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THE MORAL SENSE

BY

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON: GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE

1947

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

AMEN HOUSE, E.C. 4

London Edinburgh Glasgow New York

Toronto Melbourne Cape Town Bombay

Calcutta Madras

GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE

PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

THIS book consists of the major part of a thesis, written between 1938 and 1940, for the Degree of D.Phil. in the University of Oxford. Limitations of space for the O.C.P.M. series have made it necessary to confine the published version to four writers, Hutcheson, Hume, Richard Price and Reid. The thesis included chapters on three other British moralists of the eighteenth century, and I hope it may be possible to print elsewhere what I had to say about one or two of them.

I wish to express my thanks to Mr. E. F. Carritt, Professor H. H. Price and Sir David Ross for kindly criticism and advice. That many of the views which I express and follow are derived from the work of these three philosophers and of Professors G. E. Moore and H. A. Prichard, will be obvious but should not go unacknowledged. Professor Price and my wife have been good enough to read the proofs.

I want to express my gratitude also to the Provost and Fellows of Oriel College for electing me to be their Robinson Senior Scholar during 1938-40 and for the happiness which I had in their company, and to the Liverpool Education Committee who awarded me a Special Research Scholarship for the same period. It was not a time congenial to philosophical research, but during the subsequent five and a half years, *πρὸς πολιτικοῖς ἐπιταλαιπωρῶν . . . τῆς πόλεως ἕνεκα* in the Army and the Civil Service, I have often looked back wistfully to my Oxford days.

The book is dedicated to Edgar Frederick Carritt, who taught me philosophy, and from whom I have learned more than philosophy alone.

D. D. R.

LONDON—DUNEDIN
1945-6

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NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

I OCCASIONALLY use the word 'obligation' as synonymous with the terms 'claim', 'prima facie obligation', and 'responsibility' (expressions suggested by Professor Prichard, Sir David Ross, and Mr. Carritt respectively). I believe this is in conformity with ordinary usage. Where I have wanted to make the distinction which Sir David Ross marks between the expressions 'prima facie obligation' and 'obligation proper' (or 'duty proper'), I have used for the second the word 'duty'.

CHAPTER I

EMPIRICISM AND THE MORAL SENSE

BESIDE the splendour of the contribution to the theory of knowledge made by British philosophers of the eighteenth century, the ethical theory of the period stands in the shade. Bishop Butler is studied, but the remaining British moralists of his time are largely neglected. Yet some of them at least deserve a better fate. Of Richard Price Dean Rashdall says: 'His *Review of the principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* I regard as the best work published on Ethics till quite recent times'¹—but the remark is relegated to a footnote. Hume's views on morals well repay a fraction of the attention given to his theory of knowledge, for in the one as in the other he is so much subtler than the general run of empiricists. The discussions of the eighteenth-century moralists are of particular interest to-day when, as then, the epistemological foundations of ethics are being re-examined. The views and approaches of several contemporary writers seem to echo those of the eighteenth century. It is, for example, rather startling to open Richard Price's book and find in its first pages exactly the same logical argument for the indefinability of moral attributes as has been used by Professor Moore in *Principia Ethica*. Professor Moore holds that 'good' is indefinable since we may significantly ask of any proposed *definiens* whether it is itself good; the question would not be tautologous. Richard Price uses the same argument for 'right'.²

This book is concerned with the views of four of these eighteenth-century philosophers on the epistemology of morals, that is, on the question: When I judge that I ought to do a certain action, do I make this judgement on the basis of knowing, or of feeling, or of sensing something? This question played an important part in the discussions of the

¹ *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. i, p. 81 note.

² Cf. pp. 111 ff., below. Professor Moore tells me he has never read Richard Price.

eighteenth-century moralists and gave rise to what is known as the controversy between sense and reason in morals. The main participants in the controversy were Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith on the side of sense or feeling, and Samuel Clarke, Wollaston, Balguy, Richard Price and Reid¹ on the side of reason or knowledge. (Extracts from the works of these philosophers—except Hume and Reid, whose complete books are more easily obtainable—can be found in Sir L. A. Selby-Bigge's *British Moralists*.) Bishop Butler stood aside from the controversy, which did not interest him, and gave it no more than a passing, and almost contemptuous, notice saying that both sides were probably right. The expression 'moral sense' was first used by Shaftesbury, but in a loose and vague way; it became the name of a specific theory in the work of Hutcheson, who drew upon Locke's empiricist theory of knowledge in framing it. In this way the controversy between sense and reason in morals became indissolubly connected with the general question of the truth of the empiricist epistemology. The four writers discussed in this book, Hutcheson, Hume, Price and Reid, are chosen as those of the British moralists who were most affected one way or the other by the empiricist theory of knowledge.

Empiricism begins with the assumption that all ideas, including moral ideas, are obtained from the impressions of sensation or feeling, either (1) directly as copies, or (2) indirectly as compounded out of simple copies. The theory of moral sentiments follows the second empiricist method; that is, it regards moral ideas as complex, and analyses them into simple ideas corresponding to emotions which are admitted on all hands to exist. The moral sense theory follows the first empiricist method, and is therefore compelled to postulate one or more peculiar and unfamiliar senses from which we obtain impressions and consequently simple ideas. In one way intuitionism is not very far from this position, but instead of postulating a special sense it asserts that there is something

¹ Reid must be classed with the rationalists, but he narrowed the gap by re-interpreting the moral sense theory and taking it over in its new form.

accompanying and behind all the senses, namely a rational faculty, and that this faculty also receives *some* new ideas by itself and without the medium of sensation.

We must first ask whence comes Hume's assumption that all ideas are derived from impressions of sense or feeling. Is it a self-evident axiom which manifests itself to reason? If so, it must be necessary and universal. Furthermore it must be, according to empiricists, what they call an analytic proposition; its necessity must be such that the denial of the proposition involves a self-contradiction. Many empiricists to-day would assert this and would say that the proposition simply gives a definition—some might even say an arbitrary definition—of 'ideas'. In whatever sense this may be true, it is not true in the sense of giving a definition of what in ordinary language we mean by 'ideas' or 'concepts' or 'notions': that this is so can be shown by using the argument, mentioned on page 1, which is proposed by Professor Moore and Richard Price as a test of a definition. We can significantly ask whether all ideas are derived from sense-impressions, which is equivalent to saying we can doubt the proposition or deny it without self-contradiction. Certainly Hume himself did not intend to give simply a definition of 'ideas', for he notes the possibility of exceptions to his rule.

The only alternative, on Hume's principles, is that the proposition is a generalization from experienced instances.¹ We examine as many of our ideas as we care to, and we observe that all the examined instances—with one or two exceptions—are clearly derived from impressions. But if the proposition is an empirical generalization, the exceptions are all-important. The proposition, since it is an empirical generalization, is not certain and universal, but only highly probable; and if the intuitionist can point to ideas which are not derived from impressions, the probability of the generalization disappears. The function of a generalization is to allow us to infer with

¹ Cf. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, Essay I, ch. 4: 'It is a conclusion that admits of no proof, but by induction; and it is upon this ground that he himself founds it.'

probability from observed instances to unobserved, but it gives no grounds for inferring its application to instances which have already been observed and are therefore themselves evidence for or against the generalization. Ideas which do not appear to come from sense must either be shown to be compounded out of ideas which do, or else be taken as evidence against the initial generalization. All must be examined on their own merits, and not condemned out of hand by an admittedly unproved principle. There is a story of an old lady who visited the zoo; she had, not unnaturally, decided from experience that all animals have necks of decently moderate size, and when she saw a giraffe she roundly declared 'There's no such animal'. Hume's method of dealing with awkward cases of non-conformity is not so much to deny their existence as to say they are not what they seem. If you pull their tails enough, he says, you will find that their long necks disappear. But in all this tortuous tail-pulling he seems to have forgotten that his general principle may not be universally applicable. What began as a generalization from experience has turned into a dogma to distort experience. Richard Price returns the principle to its proper place and examines its validity. He first attempts to show that there can be non-sensuous ideas, and then, having shown that, he examines the specific class of moral ideas and decides by introspection, i.e. direct examination, whether they come from sense or intuition.

The moral sense theory does not go so far back. It accepts the empiricist principle that all simple ideas resemble and are derived from impressions: to complex ideas, it holds, there do not, as a rule, correspond complex impressions, but they are compounded out of simple ideas to which there do correspond impressions. Now are there any impressions which correspond to moral ideas? According to the theory of moral sentiments, no; moral ideas are compounded out of the simple ideas corresponding to the impressions of approbation, pleasure, sympathy and the like. According to the moral sense theory, however, there are impressions corresponding to moral ideas; this it expresses by saying that they are given by a moral sense.

Let us assume that the sentimentalists are wrong, and that no analysis of moral ideas can be complete, since it is probable that any proposed analysis can always have the attribute to be analysed synthetically predicated of it. Assuming that moral ideas are simple, let us try to decide whether it is correct to speak of the moral faculty as a form of sensation. In the remainder of the present chapter I propose to consider this question by purely empirical methods which would, I hope, commend themselves to any empiricist. In later chapters we shall have to take note of *a priori* considerations which weigh against empiricist views; but for the moment I want to take the moral sense theory as far as I believe it can go, by purely empiricist methods and on purely empiricist principles.

One way of deciding the issue would be to ask whether there are moral impressions and to use Hume's criterion of the difference between impressions and ideas. By 'moral impressions' we should not mean the feelings which admittedly *accompany* moral judgements; what we are asking is whether 'rightness' and 'wrongness', 'goodness' and 'badness', stand not only for ideas but also for impressions corresponding to those ideas in the same way as the impression of red corresponds to the idea of red, for both of which the word 'red' stands. Now Hume speaks of impressions being distinguished, in general, from ideas by their 'degree of force and vivacity'. Often he speaks as if this difference were merely one of degree; but fundamentally he appears to recognize a *prima facie* difference of kind, which may be expressed by saying that impressions have the 'feel' of being forced upon us, while ideas have a different initial 'feel' or 'flavour'—if the metaphor, which I do not wish to press in the slightest, may be allowed. If this criterion were to be used, the only method of decision would be an appeal to introspection. For my own part I think that the distinction is psychologically true, and introspection leads me, with little hesitation, to class ethical data among ideas. But many writers do not admit the distinction, and we must try to find a different criterion.

If we speak of a moral sense, presumably we do so by

analogy¹ with those faculties which are generally admitted to be senses. All analogy presupposes that some characteristics are known to be possessed in common by the things compared; from this knowledge we judge, by analogical reasoning, that some other characteristic, known to be possessed by one, is probably possessed by the other though not known to be possessed by it: the probability increases according as the number of characteristics known to be possessed in common increases, and the probability diminishes, though more rapidly, according as the number of characteristics known to be not possessed in common increases. We must therefore discover what characteristics are known to be possessed both by the senses and by the moral faculty, and in what respects they are known to differ, remembering meanwhile the dictum of Bacon that *maior est vis instantiae negativae*; we shall then be able to judge roughly what probability there is that some other characteristic, known to belong to the senses and not known to belong to the moral faculty, does in fact belong to the moral faculty and entitles us to call it a sense.

We must first try to discover what characteristics are known to be possessed in common by all the senses; next, which of these characteristics are known to be possessed by the moral faculty and which of them are known not to be possessed by it; and finally, of which of the characteristics possessed by the senses it is not known whether or not they are also possessed by the moral faculty.

First, what is common to all the senses? It is clear that the senses differ among themselves; seeing is not the same as hearing, nor is either of these the same as touching, and so on. But it is not easy to say in precisely what respects all are similar. At first sight it would seem that sensation can at any rate be analysed into an act of sensing and an object sensed. But this would not be universally admitted. Mr. Russell, for

¹ Cf. Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, Essay III, part iii, ch. 6: 'It has got this name of *sense*, no doubt from some analogy which it is conceived to bear to the external senses.' Reid's view of the analogy is considered in Chapter V, Section 4, below.

example, when he wrote *The Analysis of Mind*,¹ denied that there was an act of sensing, or at least that such an act could be discovered. And in the case of touching, and perhaps of smelling and tasting, Mr. Russell would not be alone in doubting the existence of two things, an act of sensing and an object or datum sensed.

(1) But it is at least certain that in sensation we are acquainted with something directly present to the mind. When I say that in sensation we are acquainted with something directly present to the mind, the word 'something' is intended to be vague; we must not say we are acquainted with an object of sensation because of the difficulties of distinguishing an object from an act in the case of touching and smelling.

(2) Secondly, there is the fact that our being acquainted with something in this way is partially outside our control; I cannot see a green patch or feel a toothache whenever and wherever I choose, although I can imagine them at will: in the language of physiology, an external stimulus is required.

(3) A further requisite, again using the language of physiology, is the medium of sense-organs, the retina and so on for seeing, the ear-drum and perilymph for hearing, and others for somatic sensations. If anyone lacks the organic media of any mode of sensing, he is unable to obtain sensations of that sort.

(4) If on the other hand a man has the requisite sense-organs, he is able to obtain sensations of the kind in question, so far as we are able to discover, for as long as he has the sense-organs, always provided that there is also the external stimulus: so far as we know, babies have visual, tactual and other sensations as soon as they reach consciousness.

There are no doubt other features common to the senses, but it is difficult to isolate them, and perhaps these four will be enough for our purpose. We must next consider which of these features are possessed by the moral faculty and which not, and of which we do not know whether or not they are possessed by it.

¹ pp. 17 ff.

(1) In exercising the moral faculty we are acquainted with something directly present to the mind; we are assuming that we do not know whether that something is an impression or an idea, but we do know that there is acquaintance.

(2) Secondly, is the exercise of the moral faculty partially dependent on an external stimulus? Sometimes of course it is, when for example we find ourselves in a concrete situation demanding the exercise of the moral faculty. But even here it is difficult to isolate the stimulus as the scientist can isolate the stimulus to any form of sensing. And in any case we can exercise the moral faculty as well in an imagined as in a concrete situation. Of course we can imagine a colour or a sound or a pain, but a red imaginatum is obviously different from a red sensum, and an imagined toothache is certainly different from one that is felt. (It is difficult to say what the difference is unless we adopt Hume's view that there is an initial difference of kind or 'feel': the example of the toothache in particular should make us pause before declaring the difference to be merely one of degree.) But the exercise of moral discernment does not differ, as far as I can discover, in a concrete and in an imaginary situation.

(3) Thirdly, there is not, so far as we know, any specific bodily organ necessary for the exercise of the moral faculty. Of course we often use the data of the senses as part of the situation on which we pass our moral judgement; and we could not exercise this faculty, or any other, if we had no brains. But there is not known to be any *specific* organ for the moral faculty, as there is for each of the senses. There might be such an organ, and perhaps it is what we must judge by analogy to exist in order that we may confer the title of a sense on the moral faculty, but there is no known evidence for its existence.

(4) And finally, men do not exercise the moral faculty from the time that they reach consciousness. It develops slowly, and in some persons, perhaps, it never reaches a sufficiently ripe age to make its presence known.

We have now considered the relation of the moral faculty

to the four characteristics known to be possessed in common by the senses. We have found that the moral faculty is known to possess the first, and is known to lack the second and fourth; the remaining third characteristic is not known to be possessed by the moral faculty and there is no evidence for believing that it is. This result gives little ground for an analogy between the moral faculty and the senses, especially when we consider that the one characteristic which is known to be possessed by both is also possessed by every other faculty of consciousness. When we imagine, when we think, when we believe or doubt, assert or deny, there is something with which we are acquainted. We may speak of this 'something' as an 'imaginatum' or a 'proposition', or we may prefer the more familiar words 'idea' or 'thought'; but whatever we call it, there is something with which we are acquainted, or, if you like, of which we are conscious. Indeed it would be absurd to speak of a faculty of consciousness which was not conscious of something; all we have discovered about the moral faculty is that it possesses a characteristic, not of sensation, but of consciousness in general.

There is a further characteristic of sensation, which is not known to be possessed by it, but for which there is good evidence, namely the characteristic of being private to the person sensing. It is on the question whether this characteristic belongs to the moral faculty that most of the discussion concerning the nature of that faculty has turned. But before we consider the question, it should be recalled that any evidence from this source will be comparatively weak since we have already noted a fair amount of known evidence which is against our regarding the moral faculty as similar to the senses.

At first sight there appears to be a wealth of evidence in favour of the view that the objects of some senses, i.e. the so-called external senses, are public. A certain stimulus A is presented to my visual organs; I receive an impression a_1 , which I describe by uttering the noise 'red'; another stimulus B is then presented, and I receive an impression b_1 , which I describe by uttering the noise 'green'. The same two stimuli

are presented to many other people, all of whom utter the noise 'red' on being presented with stimulus *A*, and the noise 'green' on being presented with stimulus *B*. This provides me with evidence that each person, on being presented with stimulus *A*, receives an impression of the series $a_2, a_3, \dots a_n$, and on being presented with stimulus *B*, receives an impression of the series $b_2, b_3, \dots b_n$. Of course a_1 is not identical with any of the impressions $a_2, a_3, \dots a_n$, nor b_1 with any of the impressions $b_2, b_3, \dots b_n$, but each impression in the *a* series instantiates the same universal, redness (or, if you prefer it, shares the common characteristic of being red), and each impression in the *b* series instantiates the universal greenness. This fact I do not know, but I have evidence for it from the experiments. It is clear that we receive a vast amount of such evidence in every-day life.

But now there comes along a subject *X* who, when presented with the stimuli *A* and *B*, utters the noise 'red' indifferently to each. Here I have evidence against the view that *X* receives impressions of the kind *a* and *b* when presented with the stimuli *A* and *B* respectively. Such people we call colour-blind. The experiment with *X* does not enable us to infer either that he receives impressions of the kind *a* on both occasions, or that he receives impressions of the kind *b* on both occasions; psychologists, however, have evidence, derived from subjects who are colour-blind with one eye and normal with the other, that people like *X* usually receive impressions of the kind *c* on both occasions, *c* being a series of impressions such that if *I* receive an impression of the kind *c* I describe it by the noise 'brown'.

Both in ordinary life and in the laboratory we get a large amount of evidence similar to that obtained from the experiment with *X*. There are colour-blind people, tone-deaf people, people suffering from jaundice who are said to see everything as yellowish, there are far-sighted people and near-sighted people to whom sharp edges appear blurred. All this constitutes evidence against the view that the same stimulus produces on all minds impressions which instantiate the same

specific universal; and this is what we mean by saying that sensation is private or subjective.

Now we may turn to ethical attributes of actions and states of affairs, and consider what evidence there is for thinking that they are private or subjective in the sense in which we have found evidence for the subjectivity of sense-data. The only evidence that there seems to be is that men disagree to a great extent about the rightness and wrongness of actions or the goodness and badness of states of affairs. Now those writers who have argued that moral ideas are compounded out of impressions of *internal* sense, i.e. feelings, have, it seems to me, grossly misused this evidence. For there can be no argument as to whether I am feeling pleased or not, nor whether I am experiencing a feeling of approbation or not. It is, however, possible that differences of opinion concerning moral attributes may provide evidence similar to the difference of opinion concerning colours between people of normal vision and those who are colour-blind.

I think it is true to say that there is far more difference of opinion about moral attributes than about colours in daily life. But this fact should make us beware lest the two cases be not of the same kind. Once we are convinced that the colour-blind man is using language in the same way as ourselves, we do not feel inclined to argue about the presented colour. But in the case of moral disagreement we are not content to leave the matter as an irreconcilable difference of constitution, but try to persuade our opponents to change their opinion; we do not feel, as we do with the colours, that it is useless and silly to argue. This difference in the attitude of common sense is sufficient for philosophers like Professor Moore to establish the objectivity of moral attributes. The attribute which I signify by the word 'red' is not public to me and to the colour-blind man, for he has no conception of this attribute and uses the word 'red' to describe a different attribute which I describe by the word 'brown'. But since I can and do argue with other men about the rightness or wrongness of an action, and since argument is not useless, for one of the parties to the argument

often succeeds in persuading his opponent to agree with him, then it must be admitted that moral attributes are public.

Why is it, then, that there is so much difference of opinion concerning moral attributes? I think it is true to say that in most cases the difference of opinion is not whether action *A* is right or wrong, or situation *B* good or bad, but whether the action has the character *Axy* or *Ayz*, and whether the situation has the character *Bxy* or *Byz*. A situation calling for a moral judgement is not presented as a simple impression, as is an example of red; it is usually exceedingly complex, and one man will notice certain elements in it and neglect others, while another man will neglect the first and notice the second. That this is what usually happens is, I think, certainly true. But now we must ask whether it is possible, even where two people both see a situation as *Bxy*, that one of them should pronounce it good and the other pronounce it bad. We cannot, I think, deny that this may happen. But it seems to me that the existence of evidence for such occurrences is far more doubtful than the existence of evidence for the fact that the same stimulus to a sensory organ can cause impressions of different kinds to be presented to different people. The reason why the existence of such evidence is doubtful is simply the complexity of moral situations as compared with the simplicity of a stimulus to sensation. As was said before, it is not possible to isolate the stimulus to moral judgement, as it is to isolate the stimulus to an impression, and consequently a judgement, of sensation. Nevertheless, in the lack of such evidence, we must say that moral attributes are more public or objective than sensuous attributes.

It should, however, be observed that in the sense in which we have used 'publicity' or 'objectivity', and 'privacy' or 'subjectivity', they are relative terms. Since colour attributes are, in our sense of the word, public to the minds of people of normal vision, they are to a large extent objective. And in so far as moral attributes are not comprehensible to young children and idiots, they are not public between them and sane, adult persons. But even here the evidence cannot be

obtained with anything like the same precision and certainty as in experiments with colours. The idiot and the child may have some comprehension of moral attributes, and some notion of moral principles, but they may not be able to see that a particular action is an instance of such a principle. For example, a child may have some conception of the principle, that it is wrong wantonly to cause pain, but may not realize that pulling the cat's tail causes pain. Often (at least with many children) it is not necessary to say 'Don't pull pussy's tail, or I shall send you to bed'; it is enough to say 'Pussy does not like your pulling her tail, just as you would not like having your hair pulled'. The realization that a cat can feel pain as well as a child, and that the action of pulling its tail is an act of causing pain, is enough to prevent the action being done.¹

It will be remembered that we discussed earlier four characteristics which are common to all the senses. We found that the moral faculty was known to possess one of these characteristics, and known not to possess two; of the remaining characteristic it was not known whether or not it was possessed by the moral faculty. The one characteristic which was possessed by the moral faculty, however, was also possessed by all other faculties of consciousness. We have now found a fifth characteristic (the characteristic of having objects that are 'public'), which is possessed by the external senses (though not by 'inner sense') to a limited degree, and which is also possessed by the moral faculty to a greater degree. But this characteristic too is possessed by other faculties, which are admittedly not faculties of sense. The intuition of necessary connexions, the formation of *a priori* concepts such as substance and cause, the entertaining of propositions, in short all

¹ Cf. Hutcheson, *Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil*, Section 5 (4th ed., pp. 242-3; Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, vol. i, p. 143): 'That *Children* delight in some Actions which are *cruel* and *tormenting* to Animals which they have in their Power, flows not from *Malice*, or want of *Compassion*, but from their *Ignorance* of those Signs of Pain which many Creatures make; together with a *Curiosity* to see the various Contortions of their Bodys. For when they are more acquainted with these Creatures, or come by any means to know their Sufferings, their *Compassion* often becomes too strong for their *Reason*.' See further note 1 on p. 27, below.

the activities usually attributed to reason, have objects that are, at least in our particular sense, public and objective, and that to a greater degree than the objects of sense.

