can be fierce and can disturb us by their very intensity. But happiness seems something more uniform, something which we connect with peace of mind and the harmony of the whole man. Pleasures can satiate, and their effects wear thinner the longer they last, the oftener they are repeated; but we would not speak of having too much happiness. Pleasure fluctuates, while happiness flows smoothly. Finally, happiness is nothing if not the unifying aim of life, and it is the commonest experience that you cannot attain pleasure by aiming at it directly: pleasure-seekers are among the most restless and discontented of men. For, though pleasure is a difficult notion to analyse exactly, it seems true of all pleasures that they are not of themselves the direct objects of desire. We desire roast beef or strawberries and cream and not, directly, the pleasure consequent upon eating them; this pleasure is the keenest when we are hungry, when eating food is worth doing for its own sake; if we eat merely for the pleasure of eating, we will find that pleasure only, if at all, at its most insipid. Not all pleasures, it is true, are preceded by that kind of negative state which is here exemplified by hunger, but in all cases it remains that pleasure is a sort of overtone, a bloom or fine quality of feeling that attends upon doing something which we like doing, which we desire to do.

If this last conclusion is correct, then pleasure would be distinct from happiness as part from whole, would be an ingredient of happiness, a concomitant or result of achieving our desires, but not itself the direct object of these desires.

There is now danger of a misunderstanding, but one the removal of which will do much to clarify the as yet vague notion of happiness. The fact that pleasure and happiness can be, and are, confused shows that the term "happiness" is sometimes used in just this restricted sense of an overtone of satisfaction, a bloom of contentment, that attends upon the doing of what we find worth doing. But it is only necessary to state this fact in order to see at once that this is indeed a very restricted sense, and not the one with which the present enquiry is concerned. For, taking happiness to be such a concomitant satisfaction, then at once our question becomes—not "what is happiness?" but—"what things are worth doing?" And this realization in turn provides us with something like a definition of the notion we are sifting, of happiness in the wider sense, viz., *a life of doing things worth doing*. But let us not leave the individual out of it. *I am happy when my life is composed of doing things which I think worth doing, things which I desire to do.* This formulation of the nature of happiness seems to agree with the ideas that have already been seen to cling about the notion of happiness as that term is commonly used—that it is enduring, harmonious, somehow stable, and that it doesn't wear thin. That sense of well-being which we name pleasure is not the substance of what we seek when we grope for happiness; we seek for something as enduring and as solid as a form of life which will unite in itself and blend our separate hopes and ambitions and longings.

The chief thing to note is that the enquiry has led us to see in happiness something as comprehensive as a whole *life*, to regard it as made up of *doing* things. Whatever Aristotle regarded the end of man as being—and it is not easy to draw a clearly formulated and tabloid idea of it from the constant play of his thoughts—his name for it ("eudaimonia") should not have been translated

so universally as "happiness", except with the clear proviso that by happiness, in turn, must first and foremost be understood doing something: for he defines "eudaimonia" as a kind of activity ("energeia")—not a feeling or an overtone, not a state or characteristic which attaches itself to and inheres in a man. Ethics is for him, as for everyone else, the art of *living*. Thus far, at least, the present enquiry may claim to find itself in agreement with the wisdom of the ages.

### 3. *An end or an aim?*

Now that the separate ideas of "end" and "happiness" have been discussed to some extent in isolation from each other, we must begin to gather our findings together.

The term "end" suggests something not yet attained, something we hope to attain in the future, in a way in which the alternatives "aim" and "purpose" do not. I can spend my life actually fulfilling an aim or purpose; it can clothe, "inform" and direct my activity, and be realized all the time by that activity: for instance, the aim of being a good doctor is fulfilled in the process of being one. But "end", though the term can be used in the same way, suggests more clearly an ambition towards which I am tending, but which I have not yet begun to fulfil: this corresponds to the position of the boy or student who wants to become a doctor, and is taking means thereto, but has not yet become one. It is to an end, in this sense of a goal lying ahead, that we speak of taking means; the various professional acts of a doctor's life are not means to the aim of being a doctor, they are constitutive elements in the process of being one.

Now this difference between end and aim is paralleled by one in our notion of happiness, of our general interest. Sometimes we regard happiness as a vague and perfect thing towards which we are tending, a distant goal which we, perhaps fondly, hope to reach. And sometimes we regard it as a thing to be enjoyed ("to

be lived" would be better) here and now, and continuing into the future—not perfect, but perhaps becoming increasingly more perfect. Life as we know it is rarely completely happy and satisfactory, even if it is never completely miserable. However many desires I may fulfil, however many good things I do, I will always have some further desires, perhaps many impelling desires, still unsatisfied. Thus it is one thing to regard happiness as a perfect, uniform and stable form of living which exists in the dim future—an end, for the sake of which my present life is ordered as a means, and for which I might well be content to sacrifice and to suffer much for the time being; it is quite another thing to make happiness a present aim, never perfectly attained, but perhaps progressively realized.

It is time, however, that a closer look was taken at an equation which has been asserting itself, perhaps unwarrantably, all along: the equation of being happy with the fulfilment of desire. Is it true that if a man attained all that he at any one moment desired—supposing it to be possible—that he would be happy? Certainly that is a mistaken conclusion which we may all too easily jump to. For very little reflection, and very short experience, shows that it just will not work. It is fatally easy to fancy that if I only had *a*, *b*, *c*. . . . (and I conjure up a series of particular specifiable objects I would like to attain), I would be perfectly happy. But, for one thing, our present desires are probably a rather haphazard assortment, and we would soon find that this fact would cheat us of the real contentment that we sought; precisely because of the lack of a comprehensive, co-ordinating aim, the realization of merely jumbled specific desires would increase rather than diminish our restlessness; we would still desire, and we would have lost or weakened our hope of satisfaction.

Then, too, when we are thinking of someone else rather than ourselves, we are not so ready to make this equation of happiness with the fulfilment of present specific desires; we find ourselves thinking that he is quite misguided on this or that point, and that if he really did succeed in attaining everything he at the moment

wishes for, he would not find himself happy after all. It is not that we are trying to foist on him our idea of happiness in place of his own; it is simply a realization that truth and error enter into the matter. Sometimes we will say of a man that "he doesn't know what he really wants", not thereby meaning that he is not conscious of what objects his desire has fastened on, but that he is mistaken in thinking those objects would satisfy his desire, or satisfy him on the whole. And if others can be mistaken about what would bring them happiness, or add to their happiness, may not I, too?

If happiness could be simply equated with the satisfaction of present desires, then the shortest road to it would be to have as few and as feeble desires as possible; best of all if we could stamp them out and stifle them altogether, and then we could never be discontented. This completely negative view, which seeks the fulfilment of the human personality more or less in its annihilation, was the root fallacy of the Stoics. It only needs to be stated for its absurdity to become at once apparent. For one thing, it rules out the entire idea of progress in human life, progress in every kind of skill, in intellectual development, which brings in its train a new and expanding set of values, a richer field of desire and possible attainment. Perhaps we may be mistaken about what aims, or what complex of aims would, if attained, constitute our happiness, but at least it is clear that the first prerequisite is to have aims of some sort; and the notion of happiness is essentially a rich and not a poverty-stricken one, embracing the highest and the widest achievement.

It does not seem, then, that happiness can be equated with the satisfaction of present particular desires, partly because I might be mistaken about the satisfaction such an achievement would bring, and partly because I will always be left with further desires unsatisfied; nor, on the contrary, does it seem likely that happiness can be explained without any reference to present desires. Let us, however, take stock of the various notions so far handled.

#### 4. *Is happiness the end of man ?*

Earlier in the chapter there was put forward the idea of a comprehensive aim, something distinct from particular desires for specifiable objects; happiness was described as a life of doing things worth doing; and later a distinction was drawn between an end aimed at as realizable in the future, and a purpose fulfilled here and now. Finally, it appeared that being able to do all that I want to at the moment is not the same as complete happiness. Are we any nearer to seeing whether, in any sense, the end of man is happiness, or to understanding the true nature of self-interest?

I may at the moment find that my life on the whole consists of doing things worth doing: that it is a good life, one that pleases me—on the whole. For there will always be room for improvements, and that in various ways: there will always be some things I would rather exclude; there will always be some purposes still unfulfilled; and I will probably develop one way or another, and change my mind about some things which I now think worth while, good or desirable, and exclude them henceforth. My life, in fact, leaves something to be desired. Can such a conception of happiness, a life composed of various activities all approved by me, be said to embody a comprehensive purpose?

It may do.

I cannot do everything, and therefore I have to choose between particular objectives. Apart from mere haphazard decision, a choice—e.g., between being a doctor or an engine-driver—must be made on some grounds which, when the mind has adhered to them, give rise to a fixed and directive purpose. If the whole complex of choices that I make in life, in both great and small matters, is guided by a single purpose, then my life of doing things worth while could be said to embody a single comprehensive aim: *embody* an *aim*, note; not *tend towards* an *end*. But such an aim could only be stated in the most general terms. The aim of being a good doctor would not be wide enough, for though it

might regulate a great many of a man's choices, it would not affect various sides of his life—e.g., his family life, his recreations. Nothing short of being a good *man*, the kind of man I approve of (we are still thinking exclusively in terms of interest, not of virtue), could satisfy the function of a comprehensive purpose. And since we are not speaking of abstractions, nor of conforming to a pattern, the aim would be best expressed by "being a good version of myself". If a man regulated all the choices of his life in order to do full justice to every side of his nature and personality, then it could be said of him that his life was not the mere pursuit of passing whims, but embodied a comprehensive aim.

Such indeed was the ideal of the "good life" in the Greek philosophers. But the comprehensive aim in question is not an end to which the distinct "activities worth doing" are means. The relation is rather that of part to whole, of constituent activities to the life so constituted. At any given moment the life is fulfilling the general purpose. In so far as the integration of the various activities into a harmonious whole, regarded by me as ideal in my case, is still incomplete, we can speak of such a life progressing towards its ideal and aiming at something to be achieved, perhaps, in the future. But only a stretch of life, or the whole life viewed from end to end, could be regarded as achieving, because expressing and embodying, the ultimate purpose. Only such a stretch of life could be given the name "happiness".

This idea of happiness, unquestionably a noble one, is quite different from the idea of something complete and ultimately satisfying to be attained in the future, an end to which the rest of life is a means. And it by no means includes the complete fulfilment of desire, either of present particular desires, or of desire as a whole. We said above that, in two senses, life will always leave something to be desired. Is not this, in fact, not only essential to life as we know it, but essential to the very enjoyment of life? To have no longer any purpose to fulfil, to be devoid of any desire for something still unattained, seems to be very near a definition of boredom.

And this brings us back sharply to an idea developed at the beginning of the chapter. Happiness, a good life, thus formulated, abandons for ever as a mere chimera the notion of an ultimate goal of living when every desire finds its full achievement and satisfaction. Are we in fact content to abandon this notion? Do we not ask for a comprehensive *end*, which is really an end and stopping-place, to which all the rest leads, wherein are satisfied not just particular desires, nor even a harmonious complex of them which will always present us with purposes unattained, but our very *capacity* of desire? Is the point of life just life itself, and does it in the end lead nowhere?

So great is the human demand for such a goal that even Aristotle himself, who formulated the ideal of happiness as the good life in the way outlined above, fell into inconsistency with his ideal, wavered, and finally fastened on a particular kind of activity which here in this life it was to be the end and aim of all the rest of our lives to perfect: the intellectual contemplation of eternal truths. But, of course, the demand is seen at its greatest in the history of religion. The completion of happiness, in this ultimate sense, being obviously unobtainable here in this life, religion has constantly sought it hereafter. This is not the place to discuss that question; but one observation may be made. The notion of "eternal rest" is an odd one, and not at first glance very attractive; and what about our definition of boredom? "Eternal rest" seems to contradict the idea that we are happy only when doing things. No doubt it expresses a contrast, essential to the notion of perfect happiness, with the wearing turmoil and the constant ills and evils among which we live, the failure of endeavour and the crushing of what is good and beautiful. And there is a fine, fresh, peaceful note struck by the prayers rough-cut in the walls of the catacombs that the dead friend may be led *in refrigerium*. Eternal rest appeals to us more in proportion as we have experienced eternal restlessness. But, if the present enquiry is at all on the right lines, "heaven" could never provide us with complete happiness unless it consisted in our *doing* something

eminently worth doing, which even as we did it would satisfy to the uttermost our very capacity of desiring.

But it is time, now that we have devoted a chapter professedly to exploring self-interest, to turn to the question of duty, to which happiness seems opposed. What has "being good" got to do with a good life, if by that I mean a life personally satisfying to me? Granted that in the construction of my life I cannot do everything, and have therefore got to choose, why *ought* I to choose some things rather than others?

### III. DUTY

LET'S be quite candid about it. It is with somewhat chilled feelings that we turn to examine the notion of duty, after indulging without inhibitions in reflections about our own advantage. But we do so to avoid two extremes. We have no wish to be merely shallow-minded and make the fatally easy mistake of heading straight for the objective nearest to us—"I'll do just what I feel like, and that is the only way to be happy"—and so seek endlessly our heart's desire, without ever finding it. No less uninviting is the position of the frigid few who seem to be afraid of enjoying themselves, and who concentrate so mercilessly on doing their duty as to appear almost morbid and inhuman. "There is no duty we so much underrate," writes Stevenson, "as the duty of being happy."

#### 1. *The one extreme*

You can write an Ode to Duty, but not a lyric; for, taken by itself, the notion of duty is more than stern—it is stark and loveless and remote from everything beautiful; to be asked to spend one's life being faithful to Duty is like being asked to die for a mountain peak—something cold and remote and rugged—except that a peak is at least beautiful, it is at least concrete and tangible. "Duty", taken by itself, is an abstraction, and can a man spend his life devoted to an abstraction? Perhaps some have done it, but this is a peculiarly grim and uninspiring abstraction. A life of devotion and fidelity, one would think, could only be demanded of a man for something at least mainly concrete, like his country, or for something wholly concrete, like his wife.

But must duty be taken in this way "by itself", a cold and strange phenomenon left in its splendid isolation, unrelated to our desires and longings? There is a school of moralists who think that it must: that it must remain bleak and rugged lest it lose its nobility; aloof lest by being blended with warmer notions it be robbed of its individuality.

“The voice of reason”, they would say, “issues absolute and unqualified commands; it does not say: ‘if you desire *A* (your own good, the common good, etc. . . .), do *B*’; nor does it say: ‘do *B* in order that *C* may follow’; it simply says: ‘do *B*!’—There is no relation, therefore, that can be established between duty and desire, or duty and pleasure, or duty and the common good, such that one might obey the voice of duty for the sake of any of these. To try to show that duty is desirable, or that it should be done for the sake of any ulterior purpose whatever, is to rob it of its essential characteristic of being *duty*; it is to make an absolute and unconditional command into a qualified command. Duty must be done for its own sake.”

This is in outline the extreme deontological (duty-for-duty’s-sake) position, which turns up in various forms and degrees in the writings of modern moralists. It is, of course, the famous doctrine of the Categorical Imperative enunciated by Immanuel Kant, and hence its influence on subsequent thought. The normal reaction of a mind which meets it for the first time is to shrink away with horror and with the feeling—“if this is true, it is ghastly!” One feels it simply cannot be right, and yet one is left with an uneasy suspicion that, even if it will not do as it stands, there is *something* in it—as one might expect to find in the theory of a great philosopher. The purpose of this chapter is to try to segregate the element or elements of truth in this famous theory from the elements of falsity. This can be done most easily, and without any lengthy technicalities, if it can be shown how Kant came to hold this position.

One of the oddest paradoxes in the history of thought is that Kant wrote to refute Idealism—the doctrine that things are seldom what they seem, for the characteristics which appear to belong to them come largely out of our own heads. He set out to justify the processes of our thought, and to show that they gave reliable and valid information, against the doubts of sceptics and the attacks of empiricists; and he ended by becoming in a manner the father of idealism. For Kant came to the conclusion that in

the mental process by which we acquire knowledge every positive characteristic—the redness of geraniums, the horsiness of horses, the beauty of landscapes and the fortitude of the martyrs—is contributed by our own minds; it is the shape into which we throw the quite formless data with which we are presented; it is as if we looked out on the world of objects with multi-coloured spectacles, so that, the colours being all in the spectacles, we could never attain to the objects, the things as they are in themselves. Knowing, for Kant, is quite literally “putting a construction upon things”. Such a simplified exposition of the thought of any great philosopher is bound to seem an over-simplification, but it contains the essence of the matter sufficiently for the purpose in hand.\* This account of the process of knowing naturally makes all attempts to speculate about the ultimate nature of reality (metaphysics) quite futile. Kant declared that he had shown the impossibility of metaphysics, and this account of what his thought amounts to has often been repeated. But it is not quite true. In a sense his system transposes metaphysics rather than abolishes it; transports our knowledge of the nature of reality from its old field to that of morality, from the speculative reason (asking what things are really like) to the practical reason (asking what I am to do). Kant thought he could show that reason cannot have any objective value or give us any real information when it employs such concepts as “substance,” “cause,” etc. (the tools of metaphysics), but that reason is sovereign and irrefutable in the sphere of ethics. He would not himself say that practical reason, which tells us our duties, can tell us anything about the nature of things in themselves, but that is what it amounts to; it is practical reason alone which is reliable, and for Kant it is practical reason which proves, among other things, the existence of God.

\*Of course, discussion of the intricacies of Kant’s thought, and the attempt to do full justice to it, still goes on. But, for the rather streamlined treatment which is forced on a work such as this one, it may be claimed that it is fair at least to the main impression left by Kant’s doctrine on subsequent thought.