Thus the two attributes possessed in common by the moral faculty and the external senses are also possessed by non-sensuous faculties. We have therefore no evidence at all for an analogy between the moral faculty and sense. A similar review of evidence might be carried out for an analogy between the moral faculty and rational intuition. It would show, I think, that this analogy is more plausible. What I have tried to do here, however, is not to consider which of the two analogies has the greater evidence in its favour, but what evidence there is for the first analogy alone. I have tried to carry this line of empiricist approach as far as it can go, and it has led to a dead end.

CHAPTER II

FRANCIS HUTCHESON¹

FRANCIS HUTCHESON is best known as the chief exponent of the moral sense theory, and it is as such that he will be considered here. It would, however, be a mistake to regard his theory of a moral sense as his chief title to fame. It was not for this that he was called the father of Scottish philosophy. His chief contribution to the history of moral theory is that, as a forerunner of Hume, he introduced the inductive method into morals and approached the subject from an analysis of human nature. He deserves our respect too as one of the founders of the influential school of British utilitarians; he appears to have been the first writer to use as the criterion of right action a phrase which later enjoyed much fame, 'the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers',² and in earlier editions of his *Inquiry* there is a curious attempt to provide a mathematical calculus for judging the morality of actions.³ Although this aspect of Hutcheson's work receives scant attention in this book, his place in the history of utilitarianism should not be overlooked.

Here we shall be concerned only with his arguments for the use of the phrase 'moral sense' and against calling the moral faculty reason. Hutcheson's best work on the general field of moral philosophy as he saw it is to be found in what he wrote after he had spent many years lecturing at Glasgow. But in these two books, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria* and *A System of Moral Philosophy*, the moral sense has become little more than a name; Hutcheson has been greatly influenced by Butler's account of conscience and does not insist that the

¹ References, unless otherwise stated, are to the following editions: *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 4th ed., 1738; *Essay on the Passions, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, 3rd ed., 1742; *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*, 2nd ed., 1745; *System of Moral Philosophy*, posthumously published in 1755; Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, 1897.

² *Inquiry*, p. 181: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 107.

³ e.g. 2nd ed., pp. 183-8: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, pp. 110-13.

moral faculty is wholly different from rational faculties.¹ It was his two earlier books, written while he was a young man in Dublin, that stated the moral sense theory proper, that strongly influenced Hume, and that instigated Price's attack. For these reasons I shall confine my attention to the doctrine as stated in these earlier books, and particularly as stated in the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, the most important of Hutcheson's writings for anyone who is considering him in his relation to the rationalists. This treatise appears to have been comparatively neglected by modern writers on Hutcheson, doubtless because they were not interested in the arid details of the controversy about sense and reason, but for my present purpose it will be necessary to consider in some detail the arguments of the *Illustrations* while neglecting works that are more important for Hutcheson's general view of morals.

It is well known that the phrase 'moral sense' was introduced by Shaftesbury. Hutcheson acknowledges Shaftesbury as his master in this as in other respects, but in fact no concise or coherently thought-out theory of a moral sense can be attributed to Shaftesbury. He is the forerunner of Hutcheson in founding morals on a human nature that contains more than the self-love of Hobbes or Mandeville, and in regarding moral approbation as strictly analogous to aesthetic enjoyment; but the casual application of the word 'sense' to the moral faculty is hardly more significant in Shaftesbury than it is in Samuel Clarke, who was a severe rationalist. Shaftesbury says more

¹ Cf. 'When we call this determination a *sense* or *instinct*, we are not supposing it of that low kind dependent on bodily organs, such as even the brutes have. It may be a constant settled determination in the soul itself, as much as our powers of judging and reasoning.' *System*, vol. i, p. 58.

For the influence of Butler compare the following two passages:

'This moral sense from its very nature appears to be designed for regulating and controlling all our powers. This dignity and commanding nature we are immediately conscious of, as we are conscious of the power itself.' *System*, vol. i, p. 61: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 420.

'Humana natura prima specie videbitur [alicui] chaos quoddam, rudisque rerum non bene iunctarum moles, nisi altius repetendo, nexum quendam, et ordinem a natura constitutum, et principatum deprehenderit, aut ἡγῆμονικόν [sic] aliquod, ad modum caeteris ponendum idoneum.' By reflection we see that the moral sense is fitted by nature 'ad imperandum, totamque vitam regendam'. *Inst. Compend.*, p. 40.

than once that the possession and exercise of reason is a necessary condition of having a sense of right and wrong, and his insistence on the objective criterion of equity or 'the equal' can hardly be squared with a wholly naturalistic view of morals. The fact is that no coherent view can be extracted from Shaftesbury about the moral faculty or about moral theory in general. In the course of his essays, written for the gentleman of culture and taste, are to be found simply certain suggestions which were taken over, adapted and elaborated into an explicit theory by Hutcheson.

Hutcheson's first book consists of two treatises, one about aesthetics, the other about morals; but the work was clearly regarded by him as a single whole and it has a comprehensive title stating that it is an inquiry into our ideas of beauty and virtue. This title is significant since it illustrates one of the chief features of the book, the analogy between ethics and aesthetics, a feature which characterized Hutcheson's work to the end.¹ Of the aesthetic analogy something will be said when we come to discuss Hume. Here it will be sufficient to remark that it was this analogy, together with the empiricist theory of knowledge, that brought into being the moral sense theory. Hutcheson's view was developed and clarified between the publication of the *Inquiry* and of the *Illustrations*, particularly in distinguishing between the moral faculty as the perceiving an action to be right and the moral faculty as moving us to perform an action we perceive to be right. I shall therefore discuss separately what he has to say in each of the two treatises about the moral sense and about reason.

1. THE 'INQUIRY'

A. *The moral sense*

The Introduction to *An Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil* begins by defining the two subjects of the treatise:

'The Word MORAL GOODNESS, in this Treatise, denotes our Idea of some *Quality apprehended in Actions, which procures Approbation,*

¹ Cf. *Inst. Compend.*, pp. 18-19: 'Insitus est omnium divinissimus ille sensus, decorum, pulchrum, et honestum . . . cernens. . . . Quae hoc sensu comprobantur recta dicuntur, et pulchra; et *virtutum* nomine appellantur; quae damnantur, foeda dicuntur, aut turpia aut *vitiosa*.'

attended with Desire of the Agent's Happiness. MORAL EVIL denotes our Idea of a *contrary Quality, which excites Condemnation or Dislike.*¹

We are reminded that these are 'imperfect descriptions', but it should be noted that if moral goodness is a quality 'apprehended' and which 'procures' approbation, and moral evil a quality which 'excites' condemnation, then the apprehension of the qualities must be different from the approbation and condemnation which the qualities cause. Later, however, in the Introduction the design of the treatise is given as to prove 'That some Actions have to Men an *immediate Goodness*; or, that by a *superior Sense*, which I call a *Moral one*, we *approve* the Actions of others, and perceive them to be their Perfection and Dignity, and are determin'd to love the Agent; a like Perception we have in reflecting on such Actions of our own, without any View of *natural Advantage* from them.'²

Here the moral sense is said to do both the approving and the perceiving; indeed the statement that an action is morally good is equated with the statement that we approve an action. This is clearly inconsistent with the view stated earlier; for if goodness, or the apprehension of it, causes approbation, the quality or the apprehension of it cannot be the same as the approbation.

In Section I Hutcheson shows that moral good is different from natural good, the latter phrase being used to cover anything that is the cause of, or the means to, private pleasure; and hence he concludes:

'We must then certainly have other Perceptions of *moral Actions*, than those of *Advantage*: And that Power of receiving these Perceptions may be call'd a MORAL SENSE, since the Definition agrees to it, *viz.* a *Determination of the Mind, to receive any Idea from the Presence of an Object which occurs to us, independent on our Will.*³

For the terms of this definition he refers us to the Preface which introduces the two treatises composing the *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. In this preface

¹ p. 105: cf. Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 69.

² p. 110: cf. Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 72, quoting from the 2nd edition, which omits the reference to approval.

³ p. 113: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 74.

he points out that pleasures and pains arise necessarily, just as do the objects of the outer senses, and do not depend on the exercise of our will.

'These *Determinations* to be pleas'd with any Forms, or Ideas which occur to our Observation, the *Author* chooses to call SENSES; distinguishing them from the Powers which commonly go by that Name, by calling our Power of perceiving the *Beauty of Regularity, Order, Harmony*, an INTERNAL SENSE; and *that Determination* to approve *Affections, Actions*, or *Characters of rational Agents*, which we call *virtuous*, he marks by the Name of a MORAL SENSE.'¹

The application of the word 'sense' is confessedly arbitrary, and clearly begs the question whether the moral faculty be sense or rational intuition. The criterion for using the name of sense is that the appearance of the objects of the faculty so named is not to be dependent on the exercise of the will, but is to be determined by causes external to us or implanted in our nature. Such a criterion would justify the use of the word 'sense' for our rational faculties too; if I apprehend the equality of $2+2$ and 4, or the conclusion of a deductive inference, what I apprehend or intuit is not dependent on my will but is due to a necessary connexion in or between the propositions considered. Of course I can choose not to consider the proposition at all, but I can equally choose to shut my eyes. If I do choose to consider the addition of 2 and 2, I cannot choose to apprehend the sum as 3 or 5, just as, if I do choose to open my eyes, I cannot choose to see red instead of green in this place. Equally in the case of inductive reasoning I can choose to neglect some of the evidence (though in practice such neglect is more usually due to unconscious prejudice), but I cannot choose that my conclusion should be other than that which I am led to form by the evidence which I do regard.

The later *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* gives a similar definition of a sense.

'If we may call "*every Determination of our Minds to receive Ideas independently on our Will, and to have Perceptions of Pleasure and Pain*, A SENSE," we shall find many other *Senses* beside those commonly explained.'²

¹ Preface, p. xiii.

² 3rd ed., p. 4: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 393.

With this criterion of a 'sense' Hutcheson not unnaturally shows an alarming tendency to multiply senses. We have, he thinks, besides the five commonly acknowledged external senses, a sense of beauty, a public sense, a moral sense, and a sense of honour; he suggests that there might be others, e.g. senses of decency and dignity.¹ Obviously his criterion will cover every faculty except the will, since we think all faculties other than the will are determined (though not, I should hold, all by the same kind of determination).

Hutcheson gives no further direct justification for calling the moral faculty a sense. What more we learn of his view of the moral faculty, and of his reasons for calling it a sense, is obtained indirectly, (a) from his consideration of objections to the moral sense theory, and (b) from his criticisms of rationalist theories.

B. Objections to the moral sense theory, which are considered by Hutcheson

1. That a moral sense implies determinism.

One of Hutcheson's chief objections to any rationalist theory is that reason cannot move to action. He is aware, however, that the alternative is determinism. For, as he points out, 'neither Benevolence nor any other Affection or Desire can be directly raised by *Volition*'.² Indeed, on his view it would be self-contradictory to assert that they could. For all these states of mind are, in his view, operations of 'sense', and a 'sense' is by definition a faculty that is not dependent on the will for its exercise but is necessarily determined by some cause not under our control. Now if it is a determined sense or feeling which both perceives an action to be right and moves us to perform it, no room is left for the exercise of a free will, and consequently all meaning is taken from the terms responsibility, merit, blame, guilt and punishment. Hutcheson does not see the full force of this objection, but he deals with some aspects of it. Like Plato, Hutcheson leaves no room for morally bad action proper, but only for misguided action.

¹ *Passions*, p. 6: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 394.

² *Inquiry*, p. 139.

'Bad Conduct is not owing to any Irregularity in the *moral Sense*, but to a wrong *Judgment* or *Opinion*.'¹

All actions, he suggests, however bad, seem good to the agent. 'Perhaps never any Men pursu'd Vice long with Peace of Mind, without some such deluding Imagination of *moral Good*. . . . What others call *Avarice*, appears to the *Agent* a *prudent Care* of a *Family*, or *Friends*; . . . *Persecution*, a *Zeal* for the *Truth*, and for the *eternal Happiness* of Men, which *Hereticks* oppose. In all these Instances, Men generally act from a *Sense* of *Virtue* upon *false Opinions*, and *mistaken Benevolence*; upon *wrong* or *partial Views* of *publick Good*, and the Means to promote it; or upon very *narrow Systems* form'd by like *foolish Opinions*. It is not a *Delight* in the Misery of others, or *Malice*, which occasions the horrid Crimes which fill our Histories; but generally an *injudicious*, *unreasonable Enthusiasm* for some kind of *limited Virtue*.'²

The only kind of guilt for which this leaves room is the guilt of negligence to exercise our reason adequately. It is doubtless true that many, or even most, wrong actions are done because the agent thinks them right. But the problem of ἀκρασία, of wilfully acting contrary to what is perceived or thought by the agent to be right, is left unsolved. Yet the situation surely does occur, and in occurring provides one of the most puzzling questions of ethics.

Hutcheson is even willing to call the moral sense an instinct. 'The ultimate End, according to many of our Moralists, is to each one *his own Happiness*; and yet this he seeks by Instinct. Now may not another *Instinct* toward the *Publick*, or the *Good* of others, be as proper a Principle of *Virtue*, as the *Instinct* toward *private Happiness*?'³

The proper answer to this dilemma is that, despite 'many of our moralists', the desire for private happiness is not a virtue. Hutcheson hardly ever considers any opponent other than the egoistic moralist, and forgets that there may be other views equally opposed to his. Similarly when he deals with choice:

'If it be said, "That Actions from *Instinct* are not the Effect of *Prudence* and *Choice*;" this Objection holds full as strongly against the Actions which flow from *Self-Love*; since the Use of our Reason is as

¹ p. 208: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 122.

² p. 213: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, pp. 124-5.

³ pp. 195-6: cf. Selby-Bigge, vol. i, pp. 115-16.

requisite to find the proper Means of promoting *publick Good*, as *private Good*. And as it must be an *Instinct*, or a *Determination previous to Reason*, which makes us pursue *private Good*, as well as *publick Good* as our End; there is the same Occasion for *Prudence* and *Choice*, in the Election of proper Means for promoting of either. I see no Harm in supposing, "That Men are *naturally* dispos'd to *Virtue*, and not left *merely indifferent*, until some Prospect of Interest allures them to it." ¹

This is a just enough answer to the objecting egoist, but to prove the validity of the objection against the egoist's theory does not remove its validity against Hutcheson's. It is true that there is as much room for prudence in both theories, but also true that there is as little room for choice in either. Furthermore, if men act virtuously because they are 'naturally disposed to virtue', presumably they are as naturally disposed to vice when they act viciously. It would seem that we should congratulate rather than praise the good man, and pity rather than blame the bad.

An important feature of the *Inquiry* is illustrated by this objection. Why, it may be asked, does Hutcheson consider determinism as an objection against the moral sense? Surely he might maintain that the moral sense theory itself is unaffected by the free will controversy. We might hold the moral sense theory and yet be libertarians; our *discernment* of rightness (it would be said) may be determined, but we could still have a free choice whether or not to *do* what we are determined to judge right. The fact is that in this book Hutcheson does not distinguish at all clearly between the discernment of right actions and the motive from which actions discerned to be right are done. So far as he does distinguish them, he holds that the discernment of rightness is the approbation of the moral sense, while the motive from which we do approved actions is benevolence. Now approbation and benevolence are obviously different things. But, curious though it may appear, Hutcheson often tends to confuse them, as we shall see, or to regard the difference between them as negligible. He often speaks of the moral sense as if it were the same as benevolence.

¹ pp. 196-7: cf. Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 116.

This is due, I think, to the fact that Hutcheson's chief aim in this work is not to establish the moral sense theory, but to refute the egoist. He wants to show that we often do actions from a motive other than self-love. This motive he holds to be benevolence. But the egoist maintains, not merely that we always act from self-love, but also that when we judge we ought to do an action we can only be thinking of it as one that will promote our interest. Hutcheson sees that both the contentions of the egoist are false. There are disinterested actions and there is disinterested approbation. He then naturally enough thinks the disinterested element in either case to be the same. Thus he thinks that an objection to part of his theory is an objection to the whole. It is only in the *Illustrations* that we find the two parts of his view defended separately, each being regarded as a specific theory capable of standing or falling on its own and without necessarily affecting the position of the other.

2. That a moral sense implies universal agreement on moral questions.

If the moral faculty is a sense, we should expect its deliverances to be as nearly universal to all mankind as are the deliverances of the external senses. There are, of course, some differences in the sense-perceptions of different people, but these are not as widespread as the differences of opinion on moral questions. Hutcheson must therefore show that these wide differences proceed, not from differences in the deliverances of the moral sense, but from some other cause or causes. He gives three:¹

(a) 'Different Opinions of *Happiness*, or *natural Good*, and of the most effectual Means to advance it.'²

If among a certain people the desire for liberty is much stronger than the desire to avoid war, he says, revolution will be approved by the moral sense, as conducing to general happiness. If peace is desired more than liberty, revolution will be condemned, as conducing to general unhappiness.

¹ For this list cf. *System*, vol. i, pp. 92-6.

² *Inquiry*, p. 204: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 120.

Equally, the practices of killing weak children or the aged have been approved by some peoples, because their desire for comfort and for avoiding trouble and expenditure which brings no return is greater than their natural affection. Hutcheson admits that the use of reason is implied here, and points out that false reasoning about the tendencies of actions to increase or diminish happiness is another cause of difference in moral judgement. But once reason has been employed to decide that one action produces more happiness than another, the moral sense approves the action thought to be more productive of happiness; in *this* decision, he holds, there is no diversity among different peoples or in different ages.

But, one may ask, if the only function of the moral sense is to recommend greater rather than less happiness, what need is there of a moral sense at all? Why should we not adopt the simpler and more natural explanation, that the desire for greater happiness is more intense than the desire for less, and therefore causes us to choose the former without any preliminary approbation? The reason why Hutcheson thinks the approbation of moral sense necessary is that it had not been generally recognized that there could be disinterested desire. The prevailing view of the time was that desire could only be for the agent's own happiness, and one of the chief purposes of Hutcheson's *Inquiry* is to show that we can and do act disinterestedly. But it would have seemed too paradoxical at the time to call a disinterested motive a 'desire'; Hutcheson therefore talks of an 'affection' of benevolence and of a moral 'sense', often failing to distinguish the two clearly.

(b) 'The next *Ground of Diversity* in Sentiments, is the *Diversity of Systems*, to which Men, from foolish Opinions, confine their *Benevolence*. We intimated above, that it is *regular* and *beautiful*, to have *stronger Benevolence* toward the *morally good* Parts of Mankind, who are *useful* to the *Whole*, than toward the *useless* or *pernicious*. Now, if Men receive a *low* or *base Opinion* of any *Body*, or *Sect* of Men; if they imagine them bent upon the Destruction of the more valuable Parts, or but useless *Burdens* of the Earth; *Benevolence* itself will lead them to neglect the Interests of such, and to suppress them. This is the Reason why, among Nations who have high Notions of *Virtue*, every Action toward

an Enemy may pass for *just*; why ROMANS and GREEKS could approve of making those they call'd *Barbarians, Slaves*.¹

Here too the diversity is said to be one of opinion, not of the moral sense (or of benevolence; in this passage Hutcheson obviously fails, or thinks it unnecessary, to distinguish them) Men may differ in their views of the goodness or badness of others. One would have thought that it is the moral sense which perceives another man's moral qualities; but Hutcheson escapes from this difficulty by suggesting here that moral qualities of character depend on utility.² If we call a man good, we mean simply that he is useful to mankind. So that this ground of diversity is similar to the first; in both the diversity of moral judgements is due to differing opinions about the utility of certain means for the attainment of the desired end of general happiness; but in the first case the means were inanimate, in the second they are persons.

Hutcheson's theory about the moral qualities of persons will not of course stand examination. Usually we call a person good with an eye to the past, not the future. The motives of his actions, not their consequences, are what we pass judgement upon in calling him good or bad.

(c) 'The last Ground of *Diversity* which occurs, are the *false Opinion* of the *Will* or *Laws* of the DEITY.'³

This is undoubtedly true; men differ as to what God commands, but, Hutcheson would say, they agree that his commands ought to be obeyed. If it be said that some men do not admit this, Hutcheson could reply that this is because they think either that God does not exist or that his laws do not make for general happiness. In either case the difference is one of opinion, not of the moral sense.

¹ p. 209: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 123.

² This of course is not his general view. In general he holds that a man is judged to be good or bad by the immediate operation of the moral sense. He resorts in this passage to a rather fanciful criterion of utility simply to evade a difficulty. There is a similar inconsistency in his view of the moral characteristics of actions; on the one hand he says these are given by the immediate approbation or disapprobation of the moral sense, on the other he gives an elaborate mathematical formula, embodying a criterion of utility, to decide what actions are right or wrong, i.e. useful or harmful.

³ p. 214: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 125.

3. That moral judgement is due to custom and education, not to a natural moral sense.

The objection is that we observe many moral judgements to be due to custom and education, and hence arise different opinions on moral issues. Many actions, incest for example, are abhorrent without any thought of their being contrary to benevolence.

Hutcheson replies that if there were no moral sense we should shun only actions hurtful to ourselves; incest in others we should regard with equanimity. Secondly, while it is true that most people do not disapprove of incest because it conflicts with benevolence, the reason for their disapproval is that incest is contrary to the will of God; and it is the moral sense which approves obedience to the will of God. Thirdly,

'as Men who have the *Sense of Tasting*, may, by *Company and Education*, have Prejudices against Meats they never tasted, as *unsavoury*; so may Men who have a *moral Sense*, acquire an Opinion by implicit Faith, of the *moral Evil* of Actions, altho' they do not themselves discern in them any Tendency to *natural Evil*; imagining that others do: or, by Education, they may have some Ideas associated, which raise an Abhorrence without Reason. But without a *moral Sense* we could receive no Prejudice against Actions, under any other View than as *naturally disadvantageous* to ourselves.'¹

Hutcheson's point is that before a man can do any action motivated by anything other than self-love, there must be a moral sense or feeling of benevolence (which here are clearly considered identical); unless this were so, a man could not be persuaded by custom or anything else to imitate non-egoistic actions.

Hutcheson assumes that his opponents hold an egoistic psychology, and in denying the truth of this view he is right. But his arguments do not prove the existence of a moral sense; they only prove that there must be *some* principle of action which is not self-regarding. I dare say Hutcheson might be satisfied with this: as always in this book, he has his eye mainly on the followers of Hobbes and Mandeville, and fails

¹ pp. 216-17: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 127.

to perceive other opponents ready to attack from a different base. But in dealing with the egoist he is supremely successful. The final paragraph of this section (Section IV) is worth quoting as an example.

'The *Universality* of this *moral Sense*, and that it is antecedent to *Instruction*, may appear from observing the Sentiments of *Children*, upon hearing the Storys with which they are commonly entertain'd as soon as they understand Language. They always passionately interest themselves on that side where *Kindness* and *Humanity* are found; and detest the *Cruel*, the *Covetous*, the *Selfish*, or the *Treacherous*. How strongly do we see their Passions of *Joy*, *Sorrow*, *Love*, and *Indignation*, mov'd by these *moral Representations*, even tho' there have been no Pains taken to give them Ideas of a DEITY, of *Laws*, of a *future State*, or of the more intricate Tendency of the *universal Good* to that of each *Individual*!'¹

4. That the moral sense is a superfluous and occult faculty.

In Section VII² the objection is noted, (a) that the moral sense is superfluous since prudence will recommend the same actions, and (b) that it is an occult and inexplicable faculty. To the first part of this objection Hutcheson answers thus: he agrees that prudence would recommend virtuous actions, but, he says, it works in too slow and hesitant a fashion to be of much practical value. In the same way, he thinks, prudence would recommend pleasant foods as generally conducive to health, but this fact does not imply the non-existence or the uselessness of the sense of taste as an immediate guide for eating.

This curious though not unfamiliar notion, that the pleasantness of a food is a reliable sign of its healthful properties, might prove disastrous if acted upon consistently. A sounder way of meeting the objection would be to point out that certain actions approved by the moral sense would *not* be recommended by prudence. In his first section Hutcheson gave

¹ p. 217: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 127. Hutcheson seems to have been particularly acute in his psychological observation of children. Compare his remark about them quoted in the note to p. 13, above.

One eminent professor of philosophy has told me that he disagrees entirely with Hutcheson's view of children in both passages. He thinks children admire the villains more than the heroes in stories, and that they torture animals from malice and delight in the pain of others. He has perhaps been singularly unfortunate in the children he has met—unless Hutcheson and I have been singularly fortunate! ² pp. 271-3: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, pp. 156-7. Cf. p. 30, below.

some very pertinent examples to show that what is approved and what is advantageous are by no means always coincident. We should have expected him to repeat these here. The reason why he does not do so is, I think, because he wants to agree that virtue and self-interest are ultimately coincident. Nor is this simply a concession to the egoists for the sake of argument. He agrees with most moralists that virtue must be to our interest, though self-regard is not our motive in practising it. In the Preface to the *Inquiry* he says that his principal design is 'to shew, "That *Human Nature* was not left quite indifferent in the Affair of *Virtue*, to form to itself Observations concerning the *Advantage*, or *Disadvantage* of Actions, and accordingly to regulate its Conduct." . . . Very few Men could ever have form'd those long Deductions of Reason, which shew some Actions to be in the whole *advantageous* to the *Agent*, and their Contraries *pernicious*. The AUTHOR of *Nature* has much better furnish'd us for a virtuous Conduct, than our *Moralists* seem to imagine, by almost as quick and powerful Instructions, as we have for the Preservation of our Bodys. He has given us *strong Affections* to be the Springs of each virtuous Action; and made *Virtue* a lovely Form, that we might easily distinguish it from its Contrary, and be made happy by the Pursuit of it.'¹

And the *System of Moral Philosophy* begins by saying

'The intention of Moral Philosophy is to direct men to that course of action which tends most effectually to promote their greatest happiness and perfection.'

To the second part of the objection, namely that the moral sense is an inexplicable faculty, Hutcheson again replies that it is but in the same case as other senses universally acknowledged to exist.

'This *natural Determination* to approve and admire, or hate and dislike Actions, is, no doubt, an *occult Quality*. But is it any way more mysterious, that the Idea of an Action should raise *Esteem* or *Contempt*, than that the Motion or tearing of Flesh should give *Pleasure* or *Pain*; or the Act of Volition should move *Flesh* and *Bones*? In the latter Case, we have got the Brain, and elastic Fibres, and animal Spirits, and elastic Fluids, like the *Indian's* Elephant, and Tortoise, to bear the Burden of the Difficulty: but go one Step farther, and you find the whole as

¹ Preface, pp. xiii-xiv.

difficult as at first, and equally a Mystery with *this Determination* to love and approve, or condemn and despise *Actions* and *Agents*, without any Views of *Interest*, as they appear *benevolent*, or the contrary.¹

But although we do not know the ultimate causes of the working of the senses, we do know their immediate causes or part-causes; we know that each sense is dependent for its exercise on certain specific physical organs. We know of no such organs necessary for the exercise of the moral faculty, and in this respect the moral faculty is not on all fours with the faculties universally called senses. This is the real force of the objection, and Hutcheson has failed to meet it.

C. Hutcheson's criticism of rationalist theories

It is clear from what has gone before that Hutcheson, in speaking of reason, has in mind reasoning, and never considers the possibility that immediate apprehension can be a rational faculty. 'What is *Reason*,' he asks, 'but *that Sagacity we have in prosecuting any End*?'² The italics show that this phrase is meant as a definition. Hutcheson always equates the word 'reason' with reasoning, and in the *Inquiry* he takes it for granted that those who say reason is the moral faculty hold the egoistic or prudential view of morality.

When countering the objection that moral judgements are not universally the same, Hutcheson rightly points out that this objection is stronger against a rationalist theory than against his.

'Men have *Reason* given them, to judge of the Tendency of their Actions. . . . And it is strange, that *Reason* is universally allow'd to Men, notwithstanding all the stupid ridiculous Opinions receiv'd in many Places; and yet absurd Practices, founded upon those very *Opinions*, shall seem an Argument against any *moral Sense*, altho' the bad Conduct is not owing to any Irregularity in the *moral Sense*, but to a wrong *Judgment* or *Opinion*. . . . Our *Sense* of *Virtue* generally leads us exactly

¹ pp. 272-3: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, pp. 156-7.

² *Inquiry*, 3rd ed., p. 195: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 115. This sentence is omitted from the relevant passage in the fourth edition, perhaps because Hutcheson realized that his statement, referring as it does only to reasoning for the sake of action, is too narrow even as a definition of reasoning. The omission does not, I think, indicate agreement that reason may be intuitive.

enough according to our Opinions; and therefore the absurd Practices which prevail in the World, are much better Arguments that Men have no *Reason*, than that they have no *moral Sense of Beauty* in Actions."¹

In the final section, as was noted above, Hutcheson argues that his moral sense is not superfluous, since, even if reason does commend virtuous actions to us, its operation is too slow to suffice for the speed of our ordinary moral judgements. By reason he means, as usual, prudence.

'We are often told, "That there is no Need of supposing such a *Sense of Morality* given to Men, since *Reflection* and *Instruction* would recommend the same Actions from Arguments of *Self-Interest*, and engage us, from the acknowledg'd Principle of *Self-Love*, to the Practice of them, without this *unintelligible Determination to Benevolence*, or the *occult Quality of a moral Sense*."

'It is perhaps true, that *Reflection*, and *Reason* might lead us to approve the same Actions as *advantageous*. But would not the *same* Reflection and Reason likewise generally recommend the same *Meats* to us, which our *Taste* represents as pleasant? And shall we thence conclude, that we have no *Sense of Tasting*, or that such a *Sense* is *useless*? No: The Use is plain in both Cases. Notwithstanding the mighty *Reason* we boast of above other Animals, its Processes are too slow, too full of Doubt and Hesitation, to serve us in every Exigency, either for our own Preservation, without the *external Senses*, or to influence our Actions for the *Good* of the *Whole*, without this *moral Sense*. Nor could we be so strongly determin'd at all times to what is most conducive to either of these Ends, without these *expeditious Monitors*, and *importunate Solicitors*; nor so nobly rewarded, when we act vigorously in Pursuit of these Ends, by the calm dull Reflections of *Self-Interest*, as by those delightful Sensations."²

To sum up the theory of the *Inquiry*: Hutcheson's main concern has been to refute the psychological egoist, and to show that we admire and do actions for other reasons than a regard for our interest. He establishes that benevolence may be disinterested and that there is an immediate approbation of certain actions regardless of our thoughts of their effect on our happiness. The exercise of this approbation is ascribed to a moral sense, but the moral sense is not consistently dis-

¹ 4th ed., pp. 207-9: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, pp. 122-3.

² pp. 271-2: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 156.

tinguished from benevolence and often the two seem to be considered identical. This amalgamation is all the more easy for Hutcheson because he groups together senses, desires, passions, affections and instincts, using any of these words with little discrimination for the things falling under all of these classes. This seems slipshod, but he has not been so much concerned to give an accurate and detailed classification of the principles of action, as to refute the followers of Hobbes and Mandeville. The latter task he has fulfilled admirably. Later, when he found criticism and opposition directed from other quarters, he became more cautious in his use of the term 'moral sense', and attempted a more careful analysis and classification of the mind's non-rational faculties.

2. 'ILLUSTRATIONS ON THE MORAL SENSE'

Hutcheson's second work, a volume comprising two treatises, the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* and the *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, was written three years later than the *Inquiry on Beauty and Virtue*. Its two most noticeable attributes are, first, a realization that the psychology of the *Inquiry* needed to be examined more accurately and more specifically, and second, a recognition of the rationalist view of morals as a third system distinct from the systems of self-love and of benevolence, the two views discussed in the earlier book. Of the *Essay on the Passions* I shall say nothing; it is concerned with psychological classification in general and contains little about the moral faculty. We have already seen¹ that the definition it gives of a sense is left much the same as in the *Inquiry*, and that Hutcheson enumerates four senses other than the five external senses and suggests that there may be still more.

The *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* is more relevant to our subject. Its importance for this lies, first, in its criticisms of rationalist views, and second, in its defence and elaboration of the moral sense theory, a defence principally occasioned by the criticisms of Gilbert Burnet (son of the Bishop) in letters

¹ pp. 19-20, above.

to the *London Journal* under the pseudonym of Philaretus in the summer of 1728.

The first pages of the treatise show that Hutcheson is learning to distinguish questions which had been confused in the earlier work. There are, he realizes, two activities of the soul, not one, in moral action, and that they have to be examined separately. The two questions to be considered are:

'1st, "What *Quality* in any Action determines our *Election* of it rather than the contrary?" Or, if the Mind determines itself, "What *Motives* or *Desires* excite to an Action, rather than the contrary, or rather than to the *Omission*?" 2dly, "What *Quality* determines our *Approbation* of one Action, rather than of the contrary Action?"'¹

'The *Qualities* moving to *Election*, or *exciting to Action*, are different from those moving to *Approbation*: We often do Actions which we do not *approve*, and *approve* Actions which we *omit*: We often *desire* that an Agent had omitted an Action which we *approve*; and *wish* he would do an Action which we *condemn*. *Approbation* is employed about the Actions of *others*, where there is no room for our *Election*.'²

On these questions, Hutcheson continues, there are two opinions. The Epicurean or Hobbesian view is that all approbation and election must spring from self-love. The other view is

'That we have not only *Self-Love*, but *benevolent Affections* also toward others, in various Degrees, making us desire their Happiness as an *ultimate End*, without any view to private Happiness: That we have a *moral Sense* or Determination of our Mind, to *approve* every *kind Affection* either in ourselves or others, and all publicly useful Actions which we imagine flow from such Affection, without our having a view to our *private Happiness*, in our Approbation of these Actions.'³

This, of course, is Hutcheson's own view. The theory of the *Inquiry* has been modified, or rather made clearer and more acceptable: he now holds that the moral sense approves actions, but the affection of benevolence moves us to elect, or excites us to, some actions. It is with the first of these views, not the second, that I shall be concerned.

Finally, he notes the possibility of an approach differing from both the Epicurean and his own.

¹ p. 208.

² p. 209: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 403.

³ p. 213.

'There have been many *ways of speaking* introduced, which seem to signify something different from both the former Opinions. Such as these, that "Morality of Actions consists in *Conformity to Reason, or Difformity from it*:" That "*Virtue* is acting according to the *absolute Fitness and Unfitness of Things*, or agreeably to the *Natures or Relations of Things*," and many others in different Authors. To examine these is the Design of the following Sections; and to explain more fully how the *Moral Sense* alledged to be in Mankind, must be pre-supposed even in these Schemes.'¹

Having taken cognizance of the rationalists, Hutcheson spends some time on criticism of their views before turning to a defence of his own theory of moral sense.

A. *Arguments against reason*

1. Hutcheson's first argument depends on defining reason as 'our *Power of finding out true Propositions*'.² Therefore to say that reason discovers rightness is to say that rightness is truth, i.e. correspondence to fact.³ Hutcheson has little difficulty in showing that this will not do.

'Whatever *Attribute* can be ascribed to a *generous kind Action*, the *contrary Attribute* may as *truly* be ascribed to a *selfish cruel Action*: Both Propositions are equally *true*, and the two contrary Actions, the Objects of the two *Truths* are equally *conformable* to their several Truths, with that sort of *Conformity* which is between a Truth and its Object.'⁴

If the rationalists do not hold this absurd view, Hutcheson asks them to explain what else it can mean to say that rightness is discovered by reason. The fault lies of course in his narrow view of reason, which he thinks can only discern the truth or falsity of a proposition.

2. The second argument is concerned with the phrase 'the reason for an action'. This may refer, says Hutcheson, to 'exciting reasons' or to 'justifying reasons'. An exciting reason is a characteristic of an action which excites the agent to do it;

¹ pp. 213-14.

² p. 215: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 403. Contrast the definition given in the first three editions of the *Inquiry* and quoted on p. 29, above. See also note 2 on that page.

³ For this argument cf. Hume, pp. 51 ff., below.

⁴ pp. 215-16: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 404.

a justifying reason is a characteristic of an action which engages our approbation.

'Now we shall find that all *exciting Reasons* pre-suppose *Instincts* and *Affections*; and the *justifying* pre-suppose a *Moral Sense*.'¹

We may neglect the consideration of 'exciting reasons', and turn to 'justifying reasons'.

'Here it is plain, "*A Truth shewing an Action to be fit to attain an End*," does not justify it; nor do we approve a *subordinate End* for any *Truth*, which only shews it to be fit to promote the *ultimate End*; for the worst *Actions* may be conducive to their *Ends*, and *reasonable* in that *Sense*. The *justifying Reasons* then must be about the *Ends* themselves, especially the *ultimate Ends*. The *Question* then is, "*Does a Conformity to any Truth make us approve an ultimate End*, previously to any *moral Sense*?" For example, we approve *pursuing the publick Good*. For what *Reason*? Or what is the *Truth* for *Conformity* to which we call it a *reasonable End*? I fancy we can find none in these *Cases*, more than we could give for our liking any *pleasant Fruit*.'²

Hutcheson then considers some suggestions of 'a reason for' approving an end.

2.1. Some say the reason for approving an end is that '*It is the end proposed by the DEITY*'. But, asks Hutcheson, 'why do we *approve* concurring with the divine *Ends*? This *Reason* is given, "*He is our Benefactor*:" But then, for what *Reason* do we approve *Concurrence with a Benefactor*? Here we must recur to a *Sense*.'³

Of course the list of 'reasons for' cannot be infinite; finally we must come to something which has no more ultimate ground. But Hutcheson just assumes that this final discernment must be made by sense. He never considers the possibility that reason may be a faculty of immediate apprehension. I suspect that his failure to consider this possibility lies in a confusion of two senses of the word 'reason'. He thinks that to say something is perceived by 'reason' is the same as saying 'a reason' can be given for it.⁴ This is clear from his language throughout this section. What would Hutcheson say if he were asked whether it is reason which perceives that $2+2 =$

¹ p. 218: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 404.

² p. 230: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 408.

³ pp. 230-1. ⁴ Cf. Hume, p. 71, below.

4? If he agreed, we might justifiably, on his principles, ask him what reason he could assign for twice two being equal to four.

2.2. It may be suggested that the reason for approving certain actions is that '*Study of publick Good tends to the Advantage of the Approver*'. To this theory Hutcheson quite rightly replies (a) that then the ground of approbation is self-love, not conformity to reason, and (b) that in any case this view is inconsistent with the facts.

'Men *approve* without Perception of *private Advantage*; and often do not *condemn* or *disapprove* what is plainly pernicious; as in the Execution of a *just Sentence*, which the Sufferer may *approve*.'

2.3. To the utilitarian view, that an action is approved because it will produce general happiness, Hutcheson gives the same reply as to the first suggestion 2.1, namely that this presupposes that the moral sense approves the production of general happiness. Again he does not consider the possibility that the rightness of producing general happiness may be discerned by reason.

2.4. Hutcheson does make some attempt to deal with a genuinely intuitionist position and discusses in particular a deontological view.

'There are some other *Reasons* assigned in Words differing from the former, but more confused, such as these: "*It is our Duty to study publick Good. We are obliged to do it. We owe Obedience to the Deity. The whole is to be preferred to a Part.*" But let these Words, *Duty*, *Obligation*, *Owing*, and the meaning of that Gerund or Participle, *is to be preferred*, be explained; and we shall find ourselves still at a Loss for *exciting Reasons* previously to *Affections*, or *justifying Reasons* without recourse to a *moral Sense*.'

He then proceeds to the task of defining obligation.

'When we say one is obliged to an Action, we either mean, 1. *That the Action is necessary to obtain Happiness to the Agent, or to avoid Misery*: Or, 2. *That every Spectator, or he himself upon Reflection, must approve his Action, and disapprove his omitting it, if he considers fully all its Circumstances*. The former Meaning of the Word *Obligation* pre-

¹ p. 231.

² p. 232.

supposes *selfish Affections*, and the *Senses of private Happiness*: The latter Meaning includes the moral *Sense*.¹

These definitions have much affinity with Hume's theory, and I think Hutcheson's views on this point must have had not a little influence on his friend. Hutcheson's first definition recalls one of the senses given to obligation by Hume,² the second recalls Hume's general theory about the characteristic of being virtuous.³

We may admit that the word 'ought' is used in the two senses defined by Hutcheson (though I doubt if it is used very often in the second sense; the first represents what is perhaps the most frequent use of the hypothetical 'ought'), but neither of these definitions covers what we mean by moral obligation. As Hutcheson himself admitted in 2.2, we may think actions right which are not advantageous, or which are disadvantageous, to ourselves: and men not infrequently believe they are obliged to do actions which are both disadvantageous to themselves and frowned upon by most people; a moral reformer, William Wilberforce for example, is often in this position.

Hutcheson holds that all other definitions of obligation will be found faulty if they are substituted for the *definiendum* in sentences in which the word 'obligation' actually occurs. This is a sound argument but it also kills Hutcheson's own definitions of obligation.

The obvious alternative, that obligation may be ultimate and indefinable, never enters Hutcheson's mind because he holds the empiricist theory of knowledge.

'All our Ideas, or the materials of our reasoning or judging, are received by some immediate Powers of Perception internal or external, which we may call *Senses*.'⁴

If it were suggested to him that this only applies to qualities and that obligation might be a relation, he would reply that relations, or 'relative ideas', presuppose sensible ideas, so that the faculty discerning the relation of obligation would not be

¹ p. 232: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 408.

² Cf. p. 94, below, and the quotation from Gay in note 2 to that page.

³ Cf. pp. 75-8, below.

⁴ pp. 240-1.

the ultimate faculty in moral discernment but would be dependent upon the operation of sense.

'That Things are now *different* is certain. That *Ideas* . . . are also *different*, is certain. That upon comparing two *Ideas* there arises a *relative Idea* . . . is also obvious. . . . Relations are not *real Qualities* inherent in external Natures, but only *Ideas* necessarily accompanying our *Perception* of two Objects at once, and comparing them. *Relative Ideas* continue, when the external Objects do not exist, provided we retain the *two Ideas*. But what the *external Relations*, in the Natures of Things do mean, is not easy perhaps to be conceived.'¹

It is of course true that for a relation to exist its terms must exist. But even if we were to admit that these terms must ultimately consist of sensible qualities (though I do not think this is true), the admission would not imply that the terms between which a moral relation holds are *moral* qualities; so that the sensing of the qualities between which a moral relation is discerned need not be done by a *moral* sense, and the faculty discerning that relation need not be dependent upon a more ultimate moral faculty of sensing.

Hutcheson's contention that relations exist only in the mind, with its implication that they are not therefore objects of knowledge, is absurd. He himself virtually admits it in the first sentence of his paragraph about relations, in which he talks about differences of things as well as differences of ideas. Apparently he holds a representative theory, thinking that the ideas and the differences between them copy real things and the real differences between them; but he forgets that difference is a relation, so that the objective differences between things are objective relations.

I conclude, therefore, that Hutcheson's objection to intuitionist forms of rationalism rests on the unexamined dogma of the empiricist theory of knowledge, and that in particular his rejection of a deontological view is unsound for the following reasons: (a) his analysis of obligation is not exhaustive and fails to cover the facts; (b) he neglects the possibility that

¹ pp. 251-2. 'External relations' here means real or objective relations (cf. 'external objects' in the quotation) and should not be confused with the modern distinction in logic between external and internal relations.

obligation may be ultimate and unanalysable; (c) even if empiricism be true, so that all ultimate *qualities* are sense-given, Hutcheson, owing to a false view about the nature of relations, gives insufficient attention to the possibility that the ultimate moral characteristic may be a relation.