Into the details of this strange theory it is not necessary to enter here, but perhaps enough has been said to show that for Kant duty *must* stand by itself in sovereign isolation. The dictates of our mind about right and wrong have a unique validity; whereas our speculations about the nature of things and their mutual relations do not give us the truth about anything real—except, perhaps, the truth about the workings of our minds. Hence our speculative reason can neither question nor bolster up our moral judgments.

One obvious result of all this is the complete divorce of duty from interest, or morality from happiness; and it is chiefly this characteristic of the theory which makes common sense shrink away from it. (And who will say that common sense, from which all philosophical theories must start, is an unsound guide?) For we normally like or dislike things, and act accordingly, because we see something we like *in them*: pure folly to Kant, because his epistemology (theory of how knowledge and thinking function) demands that we cannot know of any quality *in* anything. To do a thing because you desire to do it (because of some good you see in the object) is, for Kant, to let the wrong part of you take command, the speculative part; practical reason, issuing moral commands, is the supreme and only reliable or objective faculty in man, and it operates with sovereign independence over every other part of him. It is more than folly, on this theory, it is downright wickedness to be devoted to your family because you love them—no! you must do it as a duty, and from a sense of duty!

This last example may serve as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory, but it also points at once to the source of the error. The chief mistake is about the nature of desire.

## 2. *The other extreme*

Kant was writing to rescue morality from Hume's ethical theory, summed up in the famous dictum that "reason is and

ought to be the slave of the passions"—a perfectly coherent and logical position for an empiricist philosopher to take up. Hume's ethical theory amounts, in practice, to the diametrical opposite of Kant's, though they will be seen to have shared at least one notion in common.\* For the empiricist, sensation alone gives us any valid information about things as they are, whereas the concepts of reason (cause, substance, beauty, honesty . . .) are mental constructions put upon sense-data by us: they may or may not have their uses, but that is not to say that they give us any objective information about the physical world. Desire in such a theory ("passion" or "appetite" to Hume) can only spring either from below the sense level (from instinct and various biological urges), or from sensation itself—for it is only these sub-rational faculties which grasp the characteristics of objects which lead us to desire them; such desire proposes to us the *ends* which we can follow; the function of reason is simply to calculate the *means* for attaining the ends proposed by desire. Reason is the slave of the passions: we should carry on and use it as such. For instance: from the knowledge of outside objects which comes through our senses there arise in us desires for love and health and money, for food and drink and other pleasures; these are the ends which sensation proposes to us; reason is just a rather superior kind of mechanism for enabling us to devise the best means for attaining these ends.

A beautifully simple theory—and perhaps more likely to attain a following than Kant's, for obvious reasons; but of course it is no stronger than its initial premise—that sensation alone gives us information about the nature of the physical world. Nor was it in the eighteenth century, still less in its modern variants, a particularly new theory. Empiricism, with its consequences for ethics,

\*Perhaps another apology will now be owing to David Hume, another remarkable philosopher, for over-simplification; but what is important here is to grasp the essence of empiricism and reduce it to its simplest terms; this nucleus will be found recurring in the more modern versions of empiricism.

is prone to raise its head in ages when science takes a new lease of life; it was the target for much of Plato's "Republic", and reappeared with all its old vigour in the England of Newton. It boils down to an unwillingness of the scientist, triumphant about the very tangible results of his own methods, to admit the validity of processes of thought which it falls outside the range of his study to investigate—even while he uses these ways of thinking in his private life, and even in formulating the results of his science. But to this we must return in another context.

Kant's reply was, in effect: "No, even sensation does not give any information about the nature of things. But you are right about desire: desire springs from sub-rational levels, and speculative reason is merely concerned with devising means for satisfying these lower passions. That is why to follow one's desires is to be sub-human, whereas to live according to the dictates of practical reason, enunciating our duties, alone raises us above the level of the beasts."

### 3. *Desire*

Both Hume and Kant were agreed about the invalidity of speculative reason, and about the nature of desire. But they used these premises to go to opposite extremes in their ethics, the one to debunk morality, the other to frown upon desire. In both there is a mistake about the nature of desire; and in both this is bound up with their epistemological doctrine. Kant is the harder to refute, as his teaching is a completely closed circle: one must either leap wholly into it, or stay right outside.

Over the dogma of empiricism a great deal of ink has been spilt, and it is not desirable to add unnecessarily to the stream. Nor is it necessary to treat this matter at the epistemological level; for as Hume's limitation of the function of reason in the matter of desire and his empiricism are necessarily interdependent, the refutation of the former involves revision of the latter. We may stick to our guns, then, and treat the matter at the level of desire.

And surely each man's own experience will tell him that the office of reason is not *merely* to be a rather skilful calculating machine for devising means to attain desires that have sprung from, *and remain at*, sub-rational levels. First of all it is doubtful whether any desires springing in man from a sub-rational level—those prompted by hunger, say, or the sex-instinct—remain at that level. Rather, they are adopted and to some extent transformed by reason. Would we, for example, say that our love for each other is no more, or can never become more, than an animal craving? Is it not obvious that a desire which arises in us at the level of sensation is transformed into something different, something rational, precisely because we are intellectual beings? Though, for purposes of discussion, it may be helpful to treat various parts of our make-up as distinct—intellect, will, sensation, instinct, etc.—there is nothing of which we are more vividly aware than of the unity of our own consciousness. Our faculties do not function in watertight compartments. The consciousness that unites the operation of these faculties is, precisely, the consciousness proper to a rational being. It might be imagined, as an extraordinary case, that some poor creature could be so brutalized by months of starvation that his desire for food would become a sheer animal craving, remaining at the sense level, and that his intellect would function merely as a sort of low cunning for satisfying this absorbing passion. But “brutalized” would exactly describe the case—and show why it was so pitiable. The man would be acting as we imagine animals to act, absorbed by purely sensitive desire, incapable of the power of abstract thought; only the man would still possess a faculty more adept at finding means to satisfy the ends proposed by sensitive desire than any animal can command.

The empiricist description of desire, therefore, covers only a quite abnormal and sub-human state, if it covers a possible state of man at all. Normally reason transforms sensitive desires, adding to them, in the unity of the human consciousness, a quite specifically intellectual factor. Even from the pleasures of the

table have grown the art of eating, the æsthetics of wine; hearing attains an intellectual level in music where the contribution of sheer sensation is absorbed and transcended by the intellectual factor; love becomes self-sacrificing. Emerging in these examples and standing out more clearly in others, there is, we find, something *proposed to man by reason itself as an end*, giving rise to quite specifically *rational desires*. The most illuminating instances are those in which sensation, if it plays any part at all, makes no contribution to the desirability of the activity. There is all the charm of poetry and the fine sparkle of conversation; there is the peculiar intellectual satisfaction of solving abstract problems or doing crossword puzzles. And finally there is the more obviously moral field: we admire honesty, loyalty, heroism, and we are impelled to imitate them.\*

For in all these things there is an aim proposed to man by reason which consists in doing something; we have a rational desire to do brave deeds, to read, to write, to talk. Both Hume and Kant overlooked this fact that reason formulates desires of its own, that reason shapes our ends. Reason is no mere calculator of means, though that is part of its function; nor does it issue commands as mere bolts from the blue, quite unrelated to our wishes. Sometimes a course of action seems merely desirable (though rationally desirable)—“I would enjoy this concert”—without any concomitant apprehension of duty. But sometimes the mind presents both duty and interest together—“paying this debt is (a) a *good* thing (for I admire honesty), and (b) I ought to do it; it is a ‘compelling good’”. To speak of bare duty is to ignore (a) and concentrate wholly on (b); it is to ignore the fact that we do admire the moral virtues, and the instances of them

\*It becomes clear, in fact, that we can only speak of desires as being “sensitive” or “rational” according to their source of origin: those desires are sensitive in which sensation plays a conscious part; in the others, though they may be accompanied by bodily changes detectible by the psychologist, sensation adds no conscious factor to the desire. In the last resort all our desires are rational: they are the desires of men.

which we come across; we do regard them as desirable both in ourselves and in other people. The Kantian, therefore, is wrong in divorcing duty utterly from interest, for our minds do not present us with stark duties: he is quite wrong to regard a moral obligation (magisterially enunciated by reason) as contaminated by any association with desire, as degraded by the fact that it meets with our approval: he is utterly wrong in thinking that you *must* be at fault if you do something because you want to or because it's fun. For fully rational desire lies at the heart of, and is integral to, the apprehension of duty itself: duty is a compelling *good*.

#### 4. *Sense of duty and moral goodness*

So far this chapter has aimed at establishing two main truths:—

- (1) Reason shapes our ends; and this in two ways:
  - (a) reason transforms all our desires in such a way that no desire of a human being is exactly the same as the appetite of a being devoid of reason; all our desires are to some extent rational, even such desires as those for food and drink; and
  - (b) reason frames in man some desires which are wholly and purely rational (in origin), in such a way that the sensitive level of apprehension in man, though it may function in attaining the object, adds nothing to the desirability of the object.
- (2) Duty cannot be wholly distinguished from interest, from what we desire to do, because acts of virtue are themselves desirable, i.e., there is desire, interest, on both sides.

But is this last breaking down of the divorce between duty and interest sufficient? The manner in which this enquiry has been conducted still leaves one very obvious problem awaiting solution. For we began with the idea of interest, studiously keeping to

considerations of personal advantage, and were led thereby to the notion of a good life—a life personally satisfying to me, a life made up of doing things which I desire to do. But, even at that stage, the very name “good life” gave rise to a further question: What about a morally good, a virtuous life? What has “being good” got to do with a “good life”? So then we went to the opposite extreme, so to speak, from self-interest to enquire into the notion of duty, arriving finally at the conclusion that virtuous actions are also desirable.

Now in this procedure there is implicit the idea that “doing my duty” is equivalent to “being morally good”. Is it?

We decided that some courses of action seem desirable without there being any concomitant apprehension of duty. Is to act without awareness of duty always and inevitably quite different from being morally good? To put the question another way: does being morally good mean doing my duty from a sense of duty, aware that what I am doing is not merely admirable, but a compelling good? Suppose, for example, that I read a book by X just because I like his books: is that necessarily *not* a morally good act? Kant would have had to say that it could not be morally good.

Carry the enquiry a stage further. Does a really virtuous man in fact act under any sense of compulsion? The kind-hearted man *likes* helping people; charity satisfies one of his strongest desires, and men have spent their whole lives in the service of others without their good deeds taking place all the while under the impulse of any compelling forefinger of Duty. Is it not, in fact, the whole idea of a virtue that it makes morally good actions easier, so that we think of the saint as one who is supremely happy in “being good”? Actual good deeds beget a habit, so that the doing of them—which may start under the stress and strain of duty—becomes easier and easier, till they are done with relish and without any sense of strain or compulsion.

“Acting from a sense of duty” and “being morally good” are, therefore, not equivalent. If you act from a sense of duty you are being morally good—at least according to your lights: we must

leave to another place the consideration of whether a sense of duty can be perverted and misguided. But it does not follow that you cannot be morally good without acting from a sense of duty.

Concentration on the idea of duty puts the student of ethics in a false position. He should be examining the nature of the morally good act, and not the nature of duty. This concentration has arisen from two factors, of which the first is the heavy bias in the direction of "bare duty" given to ethics by Kant, which has to some extent preoccupied writers since his day.

The second reason for this concentration is the common experience of all of us. The morally good act forces itself on our attention most strongly precisely in those situations where we are faced with a conflict—"I want to stay in bed, but I ought to get up and do some work." It is then, when there is a conflict, that the morally good act shows up most clearly as a duty. We then tend to regard the situation as a conflict between duty and desire—falsely, as has been shown, for there is desire on both sides. Look for a moment at these conflicting desires. We have already seen that all a man's desires must be called rational to some extent, but that some are more purely rational than others. Is it not true that in by far the greater number of cases where we are confronted with such a conflict, the desire which conflicts with duty is not *purely* rational (i.e., rational in origin) whereas duty (*qua* duty) always is? Often in such a conflict we are aware that the desire which pulls away from duty is in some sense "lower" than the desire which commands—lower precisely because it is mixed up with sensitive and bodily elements. Even outside the context of such a conflict we apply this criterion. Sunbathing is a "lower" kind of satisfaction than reading, precisely because of the more intellectual nature of the latter occupation. But about moral good, as such, there is something purely rational which gives it its supreme commanding force. Here the fine point of human reason is engaged. Driving my aunt in to town to do her shopping may have attractions of its own—as, that I like her company, or that it is a pleasant drive, or that there is a pretty girl at the post office—

but considered merely as an act of kindness, considered in its specifically moral quality, which is easier to discern when I am reluctant to do it, it is a rational purpose refined and rarefied. To admire an act of kindness just for being an act of kindness is a function of reason into which no element of anything lower enters. It is an end proposed by reason alone.

Even when the moral conflict is not between impulses which are higher and lower in the way in which reason is higher than sense, we are still quite conscious of some kind of "higher" and "lower". Let us suppose that a man has promised to go to tea on Sunday afternoon with an aged and, unhappily, tedious relative, but that when the time comes he is engrossed in a chess problem and doesn't want to leave it. If we abstract from various circumstances which might enter into the matter, we may concede, for the sake of argument, that we have here two counter-attractions, neither attraction being of a sensitive nature. On the one side there is the promise, on the other the intellectual satisfaction of doing chess problems. But, though both impulses arise at the rational level, the promise commands; it has an "ought" attached to it, whereas the other desire has not. That is why fulfilling the promise seems higher and the intellectual occupation lower. It is from its commanding force that we see the special nobility of keeping a promise; through this impulse reason seeks to exercise control, and imparts, in this situation, the degraded air of selfishness to an occupation sufficiently laudable in itself.

It is, then, easiest to *discern* the purely rational quality of moral goodness in a case where this presents itself to us as a duty—to some extent repugnant because of another and a conflicting desire. But that does not mean that this eminently rational quality of moral goodness, of virtuous action, does not *exist* in all its instances, even when the action is done with unimpeded relish and without any sense of stern compulsion or reluctance. The essential characteristic of morally good action is that *reason is in control*; that, wherever the desire to engage upon a particular course of action may have originally sprung from (instinct,

sensation, etc.), that action is only entered upon with the full assent of reason. Then the action, whatever it may be, is informed, directed, guided by a fully rational purpose. This does not in the least mean that virtuous action is an unrelieved intellectualism or an arid righteousness. To broach a bottle of champagne or two to celebrate my friend's engagement is, in itself, an entirely reasonable thing to do. There might, of course, be reasons why I should be doing something else at that time or in that place, but that is another story.

### 5. *Duty and desire*

Thus, at length, it can be seen that the Kantian divorce between duty and interest—interpreted as a separation between what is morally good on the one hand, and all that I want to do on the other—is completely broken down, or should we say “patched up again”. The first breach made in this position was not enough: duty and interest are at last seen, not merely to be compatible on occasion, but *inevitably to coincide*. It is not enough to point out that desire exists in both types of action, for that leaves one with the impression that only actions which present themselves as “desirable and compelling” can be morally good. This sense of compulsion only arises when reason, which at all times demands to take control, is opposed within the very field of desire. At other times reason takes the lead without any such opposition or compulsion. Is not this, in fact, the natural state of affairs? The preoccupation of moralists with moral conflict tends to draw a completely false picture of our mental and moral life—depicting us as unrelievedly engaged in an unending moral tension, oppressed by a duty-conscious frame of mind. For Kant this was and had to be so: morally good action in his system involves consciously preserving in oneself this morbid and repellent sense of duty. But in fact reason is in effortless control far oftener than not, and therefore most of our actions are morally good. Reason

is, *ceteris paribus*, in control when I eat my breakfast, read my paper, kiss my wife and set off to catch the train. These are all quite human actions, prompted and guided by fully rational purpose: so there is no ground whatever for denying to them the character of moral goodness.

Kant, one must acknowledge, went to the root of the matter when he indicated that the essence of morally good action lies in the control exercised by pure practical reason. Yet the deepest of Kant's insights take on, in his system, an aspect of perversion, owing to the perverted character of the framework into which they have to be fitted. Reason cannot control our actions in the face of all desire, but only through the exercise of desire: we *don't* in practice do a thing unless somehow we want to do it. All conscious desire (and "unconscious desire" is simply a muddled use of the word "desire" for any kind of impulse) is in a sense rational desire, because of the unity of the rational human consciousness. But some desires emanate more from the purely rational, intellectual faculty than others—and these demand to take control: sometimes they control our actions without conflict, sometimes they have to overrule other desires arising from lower levels—which, therefore, in this conflict, take on the aspect of the irrational, the unreasonable. We are free to choose: and to choose the less rational purpose, setting aside the more rational, is always to some extent irrational, sub-human conduct. In this lies its wrongness.

#### 6. *Good: The Good*

These conclusions will best be rounded off and brought into line with those resulting from the discussion of happiness, if, finally, attention is directed to one further matter which has been demanding consideration with growing insistence—the use and meanings of the term "good".

There has been much talk throughout this enquiry of desire, and "good" is the correlative to desire. The activity of human

consciousness has two main functions, the apprehensive and the appetitive—not easily separable because of the essential unity of that consciousness, but none the less distinguishable in their natures. To the former belong such activities as seeing, knowing, forming opinions: they are concerned with truth, with the nature and characteristics of things, with matters of fact and reality. The latter includes the activities of admiring, approving, wanting, etc.; they are concerned with the goodness of things—which is not a fresh characteristic to be added to those attained by the apprehensive functions, but those same characteristics in so far as, once known, we react to them with desire or aversion. By the former we “take in” objects, by the latter we “stretch out” towards them. Now clearly the appetitive or orectic (stretching-out-to) powers have a wider application than the term “desire”. Desire is concerned with action, it is an appetite which involves doing something: I desire to do or to have or to be something, and in each case I am impelled to action. There may, of course, be a more detached, æsthetic quality in my appreciation, as, for example, in my contemplation of a landscape or my admiration for the contortions of an acrobat. But we are not here concerned with such merely passive acquiescence in goodness, except in so far as it too can impel to action—to travel and see the world, or to go to circuses.

For ethics, then, the good is that which is desirable and which can thereby impel me to act, can provide, as we say, a “motive” for action—a motive, not in the sense in which the word is sometimes used (another legacy from Kant) of a push or would-be impulse to action, from behind as it were, an efficient cause of action provided by instinct, sensation, complexes, etc., but a motive in the traditional sense of a final cause, an objective, aim or purpose.

An object or a course of action may be good and be desired merely as a means, or as an end, or both—i.e., for some inherent goodness as well as for its ability to serve a further purpose. To illustrate with the old example: unpleasant medicine would be

desired merely as a means to health; health could be desired as an end in itself; and whisky, or a game of tennis, could be desired both for its intrinsic enjoyment and as a means to health.

Now if a man could put before himself some ultimate end, some particular and definable thing, as the goal of his life wherein he was to find complete happiness and the satisfaction of rational desire, then *all* the actions of his life, till he attained it, could be regarded as means to this end. The end would be *the Good*, the supremely good thing, and all else would be regarded as good only in so far as it helped him to attain this end. Many things might appeal to him as in some way good, in so far as they attracted him; but his reason, fixed on the attainment of *the Good*, would rule them out as not "really good", or as not "good for me" (though possessed of attractive qualities), unless they could be seen to further the attainment of the Good, the end. And as long as reason did effectively control his choices, directing them all to this end, then those choices would be morally good, virtuous, just because of this control of reason.\* But we have already shown that there is nothing in life as we have so far studied it which could fulfil the function of a Supreme Good in this sense, and which could, therefore, act as a standard by which to measure the rationality and moral goodness of action.

If, then, such an ultimate end is illusory, *the good life itself* could alone qualify for the position of The Good by which the goodness or badness of action, its rationality or irrationality, could be judged. But in this case actions would no longer be selected and appraised as means to an end, but as congruous parts of a satisfactory whole. One could only ask: "Does this course of action really fit into the pattern of life which my own reason selects as the really good one, the best, for me?"

To make clearer what is meant one might list a series of the

\*For, *ex hypothesi*, the end in question really does satisfy rational desire. The possibility of being mistaken about the end would, of course, come in: but this situation is dealt with elsewhere.

general types of pursuit open to a person in life, of which his reason might be said to approve. Such a list is merely indicative and illustrative, and in no sense intended to be comprehensive. There lie open to a man as prospects, for example, health, wealth, congenial work, a flourishing family, intellectual pursuits, pleasant recreations, concern for a circle of friends, for the good of his nation, for the good of mankind. One cannot do everything. Hence a man would have to strike a balance between this and that, according as rational consideration showed one thing to be more valuable than another. He would choose for himself a pattern of life which seemed the best combination and interrelation of values, with an eye to his particular abilities, characteristic traits of personality, and the circumstances in which he lived. There would be room for progress and improvement as experience and matured judgment enabled him to overcome obstacles and attain a better integration—progress which would tend towards the perfection of his ideal, even if there could be no hope of his attaining it in any absolute sense.

Now it is of the utmost importance to realize just *what, in such a life, moral goodness is*. The class of "virtuous acts" could never be put on a level with health, wealth, intellectual pursuits, etc. . . . as just one among a catalogue of alternative "goods" between which one had to choose and strike a balance. It has already been shown that virtue cannot be divorced from interest in this way, and that there could be no possible ground on which to make such a choice. For choice can only be made by reference to a further standard, an ultimate, or more ultimate good, unless it is to be mere haphazard decision. The good life as here defined is not an ideal which can function as such a standard for choice between moral goodness and interest. It is an impossible situation to have to choose between them, for there could be no reason for choosing one rather than the other. Moral goodness attaches to the good life, so conceived, in two ways. In so far as the pattern of life was fixed with full rational consideration, according to fully rational standards, and not against or in spite of reason's demands, the

whole pattern of life would itself be morally good: the ideal would be morally good. And, secondly, in so far as each course of action during life was chosen just because it best fitted the pattern and ideal of the whole, then each action would itself be morally good, participating, as it were, in that moral goodness which properly belongs to the whole. Neither a comprehensive purpose of the whole life, nor special ways of fulfilling that purpose, which did not commend themselves fully to reason, would be morally good.

Moral goodness, therefore, can be nothing less than the whole purpose which life fulfils and embodies, and in which the particular activities which go to make up that life participate. It is, then, identifiable with interest, in the full sense of that pattern of life, made up by a combination of activities, which I most approve and desire to fulfil. This all-important identification of virtue and interest is grounded on the fact that—is only possible once granted the fact that—I am fully “I” only when my reason is in control: what I desire then is morally good. If this be denied, then morality and interest can conflict, and choice between them is impossible.

#### IV. THE MORAL JUDGMENT

##### 1. "*Everything is what it is. . .*"

IT might seem to the reader that we have so far rather shirked the question we set out to answer—"Why should I be moral?" The most obvious objection—"I frequently don't want to"—was tackled first, and the notions of happiness (or self-interest) and duty examined separately, in order to show that they cannot ultimately be said to clash. Duty and interest must coincide. If they seem in any instance to be in opposition, then there must be a mistake somewhere. Either what I take to be conducive to my happiness at the moment must prove on reflection to be against it after all, against my full happiness, my real interest, my happiness in the end; or what seems to be a duty at the moment will be found on further examination to be nothing of the sort.

Is the answer to our question, then, simply: "There is no reason why you shouldn't be morally good"? That would not be very satisfactory, but perhaps it is the only answer one could hope to reach merely by answering objections. Or are we saying: "The reason why you should be morally good is that really, if you look into the matter, you'll find that it serves your best interests"?

No, we are most certainly not saying this.

If, as we have tried to prove, it really *does* serve our best interests to be morally good, that would be a very good reason for our *being* morally good. But it would be no reason at all why we *ought to be* morally good. There is an obvious gap in the argument that, for example, we ought to be honest because it is ultimately to our advantage. It is easy to answer: "Why should I do what is ultimately to my advantage, if I don't want to? Where does the 'should', the 'ought', come into it?"

Some have tried to press this line of argument further, and to reply: "But you *do* want to. What you *really* want is your ultimate advantage." But this bristles with difficulties, and even then it is no answer to the objection. Even if you could show an inveterate

gambler that his practice was against his real self-interest on the whole, the fact would still remain that he likes gambling. The comprehensive desire (self-interest on the whole) clashes with this particular desire, but it does not destroy it. He still wants to gamble as really as he wants his total happiness. It is nonsensical to say that the latter desire is somehow more "real"; this would imply some sort of Real Will in us, lying as it were beneath the surface of our particular desires, and often beneath the level of consciousness. Even if such a thing were intelligible (and it has had its advocates), it is difficult to see in what sense it would be more real than our very real particular desires, which are apparently capable of clashing with it. But an unconscious desire is a contradiction in terms, as long as we go on meaning by desire what we have meant hitherto—our stretching out towards something as a result of our awareness of it. Admittedly we have instincts, and perhaps other kinds of urge in our make-up which at least begin to operate below the conscious level. But instinct is neither desire nor will. Again we noted, when first treating of desire, that there seem to be in us capacities of desiring which are comprehensive and insatiable by the fulfilment of any number of particular desires. But there was no suggestion that such comprehensive capacities were in any sense more real than our actual, particular desires.

This rather summary treatment will have to suffice to show the difficulties in the idea of a Real Will,\* for, in any case, it does not in the least meet the original objection. It is quite simple to urge that objection still further—"Well, why should I do what I really want (whatever that means)? Once more, where does the 'ought' come into it?"

And there is no way of meeting this as long as we try to explain duty by advantage. Kant may have erred about the rationality of desire, and about the value of speculative knowledge; but here he was undeniably right. You cannot prove a moral judgment

\*For a similar notion, but one which avoids treating this latent force as a will, or ascribing to it a greater degree of reality, cf. Chapter VII, under the heading "Moral Law: the Command".

from a series of non-moral judgments. You cannot arrive at a conclusion with the word "ought" in it from premises which do not include the word, from mere statements of fact which are not statements of obligation. The moral imperative is categorical, and to try to prove it, or show its validity, by appealing to desire and advantage, or any similar existing state of affairs, is to rob it of its specifically moral character of obligatoriness. If the last word on the subject of "Why should I be morally good?" is "It is really to your advantage", then the "ought" has disappeared. We have then to admit that there is really no duty after all, and that morality is merely enlightened self-interest.

"Merely self-interest." For we have to be careful at this point in our concessions to Kant. The previous chapter set out to show that duty, being morally good, is enlightened self-interest. But that does not show that it is merely self-interest. Duty might be self-interest and still be duty. We might have a duty to consult our ultimate advantage and happiness.

We must agree, then, that duty cannot be resolved into interest. But Kant pushed the position too far. Confronted by ethical theories which seemed to hold that the reason why we ought to be morally good was because it was for our advantage, or for the general welfare of mankind, he pointed out that no such considerations could explain an "ought"; that such theories of the basis of morality were unsound. He concluded that no individual should do any act because it was to his advantage: that no act done from this motive, however apparently virtuous, was in fact morally good: that an act could only be morally good when done just because it was a duty, when done from a sense of duty.

But this conclusion does not follow directly from the premises. It is one thing to deny that considerations of interest and advantage, personal or common, can sufficiently account for the phenomenon of duty and our awareness of obligation. It is quite another to say that the virtuous act must exclude all considerations of interest from its motive. The second position does not follow from the first. The link between the two assertions was, for Kant,

his denial that there can be such a thing as rational desire, a desire which has the full approval and consent of reason. It has already been pointed out that we do not in fact go through life with a harassing consciousness of duty-to-be-done dogging our every footstep. Kant thought that we should, that we ought to cultivate this frame of mind. But surely it is possible to perform a virtuous act both because I know it to be a duty and because I know it to be ultimately to my advantage. Further, is it not possible to do a morally good act simply because it seems to be reasonable in the circumstances, without any consciousness of compulsion? To do so would be to do my duty, though not from a sense of duty: but I would be doing my duty none the less: reason would be in control, operating through a rational desire. And, finally, is it not possible that my duty is to consult my ultimate self-interest? Indeed, this would seem to be a necessary conclusion if we are to maintain that duty and interest must coincide (in the sense that the obligatory act must be to my ultimate advantage), and yet that neither notion can be resolved into the other. For this is the only position which leaves the notion of duty intact, without dispelling its obligatoriness, and yet does not set up a wholly false opposition between duty and happiness.

## *2. Moral and other judgments: extreme views*

Thus we are able to steer a course between opposite types of ethical theory. At one extreme there are those theories which seek to ground the notion of obligation in, and explain it by reference to, pleasure, our happiness, the greatest good of the greatest number, etc., and thereby rob moral obligation of its specifically moral, or at least of its obligatory character. At the other extreme are the theories which leave duty in irreconcilable isolation from all considerations of our desires and our general welfare; which sunder the morally good from every other kind of good. These types are usually termed naturalistic and non-naturalistic ethics, respectively.

One advantage of naturalistic ethics, and one source of the temptation to accept such a theory, is that it offers a means of co-ordinating our moral judgments with our other types of judgment into one coherent system of thought; whereas non-naturalistic ethics seems to leave moral judgments sticking out, as it were, in splendid independence. And it is certainly time that we asked what *is* the relation between moral and other judgments. Does the judgment that cruelty is wrong tell us anything real about the real world we live in? The naturalistic moralist is able to answer "yes", and to give his reply in terms of means conducive to an end: whatever his standard of "the good" is, it is a single standard by which physical and moral good, health and honesty, can alike be measured. To take an extreme example—and extreme examples illustrate the central point more clearly than the less extreme—we may consider the full-blown hedonist position: if pleasure is the sole and sufficing end of man, then all acts are to be judged according as they are productive of pleasure or not, of greater or less, of higher or lower pleasure. This is an extreme case, but it is common to all types of naturalistic ethics that the morality of actions is judged rather by their effects, the results that follow from them, than by any inherent and inalienable moral quality in the actions themselves. Hence it is easily possible for this type of theory to relate our moral judgments about our actions to the real physical world in which these actions are carried out. But the non-naturalistic moralist, part of whose contention is that the moral goodness or badness of actions is something intrinsic to them as human actions, can find no way to relate the two kinds of judgment, unless he be prepared to go the whole way with Kant and declare that *only* moral judgments give us any real information about the world we live in, our merely speculative, non-practical judgments being without any objective validity.

Similarly we may ask: Are our moral judgments in any way affected by our other judgments? Clearly they are for the naturalistic moralist, for whom moral judgments merely declare what are or are not means to a clearly definable result. If the greater

glory of your race or nation be set up as the standard of what is right and good, then you will make very different moral judgments from the man who is concentrating on the glorification of his own race, or the greater economic progress of mankind, or, in fact, any other end. You will also judge differently of what is right and wrong from a person who agrees with your standard, but differs in his views as to what is most conducive to the glory of the race; he may think that the extermination of Jews is more important for the race than the scientific progress and pre-eminence which their retention would assist and which you put first; in either case the "moral" judgment is directed by the judgment on other matters.

But the non-naturalistic moralist seems to be in the position of supposing that we make judgments about right and wrong *in vacuo*, without any reference to our other knowledge or to our general experience and education; that we make them quite out of our heads, as it were, through some rather obscure necessity of our nature.

### 3. *Moral and other judgments: Via Media*

The whole-hearted naturalistic or non-naturalistic positions are extremes and, as was remarked when the analysis of them began, it is possible for us to steer a course between them. While we must preserve, with the non-naturalistic theories, the irreducible character of the moral judgment, it seems certain that in some way, as the naturalistic theories hold, moral judgments are affected by other judgments. For example: most of us to-day, for whatever reason, hold that men are essentially equal in some way and should have equal rights. We are not here concerned with how far this principle should be pressed, but we would probably all agree that all men have a right to marry, for example, and to have their own independent family. But not all peoples have

thought so, even civilized peoples, and it shocks our moral sense when we learn that the Roman legionary had no such right till the completion of his service, or that the Athens of Pericles or Aristotle accorded no such right to slaves. The whole idea of slavery, that one man can be literally the chattel of another, to be treated at the good pleasure of that other, revolts us. Yet Pericles and Aristotle were not without their moral sense. The wide divergence on this point depends on quite different ideas as to what is essential in the nature of man. The moral judgment "slavery is wrong" is based on a philosophy of human nature.

We have seen the same thing in our own day. The really hard-boiled Nazi said: "They are only Jews"; and his behaviour, which to us is obviously and grossly evil, may appear to him not merely good but even a duty—so indoctrinated can he become with a false philosophy. That is why we say that he needs re-educating. We know that what we were fighting in the last war was not a tyranny fully conscious of being a tryanny, but a mental perversion that was being disseminated throughout Europe and rotting the very souls of men.

Thus, the moral judgment which a man makes depends on his entire philosophy of life, on how he views the world in its entirety. But—and this is the point—he does make *moral* judgments about that world, however he views it. If I hold that men are equal I will conclude that some kinds of behaviour towards my fellow men are wrong; I will conclude that I have duties towards them of a certain kind. This consciousness of right and wrong, this awareness of personal obligation, breaks into what was a merely speculative philosophy. "Breaks into", because, once more, you can never conclude by strict syllogistic reasoning that because A and B *are* the case, therefore I *ought* to do C. However we view the world, then, we do make specifically moral judgments about it, judgments which present themselves to us as absolute and commanding, judgments which are not reducible to other types of judgment, and yet which to some extent depend on, and in turn affect, those other judgments.

The Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages and the immediately succeeding centuries tended, perhaps, to concede too much to the non-naturalistic type of theory. For centuries a Christian philosophy of life had held sway in the civilized world as they knew it, resulting in a code of ethics generally accepted not merely as to its broad outlines, but also as to the way in which those broad principles were to be applied. Even to-day, when large tracts of the civilized world have ceased to be Christian, we are still far more under the sway of a Christian philosophy of life than we are conscious of being. The equality of man is a case in point. What reason is there for thinking that this democratic doctrine, introduced by Christianity, will continue to command any wide acceptance if Christianity ultimately loses its hold?

The result of this generally accepted and long-standing code of morality was that Christian philosophers began to lose sight of the fact that it in any way depended on a Christian view of life; they tended to think that any man of good will would formulate precisely this moral code for himself, in complete independence of the particular civilization to which he belonged; he would naturally abhor, for example, polygamy, suicide, divorce and slavery. That is to concede too much to non-naturalism, to treat the moral judgment as if it came sheerly out of the human mind, unsolicited by and unrelated to a man's general view of the world. Nor is such a doctrine in any way essential to Christianity. Certainly, the Christian holds that grace is built upon nature, and that God's revelation completes and perfects, and does not destroy or pervert, man's natural hopes and aspirations and his general philosophy of life. Hence the Christian would expect that human reason, left to itself, and unaided by revelation, though apt to make mistakes here and there, would in general and on the whole evolve a philosophy of life and a resulting moral code fully in accordance with the demands of revelation; he would expect the *anima naturaliter Christiana*. And this is indeed the case. You may find a man who differs strikingly from your moral code on some point or other; but it has often been pointed out that you

will never meet, indeed could hardly conceive, a man whose moral code differed *totally* from your own and who adhered to a different *kind* of morality—a man who really admired cowardice and thought it a duty to run away; who magnified cruelty and meanness and boastfulness for their own sakes, and grew hot with indignation at an act of kindness. . . . But precisely because the Christian regards revelation as adding some wholly new, unsuspected and undiscoverable truths to all that human reason could by itself attain, he should expect that his philosophy of life and moral code would differ in some points from that of the most enlightened savage, or from that of the ordinary civilized pagan who dispenses with the luxury of a philosophy of life, and is guided by his common sense. He should expect that a common-sense view of life would result in a moral outlook broadly similar to his own, and that major aberrations would come only from highly sophisticated or decadent forms of civilization.\*

#### 4. *Why, then, should I be good?*

We do, therefore, make moral judgments which depend on our general view of the world and the place in it of human life, and which none the less break into this speculative outlook with an authoritative imperative—"This is wrong; don't do it! that is right; you ought to do it!"