2.5. Such attention as is given by Hutcheson to this last possibility (that the ultimate moral characteristic may be a relation) is devoted to a criticism of the view of Samuel Clarke. Hutcheson takes Clarke's view to be that moral characteristics are relations of fitness or unfitness. The discussion is of interest to the modern reader because of a similar view taken by Sir David Ross in his Gifford Lectures. Sir David himself says that the relation of the fitness or suitability of an action to a situation, which he regards as the ultimate moral characteristic, is the same attribute as the 'fitness' of which Samuel Clarke and Richard Price speak.¹ Hutcheson's criticism is to be found in Section II of the *Illustrations*. The criticism

'is not intended to oppose his [Clarke's] Scheme, but rather to suggest what seems a necessary Explication of it; by shewing that it is no otherwise intelligible, but upon Supposition of a *moral Sense*.'²

It is suggested, he says, that there are moral relations of fitness and unfitness. Now relations may be divided into three classes: (i) relations of inanimate objects to each other; (ii) relations between inanimate objects and rational beings; (iii) relations of rational beings to each other. It is clear, he continues, that moral relations cannot be found in the first two classes. They must therefore be sought in the third.

(One comment is needed here, though it is on a minor point. Hutcheson jumps from inanimate objects to rational beings; this classification omits non-rational but animate creatures. He should have named four classes of things which can stand in relations, either to members of the same class, or to members of any of the other classes: (i) inanimate objects;

¹ *Foundations of Ethics*, p. 52 and p. 54 note. Professor Prichard has called my attention to certain passages in Clarke and Price which throw doubt on the view that for them fitness is a relation. I think that for Price fitness is not a relation. Clarke's position is rather obscure; I hope to discuss it elsewhere.

² pp. 252-3.

(ii) animate but non-sensitive creatures (i.e. things which grow and reproduce but are not capable of sensation); (iii) sensitive but non-rational creatures; (iv) rational creatures. Moral relations will be found between terms belonging to either of the last two classes, provided that at least one term belongs to class (iv). There are no moral relations of sensitive creatures to each other, but there are moral relations (a) of rational creatures to sensitive, and (b) of rational creatures to each other.)

Hutcheson gives examples of relevant relations in his third class:

'The last sort of *Relations* is that among *rational Agents*, founded on their *Actions* or *Affections*; whence one is called *Creator*, another *Creature*; one *Benefactor*, the other *Beneficiary* . . . ; the one *Parent*, the other *Child*; the one *Governour*, the other *Subject*, &c. Now let us see what *Fitnesses* or *Unfitnesses* arise from these *Relations*.'¹

He notes the following senses of the word 'fitting':

- (1) As applied to a means. A means is called fitting to an end, if it succeeds in realizing that end. This cannot be a moral relation, for a means can be fitting in this sense to a bad end or to a morally indifferent end.
- (2) As applied to an end. This is the ultimate moral attribute.
- (3) As applied to a means derivatively from (2). A means may be called morally fitting, when we mean that it is fitting in sense (1) to an end that is fitting in sense (2). This sense of the word is simply a combination of the other two. Sense (2) is the ultimate moral attribute which we have to examine.

This is the position which Professor Moore took up in *Principia Ethica*. Hutcheson's sense (3) of 'fitting' is equivalent to Professor Moore's sense of 'right', i.e. that which will produce, or is the cause of, a state of affairs which is, in Professor Moore's language 'intrinsically good', and in Hutcheson's language 'fitting' in sense (2). Hutcheson deals with sense (2) as follows.

¹ p. 254.

'What means the *Fitness of an ultimate End*? For what is it fit? Why, it is an *ultimate End*, not fit for any thing farther, but *absolutely fit*. What means that Word *fit*? If it notes a *simple Idea* it must be the *Perception of some Sense*: thus we must recur, upon this Scheme too, to a *moral Sense*.¹

The comparison with the position of *Principia Ethica* was, I think, useful because we can now see that as soon as Hutcheson departs from Professor Moore's position he begs a question. He points out that 'fitting' in this sense may be either definable or undefinable (in his language, a complex idea or a simple). He successfully refutes some suggested definitions, with which we need not concern ourselves. He then goes on to say that if the word is undefinable, i.e. is a simple idea, it must be perceived by a sense. There is here, of course, the empiricist assumption that all simple ideas come from sense, which is just what Professor Moore and Richard Price will not admit. Hutcheson never considers whether a simple idea may come from another source; he just begs the question.

But there is a further point. For Professor Moore 'intrinsically good' is the name of a quality. What has happened to Hutcheson's belief that he was investigating a *relation* of fittingness? If he were to say that the word 'fitting', as applied to an end, is the name of a quality and not a relation, his position would be more plausible since it is more difficult to find qualities, than it is to find relations, which do not appear to be derived from sense. In speaking of simple ideas, and indeed in his whole epistemology, Hutcheson follows Locke. And for Locke relations are complex ideas. If an idea is simple, it must, Locke thinks, be a quality. The fact is that Hutcheson has here tacitly dropped the idea that fitness is a relation. For him it is just a simple idea and must therefore, on Locke's principles, be given by sense. If, however, fitness is a relation, Hutcheson's refutation is incomplete.

He would probably reply, if this point were put to him, 'How can fitness in this sense be a relation? We have agreed that it is a characteristic of an ultimate end.' To what, then,

¹ p. 255.

is it related? We have agreed that an ultimate end "is not fit for any thing farther, but *absolutely fit*". There is no second term for your relation.' But in speaking of means and ends Hutcheson has obscured the issue, just as Professor Moore obscured the issue between the utilitarian and the intuitionist by defining 'right' in terms of means and ends. Hutcheson assumes that the only sense which 'fitting' can have as a relation is that of denoting a means to an end. In fact the relation referred to by Samuel Clarke has nothing to do with means and ends. For example, in the situation 'A is aware that B is in pain', there is a moral relation between A and B which can be expressed by saying 'It is fitting for A to help B' or by saying 'A is under an obligation to help B'. (I myself do not find the first form of expression as satisfactory as the second.) This relation arises from elements in the existing situation, that is, from the facts that B is in pain and that A knows it. It does not arise from a possible future situation which does not now exist. Means and ends, causes and probable effects, have nothing to do with this relation; it is logically entailed by the existing situation.

I conclude, therefore, that Hutcheson's criticism of Clarke is ineffective. If he thinks fitness is a relation, he makes the very questionable assumption that simple relations must be perceived by sense. If he thinks fitness is a quality, he assumes, first, that 'fitness' as a relation can only denote a successful means to an end; which is untrue: secondly, he assumes that fitness, being a quality, must be given to sense; and this assumption, although more plausible than the assumption that all simple characteristics (relations as well as qualities) must come from sense, is still open to question.

B. *Objections to the moral sense theory*

Hutcheson considers, and attempts to answer, some objections to his theory at various points in the *Illustrations*.

1. 'Say they, "*Perceptions of Sense* are deceitful, we must have some Perception or Idea of *Virtue* more stable and certain; this must be *Conformity to Reason*: *Truth* discovered by our *Reason* is certain and

invariable: *That* then alone is the Original Idea of Virtue, *Agreement with Reason*." But in like manner our *Sight* and *Sense of Beauty* is deceitful, and does not always represent the true *Forms* of Objects. We must not call that *beautiful* or *regular*, which pleases the *Sight*, or an *internal Sense*; but Beauty in external *Forms* too, consists in *Conformity to Reason*. So our *Taste* may be vitiated: we must not say that *Savour* is perceived by *Taste*, but must place the original Idea of *grateful Savours* in *Conformity to Reason*. . . . We may mistake the real *Extent* of Bodies, or their *Proportions*, by making a Conclusion upon the first sensible Appearance: Therefore *Ideas of Extension* are not originally acquired by a *Sense*, but consist in *Conformity to Reason*.¹

Another statement of the objection, with a similar reply, is found in another place:

"But may there not be a *right* or *wrong State* of our *moral Sense*, as there is in our other *Senses*, according as they represent their Objects to be *as they really are*, or represent them otherwise?" So may not our *moral Sense* approve that which is *vicious*, and *disapprove Virtue*, as a *sickly Palate* may dislike *grateful Food*, or a *vitiated Sight* misrepresent *Colours* or *Dimensions*? Must we not know therefore *antecedently* what is *morally Good* or *Evil* by our *Reason*, before we can know that our *moral Sense* is *right*?

"To answer this, we must remember that of the *sensible Ideas*, some are allowed to be only *Perceptions* in our Minds.' He calls these '*purely sensible*. As to the *purely sensible Ideas*, we know they are *altered* by any Disorder in our *Organs*, and made *different* from what arise in us from the same Objects at other times. We do not denominate Objects from our *Perceptions during the Disorder*, but according to our *ordinary Perceptions*, or those of others in *good Health*: Yet no body imagines that therefore *Colours*, *Sounds*, *Tastes*, are not *sensible Ideas*."²

Hutcheson's reply is perfectly just. The fact that sense can 'be deceived', as ordinary language puts it, i.e. that owing to some physiological abnormality such as colour-blindness, or owing to poor visibility, an object looks to me a different colour from that which it 'really' has, does not prove that the 'real' colour is not basically sense-given. In making one colour the standard or real colour of the object we assume a reference to other data than the colour seen by one person at one time; for example, we usually assume a reference to what is seen by

¹ pp. 233-4.

² pp. 286-7: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, pp. 214-15.

most people of highly discriminating sight, to what is seen in daylight, and so on. But all these references are ultimately concerned with sense-data. This does not of course imply that any and every use of the phrase 'the real so-and-so' refers ultimately to sense-data; it does not prove that moral characteristics *are* given to sense; but it does dispose of the attempted proof that they cannot be given to sense because sense is deceptive.

Hutcheson could, however, have made a much better reply to the objection and have turned the argument of his opponents against themselves. If they admit, as they apparently do, that moral discernment may err, how can that discernment be an exercise of reason in the strict sense? For knowing is usually thought (and the objector clearly wants to hold this) to be unerring and incorrigible. In fact this is an argument which is fatal to any thoroughgoing rationalist who wants to say that *all* moral judgements are made on the basis of knowing. But equally it is an argument against a theory of sensing proper; for sense cannot deceive us, though it may present different data from those presented to the senses of others in the same situation. It is only when we proceed to judge more than the data of sense themselves warrant that we fall into error. If I judge, for example, that an object which looks red to me is 'really red', i.e. would look red to most people in a good light, I am liable to err. But if I judge no more than that the object looks red to me now, I cannot be deceived. We cannot, therefore, if we admit that some moral judgements are corrigible, hold either that all proceed from knowledge or that all proceed from sense alone. If an analogy with sense-perception is to be found at all, it must be sought in perceiving, not in sensing.

2. Closely connected with the former is the objection that 'we judge even of our Senses and Affections themselves, and approve or disapprove them'.¹ 'We judge even of our *Affections* and *Senses* themselves, whether they are *morally Good* or *Evil*.'² The approving of the moral sense could not be performed by that sense itself. Hutcheson replies to part of

¹ p. 217.

² p. 237: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 409.

the objection by saying that affections are judged by the moral sense, but he admits that a sense cannot judge of itself; consequently we cannot call the moral sense itself morally good or evil, any more than we can call the sense of taste sweet or bitter, or call the sense of sight straight or crooked, white or black. He answers the difficulty thus:

'Every one judges the *Affections* of others by his own *Sense*; so that it seems not impossible that in these *Senses* Men might differ as they do in *Taste*. A *Sense approving Benevolence* would disapprove *that Temper*, which a *Sense approving Malice* would delight in. The *former* would judge of the *latter* by his *own Sense*, so would the *latter* of the *former*. Each one would at first view think the *Sense* of the other perverted. But then, is there no difference? Are both *Senses* equally *good*? No certainly, any *Man* who observed them would think the *Sense* of the *former* more desirable than of the *latter*; but this is, because the *moral Sense* of every *Man* is constituted in the former manner. But were there any Nature with no *moral Sense* at all observing these two Persons, would he not think the State of the *former* preferable to that of the *latter*? Yes, he might: but not from any Perception of *moral Goodness* in the one *Sense* more than in the other. Any rational Nature observing two Men thus constituted, with *opposite Senses*, might by reasoning see, not *moral Goodness* in one *Sense* more than in the contrary, but a *Tendency to the Happiness of the Person himself*, who had the former *Sense* in the one Constitution, and a *contrary Tendency* in the opposite Constitution."¹

Hutcheson adds that the possessor of the bad moral sense might himself judge it to be bad because it procured him the hatred instead of the love of others and so was disadvantageous to him.

Hutcheson's view, then, can distinguish between what seems good and what is good. What seems good is relative to the moral sense of a particular observer; what *is* good is relative to the moral senses of the majority of mankind: just as we might distinguish between real and apparent colour by saying that the real colour of an object is the one seen by most people. Ordinarily it would be thought that when we say a man has good moral judgement, we mean that he usually judges those

¹ pp. 237-8: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, pp. 409-10.

actions to be right, and those situations and states of mind to be good, which really are right and good. According to Hutcheson what we mean is that he approves those actions and situations which most people approve. Apart from such references to the moral senses of other men, says Hutcheson, a man can be said to have 'good' moral judgement, not in the sense of 'morally good', but only in the sense of 'naturally good', that is, in the sense that the actions he approves usually lead to his own happiness. On Hutcheson's view, is the unpopular moral reformer good or bad? Apparently he will only be 'good' (and then not morally good) if his belief in the reform benefits himself. If it does not (and his unpopularity will often ensure that it does not), he is apparently bad in every sense. This consequence seems to me sufficient proof of the falsity of Hutcheson's position.

3. Hutcheson's reply to objection 2 leads to the next. On his view a being who was purely rational and had no sensuous nature could not perceive moral goodness or judge that men's characters and consciences were good or bad, but could only judge of the utility of a man's character and conscience to himself. Since God is such a being, it will follow that God is in this position.¹ To this objection Hutcheson replies:

'Why may not the Deity have something of a superior Kind, analogous to our *moral Sense*, essential to him?'²

Here the word 'essential' is question-begging. If we are to reach this conclusion by analogy from our own constitution, we must say that God's superior moral sense is 'necessary' to him in the sense of factually necessary, not in the sense of logically necessary. And even if it should make sense (which I doubt) to talk of factual necessity in this connexion, Hume is surely right³ in saying that the evidence here is of the slenderest kind or even non-existent. It is pointless to argue by analogy from created beings and their created attributes to an uncreated being who is moreover the creator of those very beings and those very attributes from which it is proposed to

¹ Hume accepted this consequence. See pp. 86-7, below.

² p. 245: Selby-Bigge, vol. i, p. 412.

³ See pp. 86-7, below.

argue to *his* attributes. Further, if we did ascribe a moral sense to God, what meaning could be given to the statement that God approves what is righteous and just? Apparently it could only mean either that God approves what he approves, or that he approves what most men approve. I conclude that on this point the moral sense theory is in a difficulty. Either it must follow the bolder course of Hume and deny that we are justified in attributing to God the awareness of moral attributes, or it must be abandoned.

Of the three objections to the moral sense theory which he considers, Hutcheson has successfully countered the first but has failed to meet the other two. In the previous section we found that his attack on rationalism was equally unsuccessful. We must therefore conclude that his attempt to set up an empiricist theory of the epistemology of morals has failed. In the next chapter I shall consider the more subtle attempt of Hutcheson's friend and spiritual son in moral theory, Hume. If Hutcheson is 'the father of Scottish philosophy', Hume is *pater magno filius maior*.

CHAPTER III

DAVID HUME¹

IT is with diffidence that I venture to include in this survey some remarks on Hume. The careful and subtle reasoning of Hume's philosophy demands a far more exhaustive and penetrating treatment than I could give to it. Whether or not we agree with Hume, whether or not we are sympathetic to the desire to found morals on human nature, it must be recognized that in many ways Hume is the most stimulating of the British moralists. It is agreed on all hands that he is the greatest of the naturalists. I should be inclined to add that he is (so far as moral theory is concerned) the greatest of the utilitarians. For he is perhaps more than any of them aware of the complexity of the moral consciousness, and he is least of all moralists subject to the charge of over-simplifying its content. (More than one of his commentators, however, may be charged with over-simplifying Hume.²) Although himself a naturalist, Hume's moral philosophy provides the best criticism of a facile naturalism that seeks to bring all our moral judgements under one hasty generalization.

But just for these reasons it would be impossible to exclude Hume altogether from any discussion of the eighteenth-century moralists. Since, however, his moral philosophy has been discussed by many writers in recent years at considerable length, I propose to confine myself to one or two small parts of his work especially relevant to my inquiry. I shall be chiefly concerned with his arguments against holding reason to be the

¹ References are to the following editions: *A Treatise of Human Nature* (cited as *Treatise*), edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 1888; *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (cited as *Enquiry*), edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., 1902.

I should perhaps say that, in spite of judgements to the contrary by many eminent persons (not the least of whom is Hume himself), I regard Book III of the *Treatise* as the more valuable and instructive of Hume's two accounts of his moral theory; it seems to me to stand in a similar relation to the *Enquiry* as does the first book of the *Treatise* to the *Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding*.

² Professor Broad's well-known chapter in his *Five Types of Ethical Theory* seems to me to err in this respect.

faculty of moral discernment, but I shall add some remarks on the aesthetic analogy, in the course of which Hume's own theory of moral discernment will be subjected to criticism, and I shall mention Hume's view of obligation.

I. ARGUMENTS AGAINST REASON

I propose to consider in some detail Hume's arguments against holding reason to be the faculty of moral discernment. The arguments given by him in the *Treatise* and in the *Enquiry* respectively overlap to some extent, but the two lists are by no means coincident. It is therefore worth while to consider separately the two statements of Hume's attack on reason.

A. The 'Treatise'

The arguments in the *Treatise* are all contained in the first section of the book that deals with morals (Book III, Part I, Section I). Hume begins by connecting the controversy about reason and sense with his own theory of knowledge; that is, he re-states the question in the language of impressions and ideas in order to make his observations conform with his general philosophy.

'It has been observ'd, that nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions. . . .

'Now as perceptions resolve themselves into two kinds, viz. *impressions* and *ideas*, this distinction gives rise to a question, . . . *Whether 'tis by means of our ideas or impressions we distinguish betwixt vice and virtue, and pronounce an action blameable or praise-worthy?* . . .

'Those who affirm that virtue is nothing but a conformity to reason; that there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being that considers them; that the immutable measures of right and wrong impose an obligation, not only on human creatures, but also on the Deity himself: All these systems concur in the opinion, that morality, like truth, is discern'd merely by ideas, and by their juxta-position and comparison. In order, therefore, to judge of these systems, we need only consider, whether it be possible, from reason alone, to distinguish betwixt moral good and evil, or whether there must concur some other principles to enable us to make that distinction.'¹

¹ *Treatise*, pp. 456-7.

1. Hume's first argument¹ is based on the fact that morality influences action. Hume thinks he has already proved, in treating of the passions,² that reason cannot move to action. From this it follows, he holds, that reason cannot give us moral distinctions.

Hume says there is no way of evading this inference unless one denies the premiss that reason cannot move to action. Now I for one would deny this premiss, and I certainly do not think Hume has proved it in the earlier passage in Book II. But this question is quite distinct from, and irrelevant to, the epistemological question, that is, the question what faculty it is that *discerns* moral facts, or, as Hume would say, gives us moral distinctions. Hume's argument is invalid, quite apart from the doubtfulness of his premiss. I can judge an action to be right without necessarily performing it. And it might be held, and indeed is held by many philosophers,³ that reason judges of actions that they are right or wrong, but that if such actions are to be performed the motive must be a desire. Even if Hume has proved his premiss, he has proved that reason is not the moral faculty only in the sense in which 'moral faculty' means the faculty moving us to moral action, not in the sense in which it means the faculty that discerns the morality of actions. Yet the question he is now supposed to be settling is whether right and wrong are 'discerned' or 'distinguished' by reason.

This first argument occurs also in the *Enquiry*. It is worth noting that there Hume says that a purely rational creature devoid of feeling and desire could not be influenced in action by right and wrong; this is virtually an admission that such a creature might be able to discern the difference between right and wrong, or at least an admission that Hume has not yet proved the contrary.

'Extinguish all the warm feelings and prepossessions in favour of virtue, and all disgust or aversion to vice: render men totally indifferent

¹ *Treatise*, p. 457.

² *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Section III (pp. 413-18).

³ e.g. Sir David Ross in his two books, *The Right and the Good* and *Foundations of Ethics*.

towards these distinctions; and morality is no longer a practical study, nor has any tendency to regulate our lives and actions.¹

It is possible that Hume was led to confuse the two questions through Hutcheson, whose first book, the *Inquiry*, failed, as we saw earlier,² to distinguish them, though the later *Illustrations* did distinguish them sharply. In general Hume's use of the phrase 'moral sense' makes it equivalent to 'moral sentiment', and he employs the two expressions interchangeably. ('Moral sentiment' is more prominent in the *Enquiry*.) Hutcheson in his earlier work had regarded the 'moral sense' as the faculty of both 'approbation' and 'election'; but in the *Illustrations* he uses it only of the faculty of approbation, distinguishing this from the faculty of election.³

Hume, however, even in the *Treatise*, does not regard the two questions as simply identical. For he *infers*, from reason's inability to move to action, the *conclusion* that it is unable to discern moral distinctions, and further he appears to give an argument for this inference. 'An active principle', he says, 'can never be founded on an inactive.'⁴ This is an obscure statement. What is the 'active principle' that cannot be founded on reason? Presumably it is the moral faculty in the sense of the faculty that moves us to act rightly. Let us assume that only desire can move to action. Now has anyone ever held that desire is 'founded on' reason? We might say that a purely rational being would be able to discern right and wrong but not to act, while in man it always happens that the judgement of right is *accompanied* by a desire to do what is right. I do not think this desire does always accompany the judgement that one ought to do an action; but even if it did, there would be no need to think that the desire is *founded on*, i.e. that it logically arises from, the judgement.

But this statement of Hume's, that an active principle can never be founded on an inactive, may be discussed in a much more interesting connexion. Sir David Ross has brought forward, in *Foundations of Ethics*, what seems to me a very strong

¹ *Enquiry*, p. 172.

³ Cf. p. 32, above.

² Cf. p. 22, above.