Can you prove such a moral judgment?

It was the false aim of purely naturalistic philosophers so to order the entire body of their thought that it would proceed by strict deduction from self-evident axioms, with all the flawlessness of a system of geometry. But, as has been shown already, you cannot prove an obligation with this kind of proof from any number of statements of non-obligatory fact.

If a man asks you, "Why should I be honest?" and he really doesn't see anything obligatory in honesty, or anything evil in

\*For a further treatment of the "Natural Law", cf. Chapter VII.

dishonesty, then either (a) you may be able to demonstrate for him, by a strict deduction, the duty of honesty from other moral principles which he does admit; or (b), since there must be something amiss with his general view of the world, since he must be viewing it in some way differently from what you take to be obvious about it, you will point out the good effects for himself and others in honesty, the evil effects of dishonesty, and so help him to *see it for himself*. This is not a deduction or demonstration in the logico-mathematical sense. You are simply setting the honesty-situation in its right context in the general world in which it occurs, and so, by concentrating his attention on all the relevant factors of that situation, enabling him to see for himself that honesty is a duty; when he does see it, then his own moral insight will "break into" that scheme of circumstances. If, in spite of all your efforts, and in spite of agreeing with you about all the causes and effects and circumstances of dishonesty, he still can see nothing wrong in it—then you can do no more: he is morally deficient, which is just one way of being mentally deficient. You cannot prove it to him.

And so of every particular kind of moral situation—lying, divorce, cruelty, cowardice and the rest.

But if a man asks, "Why should I be good?" and means the question to apply to any and every moral situation, then the case is different. Should the questioner mean that he never makes any moral judgments at all, and does not know what it is to experience a moral obligation, then he ought to be in a lunatic asylum. For then he has not merely a blind spot about some particular virtue, much as one might be incapable of making any progress in mathematics or have no ear for music, but he is quite mentally deficient in the whole matter of personal responsibility.

But it is more likely that he doesn't mean that at all. He does make moral judgments, and they present themselves to him with all the authority and inevitability of a categorical imperative. But, for some reason or other, perhaps because the recognition of a duty can at times be rather awkward, he hesitates; he wonders

whether such judgments are really valid. Maybe he is all the time looking and hoping for the impossible, to prove (or disprove) the validity of such judgments by some simple linear argument from admitted non-moral truths; if he could only do that he would feel happier about it. One can only explain to him that this is impossible, and why.

Or it may be that what he realizes to be his duty seems to be in irresolvable conflict with his interest and happiness, and so, resentful of a dilemma which seems preposterous and unjust, he wonders whether his moral judgments are not some kind of illusion. In this case one can attempt to resolve the apparent conflict between duty and happiness, as was attempted in the previous chapter.

There may be other reasons for doubting the validity of one's moral judgments, and they will become clearer when we go on to consider, in the next section, some of the more common objections or theories which try to explain moral convictions away, or render them harmless. But perhaps the questioner is not being puzzled by any of these, but by the whole business of finding himself to be the sort of being who does make moral judgments. "What is behind it all? Why is a mind the sort of thing that forms convictions of right and wrong, that dictates behaviour?" There is nothing that ethics, by itself, can say to this sort of question. One might as well ask: Why is a mind the sort of thing that is convinced that twice two is four, or of the law of gravity, or that Julius Cæsar died in 44 B.C.? These are all different kinds of mental operation, and there can be no solid reason for doubting the validity of the mental operation which we call moral judgment just because it differs from all of these: after all, they differ from each other. (In the last resort the final answer to all doubts about the validity of human reason is: that must be true, must be depended on, which the mind is unable to think otherwise. The alternative is that extreme scepticism which is next-door neighbour to insanity.) If I see a man lose his temper and strike his wife across the mouth, the reason why I judge this to be brutal,

cowardly and wrong is, surely, that it *is* brutal, cowardly and wrong. There can be no reason for thinking that a moral judgment gives one unreal, or less real, information about the physical world, just because it gives one a different kind of information from that which a mathematical, a scientific or a historical judgment provides. It gives us an irreducible kind of information about the nature of human action.

### 5. *The main lines of objection*

There have been attempts of many kinds to cast doubt on the validity of moral judgments, or on the reality and truth of the information which they convey. We will conclude this chapter by examining some of the better known of these objections.

Perhaps the most puerile way of explaining morality away is the type of theory, if it can be dignified with such a name, which maintains that consciousness of right and wrong is a kind of superstition: your nurse or your parents told you things to keep you in order, and so set up illusions which only the really strong-minded person is capable of shaking off. This explanation can be given a semblance of greater maturity by the introduction of such notions as priestcraft, heredity, racial instincts and what not—but at bottom it remains the same. Of course, when we were very young we probably did accept some moral principles on the awe-inspiring authority of our parents, and our faith may well have been assisted with the back of a hairbrush or a bar of chocolate. But obviously, with the use of reason came the ability to see for ourselves that these things were so; we came to *know* the difference between right and wrong; we came to distinguish the merely conventional from the morally good and bad. Just in the same way we came to judge for ourselves all the other things we had first accepted on authority—all about fairies and Father Christmas, about changing wet stockings, the propriety of washing, the British Constitution and the existence of God. It is surely absurd for a man to suppose that his mental faculties should have come

to maturity in every way but one, and to try to convince himself that the fully authoritative moral judgments that he makes, and cannot help making, are somehow superstitious and invalid.

Of course, it is a well-attested fact that if a man really sets himself to eradicate and blind himself to his moral judgments, to ignore them systematically and to set them aside, he will succeed in blunting them considerably even if he cannot obliterate them completely. He will become callous, hard-boiled: we say that he has stifled his conscience. (Even without going as far as that, he can weaken his moral insight by sheer neglect, much as a doctor or any other specialist can lose much of his power of diagnosis by lack of practice.) But this is to create an illusion, not to dispel one; it is to deceive and not to emancipate oneself. In other fields than that of morality we would readily recognize this procedure for what it is, a form of mania, and would give it its right name. A man of lowly birth who sets out to persuade himself and others that he is of highly aristocratic origin, and should be treated accordingly, or one of mean ability who lives under the delusion that he is a genius, will probably come to believe his own lie if he perseveres long enough; others will recognize that he is an amusing or an annoying crank. Should he go further and convince himself that he is Napoleon, he will be certified. It is just as possible to warp oneself in this sphere of morality as it is in other spheres, even unto madness. To convince oneself that in the process one is being strong-minded is merely to deepen the illusion.

Another source of doubts as to the validity of moral judgments, which may sometimes lie beneath the previous frame of mind, is the idea that moral convictions are somehow "unscientific". Here we must distinguish: it is one thing to say that science cannot prove moral truths, and quite another to maintain that natural science or psychology can disprove them. One would have thought it fairly obvious, in the nature of things, that physical science could not prove or disprove moral judgments; that moral values lie quite outside the scope of such science. But there is a very

popular superstition about the scientific argument—the method of reasoning proper to natural science—and its supposed omnipotence: the scientific argument is too often set up as the standard by which all kinds of reasoning must be judged, by which they must stand or fall. In making such statements, which we hope in time to substantiate, there is no intention whatever of trying to sneer at science, still less to adopt an attitude of superstition or obscurantism towards it. Science has had magnificent achievements in its own field, and all honour to it for that. But it is of the greatest importance to decide what is the proper field of science and to assign it its right place among the various branches of learning. In doing so we must not be led into quarrelling about a name. If it is asserted that “Science” embraces all knowledge, and can be content with no less, then either the term is being used in a far wider sense than it is being used here (much as “Philosophy” was used by the ancients to cover biology, physics, music, etc.), or the question is being begged, viz., is the method of investigation by which physical science has attained such notable and concrete results the only valid method of acquiring valid information on anything?

What has been called above “the popular superstition about the scientific argument” can best be understood if we shortly consider its origins. Modern science began its long series of successes with Newton and his immediate descendants; then was formulated clearly the aim of charting the visible world by the empirical method of observation, in order to discover the immutable laws of its working, to predict its behaviour, and so to harness its forces to our own ends. Precisely because of the great success of this study and this method in a particular field men have been too apt to assume that nothing could be true unless it stood up to the tests imposed by science, that the method proper to natural science was the only sound method of reasoning. Indeed, how nice it would be if the whole of reality were just one great machine, working according to the kind of laws that can be discovered in the laboratory, capable of being explored, charted and controlled

by scientific method! How nice, that is, for the scientist—for then there is but one, straight way to all learning, by following which one may hope to conquer or confound all wisdom.

It is not that the really great scientists have been tempted to make this assumption and usurpation. But popular imagination, easily inflamed by the ready results of modern science, has been far too prone to do so. And from the start there were not lacking philosophers, too, such as Descartes, who regarded the world as just such a machine (or hoped it was), and who elaborated their philosophical systems to explain it, and explain much of it away, accordingly. Their aim was to deduce all the laws of the behaviour of this machine, of which man is a part, from a few self-evident axioms, thus arranging all knowledge of reality in the form of a linear argument, having all the precision of a geometrical system.

But what earthly reason is there for thinking that the knowable world is anything so simple as a machine, as a homogeneous pattern of reality all capable of being fully dealt with by the method of natural science? Surely one is right in calling it a sheer superstition to hold that the scientific explanation is the only one, the scientific argument the only valid type of reasoning—unless the upholder of such a contention can adduce very substantial and positive reasons for it. Does it not seem that this materialist and mechanical view of the world is a gross over-simplification made by those who wish, perhaps without realizing it, to make things too easy? To the chemist man is a compound of various designable and manageable chemicals; to the biologist he is a complex tissue of cells which differentiate themselves with marvellous variety and intricacy of function; to the psychologist he is an assortment of complexes, reflexes, instincts, sentiments, ego-ideals, or what you will—but to the philosopher, that is to you and me, he must be all of these things and something more. Though all these branches of science have made admirable advances towards explaining the nature of man according to the particular angle from which they view him, no single one of them, nor all of them taken together, explain him fully. The point is

not that they are not yet sufficiently advanced; the point is this: what reason is there for thinking that, just by these methods, they are able to explain him fully?

The notions of right and wrong, of cowardice, responsibility and justice, simply do not come into the sphere of science nor under the sway of scientific control and argument. They are the product of an entirely different kind of judgment, as, for example, are the æsthetic ideas. The theorist who is determined to explain man fully by methods of empirical observation will promptly debunk the moral notions; in explaining how they arose he will feel that he has exposed their lack of any absolute and objective reference. At its crudest this attitude could be summed up in some such assertions as these: there can be no free will, because physics and chemistry could not regulate it by their laws; there can be no real duty, because the word "ought" could never find its way into a scientific argument; there can be no soul because the methods and instruments of science could never detect its presence; there can be no God, because that is an unnecessary postulate for science.

It will be necessary to deal more fully with the scientific method and its place in human knowledge, because there *is* a widespread if vague notion that science has undermined both ethics and religion; it is necessary to see clearly on what kind of assumptions and premises this notion rests. And there is still the standpoint of psychology to consider, before we can feel fully assured that no argument has been, or in the nature of things could be, advanced by science to shake our belief in the validity of our moral judgments. The mention of the soul and free will suggests that the matter had better be carried over into another chapter. But sufficient has been said to show what kind of answer must be given to this type of objection against the objective validity of our moral judgments. Sufficient has been said to show that, in the last resort, the fullest answer which ethics can give to the question, "Why should I be morally good?" is —You know very well you should!

## V. FREEDOM

### 1. *Defence of free will*

ARGUMENTS for the existence of the soul and the freedom of the will are two instances of the type of reasoning which is so often met by the objection that it is unscientific. Though they are obviously interconnected it is with the latter that we are more concerned in the present discussion. One very good way of making a man doubt the validity of his moral ideas, and hesitate to admit once and for all that a conviction like "dishonesty is wrong" really expresses some valid information about the world he lives in, is to make him doubt the freedom of his will. For the whole idea of duty and responsibility is inevitably bound up with the conviction that we are free agents. There can be no question of my being under a moral obligation to do A, if I am quite unable to decide what I do or do not do, and am coerced by some irresistible force to do B. Were that so, then indeed the conviction of moral obligation would be a sheer delusion.

There is a great deal to be said for Dr. Johnson's remark about free will: "Sir, we know our will is free, and there's an end on't." For, when you come to think of it, the only possible way we could ultimately decide whether we have free will or not, would be to have an interior and irresistible conviction about it. We are, in fact, very conscious of being free; a great deal of our behaviour and of our attitude towards other people is founded on the supposition that we and they have free wills. One would have thought that such an irresistible conviction was sufficient evidence of its own truth; that it could need no further proving or defence. Indeed, as has been remarked already, what more ultimate criterion of truth can there be than something which the mind cannot help but think? For no amount of speculative theorizing along determinist lines will in the least shake our inner awareness and conviction, in the moment of action, of being free.

But in the case both of the existence of the soul and of its freedom it is often urged that the scientific evidence is against it, or, with greater accuracy, that the scientific evidence is still too uncertain, and psychology too much in its infancy, for one to be able to conclude either way. Here the presupposition is that the argument for the existence of the soul is, or ought to be, a scientific argument based on the scientific evidence. But it is not, and could not be. If you have a soul, it is the sort of thing the existence of which science could neither prove nor disprove.

The root of the matter is this. Natural science (psychology is different, and we will return to it) is concerned with information about reality derived from using our senses; for science that only is evidence which is directly or indirectly (through instruments) "sensible": the scientist uses the observation of his senses to formulate the laws which govern the behaviour of sensible reality, and to predict its behaviour so that he may control it. All that sensible reality—not merely lumps of coal, but electricity, atoms, radio-activity—is what is covered by the term "matter". (When a scientist talks about a force, for example, he means some observable, sensible reality: blackmail, a sense of duty, a guilty conscience are not forces in his sense.) In the prosecution of science there is always the scientist on the one side, observing, analysing, generalizing, and matter on the other. A good deal of the scientist himself can be classified as matter, but there remains something in him which cannot, just because it is not observable by the senses. There are his thoughts, his ideas, his ideals, his memory, his hopes and his fears, his love for his friends . . . all none the less real for not being sensible. And above all this there is his mind, the unity of his consciousness, that which does all the thinking about matter, all the remembering, hoping. . . . However much science finds out in its own way about the nature of man, there will always remain the observed on the one side, and on the other the irreducible observer, the subject that can never become an object. That is what one means by "spirit", something more than and beyond the merely immaterial; something essentially non-

sensible; even sensation itself is not wholly observable by sense, because it too is pervaded in a human being by spirit; here, too, there is a subject distinct from its own object.

That is all that one means by trying to show that man has a soul. Obviously one isn't trying to point out something quite extraordinary, though essential, in our make-up which may have hitherto escaped our notice, something quite queer and out of the ordinary and unsuspected. That kind of argument would defeat itself. Obviously, if a man has a soul, he knows a good deal about it already, before you try to prove it to him; but he may not have co-ordinated his experience, or realized its full implications.

It is quite possible that anyone who denies the distinction between matter and spirit really agrees with all this, but is contending that he sees no reason why matter should not itself produce spirit, why whirling atoms and wheeling systems should not eventually produce a thinking mind. It is quite outside the scope of the present enquiry to deal with this contention; but the fact remains that, whether a product or a function of matter or not, there does exist in us a thinking mind, spiritual and immaterial, capable of abstract thought, of memory, of moral judgment.

To the psychologist I may be a bundle of complexes and a composite of thinking, feeling, willing, subconscious urges and so forth. But I know that I am not just a bundle; I am conscious to myself of being one rational unity, a person; and nothing that psychology will ever find out about my psychic layers and processes can ever destroy that consciousness of unity, or render it invalid; here, too, as in natural science, there will always be the single, conscious observer, set over against his findings. There will always be this last stronghold of selfhood, the spirit, the fundamental principle of unity, to which all the psychic operations, conscious and unconscious, properly belong; which itself thinks, wills, loves, remembers; which, therefore, does not draw itself apart as if wholly alien to, or imprisoned in matter, but permeates and transforms every one of the psychic functions considered by the psychologist.

Psychology is in an anomalous position because it finds itself half way between natural science and abstract philosophy. For the psychologist is not limited, like the scientist, to sensible observations: he will, it is true, subject you to all manner of experiments and use highly complex instruments, but he has in addition all the data of introspection at his command, and continually slides between the material and the immaterial, the sensible and the non-sensible. His temptation is like that of the scientist, to regard man as wholly and fully explained when he has described him: man becomes an arena, roped off, as it were, by a body, for the interplay of a series of forces—psychic forces this time—acting according to certain definable laws. But such psychology is purely descriptive, it looks at man from the outside in so far as it loses sight of his intimate oneness and personality; the observer is forgotten amid the welter of his observations. And, of course, it is not hard to see why such a purely descriptive approach to psychology has often found that there is no room for free will;\* free will would mean something which, precisely, could not be tabulated and predicted and reduced to an interplay of forces. And here again, no amount of this vivisection can explain or explain away the quite simple consciousness we all have that we *are* free. Why should we abandon this quite unavoidable conviction to suit the demands of a narrowed view of psychology? Why should the method and point of view of one particular branch of study be set up as the norm by which to judge the value of all our convictions?