⁴ *Treatise*, p. 457.

argument against all naturalistic theories of morals. These theories hold that the judgement that an action is right can only refer to the emotion of moral approval felt either by the agent or by some spectator or spectators. Sir David Ross points out that when we consider this emotion we see at once that

'it is not just a feeling which arises in us, we know not why. . . . It seems to presuppose some insight into the nature of the action. . . . It seems to be an intellectual emotion, presupposing the thought that the action is right, and right as being of a certain recognized character.'¹

Now when Sir David says this emotion presupposes a thought, he is presumably saying, in Hume's language, that the emotion is founded on the thought. Whether Hume's statement, that 'an active principle can never be founded on an inactive', is true or not, I am unable to say, because I am not quite clear what he means by it. But if it is true, we should use it, not to deny the perfectly obvious fact to which Sir David Ross has called our attention, but as an argument against Hume's initial contention (his 'proof' of which in Book II is certainly invalid) that reason is an inactive principle.

2. Hume's second argument is rather curiously stated.

'Reason is the discovery of truth or falshood. Truth or falshood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the *real* relations of ideas, or to *real* existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. Now 'tis evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason.'²

I find the second sentence of this argument obscure in two respects. First, Hume tells us that truth is the agreement to relations or to matters of fact, and falsehood the contrary. But what is the other term of the relation of agreement or disagreement? An agreement is an agreement *of* one thing *to* another.

¹ p. 23.

² *Treatise*, p. 458.

Hume tells us what the agreement is *to*, but does not say *of* what it is the agreement. Second, why is the word 'real' twice italicized so prominently? I can only suppose that the second of these two questions indirectly answers the first; I suppose Hume means that truth is the agreement of something not 'real' to something 'real'. The first term of the agreement, therefore, is presumably an 'idea', i.e. a judgement.

If this is Hume's meaning, it is an adequate enough account of truth in that sense of the word in which it is used of judgements or propositions. To say that a proposition is true is to say that it corresponds or 'agrees' with a fact or something 'real'. But now consider Hume's use of the word 'truth' in the first sentence: 'Reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood.' In itself this seems harmless enough, but only because we understand the word 'truth' to include in its meaning a different, though perfectly common, sense of the word, namely the sense in which it means fact. To say that reason is the discovery of truth seems in itself harmless enough since in ordinary English it bears or includes the meaning 'reason is the apprehension of facts'. But apparently Hume is using the word 'truth' in the same sense throughout (his coupling it with the word 'falsehood' even in the first sentence shows this), that is, in the sense in which the word means correspondence with fact and is legitimately applied only to propositions.

Now to say that the only function of reason is to discover whether propositions are true is not merely inadequate to cover the functions of reason as ordinarily conceived; it is inadequate to cover the functions of reason as envisaged in Hume's own philosophy. He says here that reason only discovers the relation of agreement or disagreement existing between a proposition and something 'real', thus implying that the 'real' something itself must be discerned by some faculty other than reason. But, he tells us, this something 'real', the second term in the relation of agreement, may be one of two things, it may be a 'real relation of ideas' or a 'real existence and matter of fact'. According to Hume's general philosophy some 'real' relations are intuited by reason. Thus

even Hume himself must admit that his definition of reason here, as the discovery of agreement or disagreement, is too narrow, since his own philosophy demands that one of the terms of that agreement or disagreement may itself be something which also is discovered by reason. And yet his argument here against assigning a place to reason in moral discernment depends on restricting the function of reason to the discovery of agreement or disagreement.

I suspect that this curious narrowing of the function of reason here is due to the old confusion between the two senses of the word 'truth' mentioned above, a confusion which played havoc with the exposition of the coherence theory of truth. In that sense of the word in which it means fact, nothing that Hume has said prevents reason from knowing moral facts or 'truths' as well as any other facts or 'truths'. All that Hume has attempted to prove in this argument is that right and wrong are not the same as truth and falsehood in the sense in which we call propositions true or false when we assert that they correspond or fail to correspond with facts. William Wollaston, who is the chief object of Hume's attack in this argument, thought they were the same, but I doubt if anyone else ever did. Wollaston held that if I steal someone's money I am in effect telling a lie. In so acting I am doing exactly the same as if I were to say the money belongs to me. Acting wrongly, Wollaston thought, *is* telling a lie, and acting rightly telling the truth. Hume points out that an action cannot be true or false in the sense in which a statement is true or false, because an action is a matter of fact and so can only form the second term in the relation of agreement or disagreement, not the first. But, owing to Hume's confusion of the two senses of 'truth' and his narrow definition of the function of reason, his argument is valid against no other rationalist than Wollaston.

3. Hume holds that ends are dictated by passion, while reason points out suitable and practicable means to those ends. It is by this form of service that reason is the 'slave of the passions'.¹ Now if we fail to see what action is a suitable or

¹ *Treatise*, p. 415.

practicable means to a desired end and perform an action which retards, instead of advancing, the attaining of the end, our action may, says Hume, be called unreasonable 'in a figurative and improper way of speaking'.¹ But such unreasonableness, he rightly observes, does not draw guilt upon the agent. This is a mistake of *fact*, and such a mistake we pity rather than blame.

'Shou'd it be pretended, that tho' a mistake of *fact* be not criminal, yet a mistake of *right* often is; and that this may be the source of immorality: I would answer, that 'tis impossible such a mistake can ever be the original source of immorality, since it supposes a real right and wrong; that is, a real distinction in morals, independent of these judgments. A mistake, therefore, of right may become a species of immorality; but 'tis only a secondary one, and is founded on some other, antecedent to it.'²

This presumably is meant as a reply to the objection that we may make mistakes about our duty. The point of such an objection is precisely to show that right and wrong must be objective if we can be mistaken about them. Hume has not yet shown that they are not objective. He will have to prove that there cannot be an objective right and wrong, and must then conclude that all mistakes about duty are mistakes of fact, not mistakes of right. If he can show this, it will of course follow that our moral ideas are not due to the perception by reason of an objective right and wrong, but must be derived from subjective sensations or feelings. He proceeds in the arguments that follow to consider suggestions for an objective right and wrong.

4. 'If the thought and understanding were alone capable of fixing the boundaries of right and wrong, the character of virtuous and vicious either must lie in some relations of objects, or must be a matter of fact, which is discovered by our reasoning. This consequence is evident. As the operations of human understanding divide themselves into two kinds, the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matter of fact; were virtue discover'd by the understanding; it must be an object of one of these operations, nor is there any third operation of the understanding, which can discover it.'³

¹ *Treatise*, p. 459.

² *Treatise*, p. 460.

³ *Treatise*, p. 463.

This statement depends on Hume's theory of knowledge. He attributes to reason or understanding the following two operations: (i) the intuiting of relations, and (ii) inductive reasoning to the probable existence of new matters of fact. Of course in the first book of the *Treatise* the second of these is not attributed to reason, in the strict sense, but Hume's purpose there was to show that this second kind of so-called reasoning is different from demonstrative inference proper. Elsewhere he conforms to ordinary usage and calls the process a function of reason.¹

Hume's statement that there is no third operation of the understanding would be challenged by some philosophers, who would attribute to the understanding the formation of *a priori* concepts.² This is the line of attack taken by Richard Price. I think that Price's arguments for holding *moral* attributes to be given by reason are not conclusive. Nevertheless he does prove that reason gives us *some* new ideas. Furthermore, I argued in my first chapter that Hume's principle that all ideas are derived from impressions is open to question. With this proviso against Hume's statement that there can be no third operation of the understanding, we may pass on to his consideration of the two operations which he does allow to reason.

Hume considers each operation separately. His arguments on this point therefore split up into 4.1 and 4.2, the first being concerned with theories holding that morality is demonstrable or that we intuit necessary relations in moral judgement, the second with the possibility that 'right' and 'wrong' stand for matters of fact reached by inference (presumably inductive inference).

4.1. 'There has been an opinion very industriously propagated by certain philosophers, that morality is susceptible of demonstration. . . . Upon this supposition, vice and virtue must consist in some relations; since 'tis allow'd on all hands, that no matter of fact is capable of being demonstrated.'³

¹ Cf. Kemp Smith, 'The Naturalism of Hume', *Mind*, N.S., vol. xiv, 1905, pp. 156 ff.

² Cf. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 105.

³ *Treatise*, p. 463.

Before we go on, it should be noted that the phrase 'it is allowed on all hands' must mean 'it is allowed by Mr. Hume (and his followers)'. Hume holds that all demonstration is analytic inference. But many philosophers would hold that there can be synthetic inference to new matter of fact if the necessity intuited to hold between the premisses and the conclusion is a synthetic necessity, that is, if the necessary proposition underlying the inference is an *a priori* synthetic proposition.

Hume now asks his opponents to 'point out distinctly the relations, which constitute morality or obligation', and considers two possibilities, (i) that the relation sought is one of the four which alone Hume allows to be involved in demonstrative inference, or (ii) that it is some relation other than these four. I shall number his consideration of these two possibilities 4.11 and 4.12.

4.11. 'If you assert, that vice and virtue consist in relations susceptible of certainty and demonstration, you must confine yourself to those *four* relations, which alone admit of that degree of evidence;' these are '*Resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity and number*'.¹

In such a case, says Hume, you run into absurdity, for all these relations are applicable not merely to irrational as well as rational beings, but also to inanimate objects.

This is true enough, but of course no one has ever suggested that any of these four is the relation we need. The curious question is, why does Hume restrict deductive inference to these four relations? However, it is a question about Hume's general theory of knowledge and may be left for those who deal with that topic. Fortunately Hume allows at least the possibility that his list is incomplete.

4.12. 'Shou'd it be asserted, that the sense of morality consists in the discovery of some relation, distinct from these, and that our enumeration was not compleat, when we comprehended all demonstrable relations under four general heads: To this I know not what to reply, till some one be so good as to point out to me this new relation. 'Tis impossible to refute a system, which has never yet been explain'd.'²

¹ *Treatise*, pp. 463-4.

² *Treatise*, p. 464.

Hume's predecessors had been rather vague in their talk of relations, so that his challenge is perhaps justified. But, as I hope to show when I come to talk of obligation,¹ Samuel Clarke had really given Hume all he could reasonably ask for, and Hume's ignorance is obviously more pretended than real.

Hume imposes two conditions on anyone who may attempt to point out such a relation, and tries to show that neither of these conditions can be fulfilled. Since Hume is here really bringing forward two further arguments against the rationalists, I shall number his two conditions and his discussions of them 4.121 and 4.122.

4.121. The first condition is this.

'As moral good and evil belong only to the actions of the mind, and are deriv'd from our situation with regard to external objects, the relations, from which these moral distinctions arise, must lie only betwixt internal actions, and external objects, and must not be applicable either to internal actions, compared among themselves, or to external objects, when placed in opposition to other external objects. For as morality is supposed to attend certain relations, if these relations cou'd belong to internal actions consider'd singly, it wou'd follow, that we might be guilty of crimes in ourselves, and independent of our situation, with respect to the universe: And in like manner, if these moral relations cou'd be apply'd to external objects, it wou'd follow, that even inanimate beings wou'd be susceptible of moral beauty and deformity. Now it seems difficult to imagine, that any relation can be discover'd betwixt our passions, volitions and actions, compared to external objects, which relation might not belong either to these passions and volitions, or to these external objects, compar'd among *themselves*.'²

This is clearly a fair challenge. It is in connexion with this argument that Hume introduces his well-known comparison between parricide and the destruction by a sapling of its parent tree. The example is given in the *Enquiry* also, where the sapling is compared to Nero. Professor Broad, who makes the *Enquiry* the basis of the whole of his discussion of Hume's ethics, deals with this objection in, it seems to me, far too summary a manner.

¹ See pp. 95-6, below.

² *Treatise*, pp. 464-5.

'I do not think', says Professor Broad, 'that a Rationalist need spend many sleepless nights over this objection. Nero and his mother had minds, whilst we believe that the trees had not. In virtue of this difference Nero and his mother stood in mental relations in which the trees could not have stood. And we condemn Nero in respect of his emotions and intentions towards a person who had had certain emotions and intentions towards him.'¹

While allowing that Professor Broad's answer is on the right lines, I think it requires elaboration. I should be inclined to agree with Professor Laird, who says:

'Unlike Mr. Broad, . . . I think the rationalists should have spent some sleepless nights over this objection.'²

Hume's argument is a little more subtle than Professor Broad allows, and the answer needs to be more carefully stated. It is unfortunate that Professor Broad confined his discussion so closely to the less instructive *Enquiry*; the argument as stated in the *Treatise* is not such a simple-minded one as Professor Broad evidently thinks it.

'Let us chuse any inanimate object, such as an oak or elm; and let us suppose, that by the dropping of its seed, it produces a sapling below it, which springing up by degrees, at last overtops and destroys the parent tree: I ask, if in this instance there be wanting any relation, which is discoverable in parricide or ingratitude? Is not the one tree the cause of the other's existence; and the latter the cause of the destruction of the former, in the same manner as when a child murders his parent? 'Tis not sufficient to reply, that a choice or will is wanting. For in the case of parricide, a will does not give rise to any *different* relations, but is only the cause from which the action is deriv'd; and consequently produces the *same* relations, that in the oak or elm arise from some other principles.'

Hume would willingly allow that we condemn certain emotions and intentions, i.e. certain states of mind; but, he says, the rationalist must point to some relations, not states of mind, which exist in the one instance and not in the other.³ In order to reply adequately to Hume, we must show that there are

¹ *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 111.

² *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, p. 215 note.

³ Professor Broad's failure to see this may be due to the common Cambridge habit of calling states of mind that have an outward reference, relations.

different relations in the case of the parricide or Nero, not merely that there are mental qualities or states which are not possessed by the oak or elm.

Hume's mistake is to have neglected the fact that the nature of many (or perhaps all) relations is determined by the nature of their terms. The same relations, therefore, cannot always hold between terms of different natures. For example, the relations expressed by 'to the right of' and 'to the left of' can only hold between things which are spatial, and the relations expressed by 'parent of' and 'child of' can only hold between things which are living and reproductive. Further, Hume has made the answer to his challenge unnecessarily difficult through his view of the mind as a collection of impressions and ideas. No relations, he says, can be discovered between a passion, volition, or action, and an external object, which might not be found between one passion, or volition, and another, or between one external object and another. But there are certain relations (e.g. the relations of obligation, responsibility and guilt) between rational *minds* and external beings, which cannot have non-rational minds or inanimate objects for their first term (inanimate objects cannot form the second term either), and which cannot exist between one passion, or volition, and another, or between one external object and another, simply because each of these relations presupposes some *cognition*. (They also, of course, presuppose freedom of choice, which Hume mentions; the choice does not indeed 'give rise to' the relations, for it is not a sufficient condition of their existence, but it is a necessary condition.) I cannot be obliged, responsible, or guilty, unless there exists not merely the fact that certain events have occurred (e.g. that my parents have produced and supported me, or that I have destroyed some creature), but also my knowledge or belief that these things have happened. These relations imply such a knowledge or belief in their very nature, and cannot exist between terms where this element of cognition is lacking. Hence they cannot apply to animals or trees.

It should be noted that I am not saying these relations

presuppose the cognition of right and wrong. To do so would be to argue in a circle and would be open to an objection which Hume brings forward after discussing the oak or elm.

'But to chuse an instance, still more resembling; I would fain ask any one, why incest in the human species is criminal, and why the very same action, and the same relations in animals have not the smallest moral turpitude and deformity? If it be answer'd, that this action is innocent in animals, because they have not reason sufficient to discover its turpitude; but that man, being endow'd with that faculty, which *ought* to restrain him to his duty, the same action instantly becomes criminal to him; should this be said, I would reply, that this is evidently arguing in a circle. For before reason can perceive this turpitude, the turpitude must exist. . . . According to this system, then, every animal . . . must be susceptible of all the same virtues and vices, for which we ascribe praise and blame to human creatures. . . . Their want of a sufficient degree of reason may hinder them from perceiving the duties and obligations of morality, but can never hinder these duties from existing; since they must antecedently exist, in order to their being perceiv'd.'¹

My view escapes this objection, since it holds that the relations in question presuppose the cognition of certain events, of facts, as Hume would say, not of right; the element of right is included in the relations, and arises from the cognition of the element of fact. It is, nevertheless, an objective right, though some² may go on to say that my *duty* is to act as I *think* right or fitting: i.e. duty arises from the cognition of right, that right having arisen from the cognition of fact.

4.122. Hume's second condition seems to me to rest on a misconception, perhaps wilful, of the nature of obligation.

¹ *Treatise*, pp. 467-8.

² Cf. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*, chapter vii, especially p. 164.

But Sir David Ross holds that there is an objective fittingness to the situation irrespective of anyone's cognition of that situation. I think this view is open to Hume's objection which I have quoted above; i.e. it presupposes that it is objectively fitting, e.g., for one creature not to destroy the creature that has produced and sustained it, irrespective of whether the first creature knows of this fact and of whether it has a choice of destroying or not destroying the parent creature. This fittingness would apply to irrational creatures as well as rational, a conclusion which seems repugnant to common sense.

Promises and debts seem to support Sir David's fully objective view. It seems reasonable to say a man ought (in some sense) to keep a promise he has made, or pay a debt he has contracted, even if he has forgotten it. But this is due to

(At the same time it contains an admission that his first argument¹ was unfair. 'Tis one thing', he says, 'to know virtue, and another to conform the will to it.')

'But it will be still more difficult to fulfil the *second* condition, requisite to justify this system. According to the principles of those who maintain an abstract rational difference betwixt moral good and evil, and a natural fitness and unfitness of things, 'tis not only suppos'd, that these relations, being eternal and immutable, are the same, when consider'd by every rational creature, but their *effects* are also suppos'd to be necessarily the same; and 'tis concluded they have no less, or rather a greater, influence in directing the will of the deity, than in governing the rational and virtuous of our own species. These two particulars are evidently distinct. 'Tis one thing to know virtue, and another to conform the will to it. In order, therefore, to prove, that the measures of right and wrong are eternal laws, *obligatory* on every rational mind, 'tis not sufficient to shew the relations upon which they are founded: We must also point out the connexion betwixt the relation and the will; and must prove that this connexion is so necessary, that in every well-disposed mind, it must take place and have its influence. . . . Now besides what I have already prov'd, that even in human nature no relation can ever alone produce any action; besides this, I say, it has been shewn, in treating of the understanding, that there is no connexion of cause and effect, such as this is suppos'd to be, which is discoverable otherwise than by experience. . . .

'Thus . . . 'tis . . . impossible to fulfil the *second* condition; because we cannot prove *a priori*, that these relations, if they really existed and were perceiv'd, wou'd be universally forcible and obligatory.'²

This argument simply depends on an absurd identification of obligation with causal necessity. When we say a man is morally obliged to act in a certain way, we do not mean he necessarily will act in that way; and when we say God is obliged to act in a certain way, we may think God will necessarily so act, but the necessity is of quite a different kind, as Kant rightly pointed out, from the necessity of causation. I shall therefore assume that Hume's second condition rests on

the peculiar nature of a promise, which must have originated from the obliged person *himself* with full knowledge *at the time*; promising to do so-and-so includes in its meaning knowing that you are putting yourself under an obligation to do so-and-so. The same applies to debts.

¹ See pp. 49-50, above.

² *Treatise*, pp. 465-6.

a confusion. (Some further remarks on obligation and causality are to be found in Section 3, below.)

4.2. Hume now turns to the second function which he allows to reason, namely the inferring to some new matter of fact.

'But can there be any difficulty in proving, that vice and virtue are not matters of fact, whose existence we can infer by reason? Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it.'¹

This is an important argument. It is worth while to quote here also the statement of the argument in the *Enquiry*, where certain features of it are brought out more clearly.

'Examine the crime of *ingratitude*, for instance; which has place, wherever we observe good-will, expressed and known, together with good-offices performed, on the one side, and a return of ill-will or indifference, with ill-offices or neglect on the other: anatomize all these circumstances, and examine, by your reason alone, in what consists the demerit or blame. You will never come to any issue or conclusion.

'Reason judges either of *matter of fact* or of *relations*. Enquire then, *first*, where is that matter of fact which we here call *crime*; point it out; determine the time of its existence; describe its essence or nature; explain the sense or faculty to which it discovers itself. It resides in the mind of the person who is ungrateful. He must, therefore, feel it, and be conscious of it. But nothing is there, except the passion of ill-will or absolute indifference. You cannot say that these, of themselves, always, and in all circumstances, are crimes. No, they are only crimes when directed towards persons who have before expressed and displayed good-will towards us. Consequently, we may infer, that the crime of ingrati-

¹ *Treatise*, pp. 468-9.

tude is not any particular individual *fact*; but arises from a complication of circumstances, which, being presented to the spectator, excites the *sentiment* of blame, by the particular structure and fabric of his mind.¹

The importance of the argument lies in showing that words like 'vice' and 'crime' do not describe facts of the kind described by such words as 'red' or 'angry'. When we say that something is red, we can point to the characteristic called red; we can distinguish it by comparing or contrasting it with other colours; we can differentiate it from some other characteristic which the thing in question also has, such as its shape; we can say that the redness exists only so long as there is light. When we say that someone is angry, we can illustrate what we mean by putting the man to whom we are speaking in a position in which he will feel angry; or we can point to symptoms of the anger, that is, to characteristics in the outward appearance of the angered person, which we know by personal experience to occur when we are feeling the particular kind of emotion which we call anger; we can say for how long an instance of anger in ourselves, or the manifestations of anger in another, lasted. We can point out that the redness of a thing is known by sight, and not by taste as is its sweetness; that a man's anger is felt, and not seen, by him, that its manifestations are seen or heard by others. If, however, we look, in either of the two situations instanced by Hume, for a fact denoted by the word 'vice' or the word 'crime', we cannot find a fact of which we can say the sort of things which we can say of an instance of redness or of anger. We cannot say that the crime is known by one of the senses and not the others; and as for feeling, when we say that ingratitude is a crime we do not mean that the ungrateful man is experiencing a feeling called crime—or even, for that matter, a feeling of a particular kind called ingratitude; on the contrary, we are blaming him for *failing* to experience a feeling described by a different word, gratitude. If you insist on finding the sort of thing that Hume would agree to call a fact, i.e. something which can be pointed out or distinguished in the sort of way in which an instance

¹ *Enquiry*, pp. 287–8.

of redness or of anger can be, the only relevant fact in the situation which you can find is the feeling of disapproval in yourself.