Before leaving this defence of free will in order to treat the matter more positively, it may be well to say a word about animals. For it is often urged against the exponent of free will and of the existence of the soul that he is proving too much. The behaviour of animals suggests many points of similarity with our own, and we speak of “intelligent” dogs, horses or chimpanzees.

\*It is not suggested that most, still less all, psychologists have denied the freedom of the will; this is the general trend of one particular school, the Behaviourists.

Are we, then, to say that animals, too, have souls, and to attribute to them free will and moral responsibility?

Now, it is obvious that one cannot know quite what it is like to be a (mere) animal without being one, but of certain things it is possible for us to be certain "from the outside" and because we are in part animal. To begin with: however "intelligent" the behaviour of some animals may be, there is no reason whatever for ascribing to them the power of abstract thought, e.g., ethical notions, the abstract concepts used in æsthetic, mathematical, historical or political judgments. They do not talk: and the reason for this seems to be that it is impossible to talk without the power of abstract thinking, or even the power of generalization in concrete matters. Any verb, however concrete and sensible the behaviour it describes, such as the verb "to move", is such a generalization. For this reason, whatever the psychic make-up of an animal may be like, it cannot have a mind or intelligence like our own; it cannot have a rational faculty (the whole complex intellect—will, as we know it). Hence, since it has no will, it cannot have a free will.

But animals have the power of sensation, probably some kind of sensitive memory, and, with these, some power of grasping the concrete relation of two objects in a given set of circumstances. Hence they must have some kind of unity of consciousness, they must be more of a unity than a stone, or even a tree. So by all means let us admit that an animal has a soul; but in using such a term we no longer mean what we mean when applying it to a human being; we are now using it as a generic term to cover two examples which are only analogous to each other. Let us call the animal's ultimate psychic constituent a sensitive soul and our own a rational soul. And then let us forget about animals, since consideration of them merely impedes and complicates matters without advancing our enquiry in the least.

## 2. *Limitations of freedom: "freedom from"*

No small disservice has been done to the doctrine of the freedom of the will by those of its advocates who have overstated their case. In talking of a free will we are not ascribing some entirely untrammelled, arbitrary and haphazard caprice to the human personality; we are not necessarily attributing to the human spirit everything that might be covered by the term "freedom". It is an elementary but essential precaution to remember that what is under discussion is a free *will*—only that type of freedom which a will could have is relevant. Now a human will is a rational faculty. Though we distinguish, for purposes of discussion, our intellect and will, as we distinguish these from our emotions or our senses, yet all these factors act and interact within the unity of our consciousness. A will does not loose off, as it were, entirely on its own, without reference to thought or feeling, or any other of the elements of consciousness.

No need here to enter into any very detailed analysis. Nor is it possible to state all the laws of behaviour of a free will, because if one could, it would not be free. But some limitations are obvious. To some extent will is bound by intellect: desiring to do, or to be, or to have (all of which imply action) depend on knowing; you cannot desire to hear Beethoven's Fifth, and your will cannot begin to move you to action in the matter, if you have never heard or heard of this symphony. Again, though will and intellect can interact in the most complex fashion, though you can direct or avert your attention, concentrate or whisk your thoughts lightly over a subject, once you really do know something for certain you are no longer able to un-know it; once you know that parallel lines in ordinary three-dimensional space can never meet, or that you forgot to put the car away, you are not free to think the opposite. Hence it is obvious that a man's freedom of action (what he is free to think, and so to desire, and consequently to do) is limited by his knowledge or ignorance.

And yet a free will is not wholly and in every way limited by intellect. It has been noted already that will can direct attention to start thinking about this, to stop thinking about that: they interact. This is just one instance of the power which is essential to the notion of free will—that ability to do A rather than B; the power of choice; the consciousness that I am not simply an arena in which psychic forces act upon each other, and determine the activity of the whole arena according to rigid laws. This power of free choice it is which makes possible our personal and moral responsibility for our actions. Let us examine for a moment this fact of choice in a moral context. A shopkeeper knows that if he adulterates his goods and sells them under weight he will make more money; he is fully aware that it is a mean and rotten practice; he would hate to be found out and known for a common swindler; he realizes that even his self-esteem must suffer; he fears the penalty of the law. But he will be richer. With his eyes fully open he adopts the practice. Philosophers have tied themselves in knots trying to explain a choice of this kind: how *can* a man who knows that A is better than B, even if both are in some way attractive, choose B with full advertence to their relative merits? Faced by this situation some philosophers have not hesitated to equate virtue with knowledge, vice with ignorance, and thus to say that if a man really knew evil to be evil he could not choose to do it. But we know that he can: we know that this “solution” of the problem is really an evasion of it. And surely it is in fact impossible to explain this act of choice—impossible precisely because it is not a fully reasonable act at all: it is just in its irrationality that its malice lies. In choosing a known evil instead of a known good a man’s free will wrests the control of his action away from his intelligence, turns away from and blinds himself to his own insight. Of course, not every act of wrong-doing is accompanied by such full advertence to the opposing good and evil; and we adjudge responsibility and blame by the measure of this advertence.

This analysis will serve to show in outline to what extent free

will is limited by intellect, that is by knowledge and by ignorance. We are so apt to take a negative view of freedom, and regard it merely as "freedom from . . .", mentally listing the various kinds of compulsion to which we are not, or are trying not to be, subject. Here at least is one limitation from which we are not free. And, further, the whole history of the education of each of us is a "limitation" to the exercise of our free will. It is not that we are forced by inner necessity to think the things we were told to think, to follow the opinions of our masters. If that were so we would not have free will at all. But the nation and the age into which a man is born, the upbringing he has at home, the education he has at school, the kind of books he reads—these all give a certain cast and direction to his thoughts, and consequently to his choices and actions. The disciples of Plato are free agents and may have quite independent minds, thinking many things which he would not have sponsored; but we will recognize in them the traces of their master, and will not expect them to think the thoughts of Confucius or Kant. The child born and reared in an underworld of crime, where various malpractices are taken for granted, will with difficulty come through his own unaided efforts to recognize dishonesty for what it is: we realize this, and say that he never had a proper chance in life.

Finally, a man is certainly not free from his former self. His mental ability will do something to circumscribe the opinions he holds and on which he acts. His character is another factor: a phlegmatic disposition will give rise to quite different situations for choice from those which will be occasioned by a quick temper. And all his previous choices will leave their mark upon a man; habits grow, whether good or bad, by little and little, and the man who has stolen once will not be faced with precisely the same psychological situation when he comes to choose again.

### 3. *Responsibility: "freedom to"*

Of all these limitations we must remain fully aware when we assert that man has a free will. It is not some wild and capricious force, capable of doing anything without reference to any kind of compulsion or influence. We have noted only some of the internal psychological factors which exercise pressure at the moment of choice: that our freedom of action is limited at that moment by a great accumulation of external factors, "circumstances beyond our control", is too obvious to need examination.

Yet the essence of freedom remains. It has been well defined as consisting in *the power of choice between open possibilities*. While we may accept this statement as an adequate description of free will, our consciousness of all the limitations may be expressed by adding that, at the actual moment of choice, a great many factors combine to *restrict the possibilities which are open* at that moment. I may look back on my life as a chain of events, the history of which was partly, perhaps largely, beyond my power to alter; and yet through it all there runs the long, unbroken thread of my own free choices, sometimes causing a violent and lasting deviation in the course of those events, occasionally creating a mere digression, more often simply giving a slight touch here and there like the taps of a sculptor's chisel which slowly mould the statue. This thread of choices is the story of my personal responsibility: it is what I have made of myself.

"Expressing one's personality" seems to be one of the favourite slogans or battle-cries rather peculiar to modern times. It is a somewhat vague ambition, and strange things have been perpetrated in its name. Presumably it doesn't mean that the person of choleric temperament is his truest and best self when he flies into bigger and better rages. It is more intelligible as an ambition if we take it to mean that a man is his best self when he has the courage and the opportunity to develop those abilities and aspects of his own peculiar character which he himself most approves; this at least would be the expression of an intelligent and rational

personality; it would mean that a man makes himself responsible for what becomes of him. But even this is not quite intelligible unless we understand that the development takes place according to some plan or pattern; I cannot make myself responsible for what becomes of me unless I plan this future "me".

It is time we returned to what was said in an earlier chapter of happiness and the pattern of a good life. As I look back over that thread of choices running through my life, which spins the fabric of my responsibility and tells me what I have made of myself, I may well ask—has it been a good life? Certainly it will not have been a perfect life, either in respect of the opportunities I might have had and through no fault of my own did not have, or in respect of the courage and responsibility I have shown—the things I might have done otherwise, had I so willed. But I am not asking myself whether it has been a perfect life: that would have been impossible. It is useless to regret the things I could not have changed, to regret that I was not born a duke or a millionaire. For it is *my* life that I am trying to appraise, not the life of some imaginary person, or of some fictitious ideal of myself. Such regrets would be not merely useless, but quite irrelevant to the present question—has it been a good life? Have I done things worth doing; have I made the most of the chances and the abilities at my disposal, blending all my activities into a pleasing pattern which the finest insights of my reason can commend? If I can say I have, then it has indeed been a good life, a good "expression of my personality". With reason I may regret the choices that were wrong, the choices I knew were wrong even while I made them. And I may well regret the drifting, when I did things merely because others did them as a line of least resistance, without a real opinion of my own; for then the control really passed out of *my* own hands, and, when I might have been free, and been myself, through mere inertia I became a slave of fashion. And then the errors—yes, what about the errors, the times when I was deceived about the efficacy of a means or the value of an end? Is not to regret these, to wish that I had been born a genius, with super-

human insight, rather like wishing that I had been born in purple and fine linen? Yet it is very hard not to regret the mistakes: even though in many cases I could not have altered these (in some cases I might have done), yet I can no longer value now what I thought worth doing then. I will not regard these misguided efforts as mere waste, particularly if I have learnt by them—but if only I had *known*! My reminiscent mood may conclude that, at any rate, advancing years have brought greater maturity and wisdom, greater insight, greater power of judging what is in truth worth doing. How much easier it would be to make the best of oneself if only one were always wise!

It is remarkable how in our times the idea of freedom has become divorced from that of truth and knowledge. There are many catch-phrases about freedom, and “freedom of thought” will show most clearly what is meant by this divorce. It has almost come to be regarded as a privilege or a right of man to be given every opportunity to think exactly what he likes—whether it is true or false. (This comes from thinking negatively of freedom, considering only what we wish to be free “from”, not what we wish to be free to do.) The right name for such a freedom would be “freedom to err”: and can this be regarded as a privilege? Is there any sense in calling it a right of man?—“I have a right to my own opinion,” a man will say. *Has* he? Has, for example, the ordinary armchair strategist any right to an opinion how this or that campaign ought to be conducted? Surely the right to form an opinion must be based on the requisite knowledge. Since the mind of man is a faculty the precise function of which is to attain a knowledge of the truth, it would be more reasonable to maintain that a man has the right to know the truth: that he should be prevented by every possible means from picking up haphazardly any and every opinion, whether true or false. In what sense could this be called a repression of his freedom? It is precisely what is done by every schoolmaster. Only the most negative and unintelligent view of what freedom means could maintain that it hampers a man’s freedom to be instructed in and directed towards a know-

ledge of the truth. Freedom must mean "freedom to" on the positive side, and cannot be made intelligible as long as it is considered merely in terms of "freedom from". And if the function of thought is to attain an ever deepening knowledge of the truth, surely he is most "free to" think who has already attained a profound grasp of truth. What is true of speculation must necessarily be true of action, since the latter proceeds from the former. He is most free in action, most free to order his own life in such a way that it expresses the best version of himself, who is free from error, who has the deepest wisdom and knowledge.

Not long ago there was an exaggerated and ridiculous trend among some educationalists towards letting children run completely wild at school; this procedure, we were told, was the soundest way of letting them develop their personalities free from repressions and inhibitions (one naturally finds oneself describing such an outlook in terms of "freedom from"); all kinds of punishment were to be abolished, for that was no way to develop the intellectual faculties of a rational being. There is no wish here to sneer at sound psychology: obviously harm comes from the opposite extreme, and there are dangers in an over rigid discipline; true, too, that the appeal to a child's intelligence should be used as far as possible, and that a certain freedom of action develops a sense of responsibility, etc. But what is certainly untrue is the underlying theory that a child does not need to be taught morality as much as he needs to be taught anything else. Even if one holds that a human being, left to himself, naturally tends to think and to do what is right (and the Noble Savage notion crops up from time to time under fresh names), even if one denies that there is a certain drag downwards in our nature, yet it is still obvious that the child is cast into a world where moral depravity is rife even if the virtues too are well represented and exemplified. Is he to be left without direction to pick up any and every notion of what is right and wrong, and sort them out for himself as best he may? Only a society which had lost or slackened its own hold on its moral convictions could be satisfied to leave

its children without training and direction in this matter. Were it really convinced of the absolute *truth* of its moral code it would regard it as a primary duty to teach that code to its children. The older educationalists had no doubts about their moral code, and their donkey-and-carrot methods at least had the advantage of directing the child's attention towards the right principles, forcibly at times. The underlying theory here is that only a matured judgment can fully appreciate moral values for itself; therefore mere appeal to the immature intellect will not do; accustom the child by appealing to his senses and emotions as well, to his anatomy if necessary, to hold sacred the right moral principles, and then, when his mind can stand on its own legs, he will come to see for himself that they are indeed sacred.

What has been attempted by a few extremists in the matter of morality has become the common attitude towards religion. Only a society which had lost its conviction of religious truth could, in the name of freedom, fight shy of indoctrinating its children in religious matters. Can one imagine a history or mathematics master who regarded all indoctrination in his subject as stunting and repressing the "freedom of thought" of his pupils and who thought they should be allowed to pick up any stray historical opinion, any slipshod method of thought or investigation, lest their liberty be encroached upon? The intellectually honest master will take it to be his duty to teach his pupils what he knows for certain fact, and the best methods of arriving at a knowledge of the truth of which he is aware; he will also regard it as his duty not to instil into their minds as "gospel truth" views of which he is himself uncertain. That *would* curb their freedom of thought. One sees at once, in this example, the recognition that "freedom of thought" is increased by knowledge of the truth and diminished by erroneous opinion. And, even outside the sphere of education proper, it is the most common attitude to avoid, and even to despise, in the name of freedom of thought, any dogmatic statement of religion. The tenets of dogmatic Christianity are a case in point, and the arch-offender is the Church of Rome. It is

regarded as so narrow-minded to cleave to closely defined dogmas. But surely the question that should be asked about a dogma is not, "Does it tie down my intellect?" but, "Is it true?" These chapters are not a defence of dogmatic Christianity, but at least we can see the logic of that creed. "The truth," it was promised, "will make you free." (John viii, 32). And it is worthy of record that even men with minds as independent as G. K. Chesterton could say that only when they had submitted to dogma did they feel at last really free. Why? Because they held it for truth, and truth of enormous and far-reaching importance, in surrender to which freedom of thought expanded before them as something positive and vast.

Of course there is no surrender so complete as that which is forced upon a mind confronted by unmistakable, unavoidable truth. Courage may be needed to face it squarely and to submit completely, particularly when it contains a moral truth and entails a course of action. For love of truth is a moral virtue itself, a great moral virtue, and only the really strong mind will excel in it. The fact of the matter is that the slogan "freedom of thought" implies that no one really knows, and so everyone has a right to decide for himself. But the phrase has become detached from the context of truth to which it belongs, and there is a great danger that we should come to love the darkness rather than the light, and cling to our freedom to err and freedom to compromise: C. S. Lewis brings this out well in his book, *The Great Divorce*. There is perhaps in all of us an element of weakness in this respect, a lingering inclination to fight shy of anything so uncompromising as truth. But at least we can be honest about it, and not erect that weakness into a virtue and glorify it with the name of independence.

#### 4. *Freedom and law*

When one enters into argument about whether man has or has not a free will, one is usually led into treating freedom in a purely negative way, and may end up without any positive notion

of it. In the course of argument the chief concern will be to show that man is *not subject to* compelling forces of various kinds which might determine his action: the talk is all of "freedom from". In the preceding section an attempt was made to give a more positive value to the notion of "choice between open possibilities". It is not enough to realize that the possibilities are open; we must realize that they are possibilities. A choice is made by a man with two pieces of information before him; what he does is to direct the whole force of his personality towards one of these, to commit himself (his *self*) to one. The choice will have results; it will do something towards limiting the possibilities which will be open to him in the future. Thus the possibilities are really opportunities, and on his choice will depend the opportunities he makes for himself in the future. And always, and all the time, the breadth and depth and value of those opportunities will depend on the value of the information which lies before him as he chooses.

To gain a positive notion of what freedom means you cannot, therefore, separate it from truth. Hence the well-known paradox of freedom and law, often stated in some such way as this—man is then most free when he is most obedient to law. What is meant by this apparent contradiction?

We shall have to begin with a distinction. At the moment of choice itself, when a man is confronted by possibilities A and B, he is free if he is able to do either A or B, if both possibilities are really open. There can be no more nor less about it. Either the possibilities are really open to his choice or they are not. We can only, and do only, speak of a person being more or less free when we are considering, not the open-ness of the possibilities, but the extent of the possibilities which are open. This is sometimes put by saying that "freedom to act or not to act" does not admit of degrees, it is something indivisible, whereas "freedom to do this rather than that" does admit of more or less.

We are not, therefore, considering here the knife-like quality of free will which, at any given instant of its operation, constitutes self-determination; but rather the field in which this fall of the

knife operates, the range of opportunities which a man has or has made for himself for the use of this power of self-determination. And we have already seen that one of the chief factors narrowing this range of choice is a man's ignorance and lack of wisdom.

Now law, in the sense of a *code* of law, a series of general rules binding on all, is a substitute for wisdom. Were all men perfectly wise and perfectly reasonable in conforming their actions to their wisdom, they would have no wish to make any laws, except perhaps a few of the purely conventional type, e.g.: "Let's all drive on the left side of the road": even here, there may be some intrinsic virtue in driving on the left (or right) side of the road, connected perhaps with the majority of men being right-handed, which escapes the present writer: and then there would be no need for even this law, as no one would dream of driving on the other side. But as it is we are neither perfectly wise, nor do we invariably act up to our better judgments. So there are laws—laws made by statesmen and by judges to embody and express the accumulated wisdom of experience. And, as we all realize, these laws exist precisely to improve and to extend, not to hamper, the opportunities open to the people who are subject to them. It is by this standard that we judge them: we consider laws to be wise precisely in so far as they direct people to act according to a wisdom which they themselves as individuals would not be able to possess, or against which, even if they possessed it, they might in their perversity rebel. It is the contention of anarchists alone that *all* laws hamper freedom, and this contention is based either on a purely negative and empty view of freedom, or on a misguided optimism as to the wisdom and probity of the generality of men. But the rest of us are agreed that a state must have some laws, and that their function is to extend and advance, or to safeguard, our opportunities. The laws of an oligarchic state will have an eye only to the vested interests of a class; in a democracy they will be directed to the improvement of opportunities for all. It is in this context that the paradox can be maintained that man is most free when he obeys (wise) laws. For laws are concerned with "freedom to".

### 5. *Freedom and moral judgment*

About the Moral Law, regarded as a code, and the applicability to it of this paradox, more will be said in Chapter VII. But the present discussion of freedom will best be rounded off with a word on the relation of freedom to the moral judgment. And here we are considering the particular moral judgment, that I have a duty here and now to follow or avoid some specified course of action in a given set of circumstances; we are postponing consideration of the general moral judgment (that certain types of action are good or bad).

We can be so obsessed with the anarchical and negative notion of freedom as to fail to realize that in making a moral judgment, in apprehending a duty, we present ourselves with an opportunity. In this statement there are two things which demand special notice—that the occasion is an *opportunity*, and that we *present ourselves* with it. Could we but fully grasp these facts we could never imagine that a moral judgment is in any sense a hindrance to our freedom. Certainly there is a command in a moral judgment, but the command is one I lay upon myself—my own reason declares that one course of action is to be followed, the other avoided; it approves the one and disapproves of the other. To desire to be free from such commands is to desire to have a mind and yet not to have a mind; to know the (moral) truth and yet not to know the truth.

For a moral judgment is, just like any other judgment, concerned with truth and falsity. And its approval and disapproval present me with what is in every sense an opportunity. I am still free to take the opportunity or to disregard it, to be reasonable or unreasonable. But on my decision will depend, as we have seen, (a) whether I add to my life something which my reason fully values and approves, something worth doing, something which fits into the ideal pattern; and (b), to some extent, the opportunities, the possibilities of choice, which will later come my way. Again, it would be quite a chimerical notion of freedom to dislike

being bound by my own choices. Certainly I am free to make or mar my life—but not to eat my cake and have it, to mar that life and still to find its beauty and harmony unimpaired. On the contrary, to be free must mean to be responsible—for better or for worse. For better, too: for if I live according to my moral judgments and let reason take control, the good life so lived will have been freely fashioned; in every choice I will have added something of value to the pattern, and I will have shaken off something of the limitation which every bad choice winds around my freedom to choose well; and in the long string of such reasonable choices, I will have used my freedom to create something which is that expression of myself of which I most approve.

This is really all that ethics has to say in answer to the question, "Why should I be moral?" There remains but to sift this answer and to see if after all it satisfies. But before this task is undertaken there is one final observation to make, which may have arisen many times in the reader's mind in the course of these chapters, but which the discussion just concluded has made all the more insistent.

A moral judgment, it was said above, is concerned with truth and falsity, just like any other judgment. We do not blame a person who with the best intentions does something which we know to be wrong or mistaken; but we regard the action as none the less wrong (in itself, or "objectively") for all that. We say he was acting according to his lights, and distinguish the subjectively good action (done according to what the agent thinks is right) from the objectively good action (which is in fact right). Of course we have only our own view of the situation to set against his; but, if they flatly contradict, one view must be true and the other must be false. We can only act according to our own certainties; and yet the fact remains that a moral judgment can err. In the normal course of things men very largely agree in their moral-views; usually it is only a peculiarly tricky situation or a mistaken philosophy of life that will give rise to an erroneous moral view. But we would have to say that, for all his good

intentions, a man whose action was objectively bad, though subjectively good, was not in fact doing something worth while; for all his good will that course of action would constitute a blot in his life, which perhaps he, too, might some day come to deplore. The dedication of ourselves to such an error would be in a very real sense a drastic binding of our freedom; and to make this dedication in any serious matter of far-reaching consequences would be nothing less than a tragedy, making havoc of our lives.

Once again, it seems, is forced on our attention the transcendent importance of wisdom in the fashioning of a good life. Reason shapes our ends: and as long as reason is in error, not knowing good from evil, impelling us to devote ourselves to aims which are valueless or worse, we are incapable of fashioning a life that can in any final sense be called good. We are in the slavery of ignorance.

## VI. IS ETHICS ENOUGH?

### 1. *Pure ethics and religion*

BY "pure ethics" is here meant that inter-related complex of ideas which centre round the notions of right and wrong and the attempt to blend them into a coherent system—excluding all the while the question of the existence of God. In these days ethics is usually treated in this way, as it was in the main in ancient pagan philosophy.

But it seems reasonable to suppose that belief in the existence of God is liable to make some difference to this complex of ideas which we have called the domain of pure ethics. That is not to say that the theist finds himself forced to unsay half that he has said in pure ethics when he comes to consider man's relation to God. If sound arguments can be adduced as to man's duties and the function they play in life, in abstraction from the question of God's existence, those arguments are still sound when we come to ask ourselves: Does God, then, exist? and if he does, what then? If we do conclude that God exists, it is likely that we may have a great deal to add to our ethical theory; and this addition may be of such a kind as to shed a new light on the whole of our ethical theory from A to Z. But it cannot make a sound argument unsound. The point can be illustrated from practically any branch of learning. The historical facts we learn from text-books are still historical facts when we have gained a deeper insight into them; it still remains true that a potato in the pocket is good for rheumatism (or something of the sort), when we have found a scientific explanation of the phenomenon. No: to the theist ethics is sound enough as far as it goes—but it doesn't go very far.

It is most necessary to be emphatic on this point. For one sometimes meets the theist who will argue: "there's no sense in being good at all, or in behaving decently, if you don't believe in God." The preceding chapters have done their best to show that there is

plenty of sense in being good, whether you believe in God or not. The moral judgment ("I ought not to do this, because it is dishonest," for example) is not made by man in logical dependence from the judgment "God exists". And we have argued that no good reason can be adduced for doubting the validity of such a judgment. The naïve theist argument just indicated would amount to a denial of the validity of human reason. Certainly the theist may maintain that the reasons for being good which we have adduced provide a very *weak psychological motive* for morally good conduct, one not easily grasped by the ordinary man and unlikely to stand up to any great pressure: and few would disagree with him in this. He may also maintain that only a belief in God gives full value to the idea of moral goodness, or gives an ultimately satisfying explanation of the moral judgment as a comment on the nature of reality: of this more will be said later. But it is no part of the theist's position to declare that there is *no* motive for being morally good, or that it is illogical to stand by one's moral judgments, if one does not believe in God.

Now this book is about ethics and does not undertake to prove the existence of God, unless there is an argument for the existence of God to be drawn from ethics: but of this anon. For the moment we simply note the fact that many philosophers have contended that the existence of God can be proved by metaphysical arguments, without appeal to ethics, and we ask: Supposing that you do believe in God, what difference does it make to ethics?

One has only to state the question in order to realize that a complete answer would either be impossible or a voluminous undertaking. For the difference made by the idea of God depends on what idea of God is meant, on what you mean by God and how you think of him. A full answer would have to be preceded by an entire treatise on natural theology, and probably a discussion of the question of revelation as well. But one thing is possible: one could try to state, in outline at any rate, what difference traditional, orthodox Christianity makes to ethics. That project is more manageable, and probably of more immediate interest and

importance as well. And the method of approach is suggested by what has gone before.

It may be that the reader has, in the course of the preceding chapters, felt a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the answer, or system of answers, given by ethics to the question, "Why should I be moral?"

The writer certainly has.

It seems best, therefore, to make an honest attempt to express this dissatisfaction, and then simply to set over against pure ethics the Christian view of the ideas of happiness, duty, etc., which have so far been handled. Such a juxtaposition, or contrast, would not in itself be a proof of anything. But it is hoped that it would provide a clear and interesting statement of two different points of view.

## 2. *The limitations of pure ethics*

(1) It is hard, in the first place, to be satisfied with what may be called the intellectualism of pure ethics. It is the job of everyone to live a good life, and yet the motive for excluding the least baseness from our actions is, in the last resort, a somewhat rarefied one. It would only appeal fully to the speculative intellectual, to the rationalist philosopher; perhaps it would only be understood by him, and even for him it would present a hard ideal to live up to. One would find it difficult to convince a pick-pocket that his practice is against the right control of his life by reason, that he has a real and solemn duty to spread the pattern of his life according to the demands of intellect, his highest and most noble faculty. And if this is so, then only the intellectuals, only those capable of deriving inspiration from the loftiest speculations, are capable of living really good lives. Anyone reading Plato or Aristotle must have felt this conclusion being forced upon him by those philosophers.

The same conclusion is reached when we regard, not the motive for, but the constituents of a good life. We have been

driven to the conclusion time and again that wisdom is essential in fixing the ideal pattern of a good life and in choosing the means for its fulfilment. The stupid and the unintelligent, and even those who are merely misled, seem to be incapable of living a life that is a really good version of themselves. It might almost seem to be the duty of the more gifted to interfere and to save them from themselves—and then we are at once in the Ideal Commonwealth, that fascist state run by the philosophers, where the smallest details in the lives of “the baser sort” are managed for them. After all, what rights can ignorance have against knowledge?

Not only that, but if reason be thus deified—and if there be no God, reason must be the last court of appeal and take God’s place, as it has in fact taken his place in all pagan philosophies, whether of the ancient world or of the eighteenth or the twentieth centuries—must we not conclude that the kind of life led by the intellectual, the artist, the writer, the thinker, is a higher kind of life than that of the artisan or the practical man of affairs; that it is a *better* life in the only ultimate sense of that word, and therefore in a moral sense? It is perhaps unnecessary to remind the reader how Plato was faced with this dilemma—once the wisdom-lover had fully turned to contemplation of the Good, what reason was there why he should return to the Cave and condescend to manage the affairs of lesser men?

(2) There is another snobbery in pagan ethics, no less hard to stomach than the kindred snobbery of intellectualism, and that is its self-perfectionism. The good man’s whole interest seems to be in making a good job of himself; he is continually patting himself on the back and saying, “What a good boy am I”. He suns himself in the warmth and radiance of his own perfection. In fact we seem to have demonstrated that to be happy can only mean to be the creator of a most noble achievement—myself—and to be mighty proud of it.

It is an old saying that humility is a Christian virtue and was unknown to the Good Pagan of pre-Christian days, particularly to the intelligent pagan. The stupid man may have good reason to be humble: why should the wise?

But even apart from Christian sentiments this self-perfectionism is unsatisfactory. Do we really want to be self-satisfied—it is a question we may not have squarely faced before? Can we really be content to find the ultimate centre of our lives inside ourselves? In all this system of ethical theory, what has become of love? There is far too little talk of love, except self-love. Neither the philosopher nor the ordinary man who is untroubled by speculation will be satisfied with this.

Not the ordinary man. For he is accustomed to regard love as somehow inclusive of all excellence, as redeeming all failures and inevitable discontents. In his vague notion of happiness love figures as the paradigm and exemplar of the most ecstatic state of bliss into which he can enter, and in which he rises above his ordinary self to his full stature. And yet we have presented him with happiness in terms of a good life where love is emptied out or perverted, or—which perhaps is worse—is relegated to the position of a constituent.

Nor the philosopher. For right through the history of thought there runs the claim of the will as against the intellect, the heart as against the mind, to be the highest faculty in man: love and not knowledge is stated to be the noblest operation of which man is capable. Herein lies the tension between the poet and the philosopher, the mystic and the theologian, the romantic and the classic, often traceable in the one individual, operating with very different emphasis in men as diverse as Virgil and Pascal. Against the whole tenor of the argument of this book can be heard rising, and boiling, the tide of indignation of all those who have exalted will above reason, sweeping away in a burst of magnificent recklessness all the self-satisfactions of intellectualism. It is the reaction of those who most deeply appreciate, and who give pride of place to, the deep springs and inexhaustible capacities of

desiring of which we have spoken; it is the reaction of all those romantic philosophers who reject with superb scorn the abstract universals which reason offers, and break away in search of a concrete reality wide enough and deep enough to slake their unquenchable thirst. They do not re-write ethics from the point of view of will rather than reason, for to abandon reason is to abandon, not to re-write, ethics. And in the end they do not give us love, for theirs is still that desire without an object that it always was. Either they half-rationalize their flight from reason and seek to be fused with, and dissipated in, an impersonal Absolute; or, if not, their flight remains a blind passion which leads them by swift stages to two ends unwanted, perhaps, and unlooked for—the overmastering egotism of the Superman, and all his black despair. And these are precisely the two factors which will break away from reason to avoid.

What then is to be done? Can ethics be re-written from the point of view of genuine love, to avoid the premium placed on wisdom and the coldness of intellectualism on the one side, and on the other the insane hopelessness of un-reason?—But love of what? Certainly not of an abstraction, of Law, of Duty, of the Good or the Good Life. And love of the good life made more concrete by becoming love of the good life exemplified in, or wrought out by, myself leads us back to where we were: this is the very antithesis and parody of love, the last perversion of all that we mean by love—self-love. There remains for pure ethics only love of our fellow men. This has indeed been tried as the central principle of ethics, and found wanting. In its lowest form it has been advocated by the exponents of racial ethics: the good of the race is to be the ruling principle of life. But this is to assert that there is no central principle of ethics common to all men; this, too, is to abandon ethics and to abandon reason, subjecting both to a blind will-to-power. Nor does it satisfy our original demand: for we are offered in place of love, fanaticism for an abstraction.

In its highest form the plea for the love of our fellow men has

been advanced by such men as Joseph Butler, in whose system our other-regarding impulses of Benevolence seek to control and direct the whole range of our ethical thought. Let us be clear about this, for it is a crucial point for ethics. Suppose love of myself and love of my fellow men come into conflict with each other: that they often do hardly needs illustration: which is to prevail? If we say that no answer can be given, but that each must choose for himself (i.e., merely decide, unable to advance any reason for his decision), then we must abandon the attempt to round off our ethical theory into a complete and coherent system: the dilemma remains. And perhaps that is the right answer. Or we may maintain that we must choose here as we would between any conflicting goods, such as justice and mercy, intellectual and practical pursuits, according to what we conceive to be the ideal balance and harmony of our own particular lives. In this case we relegate love of our fellow men to a position equal to that of any other virtue, and we solve the dilemma; but we do nothing to remedy the original dissatisfaction: for now we practise unselfishness with an eye to our own perfection; we still admire unselfishness for its own sake, for being unselfishness, but we weigh it and parcel it out, we choose to blend it with our lives just in so far as it suits our ideal of ourselves.

There remains the alternative of those who would make love of our fellow men take control and decide all issues; they would consecrate it as the central principle of ethics. Now that has a very noble ring about it, but it is an extremely hard position for ethics to defend. One would have to claim self-evidence for this central principle of our lives. But there are few who would consider such a principle anything like self-evident. And is there not more than a suspicion that there is here an importation into pure ethics of an idea that belongs to, and finds its logical setting only in, Christianity? It is heroic and noble to maintain, quite apart from any hope of an after-life, that man's greatest act is that of self-sacrifice and devotion to others, and perhaps there have been a few who really lived according to this principle—Socrates

perhaps, though he certainly believed in the immortality of his soul. But it is scarcely a self-evident duty.

And, further, it incurs the danger to which ethics is always so liable of consecrating our lives to an abstraction. The moment we try to give it concrete and real content (such as alone can satisfy a human will) its emptiness becomes apparent. What is this good of all to which each must devote himself? If we list, in reply, the concrete and physical states of health, education, high standards of living, etc. (in fact, all the "freedoms from"), then we have come the full circle of contradiction into utilitarian ethics: we have emancipated the moral reason from empiricism just in order to show that it must eventually be subservient to the purely physical goods; we have crowned reason with sovereignty in order to make it the slave of the passions. And if we say that the moral good of all must be the aim of each, we have, instead of a contradiction, a vicious circle: the moral good of each cannot consist in devotion to the moral good of all: that is a sacrifice to Sacrifice.