Hume's argument points out to us, first, that many words of moral connotation require analysis: to say that ingratitude is a crime is to say something complex, e.g. that if A, knowing B to feel benevolence towards him and to have benefited him, does not feel a certain emotion, gratitude, towards B, he deserves that others should feel and express censure of him. Secondly, Hume points out that crime is something which *arises* from a complex situation. He himself suggests that the only thing which does arise is the feeling of disapproval excited by the situation in a spectator of normal human constitution. This suggestion does not necessarily follow from the argument, but Hume's excellent piece of analysis or 'anatomizing' indicates to us that moral words refer, not to facts of the kind which are given by the senses or feeling, but to something which arises from a complex situation containing several such facts. If we examine the meaning of a moral word in a particular situation, we shall usually find that it refers, not to one simple fact, but to a complex situation which can be described (at any rate partly, and according to Hume wholly) in non-moral terms. I should say that such descriptions or analyses will frequently contain at least one residual moral term which cannot be analysed further. Examples of such unanalysable moral terms are obligation and desert, which, however, I should hold to be relations and not 'facts' in Hume's sense of the word. I have already explained¹ that I think such moral relations *arise* from a complex situation, and to this extent I agree with Hume here. A third example of an unanalysable moral term is, I am inclined to think, to be found in good.² Goodness, however, is not a relation but a quality, so that instances of it are what Hume would have us call 'facts'. But they are, as we can learn from Hume's argument, qualities or

¹ pp. 56-60, above.

² But see pp. 78 ff., below, for doubt about the falsity of Hume's view of good.

'facts' of a different kind from the qualities or 'facts' given to sense or feeling. Sir David Ross¹ says that an instance of good is a 'consequential' characteristic arising out of 'constitutive' characteristics, and thus he too agrees with Hume that what is denoted by an ethical word is not a simple 'fact' like an instance of red or of anger, but is something which *arises* from a complex situation containing simple or 'constitutive' facts of this kind.

5. Hume's final argument is also important.

'I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason.'²

This puckish passage, besides reiterating the previous demand to point out clearly the moral relation, insists that an 'ought' cannot be deduced from an 'is',³ as, Hume thinks, rationalist philosophers try to deduce it. I doubt whether many philosophers⁴ have attempted to demonstrate formally the existence

¹ *The Right and the Good*, p. 121.

² *Treatise*, pp. 469-70.

³ Cf. Prichard, 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?' *Mind*, 1912, p. 24: 'An "ought," if it is to be derived at all, can only be derived from another "ought".'

⁴ There are passages in the Boyle Lectures (delivered in 1704 and 1705) of Samuel Clarke which suggest such an attempt. Cf. *Works* (published by John Clarke in 1738), vol. ii, pp. 571 and 608.

of moral characteristics from premisses that contain no moral term, but the argument raises an important point of logic.

It is perfectly true that formal inference cannot introduce into the conclusion a term that is absent from the premisses. But not all implication is of the analytic kind found in formal inference. (Hume of course does not recognize synthetic implication.) Besides the formal implication that holds between propositions there is implication between concepts which may be signified in a single proposition; such implication may be analytic, as in 'White swans are white', or synthetic, as in 'Equilateral triangles are equiangular'. Apprehending that the nature of one universal necessitates the existence of another is not inferring from premisses to a conclusion containing a new term. The proposition stating such an implication is known to be true from the nature of its own terms and is not deduced from anything else. When a valid inference seems to introduce a genuinely new term into its conclusion, there is always, I think, presupposed (though not explicitly stated) a synthetic axiom which contains the new term and which is known to be self-evident from the nature of its own terms. In such inferences about morals the synthetic *a priori* axiom which is presupposed, together with its 'ought', is a primitive proposition, and neither it nor its 'ought' is derived from any more ultimate proposition not containing an 'ought'.

The great importance of Hume's philosophy is that it showed the consequences of not admitting the existence of *a priori* synthetic propositions. Both his treatment of causation and his treatment of ethics illustrate this. And although we may think Hume to have been mistaken, it was due to him, not to his rationalist adversaries, that Kant was awakened from his dogmatic slumber to draw attention to the problem of the *a priori* synthetic proposition.

B. The 'Enquiry'

We may now turn to the arguments against reason in the *Enquiry*. Section I is a rather general discussion which simply gives one argument for each side and then postpones the issue

to the first Appendix. The argument for reason is that we dispute about moral questions and give proofs and inferences for our opinions. As Hume has seen in the *Treatise*, the non-rationalist may account for this by saying that the disputes, proofs and inferences are always about questions of fact, not about questions of right. The argument against reason is that given as the first argument of the *Treatise*, namely that it belongs to morality to excite emotion and move to action, things which reason cannot do (as shown, Hume believes, in the earlier *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*). At the same time, as we noted in considering this argument earlier,¹ Hume virtually admits here that he has shown only that without feeling we should be unable to give practical effect to moral distinctions, but not that we should be blind to them.

In the first Appendix, which is entitled 'Concerning Moral Sentiment', Hume first gives his own view, namely that ends are shown by feeling and means by reason, then proceeds to consider the possibility of an alternative view, and produces five arguments against any rationalist theory.

'This partition between the faculties of understanding and sentiment, in all moral decisions, seems clear from the preceding hypothesis. But I shall suppose that hypothesis false: it will then be requisite to look out for some other theory that may be satisfactory; and I dare venture to affirm that none such will ever be found, so long as we suppose reason to be the sole source of morals. To prove this, it will be proper to weigh the five following considerations.'²

1. The first argument is the same as argument 4 of the *Treatise*. 'Reason judges either of *matter of fact* or of *relations*.'³

1.1. There is no matter of fact to constitute crime other than the feelings in the spectator.

1.2. The relations of contrariety and equality, for example, can be found in moral and immoral actions alike.

1.2.1. It may be suggested that the relation required is a

¹ Cf. p. 49, above.

² *Enquiry*, pp. 286-7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

different one, namely, agreement with the rule of right. This argument is circular.

'Moral relations are determined by the comparison of action to a rule. And that rule is determined by considering the moral relations of objects. Is not this fine reasoning?'¹

1.1 and 1.2 have already been considered in my discussion of the *Treatise*. Hume's retort to the suggestion in 1.21 is of course perfectly just.

2. The second argument is similar to argument 3 in the *Treatise* but is more carefully stated by a comparison with reasoning in geometry. In morals, Hume holds, reason discovers all the facts and relations, and only when we have all these do we proceed to a judgement of right. Hence a mistake of fact is not criminal while a mistake of right is. In geometry on the other hand we infer new relations from facts and relations already known.

In discussing this argument I do not think I can do better than quote Professor Broad's criticism.

'There are two undoubted truths in this argument of Hume's. (a) I must be fully aware of the non-ethical relations in a situation before I can make a trustworthy judgment on the ethical relations. (b) When I am fully cognisant of the non-ethical relations I cannot infer, from them and them alone, the ethical relations; as I might seem to infer the remaining geometrical relations between a set of points from a selection of their geometrical relations. But, even in the geometrical case, I do not infer the additional geometrical relations *simply* from those which are already known. I infer them from these *together with* the axioms of geometry, which are known by Intuitive Induction. Similarly, it is arguable that I first recognise the co-existence of certain non-ethical relations with certain ethical relations in a particular case; then see by Intuitive Induction that the presence of the former *entails* that of the latter in *any* case; and finally use this as a premise for inferring the presence of these ethical relations in other cases in which I find these non-ethical relations. So the premises of this argument are quite compatible with the view that Reason plays a much more important part in ethics than Hume allows.'²

I have already tried to indicate³ how the knowledge or belief

¹ *Enquiry*, p. 289. ² *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 112. ³ pp. 59-60, above.

that certain events have occurred entails new relations of obligation and responsibility, while the knowledge or belief that I have an obligation or responsibility entails guilt for its omission and merit for its performance.

There is, however, one difference between mathematical and moral entailments. The former are reciprocal, and the latter are not. From the knowledge that the angles of a triangle are equal, I can infer that its sides are equal, and vice versa. But from the fact that I have an obligation to another, we cannot infer, e.g. that I know or believe he has benefited me, or that I know or believe him to be in pain—unless indeed the statement that I have an obligation to him is elliptical and should be more fully stated in some such form as ‘I am obliged to repay to X the benefit I know or believe him to have done me’ or ‘I am obliged to relieve Y from the pain I know or believe him to be in’. If these are the proper statements of my obligations, then from these statements it can be inferred analytically that I know or believe X has benefited me, and that I know or believe Y is in pain. But the counter-implications, that the knowledge of X’s benefit entails an obligation to return the benefit, or that the knowledge of Y’s distress entails an obligation to assist him, are not analytic but synthetic, or at least depend on a tacitly presupposed premiss that is synthetic and universal.

In this argument, then, Hume allows that reason judges of fact, but has failed to prove that it may not also judge of right.

3. The third argument rests on analogy between ethics and aesthetics. This argument is implicit in Hume’s treatment of morals in the *Treatise*, but is not explicitly stated there in his list of arguments against the rationalist theory. Euclid, says Hume, has told us all the geometrical properties of the circle but has said not a word about its beauty, for the simple reason that the beauty of the circle is not a property of it but is the feeling it arouses in the mind of the spectator. Similarly, Hume holds, when Cicero describes to us the actions of a Verres he cannot point to Verres’ turpitude, for the expression ‘Verres’ turpitude’ does not describe a property of Verres but

refers to the feeling aroused in us when we contemplate Verres' deeds.

It should be noted that even if Hume can establish a perfect analogy between aesthetic judgements and moral judgements, the force of the argument from analogy itself will have all the weakness of any argument from analogy, and will not in itself prove, but will at most render highly probable, the view that moral judgements arise from a faculty similar to that from which aesthetic judgements arise. In fact, of course, Hume is not able to establish a perfect analogy. Further, even a perfect analogy will not establish that the moral faculty is feeling and not reason, unless it be granted that the aesthetic faculty is feeling and not reason.¹ Those who hold the perception of beauty to be rational insight into something more 'real' than the world of sense could use the analogy to render probable the view that moral perception is a similar insight. So that as a proof against the rationalist view the argument falls. Nevertheless, I myself think Hume's view of aesthetic judgement is true, or at any rate on the right lines, though I do not think he has established a sufficient analogy between it and moral judgement. But since the analogy with aesthetics has played an important part in the history of moral theory, and is of great interest to students of ethics and aesthetics alike, I propose to devote a special section to it.²

4. Hume's fourth argument against reason is the same as argument 4.121 of the *Treatise*, the one which compares a parricide to the sapling that destroys its parent tree. This argument I have already criticized.

5. Hume's final argument is that ultimate ends can never be given by reason. This may seem to be mere assertion and thus a *petitio principii*, but I do not think it is; I think it is meant to rest upon argument, but the argument is a bad one. If you ask a man, says Hume, why he exercises, he will reply it is for the sake of health; if you ask him why he wants health, he will reply sickness is painful. 'If you push your enquiries

¹ Of Hume's opponents, Balguy held reason, Price feeling, to be the aesthetic faculty.

² Section 2, below.

farther, and desire *a reason* [my italics] *why he hates pain*, it is impossible he can ever give any. This is an ultimate end, and is never referred to any other object.¹

Now I very much fear that Hume has fallen into the old trap of equating 'given by reason' with 'being such that *a reason* can be given for it'. (As we saw on page 34, Hutcheson made the same mistake.) The answer to the fallacy is virtually given by Hume himself.

'It is impossible there can be a progress *in infinitum*; and that one thing can always be a reason why another is desired. Something must be desirable on its own account. . . .'²

But just as there cannot be an infinite regress of ends and means, so there cannot be an infinite regress of premisses and inferences. Something must be 'reasonable' on its own account. There must be ultimate axioms. Reason, as well as nature, abhors a progress *in infinitum*.

Hume therefore has not shown that in moral reasoning we must start from desired ends and cannot start from self-evident axioms about goodness and obligation. The case against reason is not proven. We must indeed admire the skilful cross-examination of the prosecuting counsel, but the verdict is *non liquet*.

2. THE ANALOGY WITH AESTHETICS AND THE THEORY OF MORAL TASTE³

The first point to be noted about the analogy with aesthetics as used by Hume and Hutcheson is that they apply it, not to all moral judgements, but only to judgements about virtue and vice. There are five types of propositions containing specifically ethical concepts:

- (1) propositions about responsibility and obligation;
- (2) propositions about desert;

¹ *Enquiry*, p. 293.

² *Ibid.*

³ I am deeply indebted for the basis of this section to an article by Mr. Carritt, 'Moral Positivism and Moral Aestheticism', published in *Philosophy*, 1938. But Mr. Carritt, in criticizing theories of moral taste, considers only judgements of obligation and does not do justice to the complexity of Hume's moral theory.

- (3) propositions about moral goodness and badness;¹
- (4) propositions about virtue and vice;¹
- (5) propositions about intrinsic goodness and evil.

I hold propositions of type (1) to be underivative unless from other propositions of the same type. Propositions of type (2) arise from propositions of type (1); that is, if a man acts as he thinks he ought, and for that reason, he deserves (ought to receive) reward, and if as he thinks he ought not,² he deserves punishment.³ Propositions of type (3) arise from propositions of type (1) in the same sort of way as do propositions of type (2); if a man acts as he thinks he ought, and for that reason,

¹ Ordinary language makes little or no distinction between the meaning of 'morally good' (or 'moral') and 'virtuous', or between the meaning of 'morally bad' (or 'immoral') and 'vicious'. It is perhaps confusing to ascribe a different sense to each of a pair of terms which are used in ordinary language with little discrimination between them. But I think that there is in fact a difference of nature between the goodness of doing an action from the thought that one ought, and the goodness of doing an action from some desire or emotion whose existence is thought to be good (e.g. from benevolence, pity, heroism, and so on): there is also a difference between the badness which consists in acting, or refraining from action, contrary to the dictate of conscience (the badness of being weak-willed—no man would do an action *because* he thought it wrong), and the badness which consists in the badness of the desire or emotion from which one acts (the badness of acting from malevolence, or contempt, or cowardice, and so on). It is needful to mark the distinction between the two kinds, both of goodness and of badness, by using one pair of terms for the first kind of goodness and badness, and a different pair of terms for the second kind; I therefore choose to use the pair of terms 'morally good' and 'morally bad' for the first kind, and the pair of terms 'virtuous' and 'vicious' for the second. This usage, though it violates ordinary language, is the least misleading way I know of marking the distinction. For the proposed usage of these two pairs of terms, compare Carritt, *The Theory of Morals*, pp. 136–7, though the way in which he chooses to define 'virtuous' and 'vicious' is not quite the same as mine.

Whatever may be thought of the proposed usage of *words*, certain it is that many philosophers have recognized the distinction between the two kinds of goodness. When Kant makes the apparently paradoxical statement that no action proceeding from desire is good, he does so, I believe, because he is confining the discussion to *moral* goodness—rightly, since he thinks moral philosophy is concerned only with obligation and the concepts entailed by obligation.

An action done from the mixed motive of thought of duty *and* good desire or emotion would, I suppose, have in it elements both of moral goodness and of virtue. I doubt if it makes sense to ask which of the three kinds of motive, moral, virtuous, or mixed, has the 'most' goodness and which the 'least'. Which has the 'most' colour, red, yellow, or orange?

² Always bearing in mind that 'ought' in this sense implies 'can'.

³ I do not think the fact in itself that a man deserves reward or punishment necessarily implies that another man ought to give him it.

he is morally good, and if as he thinks he ought not,¹ morally bad. At the same time propositions of type (3) fall under propositions of type (5) as one class of propositions about intrinsic goodness and badness; moral goodness is one species of intrinsic goodness, and moral badness one species of evil. Propositions of type (4) fall under propositions of type (5) as another class of propositions about a particular species of goodness or badness, namely the species attaching to certain emotions and desires, which species we are calling virtue and vice. Propositions of type (5), besides including propositions of types (3) and (4), include also propositions about other species of good and evil, e.g. the goodness of aesthetic enjoyment or the goodness of knowledge, and the badness of pain or the badness of ignorance or depraved taste. But these species of goodness and badness (i.e. all species other than the species of moral goodness and badness and of virtue and vice) are not strictly relevant to the theory of morals, though they are to the theory of value. All propositions falling under type (5), except that class of propositions which also form type (3), are underivative unless from more general propositions of the same type.

Propositions of type (1) are in general treated by Hume in a special manner; he deals with them under the head of artificial virtues, and holds obligation to arise either from interest or from custom and convention. Hume's account of obligation may be unsatisfactory, but he has the acuteness to see that it cannot be treated in the same way as other moral concepts, and in particular he never attempts to apply to it the aesthetic analogy. In this Hume seems to me far superior to his modern followers, who sometimes use the aesthetic analogy rather wildly and do not differentiate between different types of moral judgement. Hutcheson does not deal with propositions of type (1) at all; his book is confessedly about 'our ideas of beauty and *virtue*', and he holds that the word 'ought' can only be used hypothetically and presupposes either self-interest or virtue (i.e. the approval of the moral sense).²

¹ Always bearing in mind that 'ought' in this sense implies 'can'.

² Cf. pp. 35-6, above.

Propositions of type (5), as distinct from propositions of types (3) and (4), which, I hold, fall under type (5) as two special classes of propositions of that more general type, are not considered by either of these authors; nor, I think, are they consciously before the minds of any of the eighteenth-century moralists (except Richard Price, who deals briefly with intrinsic goodness).¹ I doubt if Professor Moore realized, when he wrote *Principia Ethica*, how comparatively novel in ethical discussion was his general use of the word 'good'. I am inclined to think that the transference to the 'theory of value' (as opposed to the theory of morals) of the sort of questions about goodness in general which Professor Moore discusses in that book, is a helpful one.²

Propositions of types (2), (3) and (4) are grouped together by Hume, (2) and (3) being considered to be simply variants of propositions of type (4). Hutcheson treats propositions of type (2) in the same way as propositions of type (1), believing that both must be analysed in terms of virtue (i.e. the approval of the moral sense);³ and he joins Hume in grouping together propositions of types (3) and (4)—as indeed must any determinist. Thus for Hume propositions of types (2), (3) and (4), and for Hutcheson propositions of types (1), (2), (3) and (4), are all really propositions of type (4). It is to this class of judgements, i.e. propositions of type (4) and statements which Hume and Hutcheson think to be simply variant forms of asserting propositions of type (4), that the aesthetic analogy is applied by both of them.

Now it seems to me that, in confining the aesthetic analogy to propositions of type (4), Hutcheson and Hume were wise. It seems to me that the application of the aesthetic analogy to propositions of type (1) and to propositions derived from them (i.e. propositions of types (2) and (3)) is completely

¹ Cf. p. 104, note 2, below.

² My remarks on this point must not be taken to imply that I underrate the importance of *Principia Ethica* for students of moral philosophy. On the contrary, I think I have learned more from that book than from any other concerning what I conceive philosophical method to be, and concerning the clarification of meaning and simplicity of style which are such valuable assets in philosophy.

³ *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, Section V.

absurd. I hope to say something of obligation, i.e. the content of propositions of type (1), later. Propositions of types (2) and (3) I hold to be derivative from propositions of type (1); but for argument's sake we may neglect moral goodness and desert as specific concepts, and concede to Hutcheson and Hume that propositions of types (2) and (3) are variant statements of propositions of type (4); that is, we shall assume that types (2) and (3) are non-existent as special classes of propositions. We have, therefore, to consider the aesthetic analogy only in connexion with propositions of type (4).

Mr. A. J. Ayer, in his *Language, Truth and Logic*,¹ takes over the aesthetic analogy from Hume, but rather rashly groups together all moral statements, assuming that all such statements contain the word 'right' or the word 'good' or their opposites, and purport to denote a quality, just as aesthetic statements, by using the words 'beautiful' and 'ugly', purport to denote a quality. In fact, thinks Mr. Ayer, all these statements do nothing more than express a feeling in the mind of the speaker. (We shall see that, even in the elucidation of aesthetic statements and of those moral statements thought to be analogous to aesthetic statements, Hume gives a more careful and elaborate treatment than Mr. Ayer thinks Hume gives, or than Mr. Ayer himself gives.) In all this I think Mr. Ayer has fallen into a trap against which he and his friends constantly warn the rest of us; he has been misled by language. Because we often use an adjective word, 'right', to connote the relation of obligation, Mr. Ayer has failed to see that statements asserting rightness or obligation are quite different from statements asserting goodness. He would have done well to confine the aesthetic analogy, as Hume does, to statements asserting goodness. But then he would have found it difficult to fit other moral statements into his system.

Hume holds that the statement 'X is beautiful' is to be analysed in one of the following ways:

- (a) Sometimes the statement gives expression to the

¹ p. 170.

aesthetic emotion which the speaker feels on contemplating X.

- (b) Sometimes the statement signifies that all or most men of a certain class (e.g. men thought to have good taste, or men of a particular society or civilization) have or would have the aesthetic emotion on contemplating X.

Hume holds that statements of the form 'X is virtuous' or 'X is good', and 'X is vicious' or 'X is base' or 'X is bad', are to be analysed in the same way, the moral emotions of approval and disapproval being substituted for the aesthetic emotion.

Two points are to be noted at this juncture. (i) Mr. Ayer's account is less subtle than Hume's in that Mr. Ayer gives only the first analysis for *all* aesthetic and moral statements, thereby robbing them of the objectivity and publicity which they obviously often require. Of course Mr. Ayer claims that he gives all the objectivity needed for such statements, namely the objectivity of the matters of fact which are declared to be right or good or beautiful; but clearly the words 'right', 'good' and 'beautiful' are themselves public symbols, and this Mr. Ayer's theory does not allow. (ii) Professor Broad (and I think it is clear that Mr. Ayer follows him in this, believing his own theory to be a product of the twentieth century) errs in attributing to Hume only the second analysis of moral statements.¹ In fact Hume combines both the view attributed to him by Professor Broad and Mr. Ayer, and the view of Mr. Ayer himself. His theory is therefore more complex than is usually assumed, and is able to escape many of the usual objections brought against it since it can have recourse to one or other of the two analyses as is convenient.²

What is rather doubtful is whether we are justified in think-

¹ *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 85.

² In proof of my view that Hume holds a theory similar to Mr. Ayer's as well as the one attributed to him by Professor Broad, I would cite the following passages:

'To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no farther; nor do we enquire into the cause of the satisfaction. We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But

ing Hume to have been explicitly aware that he was giving two different analyses at various places in his work. There are three possible interpretations on this point:

- (1) The double account is unintentional and Hume is simply inconsistent.
- (2) The double account is intentional and is intended to apply as a whole to every moral statement.
- (3) The double account is not intended to apply to every moral statement, but there is no inconsistency since Hume intends one analysis to apply to some statements and the other to other statements.

Of these possibilities I think the second can be ruled out. There is doubtless some truth in the first interpretation; Hume

in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous.' (*Treatise*, p. 471.)

'The distinction of moral good and evil is founded on the pleasure or pain, which results from the view of any sentiment, or character; and as that pleasure or pain cannot be unknown to the person who feels it, it follows, that there is just so much vice or virtue in any character, as every one places in it, and that 'tis impossible in this particular we can ever be mistaken.' (*Treatise*, pp. 546-7.)

He connects this view with the objective analysis by a note on the word 'follows' in the last quotation:

'This proposition must hold strictly true, with regard to every quality, that is determin'd merely by sentiment. In what sense we can talk either of a *right* or a *wrong* taste in morals, eloquence, or beauty, shall be consider'd afterwards. In the mean time, it may be observ'd, that there is such an uniformity in the *general* sentiments of mankind, as to render such questions of but small importance.'

That is, aesthetic and moral statements are either subjective or objective in the same way as statements about secondary qualities may be either subjective or objective; they depend on our constitution, but since most of us are constituted alike we can use the words denoting such sensations as public symbols. Compare two passages laying stress on the analogy with secondary qualities:

'Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.' (*Treatise*, p. 46.)

Moral and aesthetic taste 'has a productive faculty, and gilding and staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation'. (*Enquiry*, p. 294.)

We are forced to the objective sense of all words originally denoting subjective sensations, thinks Hume, by the necessities of language, which must be public to be of any use.

I need not give quotations for the second analysis, the one usually attributed to Hume. The combination of the two analyses, with the account of the transition from the one to the other, produces what is obviously a very ingenious theory, and even if it is false we can learn much from it.

cannot have been altogether explicitly aware that he was giving two distinct accounts, for then he would have stated more definitely that different accounts are to be given of different statements. But to some extent I think he was aware of giving a double account, or rather an account of a continuous development from one usage to another; so that on the whole the third interpretation comes nearest the mark.

I must say before I go on that I am assuming, perhaps rashly, that Hume's elucidation of aesthetic statements is true, though I do not think a similar elucidation of moral statements is true.

It is clearly impossible to apply this analysis to statements of obligation, to say for example that the statement 'I ought to keep my promise to X' simply expresses my approval of keeping my promise. As Hume saw, to make a promise *is* to bind oneself to the performance of an action.¹

But the analysis is at least plausible when applied to propositions of type (4). It is plausible to say that the statement 'X is virtuous' is akin to the statement 'X is beautiful', in that (a) the speaker states indefinitely that X has certain characteristics which cause a feeling of a certain specific kind in him or would cause such a feeling in most spectators, and (b) he is expressing that feeling. Very often in both cases we can specify the characteristics which cause the feelings; in the case of the beautiful object we might point to certain colours and patterns, or to certain harmonies and melodies; in the case of the virtuous person we might point to the fact that he frequently acts from motives such as generosity, sympathy and the like. Thus it might be said that the only objective facts

¹ There is one passage in which Hume suggests that statements of virtue and statements of obligation are on a par. 'When any action, or quality of the mind, pleases us *after a certain manner*, we say it is virtuous; and when the neglect, or non-performance of it, displeases us *after a like manner*, we say that we lie under an obligation to perform it.' (*Treatise*, p. 517.) But this is an exception to Hume's usual account of obligation. Cf. Section 3, below. Mr. Carritt's criticism of subjective theories of obligation, that 'The creditor's claim cannot vary with sympathies, or debts could be cancelled by propaganda' (op. cit., *Philosophy*, 1938, p. 141), does not apply to Hume's general view of the obligation of contracts.

there are to refer to are these feelings of X which motivate his actions; and that we bundle all such motives together and give the bundle the name of virtue or goodness, not on account of any common quality possessed by the members of the bundle, but simply because each of them raises approbation in a spectator.

I think this analysis is true of some of the statements of this form that I make; for example if I say 'Tom is a good fellow' or 'Snooks is a nasty creature'. And it is at any rate plausible to say that this analysis is true of all statements of this form. Nevertheless I do not think it is in fact true of all such statements. Some statements asserting virtue or vice are, I think, genuine ethical propositions, and I want now to proceed to criticism of the suggested analysis.

It should be first noted that Hume's view, stated in this complicated form, as I think it should be stated, is immune from most of the usual objections brought against it.

1. The first of the usual objections, or rather the general form of all of them, is that Hume's view runs counter to common thought and language. Hume himself uses this kind of argument in talking of political obligation.

'The opinions of men, in this case, carry with them a peculiar authority, and are, in a great measure, infallible.'¹

And again a little later in the same section:

'It being certain, that there is a moral obligation to submit to government, because every one thinks so. . . .'²

Now why should the opinions of men not be infallible also in holding that a character is virtuous or vicious irrespective of anyone's feelings towards it? Hume has his answer for those who cite ordinary language and thought in judgements about virtue, and is willing to show how all ordinary men are deceived. But he is not willing to resort to the same method in talking of political obligation. He cannot have it both ways: either one makes common language and thought the basis of one's philosophy, as does Professor Moore for example, or

¹ *Treatise*, p. 546.

² *Ibid.*, p. 547.

one uses philosophical premisses. Hume, therefore, to be consistent, should be sceptical of the opinions of ordinary men concerning political obligation too. However, a sceptic he insists on being when talking about virtue, and it is as such we must deal with him.

The specific forms of this general argument from ordinary language and thought are as follows.

1.1. We argue about moral judgements and consider them objective. But one part of Hume's analysis allows for this; we can discuss objective virtue just as we can discuss an objective colour; one of two disputants may be colour-blind, but it is still sensible to ask what is the 'real' colour of the object, i.e. what colour is seen under standard conditions by most observers.

1.2. There is no contradiction in saying both that an action is vicious, and that I do not have any feeling of disapproval for it; or (another form of the same objection), it is a perfectly intelligible question whether an action for which I feel disapproval is really vicious.¹ This objection can be answered by Hume in the same way as the previous objection.

1.3. Moral reformers and other people of unusual opinion often hold a moral judgement knowing the majority of people to hold the contrary; therefore when they say a course of action is right or wrong, they cannot mean the action is approved or disapproved by the majority of men. Hume can reply that such individual judgements simply express the feelings of the person judging and have no denotative reference to the feelings of most people.

Mr. Carritt, in the article to which I have referred, claims to refute Mr. Ayer through Hume and Hume through Mr. Ayer. But if my interpretation of Hume is right, Hume holds both the views discussed by Mr. Carritt, and although Mr. Carritt has refuted Mr. Ayer he has not refuted Hume but has simply shown that Hume's alternative analyses are inconsistent. Hume, however, knows that they are, holds that each applies to different statements, and gives what is at least a

¹ Cf. Carritt, *op. cit.*, *Philosophy*, 1938, p. 134.

plausible explanation of how there come to be two senses of ethical words, one private, the other public.

I want now to consider three objections which are not usually made in criticisms of Hume. The first is derived from Sir David Ross's *Foundations of Ethics*.

2. I said earlier¹ that Sir David had brought forward in that book what seemed to me a very strong argument against all naturalistic theories, the argument that the emotion used by the naturalists, moral approval, is an intellectual emotion that presupposes a moral judgement. Now I think this argument is able to show that Hume is wrong in including in his theory, and in the aesthetic analogy, propositions of my third type, i.e. propositions about moral goodness and badness; but it is not, I think, applicable to propositions of type (4).

To explain myself. I think that we feel towards a morally good person, a person who acts from the thought that an action is right, a specifically moral emotion that may be called approval or esteem or admiring respect, and to a morally bad person the opposite emotion. These are the emotions of which Sir David Ross speaks, and they do presuppose a judgement. But to virtuous persons, i.e. persons who act, not from the thought of duty, but from some natural propensity such as kindness or generosity or heroism, we feel, it seems to me, a different emotion, one that may not unjustly be called love; we are *attracted* to such persons. To vicious persons, persons actuated by cruelty or meanness or cowardice, &c., we feel an emotion of dislike or contempt;² they *repel* us. These emotions do not presuppose moral judgements in the same way as do the emotions felt towards moral goodness and badness. We can of course usually say that we love a virtuous person for his *kindliness*, and dislike a vicious for his *cruelty*; but this Hume allows. For equally we can say of a beautiful object that we like it for its colours and patterns. What Hume will not allow is that we feel emotion towards virtuous persons and

¹ pp. 50-1, above.

² We do not, I think, feel the *same* emotion to all vices; cowardice may arouse contempt, while cruelty would arouse anger rather than contempt. But *repulsion* is common to the feelings aroused by all vices.

beautiful objects for any quality of *virtue* or *beauty* different from the characteristics of kindness, &c., that we *call* virtuous, or the characteristics of vividly coloured, &c., that we *call* beautiful.

And indeed I think the emotions felt towards beauty and towards virtue are sufficiently similar to justify *some* analogy between beauty and virtue. This is the grain of truth in the analogy between ethics and aesthetics, and is probably what led Shaftesbury to say 'beauty and good are still the same' and Hutcheson to write of 'beauty and virtue' as if they were species of one genus. (In Plato too, be it noted, it is *ἔρως*—*ἔρως τοῦ καλοῦ*—which covers both the enjoyment of beauty and the love of goodness.) Certainly the emotion felt towards virtue is far more like the emotion felt towards beauty than it is like the emotion felt towards moral goodness. Lest this differentiation between the emotions felt towards virtue and moral goodness be thought an idiosyncrasy of mine, I would quote Hume himself in my support. I am particularly happy to receive confirmation from Hume on this point, since it really destroys his amalgamation of moral goodness with virtue.

'The characters of *Caesar* and *Cato* . . . are both of them virtuous . . . but in a different way: Nor are the sentiments entirely the same, which arise from them. The one produces love; the other esteem: The one is amiable; the other awful: We cou'd wish to meet with the one character in a friend; the other character we wou'd be ambitious of in ourselves.'¹

Before leaving this subject I should like to suggest that it is not unconnected with the distinction, so dear to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, between the beautiful and the sublime. I am inclined to think that the emotion to which the writers of that period referred when they talked of the sublime (it is of course quite a different thing from Longinus' *ὑψος*) is not the aesthetic emotion at all, but is

¹ *Treatise*, pp. 607–8. Cf. Richard Price, *Review of Morals* (3rd ed., p. 324): 'Wherever the influence of mere natural temper or inclination appears, and a particular conduct is known to proceed from hence, we may, it is true, love the person, . . . but no regard to him as a *virtuous* agent will arise within us.' Price uses the word 'virtuous' to mean what I call 'morally good'.

rather akin to the moral and religious emotions of reverence and awe. The quasi-moral feeling which often simulates the aesthetic emotion when we contemplate some of the objects which are also capable of arousing in us the aesthetic emotion, may have contributed to the venerable confusion between ethics and aesthetics, with which Mr. Carritt deals so ably in the article I have mentioned, and which, as he says, 'has been disastrous for both ethics and aesthetics', producing theories of moral 'taste' on the one hand and didactic theories of beauty on the other.

So far, then, I have tried to show that the aesthetic analogy is inapplicable to judgements of moral goodness, but I have not shown that it is inapplicable to judgements of virtue. On the contrary we have seen reason to admit *some* analogy between beauty and virtue.

Nevertheless I think Hume is wrong. The view which I think is true is this. Moral goodness is a consequential characteristic arising from the characteristic of doing what one thinks one's duty. Virtue is the name given, not to the characteristics of benevolence, courage, &c., but to a consequential characteristic arising from these characteristics.¹ This characteristic is a species of intrinsic goodness, but a species different from the goodness of conscientious action. That is to say, statements of types (3) and (4) really are propositions of type (5), denoting the presence of intrinsic goodness, although they also express our feelings towards these different species of intrinsic goodness. Now I think Sir David Ross's argument about the emotion of approval sufficiently establishes this conclusion of statements about moral goodness. But I have not yet shown it to be true of statements about virtue. And

¹ For the doctrine that good is a consequential characteristic, my debt to Sir David Ross (*The Right and the Good*, pp. 121-3) will be obvious. But I do not think he would accept the differentiation between moral goodness and the goodness of virtue, or perhaps even the view that there are different species of good.

I might add that I think the way to *prove* good to be unanalysable is to show, as Sir David has, that it is a consequential characteristic, and so cannot be a constitutive characteristic nor can it be a complex of constitutive characteristics. Professor Moore's arguments in Chapter I of *Principia Ethica* make it highly probable, but do not prove, that good is unanalysable.

indeed it is rather difficult to refute Hume's view that there is no consequential characteristic in this case. Nevertheless I propose to try to refute Hume by two additional arguments.

3. I have argued earlier¹ (and shall argue again) that feeling theories of ethics cannot be true because we know certain entailments concerning moral concepts. The holders of feeling theories therefore fail to assign sufficient place to reason in moral judgement. But the examples I use are generally propositions about obligation. It is quite easy to point to propositions of this type which are necessary propositions and which entail and are entailed by other propositions. But it is not so easy to point to necessary propositions about goodness.

We may of course point to entailments of this sort: 'A is better than B, B is better than C, therefore A is better than C.' But this is purely formal inference, and may depend simply on language. Equally we may infer: 'A is more beautiful than B, B than C, therefore A than C.' Or, in case anyone thinks this is an argument in favour of holding an objective view of aesthetics, I would point out that the same inference may be made with words which everyone must admit to be primarily expressive and to obtain any objectivity they may have only in the sociological sense. For example, 'Joke A is funnier than B, B than C, therefore A than C'. Or, 'A is more wonderful than B, &c.' Here the words 'funny' and 'wonderful' can only refer to the amusement and wonder of the person judging or of most members of a certain society.²

Hume is well aware of this kind of necessary proposition and of its utter uselessness for proving morals to be founded on reason. He refers to arguments of this sort in one of his essays. The logical positivists would do well to study Hume on this point; they might have done better to call moral statements

¹ Cf. p. 41, above; and cf. pp. 144-5, below.

² It has recently been pointed out that certain relations between sensible qualities, which might seem from linguistic analogy to be transitive, are in fact not so. I may be presented with three specimens of red wool, where I can detect no difference between A and B, or between B and C, and yet can detect a difference between A and C. If the relations of similarity and difference between colours were transitive, it would follow by formal inference that A and C did not look different.

tautologies rather than unmeaning noises, if they must make these statements somehow conform to their scheme. In his essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' Hume considers the proposition that, despite the variation of opinion on moral questions, all men are agreed about the broad principles of morals.

'This great unanimity is usually ascribed to the influence of plain reason. . . . So far as the unanimity is real, this account may be admitted as satisfactory: But we must also allow that some part of the seeming harmony in morals may be accounted for from the very nature of language. The word *virtue*, with its equivalent in every tongue, implies praise; as that of *vice* does blame: And no one, without the most obvious and grossest impropriety, could affix reproach to a term, which in general acceptation is understood in a good sense; or bestow applause, where the idiom requires disapprobation. . . .

'The merit of delivering true general precepts in ethics is indeed very small. Whoever recommends any moral virtues, really does no more than is implied in the terms themselves. That people, who invented the word *charity*, and used it in a good sense, inculcated more clearly and much more efficaciously, the precept, *be charitable*, than any pretended legislator or prophet, who should insert such a *maxim* in his writings.'¹

Being charitable entails being virtuous, but this entailment is analytic, says Hume, since the concept of charity includes the concept of virtue in it by definition. Equally we can infer that being red entails being coloured, but it would be false to maintain that colouredness is a different quality over and above the determinate qualities comprised under it. 'Colour' is a *name* we give to a collection of visual qualities which may be formed into a graded series in which they shade off from each other by infinitely small gradations.

What we require are not necessary propositions whose necessity is merely analytic or verbal, but propositions which are synthetic as well as necessary. We do, however, intuit synthetic *a priori* propositions of this kind. We do not find by experience that all the instances we have met of kindly feeling or of benevolence or of aesthetic enjoyment are good, and then proceed to generalize our experience and say that

¹ Essay 23; in Green and Grose ed., vol. i, pp. 267-8.

probably every instance of such emotion is good, leaving it to language to supply a necessary connexion in our connotation of the words. We discover by intuitive induction that every instance of such emotion must be good.¹

We have, then, proved that reason plays a greater part than Hume will allow. Nevertheless we have not shown that goodness is an *a priori* concept. We know *a priori* synthetic *propositions* about empirical concepts too. For example, it has recently been suggested that we know *a priori* that any instance of green is more like any instance of blue than it is like any instance of red. But no one will say the *concepts* of green, blue and red are *a priori*.

Now to say a concept is *a priori* is to say it is not empirical. If goodness were an empirical concept, that is, if it were abstracted from impressions of sense or feeling, we should be able to say only that any being with our sense organs or psychological constitution would find every instance of kindness good. Of the colour proposition we can only say that *if* a creature, having visual organs like ours, can see the colours we can see, he can recognize certain propositions about those colours to be necessarily true. But of goodness we know that any rational creature, whatever his physical or psychological constitution, that God and that angels, if angels exist, must have the capacity of knowing kindness is good, and cannot possibly think it other than good. We cannot say similar things of secondary qualities or of beauty.

Hume denies that we can say it of moral attributes, but only because his theory obliges him to do so. In a letter to Hutcheson in 1740 he says:

'I wish from my Heart, I could avoid concluding, that since Morality,

¹ I have not used Hume's example of charity, since this is an obligation, and to establish synthetic *a priori* propositions concerning the goodness of charity might be to rest that goodness on the obligation. I have already said that it is easier to find such propositions concerning obligation than concerning underivative goodness. The required proposition concerning charity can, of course, easily be found. Hume holds that 'charity' includes 'good' in its definition; but the statement 'Giving money to the poor is good' is synthetic, not analytic, yet is known *a priori* (or, if you like, by intuitive induction), not by empirical induction.

according to your Opinion as well as mine, is determin'd merely by Sentiment, it regards only human Nature and human Life. . . . If Morality were determin'd by Reason, that is the same to all rational Beings: But nothing but Experience can assure us, that the Sentiments are the same. What Experience have we with regard to superior Beings? How can we ascribe to them any Sentiments at all? They have implanted those Sentiments in us for the Conduct of Life like our bodily Sensations, which they possess not themselves.¹

We may compare a sentence from the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*:

'We have reason to infer that the natural attributes of the Deity have a greater resemblance to those of man, than his moral have to human virtues.'²

Inductive argument from analogy may make this seem probable, but *a priori* considerations show the opposite to be true.

Hutcheson on the other hand, seeing that the moral consciousness demands that God should rule the Universe morally, suggests that God must have some faculty analogous to our moral sense.³ The fact that we do feel very strongly justified in applying morals beyond the human sphere, and in demanding a moral foundation for a theology before we can accept it, is an argument against Hume's view. Hume admits that the consequence of his view is unwelcome and only arises from the initial presuppositions of his theory; if the moral faculty were reason, he says, we could agree with the ordinary conviction. But we have seen that he fails to establish that the moral faculty cannot be reason; so that, instead of using the theory of moral sentiment as an argument against applying morals beyond human nature, we must use the fact that morals do apply beyond the human sphere as an argument against the theory of moral sentiment.

4. For my final argument we must turn back to Hume's actual account of the aesthetic analogy.

'Again; attend to Cicero, while he paints the crimes of a Verres or a Catiline. . . . The orator may paint rage, insolence, barbarity on the one side; meekness, suffering, sorrow, innocence on the other. But if

¹ *Letters of David Hume*, ed. Greig, vol. i, p. 40.

² Ed. Kemp Smith, p. 270.

³ Cf. p. 45, above.

you feel no indignation or compassion arise in you from this complication of circumstances, you would in vain ask him, in what consists the crime or villainy, which he so vehemently exclaims against?¹

To this there is the following objection. We read Cicero now without emotion, yet we can still judge Verres to be a villain. According to Hume's theory our judgement must change as do our feelings. I do not feel indignation as strongly now about the German invasion of Czechoslovakia as I did at the time it happened; yet I do not judge the action to be less wrong now than I did then, or the agents less criminal.

Hume himself realizes the force of this objection elsewhere. In *Treatise* III, iii. 1,² he notes an objection to his system. Since sympathy is variable, this seems to imply that our moral judgements are variable too. We sympathize more with neighbours than with those at a distance, with friends than with strangers, with Englishmen than with Chinese. Nevertheless we approve equally the moral qualities of Chinese with those of Englishmen. In replying to the objection Hume first notes that it applies with equal force to any feeling theory. This should lead him to suspect all views which base ethics on feeling. But instead he thinks this consideration goes a long way to mitigate the objection, since he believes it is certain that morals are due to sentiment, not reason. The lack of variation in our judgements, he says, is due to the fact that if we continued to express our own feelings, we should find ourselves continually involved in contradictions with other people, so that linguistic intercourse concerning such matters would become impossible. We therefore suit our language to the feelings of spectators on the spot, and imagine what feelings we should have if we were in China and saw the Chinese. He points out that the same thing happens with all our judgements of sense. This is of course the phenomenalist theory joined with a theory of language. It sounds surprisingly modern and must be acknowledged to be an extremely subtle attempt to save Hume's view. In our general judgements, he says, we learn to neglect our own feelings.

¹ *Enquiry*, p. 292.

² pp. 580 ff.

'Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable. . . . Such corrections are common with regard to all the senses; and indeed 'twere impossible we cou'd ever make use of language, or communicate our sentiments to one another, did we not correct the momentary appearances of things, and overlook our present situation.'

Hume attempts to apply the aesthetic analogy again. A beautiful face, he says, gives less pleasure at a distance than when near at hand. But we do not say it is less beautiful, since we imagine what we should feel if we were near at hand.

I doubt if the analogy is very close here. For one thing, a landscape may be more beautiful when seen from a distance than from near at hand. And if I am near at hand to such a piece of country, I am not, I think, inclined to say it is beautiful, imagining what it would look like if I were at the place from which I had seen it a few hours before. I think I should say it looks beautiful from the one place and not from the other. But I should not say of a virtuous person that he appeared virtuous when I saw him and his acts, and did not appear so when I simply heard about him.

Hume then brings his account into line with what he says of inductive reasoning in Book I. It is only present passion, he says, which can move us to action; imagination of the passion which we should feel if we were differently situated, can produce moral judgement but not action. (I do not think this is true; a man will subscribe to a fund for destitute Chinese, whose condition he simply imagines, as well as for his unemployed neighbour whom he sees and strongly pities.)

'Sentiments must touch the heart, to make them controul our passions: But they need not extend beyond the imagination, to make them influence our taste.'

Now Hume began by denying that moral judgement could be due to reason, deductive or inductive, giving as his first and presumably chief argument the fact that the moral faculty moves to action and so must be passion, which alone can

¹ *Treatise*, p. 582.