(3) Pure ethics must be content with a lasting sense of frustration. We may recall all that was said earlier of man's desire for perfect happiness, in the sense of an end or ultimate goal and resting place; and this desire is not satisfied by happiness in the form of a good life built up step by step into an ideal harmony and design. Are we, then, beings who are in the end eternally and essentially restless, insatiable, beings who have a capacity of desire and longing too wide and too deep for anything to fill? To this question about the nature of man even Christian belief can only give the qualified answer "yes, and no". But pagan ethics must answer with an unrelieved "yes, indeed". And from this conviction comes that high note of tragedy which is one of the most penetrating and majestic qualities of pagan literature.

(4) Then, in pure ethics we are presented with a command that has no adequate sanction. Man-made laws bring their own

reward of observance in the benefits resulting for society in general, and there is always added to them an external penal sanction, a punishment for breaking them—external, because it is not a natural consequence of non-observance. Virtue is its own reward, the philosopher must claim; and if we find this a rather rarefied and remote reward, when we honestly face the terrible circumstances in which great virtue is often practised, our dissatisfaction will be nothing to that which we experience when we turn to look for the penal, external sanction of vice. It is useless to argue that there is no peace and satisfaction to compare with that which results from a contented conscience, self-satisfaction in a noble standard maintained and a high achievement wrought, which the vicious must inevitably forgo. For, even if this does not turn our stomachs by its priggishness, it is quite obvious that many get on very well without it and do not feel its absence. The wicked notoriously flourish, and the righteous often lose all but their nobility. There is no adequate internal sanction for morality which is the natural consequence of “being good”. Still less is there any adequate external sanction added by man, from whose reason these moral commands issue. What satisfaction is there that a few men should hang for the thousands of victims of the concentration camps, and for the untold misery of nations? What righting of a wrong, or repairing of a damage done is there here? The passion for justice is one of the strongest that there is in man, and yet for reparation the most that he is offered is revenge.

And, quite apart from the wrongs wilfully done to us by other men, we are powerless in the hands of chance. The good life of the reason-governed man, Aristotle would argue, is better than the goods of fortune—health, wealth and ability, to name a few. But even he had to admit that a life comprising both together is better than either taken singly. Here, too, it is difficult to escape a sense of the deep injustice of life. Why should we not all have an equal chance? We haven't: and there, for ethics, must be an end on't.

### 3. *The Christian view*

It is not, of course, Christianity to hold that man should behave himself here in order to be rewarded hereafter; that if he does not he will be punished. For Christianity is in the first place a theology, and here there is no mention of Christ. That this is not even the Christian view of morality should be obvious to all who remember that the first and greatest commandment of the Law, the Old Law which was taken up by and perfected in the New, is: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. This means literally and exactly what it says—that the first, last and fundamental reason for doing anything is to be found in love. When we love God we do one thing rather than another because it pleases him. Anyone who knows what love is will need no further explanation of how love functions as a mainspring and directing motive for action.

If there was ever danger to fear superficiality in the rather summary treatment of this book, that danger is most pressing now. But it is worth making the attempt to set down, in however sketchy outline, the main Christian point of view. It will be obvious to the reader that the command to love God, the Supreme spiritual Being, whom we cannot see nor fully understand, presents a difficulty; obvious, too, that God has made it easier for us by becoming man, taking upon himself the nature of man, so that in loving Christ and devoting ourselves to Christ we fulfil the first commandment—and with it all the rest. But that realization is the merest glimmering of light on the position occupied in the Christian's life by Christ.

The central doctrine of the Christian faith is that of our redemption by Christ—how his sacrifice has won for us, not merely a reward which will come later on when we die, but a pearl of great price here and now, nothing less than a share, a participation in the divine life itself, even now as we live our lives on earth. Impossible here even to attempt any real exposition of this doctrine of grace: it may be read about in every theologian

from St. Paul to those of the present day. But the main consequences for the questions we have here been asking are as follows.

The Christian's aim in life is simply to become closer and closer knit to Christ, by the fostering and growth in his soul of this spark of divine life received at Baptism, this sharing in the life of God in that measure and manner in which we are capable of sharing it. Holiness, virtue, being good can only mean the growth of Christ in our souls to his full stature. And according to the measure of this life in us when we die will be the measure of our reward in heaven—not a prize added on completely from outside, as it were, at the end of the contest, but a full blossoming into reality and perfection of what is there already.

Thus it can be seen, to deal with the question of sanctions first, how in the Christian view virtue is its own reward. Virtue is our free co-operation with the grace of Christ;\* it is the planting and fostering of a seed which blooms at our death into an eternity of happiness—a happiness beyond the bounds of our conceiving because it means nothing less than a share, in the measure in which we have made ourselves capable by God's grace of sharing, in the divine life. All our efforts and all our sufferings, too, the wrongs we endure and the drawbacks under which we labour—yes, even our stupidity—can add to and cherish this growth of grace in the soul, if all is done for the love of God, and they all can make us capable of a greater and greater reward. In this summary statement is contained all the mystery of the true value of human life. Reason proposes a new end which shapes all else differently. The cold assessment of the intellectual and all his regrets are now transformed. Only a Christian could have written that even his castles in the air and aspirations never realized had an eternal value:

\*It is essential to insist, with the utmost emphasis, that, in the traditional Catholic doctrine of the growth of grace in our souls, we do co-operate: we play a free and a very real part by this co-operation. Otherwise there is a complete hiatus between ethics and Christianity which must make nonsense of one or the other.

All the world's coarse thumb  
And finger failed to plumb, . . .

All instincts immature,  
All purposes unsure, . . .

Thoughts hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act,  
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;  
All I could never be,  
All men ignored in me,

*This I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.*

And vice brings its own punishment. How shallow it is to argue, as some do, against the doctrine of hell by saying that an infinitely good God could not devise and inflict anything so terrible as an eternity of punishment. This is to think of God in the rôle of a human judge who, after coming to his verdict, imposes some fitting sentence. But in this case there can be no distinction between the verdict and the sentence. And the verdict is of our choosing, not God's. He has made us free and given us the opportunity of embracing grace within our souls, or of rejecting it. The reward is no more added on, as an afterthought, than is the punishment. If we reject it, then, when we die, the seed of grace does not exist in our souls: we are, for all eternity, what we have chosen to be—men rejecting any share in the divine life. That is hell. It is quite illogical for a Christian to believe in heaven and not in hell; and it robs life of that urgent sense of high endeavour, showing no appreciation whatever of what is at stake, i.e., of what is meant in the Christian faith by being good and by being bad.

From this doctrine of grace it is possible to see what must be the Christian answer to man's groping search after an ultimate end and resting place. It is that, even as the philosopher must conclude, man has no natural end. For the eternity of reward is not in any sense a natural end. It is a completely free and gratuitous gift of God, raising man above the level of his own nature; it neither follows with logical necessity from the creation of such a being as man, nor is he able by his own natural and unaided

powers to attain it. Man is indeed a fundamentally restless and insatiable being, and the seeds of frustration are sown deep in his nature; for, in his present state, and apart from the grace of God which escapes the eye of the philosopher, there is no adequate purpose for which he exists, there is none which he can form and follow for himself. And so we may indeed conclude, with Virgil, that there are tears deep down at the heart of things; or, with Augustine, that our hearts were made for God, and can find no rest until they rest in him.

Thus Christianity transforms and transfigures ethics from top to bottom. It does not merely add something by way of conclusion, dotting a few i's, crossing a few t's. And yet it does not sweep away the truths of ethics; rather it irradiates them, warming what was frigid, making supple what was stiff and stark. For it still remains true, in the Christian view, that man has an aim in life, the pattern of a good life for him to weave harmoniously from end to end. Yet now that aim is no longer its own, would-be self-sufficing end, but leads by the grace of God to a further end which is the goal. We no longer come to a full stop in self-perfection, for I most perfect myself when Christ most fully grows to perfection in me: he must increase and I must decrease. Yet the gift of God is not forced upon me; at its entrance and at every stage of its growth and differentiation into a thousand varying qualities of splendour, it is the result of free choice. It is my doing, and yet it is wholly the gift of God, the work of Christ in my soul. The most that I can do is to admit the grace of God, to allow Christ to do his redemptive and sanctifying work. And my admission, my submission, the summit of my own achievement and the driving force of all my choices, is an act of love: it is an embrace.

And yet it is none the less my own self and none other that is thus made perfect and attains its highest expression. For God, who has created a world in which no two leaves shall grow exactly similar, has shown even more marvellously the diversity of his riches in the creation of mankind. It is just me, with my own

peculiar kinks and tastes and traits, that the grace of God fills with graciousness. In all eternity there can never be another quite the same.

Here then, in their very diversity, is the equality of men which pagan ethics destroys with its intellectualism. They are equal in their own ineffective nothingness; and equally made of infinite value by the grace of Christ admitted of their own free will. Certainly in the fashioning of life reason is in control, but reason making the highest act of which it is capable, more sublime than the profoundest insights and speculations of the wise, an act of faith in God's revelation. In this act of faith man's two noblest and most soaring faculties, his power of intellectual vision and his great power of loving, are united in a single act. For one cannot, in the last analysis, have faith in propositions and in abstract formulations of doctrine. We put faith in persons. Thus, I believe that Vladivostock exists, though I have never been there to see, ultimately because of my faith in human beings and their normal rational behaviour. I believe in my friend and in my mother because I know them intimately and love them: I trust fully in their goodness and good-will and believe what they tell me. Even so, too, do I believe in God and in what he tells me because I have known him at first hand. And in this act of faith, where love and insight are united, human reason soars out through and beyond all its tabloid ideas, its strutting distinctions and its frigid abstractions to Truth which is warm and personal and ultimately real.

There is no premium here set on natural intellectual ability. The values of our human life are measured by a different standard. It is no easier, and no harder, for the mentally endowed to fashion a good life graced by holiness, than it is for the most humble and ill-educated. God is no acceptor of persons. And yet this act of faith, prolonged through every choice in life, is no blind abdication of reason, it is itself an act of reason penetrating to truths more fundamental and more sublime than any which natural reason is capable of attaining. And though it leads the stupid and

the ignorant, as it leads the wise, straight to the things which matter most, it does not sweep aside or set at nought the great achievements of the natural intellect; rather it illumines, crowns and transfigures them, even as here in this branch of human knowledge known as ethics, the truths of faith crystallize and complete all that unaided reason penetrates and gropes for. For it is the precise function of grace, as was explained in the beginning, to build upon nature and perfect it at every turn, and in every light and shade of eternal truth that is reflected in it.

As a conclusion to this brief outline of the Christian view of moral behaviour a further instance of the claim just made may be given for the more speculative. When setting down, at the very beginning of this book, the various frames of mind that might lie behind the question, "Why should I be moral?" we tried to catch the mood of one who was perplexed at the very existence of morality, and the moral judgment, and who asked: "Do moral judgments give me any real information about the world in which I live? Is there any metaphysical basis of morality?" In the course of discussing the nature of the moral judgments we tried to show that they cannot be reduced to judgments of other types, and that they add something quite unique to our knowledge of ourselves in relation to our surroundings; that there can be no good reason for doubting the validity of this information. Now all our knowledge, in the Christian view, gives us information of a world made by God, so that in that knowledge we learn something—obscurely and as in a reflection, as Plato and St. Paul put it—of the nature of him who made all that is, being himself the primary reality, whose name is "He who is". But the greatest of all contributions to our knowledge of God, apart from revelation, comes from our moral judgments; for they give us our deepest knowledge of ourselves, of man, whom in a special manner God made in his own image and likeness.

#### 4. *The "Moral Argument" for the existence of God*

If there is such a thing as a specifically moral argument for the existence of God, this book is it. Whether such an argument can be called a proof of God's existence depends, of course, entirely on what constitutes a proof and what does not. And about that, discussion may rage for ever without conclusion. The ordinary theist, who has never had time or inclination for much speculation, would probably agree that he believes in God's existence because this is what gives coherence and meaning to his entire experience of life; the existence of God is a conclusion forced on him in a thousand ways. This would be the man-in-the-street's argument for God's existence, quite a personal one, quite impossible to state in words or to deploy in a series of connected propositions for the vulgar to gaze upon. Are we to say that this is unreasonable, or to conclude that reason can function in more ways than one? Is not this operation of reason rather like the diagnosis of an experienced doctor, a firm conviction reached, not as the conclusion of a linear argument, but as a flash of recognition that cuts its way through a host of jumbled details? Call it what you will: it was called by Newman the "illative sense". It provides each man's own personal argument for God's existence, fashioned out of the whole of life as he has known it. If this entirely satisfies his reason, does it matter whether we do or do not accord to it the name of "proof"?

The so-called moral argument for God's existence is simply a common slice taken out of each man's whole experience, and set into some shape. It is the argument from man's ethical convictions. There is no pretence that it is a linear and a logical argument and concludes, as the great metaphysical argument or arguments conclude, with logical necessity. In a sense it is just the poor relation of those arguments, but in our time it has attained an unwonted popularity, either because of the discredit which modern philosophy has tried to shower on metaphysics, or

because we do not take easily to the shirt-sleeves type of thinking which metaphysics involves.

The "moral argument" can be taken in a broader or a narrower sense. In the broader sense it is the whole of this book; it is just the fact that man's moral convictions, his hopes and desires and all that they imply, seem to need the existence of God to make them cohere into a system which satisfies the whole man, intelligence included. In a narrower sense the moral argument consists in taking one or other of these ethical notions and showing how the same thing happens; in particular the notions of obligation and of sanction, briefly as follows:—

(1) In ethics man is confronted by a command which he issues to himself, as binding on himself, and yet one from which he cannot free himself. The whole idea of a command with no ultimate authority behind it seems unsatisfactory. A command of reason seems to imply a person, a rational being, issuing that command in his own right: so it is with every other kind of command and law with which we are acquainted. And yet, while I am conscious that it is my own mind which tells me I should do this and that, I am also fully aware that it is not I who made it so; I am not the final authority; I can see that honesty *is* a duty, but am not responsible for the state of affairs in which such duties exist.

(2) The argument from sanctions states another form of rational dissatisfaction that arises from ethics. It is the deep sense of injustice and frustration which we have already noted. If virtue is really obligatory, must it not be its own full reward? It is impossible to regard the least discrepancy between virtue and self-interest (in the final reckoning) as rational or intelligible. For if virtue is really virtue, a moral obligation, and self-interest really is self-interest, how is it possible to choose between them if they conflict in any degree whatever? That is a totally irrational position to be in. Only an adequate sanction for virtue and vice could solve this hopeless dilemma.

And, on the side of the reward of virtue, we find ourselves

desiring the apparently unattainable. We find ourselves with a capacity of longing which is universal in its grasp, and yet with a desire that fixes itself on concrete objects and cannot be satisfied by universals that are abstract ideas. Only a single concrete being that comprised in itself *all* good could satisfy this root of our desiring. How could such a thing as man, possessed of this tragic and insatiable longing, come to exist at all in a world of limited and finite things? The only real answer to this question is that we were made by God for God, and for nothing less, and that our hearts must remain restless unless they find rest in possession of him.

With that we may leave the question of the moral argument. There is no claim here, be it repeated, that you can conclude in strict logic that, because we seem to hope for happiness of a certain type, happiness of that type must exist. Whatever else the moral argument is, it is not, as long as it stays within the bounds of ethics, a strict linear argument, a "proof" as one might use that word in geometry, for God's existence. In so far as these arguments from obligation and from sanctions can be grounded in a metaphysical theory and raised to the plane of metaphysical argument, then they may perhaps prove the matter in the strict sense. But then we have no longer a specifically moral argument but rather an approach to the one, radical, metaphysical argument through ethics. But that is another question. The purpose and the main emphasis of this book has been to make an honest enquiry into the sphere of ethics; to state the sense of dissatisfaction which hedges this study about; and simply to set beside it, for purposes of comparison and contrast, that real Christian view of morality which is ingrained more deeply than we realize in our ordinary outlook on decent behaviour. It is hoped that at least the two different points of view will stand out clearly.

## VII. MORAL LAW

### 1. *Moral law: the Command*

WE had occasion when speaking above, in Chapter V, of freedom and law, to draw a distinction between law regarded as a *command*, and law regarded as a *code*. Though the matter is of the first importance for assessing much that is written on ethics, it seemed better to postpone it to a final chapter where some conclusions of this book may be drawn, in order that the main argument might not be interrupted by too long a digression.

A good deal of obscurity can be engendered by failing to draw this distinction between command and code. Much has already been said about the command, the imperative, that is contained in a moral judgment; but before we pass on to consider what is meant by a code of moral law, there are still a few reflections to be made under this head.

It is in the compelling force of his moral judgment, as has been seen, that a man's reason asserts its superiority and would-be sovereignty in matters of action. When confronted with an obviously moral choice a man sees that the actual doing-by-him of a particular action would be wrong, morally bad; and therefore that the avoidance of it is right, morally good, a duty. From the objective validity of such a judgment, defended above, it follows that the goodness or badness of human action is a real, objective fact, an additional factor in reality over and above all that our merely speculative intellect is capable of apprehending. In other words, moral judgment gives us real information about the world of which we are a part, information about ourselves-and-this-world.

This is the border line between ethics proper and metaphysics. It is a metaphysical question what exactly the goodness or badness of human action consists in, and how this additional piece of information about the nature of reality fits in with all the other

pieces of information acquired by the speculative intellect. And this is where teleology,\* essentially a metaphysical theory, comes in to offer its suggestion.

The suggestion amounts to this. All living things strive by their nature towards their own perfection. This is the very law of their being. It is in this sense that men can be said to exist "for" an end, even apart from, though not excluding, the possibility of their having been created by God for such an end. But man is a rational animal, and therefore in his case this law of life expresses itself through his reason. Just as inorganic matter behaves according to physical laws, discoverable by science, so, too, the behaviour of man is subject to law. Being a rational animal, his conduct is not accounted for by physical or psychological laws which would force it along certain lines, but is governed by a law expressed through his reason which, being free, he is not physically or psychologically bound to obey. That is precisely what is meant by a moral law—a command laid upon a rational being, which he is free to obey or disobey. Thus the inherent striving and urge towards perfection in all living things issues in man's case in a command of reason, a moral imperative.

It is in this context that that much bandied term "Natural Law" received its first and most important application in ethics—most important because most profound, and underlying all subsequent and other uses. Man, this theory holds, is subject to a law which issues commands (whether in code form or not remains to be seen), which express that behaviour in which lies the perfection of his rational nature: the moral law, then, considered as a command, is the natural law of man.

Whether or no such a theory will find acceptance is a matter of metaphysics, and therefore outside the scope of this book. But at least it should be understood what the theory attempts to explain,

\*Teleology: the idea that events, particularly developments, are ultimately explained by *purpose*—whether interior to the thing developing, or exterior.

viz., why it is that a moral judgment contains an "ought", that irreducible imperative factor which makes it so different from any other kind of judgment, that "ought" which cannot on analysis, as we have tried to show, be reduced to the goodness, the desirability of the action, however lofty and high-minded the admiration which such goodness may inspire.

Whether this teleological explanation, even if accepted, does in fact fully explain the presence of this "ought" is by no means clear. If we return for a moment to the opening paragraphs of Chapter IV, we will see there the attempted proof that we have a duty to consult our ultimate self-interest. Were we to accept the teleological theory we would be able to say: "Reason, certainly, commands me to seek my own perfection; now I see why it does; I see the source of this commanding force." But is that conclusive? Is it, or is it not, possible to ask: "Why should I do what my reason, expressing the innate law of all living things, commands? Am I, in the last resort, the minion of a biological force?" Whether this is a sensible, a significant question, or not, will be left to the reader to decide. But it should be remembered that the teleological view was accepted in the Middle Ages and after by philosophers who were able to back it up with, and ground it on, the idea of a personal God having by his own nature supreme dominion and authority over all he had created—and revealing this dominion to his rational creatures precisely in this way, through their reason. It is just from any dissatisfaction we may feel with the teleological or any similar explanation, as a final *raison d'être* of the "ought", that the moral argument for God's existence from the fact of obligation draws its force.

At any rate some such theory as the teleological is needed if the imperative factor in moral judgment is not to be left as a loose end, sticking out and unassimilated by our general systematic view of reality.

## 2. *Moral law: the Code*

That the reason of man issues moral commands is a fact of common experience. It is one question whether this fact can be satisfactorily explained by the teleological conception of Natural Law, and that question is here left open. It is quite another question whether reason issues its commands in code form, and this now comes under discussion. But it should be noted that this question is not necessarily bound up with the teleological theory just enunciated.

The question of a Code of Moral Law arises, not from the situation of moral conflict, where a man knows what his duty is but does not want to do it, but from the situation of moral doubt, where he cannot make up his mind whether a certain course of action is good or bad. Now this state can be most easily misconceived. A man does not ask himself: "Is cruelty wrong?" (unless he is morally, i.e., mentally, defective in the way explained in Chapter IV). He knows quite well that cruelty is wrong, but cannot decide whether this particular instance of "inflicting pain on others" is cruelty.

Certainly it may readily be conceded that the moral commands of reason issue, at least ultimately, in a code of principles of the type of "cruelty is wrong". At least ultimately, because we do not find ourselves in the world replete with a comprehensive armoury of such judgments, innate moral principles as it were. We acquire them by a simple process, which may be called a type of induction, just as we acquire much of our other knowledge. We come across instances of cruelty, i.e., of pain inflicted on others, which our reason condemns; and by this intellectual grasp of the nature of cruelty *in its instances* we form a universal idea of a particular type of wrongness, cruelty, much as we get a universal idea of redness from seeing red things, or of epic poetry from reading epic poems.

Such judgments as "cruelty is wrong" are, of course, universal judgments admitting of no exception. All red things are red and

all cruel acts are cruel. The word itself, "cruel," carries a moral stigma attached to it, as indeed it must seeing that it is only a name for a particular type of wrongness. (Hence "cruelty is wrong" is an analytic judgment, in the sense that it predicates of the subject a quality explicitly contained and recognized in that subject. Hence judgments of this type are universal.)

The sum total of such judgments, acquired in this way (or, if at first accepted on the authority of our parents, etc., assessed and accepted later by our own matured reason), can be called the Moral Law. And, by a natural transference of terminology on the part of holders of the teleological view, it has also been called the Natural Law. But there are two things to note about it:—

- (a) It is a transference of terminology. To speak of Natural Law in this sense, or, for that matter, of *the* Moral Law, does indeed imply a belief that there is one moral law binding on all men, one such code of ethical principles which the natural reason of man everywhere forms, or should form. (We tried to show above that a man's moral judgments are influenced by his general philosophy of life, and do not operate *in vacuo*. It may indeed be the case that one could find a tribe of men so radically wrong-headed on some point or other that they did not recognize a type of wrongness corresponding to cruelty at all. But that would not be the same as their not regarding as cruel acts which we consider cruel: this latter situation would not imply that they had formed no judgment of *this type*, but only that they formed their concept of cruelty from quite other and very different instances.) *But* to speak of Natural Law in this sense of a universal code, as *the* Moral Law, does not commit one to the teleological theory explained in the previous section. The notion of such a code can be arrived at simply by considering the logic or psychology of moral judgments.
- (b) Such a Natural Moral Law does not of itself solve one's moral doubts. It is not a rule of thumb or formula which

one can apply to a "case of conscience" in order to solve it. People who argue about corporal punishment are not in the least perplexed as to whether cruelty or over-indulgence (ideas formed from other and more straightforward instances of pain inflicted or favours lavished) are wrong; what they are trying to determine is whether corporal punishment is an instance of cruelty or its omission an instance of over-indulgence.

There is no wish here to minimize the part played by such a code of ethics (universal moral principles) in the determination of moral behaviour. It is essential to be fully alive to all the kinds of rightness and wrongness that there are in order to make enlightened moral judgments; and we are frail beings, only too apt to forget and to be narrow, going bald-headed for the first thing that occurs to us. So it helps a good deal towards deciding a particular moral doubt to review the whole interplay of ethical principles which may be involved. But it doesn't of itself decide it; it does not settle the doubt in the way in which the application of a formula produces the desired results, or syllogistic reasoning leads you to an inevitable deduction. It will help considerably towards discovering the true nature of a perplexing situation with which we are confronted to review all the types of goodness or badness of which the course of action under consideration *might* be an instance; it will help us to place it in its true context; it will sharpen and train our insight. But we have still got to decide what that true nature is, before we can act accordingly. And for this we have only, when all has been weighed, our particular moral insight, that elementary faculty of moral vision in a given set of circumstances, which first enabled us in easier cases to see cruelty or over-indulgence for what it is, and so to generalize that "cruelty is always wrong".

What the man in moral doubt is trying to do is to attach a *moral* qualification to an action considered as a purely *physical* event, to see the moral character exhibited by the particular physical activity in the particular circumstances in which it occurs. What

he asks is: "Is this-inflicting-pain (physical event in given circumstances) cruel (moral characteristic)?" or, to put it another way: "Is inflicting-pain, in these circumstances, cruel?" If he decides that it is, then he judges that this physical event is (or would be) cruel.

This is a synthetic judgment, and immense confusion can be caused in ethics if it is not clearly distinguished from the previous (analytic) type of judgment, "cruelty is wrong". For, just as a man can generalize about types of moral activity and see that they are always good or always bad, so he can generalize (but in a different sense of "generalize") about physical activities. The killing of one man by another, for example, is in most or nearly all of its instances and circumstances a physical activity which is morally wrong. Thus, if a man generalizes about such a situation, he can form the synthetic general judgment: "it is wrong for one man to kill another". About such a judgment there are two most important things to notice:—

- (a) It is a generalization, not a universal judgment. The man who forms it has no reason whatever for asserting, because he has considered some or a good many instances of killing which are in fact wrong, that *all* instances of one man killing another (physical event) must be morally wrong (moral characteristic).
- (b) Such a judgment considers the action as a physical event in abstraction from the particular motive for which, and the particular circumstances in which, it is done. And precisely because this is so, precisely because the subject of the judgment is a physical event considered in abstraction, it cannot have a moral predicate attaching to it of its own nature.

*If* one could form a code of such synthetic judgments which were really universal judgments (admitting no exception), then

one would have a formula for deciding whether any particular action was right or wrong, a code which could be used for simple syllogistic deduction in solving cases of conscience. It would be sufficient to know that a contemplated course of action was an instance of killing a man, to be able to conclude that it was inevitably wrong. But such a code is an impossibility, and the aspiration after it is sheer confusion (a confusion easy enough to fall into, because of the great interplay of analytic and synthetic principles in our minds when we are trying to solve a moral doubt). There can be no natural law of this type, a code from which one could read off, from the physical activity of men, the moral character of their actions, except in a general sort of way. There could not be: for it would be easy to think of a physical activity, e.g., saying what one knows to be untrue—which was an instance of two conflicting would-be universal synthetic propositions: an instance, in the example taken, both of deception and of preserving a secret. Were the judgment "*saying what I know to be untrue* (physical event regarded in abstraction from motives and circumstances) *is wrong*" really a *universal* judgment; and were "*keeping a secret is a duty*" really another such—then we would be faced at times with the real dilemma, which would damn any theory of ethics, that, when faced with the alternatives of telling the truth or keeping a secret, whatever we did would be both right and wrong.

It seems evident that considerable confusion is in fact caused by mixing up these two types of judgment, the analytic-universal and the synthetic-general. For instance, if one is asked "Is lying always wrong?" one cannot answer without knowing how the questioner is using the word "lying". By common usage it has a moral stigma attached (because *most* examples of untruth are in fact wrong), and it should therefore be used only to cover the wrong instances of "saying what one knows to be untrue." In that case, lying is always wrong, *ex hypothesi*; but this judgment would then be no help towards deciding whether a perplexing instance of "saying what one knows to be untrue" is in fact an

instance of "lying": for it might be rendered lawful and good from the circumstances and motive: e.g., telling fairy stories to the children.\*

One could perhaps think of some types of event (e.g., a man beating his wife) for which it would be impossible to imagine justifying circumstances and motive. In that case the synthetic general judgment "wife-beating is wrong" would approach, or reach, the status of a universal judgment; it would do so in the way in which all strict inductions of this type do so, by enumeration of all the instances. But even then the moral stigma would not inhere in the action precisely *qua* physical event; it would invariably be a bad action because the whole complex, event-circumstances-motive, was invariably a bad one. It is for this reason that we do not blame the insane or sleep-walkers for their behaviour; we regard it as a purely physical event, knowing that it is not moral action, precisely because we must detach from it the mental activity which would normally "inform" such behaviour; and therefore it cannot be praised or blamed, it cannot be qualified with a moral predicate. We may say that "objectively" it is morally bad—meaning that it usually would be—but that "subjectively," or in concrete fact, it is not moral action at all.

### 3. *The Guardian of the Moral Law*

It should be noted that of these two types of judgment, synthetic and analytic, the synthetic judgment comes first, both in time and in logical priority. It is from a particular synthetic judgment that a man first comes to recognize, in an easy case, the particular type of wrongness called "cruelty". And then, in much harder and more complex situations, he uses both his

\*No one has ever held that you can do *evil* that good may come. But we often find ourselves in the position of wondering whether a certain action which would in other, and in normal circumstances be evil, is in fact evil in *this* situation.

universal-analytic and his general-synthetic judgments to aid him in discovering whether a further particular situation also exemplifies cruelty. He uses them, not as formulas or as premises for a simple deduction, but as beams of light which he can focus on the situation in order to discern its true nature.\*

We noted that where men differ in their moral judgments is not in the analytic but in the synthetic type. They will not be lacking in any notion of cruelty or justice, but different men will consider different acts to be cruel or unjust.

Who is to decide? We must admit that wrong moral judgments are frequently made, through wrong-headedness (perhaps about other matters) and through lack of insight, narrowness, etc. Surely only the wise can know: only those possessed of a true philosophy of life.

Hence in the philosopher-governed state of Plato it was the solemn duty of the wise to be Guardians of the moral law, regulating the behaviour of the less wise by rules of thumb and codes of law, to save them from their stupidity. It must have occurred to many readers of the "Republic" that the reason why the philosopher-state is so much more widespread and extensive in

\*This analysis is not meant to favour an explanation of the situation of moral doubt which regards the proposed action (e.g., of administering corporal punishment) as actually possessing and exhibiting both morally good and morally bad qualities: and which suggests that we weigh the inherent badness against the inherent goodness. In such a theory one must distinguish the goodness of an action (any good qualities it supposedly possesses) from the rightness of the action (whether it is good on the whole, and therefore licit); and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we may find ourselves forced to do, as a *duty*, an action which is "partly bad". No: such an explanation forgets that the particular moral judgment about particular situations is the starting point of all ethical thought. We apply our general or universal judgments to help us to see what *is* the moral characteristic of the proposed action, e.g., corporal punishment. Under the light of one principle it may appear to be cruelty; in the light of another its omission will seem to be over-indulgence. But when we decide, then we decide that it really is good or bad; and if good, then also right; if it is seen to be good, or a duty, it is seen not to be bad *at all*. Once more, it is such particular judgments that are at the basis of ethical assessment.

its control than our own states, is that it combines in itself the function we would ascribe to a sovereign state on the one hand, and to a divinely guided Church on the other.

Our own secular states have cut themselves off from the Church, and attempted to distinguish between the functions of Church and State in such a way (at least among the better of them) as to leave each independent in its own sphere. The state has abdicated its rôle of Guardian of the Moral Law. But can it in fact do anything of the sort? Can it, for example, take charge of the education of the children without interfering, for better or for worse, in the guardianship of the moral law, i.e., without helping to create and disseminate a philosophy of life which is either right or wrong? Can it handle the divorce laws without consecrating and generalizing lines of action which must have moral import? Can it, in fact, in the whole body of the laws which it enforces and in all the public behaviour which it exhibits towards other countries, avoid crystallizing and canonizing moral principles?

It hardly needs remarking that we cannot to-day leave the direction and assessment of moral judgment in the hands of the "wise" with quite the same confidence with which Plato could. Who is to say which is the true philosophy of life? And is it enough to conclude that each must decide for himself, when we are faced with the fact that the state inevitably embodies, expresses, and to a large measure enforces an interpretation of what is right and wrong? If this is all that we can say, that each man must decide for himself, we thereby admit that there is no authority capable of applying and interpreting the moral law, of guarding it or saving it from drifting uncontrolled where circumstances may take it, under the influence of that strangely impersonal force the secular state, which even when it sincerely intends to leave the individual conscience free is all the while, perhaps in spite of itself, moulding and putting pressure on his opinion.

We must not make any mistake about the Church's position, and by minimizing her claim totally misconceive the logic of her

position. She does not claim to be the Guardian of the Moral Law because of the long and distinguished list of her philosophers, and her readiness to argue for the reasonableness of all her teaching; nor, even, does she claim this position because of her immense experience in handling the moral problems of men. She does not, in fact, rank herself with the most wise of this world and compete with them. She does far more than that.

The Catholic Church asserts that she, and she alone, is the divinely appointed, divinely instructed, divinely assisted Teacher of God's revelation; that God himself teaches us through her. However we may react to this claim, it would be foolish to blink it and fail to see what it implies. It means that the Church holds the ultimate secrets, revealed by God, of the nature and destiny of man, without which no view of life, as it strives to master and include the bewildering variety of human experience, can fail to be incomplete, if not actually twisted; for the last secrets are not truths which human reason can reach by its own power and light. It means that she has a sacred duty to teach and to spread these truths, and all the moral truths which depend on them, with all the zeal and energy she can command; to teach them as she has received them, with unqualified authority, with uncompromising loyalty to her trust.

In the exercise of this trust she has often had to incur the hostility of opposing extremists by insisting on the universal principles of the natural moral law. And she has found it necessary, too, in order to counteract the errors of extremists, to state her mind on various classes of human action by expressing in terms of coded law those general synthetic judgments which are as near an approximation to universal principles of action as it is possible for such coded law to be. For such laws can never be more than a substitute for perfect individual insight, and they may cover many hard cases in their sweep.\* Of this the Church is

\*We are speaking of *ethical laws*. The *supernatural* effects of, e.g., a Sacrament introduce an entirely different and separate factor.

fully aware; it is not likely that she, of all law-givers, should forget that the letter kills and the spirit, in her case the Spirit of God, gives abundant life.

It would be shallow indeed to look on this tenacious hold on moral doctrine as a staid, a dull, a narrow thing. It was G. K. Chesterton who pointed out that it is really orthodoxy that is exciting, and aberration but an insipid and spineless affair. For orthodoxy is not only, as he puts it, as thrilling as the breathless driving of a spirited chariot team along the ridge between two precipices, swerving this way and that to avoid the kinks and pitfalls of the narrow road, bracing against the battering elements and the conflicting winds of doctrine. It is as stimulating and as full of vitality as the life of a man—a man who can fling wide his arms to embrace and to be enriched by all the width and depth of human insight and sensibility, and yet hold firm to an unwavering course through his length of days; for he knows all the time whence he has come, and he can see, far off perhaps, but clearly, where he is going.