² *Ibid.*, p. 586.

influence action. He now agrees that there can be moral judgement which cannot move to action, thus admitting a distinction between, and possible separation of, moral judgement and moral motive. Further, this moral judgement which, according to him, cannot influence action, is imagination due to past experience; i.e. it is inductive reasoning, which, in Hume's view, is an operation of the imagination influenced by past experience. He is now holding that passing moral judgement on persons at a distance is inferring inductively to some new 'matter of fact', namely the fact that certain impressions of passion would exist under certain conditions.

I do not think Hume's ingenious attempt to explain how our judgements fail to vary with our feelings succeeds, but we need not try to criticize it. Hume refutes himself elsewhere. In the *Enquiry*, Section V, Part 1,¹ he refers to Plutarch's story of the generous treatment which Demosthenes² received from his enemies at the time of his exile. Hume at first purposely suppresses names. The banished statesman, he says, praised virtue, even in an enemy; and we must praise it too, nor do we withdraw a jot of our praise when we hear that it happened a long time ago and in a distant land.

'It is but a weak subterfuge, when pressed by these facts and arguments, to say, that we transport ourselves, by the force of imagination, into distant ages and countries, and consider the advantage, which we should have reaped from these characters, had we been contemporaries, and had any commerce with the persons. It is not conceivable, how a *real* sentiment or passion can ever arise from a known *imaginary* interest; especially when our *real* interest is still kept in view, and is often acknowledged to be entirely distinct from the imaginary, and even sometimes opposite to it.'³

Hume here (following Hutcheson, who also, in one or two passages, uses examples from the ancient world to make the same sort of point) is attacking the egoistic theory of morals, but can we not parody the passage and turn it against his own

¹ pp. 216-17.

² Or which Aeschines received earlier from Demosthenes himself. In fact Plutarch tells the story, in a slightly different form, of each of the two orators, and it looks as though Hume (or his authority) has mixed up the two accounts.

³ *Enquiry*, p. 217.

theory? It is but a weak subterfuge to say we transport ourselves by the force of imagination into distant ages and countries, and consider the passions which we should have felt on contemplating these characters had we been contemporaries and had commerce with the persons. It is not conceivable how a *real* sentiment can ever arise from a known *imaginary* sentiment; especially when our *real* sentiment is still kept in view, and is often acknowledged to be entirely distinct from the imaginary, and even sometimes opposite to it. I now feel completely indifferent to Verres, and know it. Yet, Hume tells me, when I judge Verres to have been a villain, I am so deceived by my imagination that I talk as if I felt a strong feeling of anger. The only thing that exists which could constitute Verres' vice, according to Hume, is my non-existent feeling of anger. "Ἔστιν τε κοῦκ ἔσθ". Hume has become a Euripides!

3. OBLIGATION

Hume has three senses of the word 'obligation', the first of which occurs, if I am not mistaken, only once¹ and is an exception to his general view.

(1) 'When any action, or quality of the mind, pleases us *after a certain manner*, we say it is virtuous; and when the neglect, or non-performance of it, displeases us *after a like manner*, we say that we lie under an obligation to perform it.'

A change of obligation presupposes a change of sentiment. But since we cannot change our sentiments at will, we cannot create a new moral obligation. Those who say that a promise is the willing of an obligation talk of 'something altogether unintelligible'. In this way Hume disposes of moral obligation proper (as it would have to appear on his moral theory), and is able to go on to his substitutes; these constitute the two other senses of the word 'obligation'.

But before we pass on to them, we must pay some attention to Hume's statement that moral obligation proper, if it existed, would simply be the complement of what *he* calls virtue; that

¹ *Treatise*, p. 517. Cf. footnote to p. 78, above.

is to say, it would conform to Hume's general theory, instead of requiring separate treatment, and would be subject to the aesthetic analogy. In speaking of obligation Bishop Butler had made the following objection to the aesthetic theory of morals:

'The not taking into consideration this authority, which is implied in the idea of reflex approbation or disapprobation, seems a material deficiency or omission in lord Shaftesbury's Inquiry concerning Virtue.'¹

If Butler is right in saying that the approval of conscience differs from all other feelings in containing authority, then Hume's view, that being obliged is simply feeling a special kind of displeasure akin to the feelings of pleasure and displeasure which we have in contemplating beautiful and ugly things, will be false and the aesthetic analogy will be misplaced. I have argued that the analogy cannot with the slightest degree of plausibility be applied to obligation and that Hume in general realized this. Nevertheless here is one place where he does set obligation on a par with virtue.

It seems strange that Hume nowhere in the *Treatise* or *Enquiry* refers to Butler's doctrine of authority, despite the fact that 'Dr. Butler' is one of the 'late philosophers in England, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing' by using the empirical method.² But in a letter to Hutcheson he does refer to it:

'You seem here to embrace Dr. Butler's Opinion in his Sermons on human Nature; that our moral Sense has an authority distinct from its Force and Durableness, & that because we always think it *ought* to prevail. But this is nothing but an Instinct or Principle, which approves of itself upon reflection; and that is common to all of them.'³

It is clear enough that Hume thought he had a good reason for neglecting Butler's notion of authority, and considered that its introduction as something peculiar to conscience was a mistake. But what is that reason? What on earth can Hume mean by saying that all other principles or instincts (this presumably means feelings and desires, all principles and instincts

¹ Preface to *Sermons*. Cf. Carritt, *Philosophy*, 1938, p. 131.

² Introduction to the *Treatise*, p. xxi.

³ Dated 10 January 1743. *Letters of David Hume*, ed. Greig, vol. i, p. 47.

other than the principle of conscience or reflective approbation) approve of themselves on reflection? If Butler's conscience is stated to *be* the principle of reflective approbation, how can any other principle reflect or approve? And quite apart from Butler's definition of conscience, what does it mean to say that a feeling or desire approves itself? I can only assume that Hume is referring to one of two things; but in either case he has completely missed Butler's point.

(a) He may be referring to the fact that every desire 'clamours', as we say, for satisfaction.

(b) Or he may be referring to the process we call 'rationalization', that is, to the fact that we are prone to try to justify to ourselves many of our desires.

But the authority of conscience is just obviously different from either of these, and that is Butler's point. The difference between the authority of conscience and the 'clamouring' of a desire is what Butler insists on so strongly and so often when he says it is the difference between 'mere strength and authority'; the one impels, the other commands. As for the second possible thing to which Hume may be referring, the whole point of the process of 'rationalization' is to try to persuade ourselves that the desire in question is approved, or at least not disapproved, by *conscience*, not by itself. The very process of rationalization is an admission of the authority of conscience.

So much for moral obligation proper, which Hume has somehow managed to convince himself he can afford to neglect. We may now turn to the substitutes. Hume sees in general that obligation, particularly the obligation of contracts, is not to be disposed of easily and must be given different treatment from that given to judgements of virtue.

(2) 'There is a *certain form of words* . . . by which we bind ourselves to the performance of any action. This form of words constitutes what we call a *promise*, which is the sanction of the interested commerce of mankind. When a man says *he promises any thing*, . . . by making use of this *form of words*, [he] subjects himself to the penalty of never being trusted again in case of failure. . . . After . . . signs are instituted, whoever

uses them is immediately bound by his interest to execute his engagements, and must never expect to be trusted any more, if he refuse to perform what he promis'd.¹

This then is our 'interested obligation to virtue'. It is of course a hypothetical, not a categorical, imperative and is, according to Hume, the only 'natural' obligation there can be.²

(3) But he distinguishes this from what he calls 'moral' obligation, which is founded on sentiment and arises from 'natural' obligation as the result of custom.

'Interest is the *first* obligation to the performance of promises. Afterwards a sentiment of morals concurs with interest, and becomes a new obligation upon mankind.'³

'Moral obligation' is not hypothetical, but it is not 'natural' nor is it perceived by reason as founded in nature. Having become accustomed to feel ourselves obliged to the performance of justice (i.e. obliged for our own interest), the feeling remains and produces an illusion of obligation even when the interest has vanished, when, for example, we might do an unjust act in secret.

The trouble with this account is that, if it were true, I should recognize 'moral obligation' as an illusion once I had read my Hume, and should realize that I am not at all obliged to be just when I can escape observation in being unjust. Having read my Hume I should become a Thrasymachus and realize that Socrates is a superstitious and irrational fool. Hume's theory may be a fair account of what is called 'business morality', and doubtless many of us often act from the motives he describes. But I think it must be admitted that there are also genuine moral obligations which we can intuit on reflection.

My purpose, however, is not to criticize Hume's account so much as to point out the similarity between it and his

¹ *Treatise*, p. 522.

² Gay defines obligation thus: 'Obligation is the necessity of doing or omitting any action in order to be happy. . . . And no greater obligation can be supposed to be laid upon any free agent without an express contradiction.' (Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, vol. ii, p. 273.) Cf. Hutcheson, pp. 35-6, above.

³ *Treatise*, p. 523.

account of causal necessity. I think Hume was aware of this. As we saw,¹ Hume, in demanding a proof that the rationalists' relations are obligatory on all rational creatures, assumes that 'obligatory' means causally binding, i.e. necessarily motivating, and repeats that a causal law can be discovered only by experience, not *a priori*. And now, in accounting for moral obligation, Hume has said exactly the same of it as he said of necessity, namely that it is really a feeling in the mind arising from custom and that we falsely suppose it to be something objective.

There is in truth some analogy between obligation and necessity. Samuel Clarke talks of moral necessity and absolute necessity; and Kant says the holy will is necessarily determined by the moral law. But the two necessities are obviously different in kind and operate in different spheres. Clarke says moral necessity is not really necessity and is called such only by a justifiable metaphor: and Kant insists that the determination of the moral law is quite different from the determination of causality; the one is noumenal and out of time, the other phenomenal and temporal. To reduce both to causal necessity, as Hume does in the former section of the *Treatise*, is absurd. Obligation presupposes freedom from causal necessity in its very idea. There does seem to be a sense in which it is necessary or binding, but the 'necessity' cannot be causal necessity nor can it imply that what is 'necessitated' will indubitably be done. We can only express the difference by saying that what is obligatory *ought* to be done.

It may be said that obligation is therefore not necessity at all, since there is only one kind of necessity and we cannot understand any other. I should reply that, far from this being true, we also know a third kind of necessity, which is quite obviously different from these two and operates in a different sphere, and yet is justly entitled to the name of necessity; I mean implication. It has truly been said that there is no *ἀνάγκη λέγειν* but only an *ἀνάγκη εἶναι*.² Equally I suppose it would

¹ Cf. pp. 60-2, above.

² I understand the remark was originally made by the late Professor J. A. Smith.

be admitted that there is no ἀνάγκη to *think* in a certain way. There is no *necessity* (in the sense of factual necessity) for me to assent in thought to the conclusion of a valid inference; if I choose to be wilful (as did Lewis Carroll's tortoise),¹ I am free to refuse my assent. (This does not imply that I can conclude the opposite. What I can do is refuse to conclude anything.) Nevertheless I 'ought' to assent to it, that is, I shall be reasoning validly only if I do assent to an implication. Of implication we use both the word 'ought' (though it is a hypothetical imperative with validity as the end to which it is the means) and the word 'necessity' (when we call it logical necessity). Such language indicates, and rightly, an affinity both with necessity and with being obliged. Yet implication is clearly different from both. The necessity is not a necessity of existence, nor is the obligation a moral obligation (though it does have reference to an ideal standard). I know that most philosophers who think the necessity of causation to be a genuine necessity hold it to be the same as implication, but this seems to me clearly false: implication applies to non-temporal universals, causal necessity to temporal existents; implication between two universals may be reciprocal, the relation of cause and effect cannot be symmetrical. The one entails, the other produces. They have an obvious affinity, but are quite different in nature and apply in different spheres.

Equally, it seems to me, Clarke and Kant are both right in referring to obligation as a kind of necessity but as one which differs, both in its nature and in its sphere of operation, from factual and logical necessity. There is no need to boggle, as Hume does, at a kind of necessity which is quite different from the necessity that lies in causation.

But when he comes to talk of justice, even Hume is compelled to regard obligation as a special and curious concept, and at the same time to account for it in the same sort of way

¹ 'What the Tortoise said to Achilles', *Mind*, N.S., vol. iv. This amusing dialogue brings out exactly the difference I am trying to state between implication and factual necessity.

as he accounts for the idea of necessity, so that for Hume also the two are similar with a difference; and in this Hume is wise, even if his account of both is unconvincing. Just as, on Hume's view, the idea of causal necessity is really derived from a feeling arising from custom, and is wrongly attributed by us to external events which are in fact not necessarily connected, so the idea of moral obligation is derived from a similar feeling arising similarly from custom, and is wrongly attributed by us to actions which are in fact not obligatory. Hume has seen the affinity between the two quite well, but his initial dogma that all ideas are derived from impressions leads to the same absurd account of both. I am happy to cite Hume as a supporter of Clarke and Kant in showing the affinity between necessity and obligation.

As I interpret Hume on this point, therefore, he deals with obligation in exactly the same way, in effect, as with necessity. Why then does he not adopt the same plan of exposition? Why does he talk continually of moral good and evil, virtue and vice, in discussing the foundation of ethics, and leave obligation until he comes to talk of promises? Why does he not say openly (or perhaps does not even realize) that the chief problem for his moral system, as for his theory of knowledge, is to find an impression for the troublesome idea of obligation, as for that of necessity, since an impression for neither of these can be found in the place where, in our ordinary thought and language, we judge the idea to have its content, and must consequently be sought in the feelings of the mind? The answer is, I think, twofold.

(i) Obligation implies liberty. Now Hume had already treated of liberty in an earlier part of his work (in the *Treatise* he deals with it in the book devoted to the passions; in the *Enquiries* it is even placed in the study of the understanding), and had rapidly—much more rapidly than most determinists—come to the conclusion that liberty is impossible, or rather completely unmeaning. Consequently the idea of moral obligation proper must be for him unmeaning; and it must be very largely for this reason, I think, that the categorical 'ought'

is so conspicuously missing from his pages¹ and that he treats of obligation as 'artificial virtue'. Hume nowhere links up his treatment of liberty with his omission to use obligation in a strictly moral sense, so that this suggestion might be regarded as suspect. But the alternative, to say that Hume really had no notion of, or failed by oversight to think about, moral obligation proper, seems to me incredible.²

(ii) Hume's predecessor, Hutcheson, to whose moral and aesthetic theory Hume is more indebted than is usually realized by those who know of Hutcheson only by hearsay, had preferred to talk about virtue and vice rather than obligation. The reason for his comparative neglect of obligation was simply that he could not fit it, with its obvious objectivity, into his rather crude empiricism in any non-hypothetical sense. Unlike Hume, Hutcheson did not even try to seek impressions for ideas which did not obviously fit into the empiricist scheme, but simply made a brief and highly unconvincing attempt to explain them away. However, the fact that Hutcheson had found it so easy to dismiss moral obligation, at least to his own satisfaction, and had turned his attention solely to judgements of virtue and vice, in which task he had used so successfully the analogy with aesthetic judgements, may have had some influence in causing Hume to devote himself chiefly, at any rate in laying the foundations of his moral system, to judgements about virtue, and to leave obligation to turn up in a debased form later when it could be assimilated to the naturalist philosophy.

I think it is greatly to be deplored that Hume ever fell so completely under the spell of Hutcheson's aesthetic analogy. Hume's moral writings, whether or not we are inclined to sympathize with his naturalism, contain penetrating analyses and subtle yet clear arguments of an order rarely to be found among moralists. Others may see more deeply, but none more keenly. The aesthetic analogy unfortunately dimmed that keen vision.

¹ Subject to the exception noted on pp. 78 and 91, above.

² I owe the suggestion contained in this paragraph to Professor W. G. MacLagan.

CHAPTER IV

RICHARD PRICE¹

STUDENTS of moral philosophy are aware, with varying degrees of vagueness, that Richard Price is one of the writers from whose work Sir L. A. Selby-Bigge took excerpts for his book on the *British Moralists*; they may even know that some philosophers consider Price's work to be of a very high standard. Apart from this Price is, I believe, little known except to the adherents of his own creed, the Unitarians,² who justly cherish the memory of a man equally distinguished in speculation and in practical life.

Price wrote his *Review of Morals* in his early thirties. Two later editions appeared during his lifetime; these contained minor modifications of phrasing, but in essentials Price's views on moral philosophy remained exactly the same as when he was a young man.

Richard Price was not a professional philosopher. The book on morals was his first work, but the rest of his life was devoted partly to his flock as a minister of religion and partly to urgent social and political questions of his time. His contribution to the latter was anything but insignificant. He was the founder of life insurance. His championship of the French revolutionaries and of the Americans in the War of Independence (a championship, be it said, which did not consist merely in

¹ My references, unless otherwise stated, are to the third edition of the *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*. (Wherever the passages which I quote are included in Selby-Bigge's *British Moralists*, I give the reference to that book also.) It is little short of scandalous that no later edition of the *Review* has ever appeared, particularly as it is exceedingly difficult to procure a copy of any of the three editions that were published during Price's lifetime.

² Most of my knowledge of Price's connexion with Unitarianism is due to the kindness of the Rev. R. V. Holt, who has called my attention to one or two relevant books, particularly a biography, *Richard Price*, by Roland Thomas (Clarendon Press, 1924). To one unacquainted with the history and influence of Unitarians and Unitarianism in this country it is a little surprising to find that the two most distinguished members of the rationalist school of British moralists, Richard Price and Samuel Clarke (Reid is not strictly a rationalist), belonged to that creed. Another very level-headed moralist, John Taylor of Norwich, a follower of Price, was also a Unitarian.

sympathetic pamphlets and sermons but also included detailed and expert advice on pressing financial and social problems) earned for him the hostility of many of his countrymen,¹ and the love and undying admiration of the French and the Americans; to the French he was known as the Apostle of Liberty, and from the Americans he received urgent invitations to become a Citizen of the United States and to assist in laying the financial foundations of their constitution.

Against intuitionism in ethics there is sometimes brought the pragmatic objection that it impedes social progress by justifying the *status quo* while utilitarianism, whatever be its defects as a philosophic theory, is pragmatically useful. (The objection, like most arguments which use some other criterion than that of truth, can of course be returned with equal force; if we must descend to arguments of this kind, it may be said that utilitarian theories permit the worst exaggerations of the dictum 'The end justifies the means'.) But while yielding to no one in my admiration for J. S. Mill as a man and social reformer, I doubt whether his zeal for reform would have been at all impaired by his holding a different philosophic theory (though it is not quite so easy to say this of Bentham). At any rate the objection cannot be made against Price. He was in truth an apostle of liberty, and his enthusiasm for liberty is reflected equally in his speculation and in his life. Epitaphs often exaggerate the virtues of those they commemorate; the memorial tablet to Price in the church at Stoke Newington contains no word that is not fully deserved:

'To the Memory of Richard Price, D.D., F.R.S., Twenty-six years Minister of this Chapel, born at Tynton, Glamorganshire, February 23, 1723; died at Hackney, Middlesex, April 19, 1791. Theologian, Philosopher, Mathematician; friend to freedom as to virtue; brother of man; lover of truth as of God; his eminent talents were matched by his integrity, simplicity, and goodness of heart; his moral dignity by his profound humility. Few have been more useful in their generation, or

¹ Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* was meant, at any rate immediately, as an answer to a sermon from Price pleading for a recognition of the ideals underlying the revolution. Price became a little disillusioned later, but did not live to see the worst excesses of the revolutionaries.

more valued by the wise and good; none more pure and disinterested. Honoured be his name! Imitate his example!¹

Price's contribution to moral philosophy consists of a single, comparatively small book, but this one volume is probably worth more than any of the more weighty tomes produced by most of his contemporaries; of them perhaps none but Hume and Butler challenge serious comparison with Price as a thinker on moral subjects. Rashdall says of him:

'His *Review of the principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* I regard as the best work published on Ethics till quite recent times. It contains the gist of the Kantian doctrine without Kant's confusions.'²

I think this judgement is rather unfair to Kant, but I quote it to illustrate an aspect of Price's doctrine that unfortunately must be omitted from these pages. His views about the constitutive side of ethics (i.e. about the content of the moral consciousness) undoubtedly anticipate Kant and are at times clothed in very Kantian language. This aspect of Price's book is well worth serious consideration, particularly in view of the recent revival of Kantian ethics. Price's views bear a strikingly close resemblance to those of Sir David Ross, as does his method of argument which is similar also to the methods employed by Professor Moore.

Here, however, Price will be considered only in relation to the epistemological question, the nature of moral discernment. In treating of the moral faculty he has principally in mind Hutcheson's theory of a moral sense, which he is concerned to dispute, but in general epistemological and metaphysical questions he continually has at the back of his thoughts the work of Hume. He had learned much from Cudworth's recently published³ *Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, a book whose title is a little misleading since it is more concerned with the theory of universals and what Kant later called 'categories' than with the special province of ethical characteristics; however it was from this book that Price

¹ Quoted from R. V. Holt, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress*, p. 77.

² *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. i, p. 81 note.

³ But written many years earlier.

learned that the proper way to set about attacking empiricist ethics is to attack the empiricist epistemology. Among contemporary moralists he greatly admired Butler, as appears from his numerous quotations of the Bishop's writings and from the Preface to the first edition of the *Review* where he says:

'There is no writer to whom I have near so much reason to acknowledge myself indebted, as Dr. Butler, the late Bishop of Durham.'

Price's relation to Hume perhaps deserves more than a passing mention. The correspondence between Reid and Hume is well known, in the course of which Reid says he owes his views very largely to the calibre of the man he opposes. Price stands in a similar position. His nephew, William Morgan, says of the *Review*:

'I shall only observe, that the author with his accustomed modesty was used to express himself greatly indebted in the composition of it to Hutcheson, Balguy, Clark, Butler, and Hume; but particularly to the latter, whose doubts and objections led him to examine the ground on which he stood, before he ventured to raise his own structure upon it.'¹

We may compare a statement from Price himself in the Preface to his *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*:

'And I cannot help adding, however strange it may seem, that I owe much to the philosophical writings of Mr. Hume, which I . . . studied early in life. By attacking, with great ability, every principle of truth and reason, he put me upon examining the ground upon which I stood, and taught me not hastily to take anything for granted.'²

Hume in return displayed the same characteristic generosity to Price as to Reid. To quote again William Morgan in the work mentioned above:

'The modesty, candor, and benevolence displayed in this work, conciliated the minds even of those who differed most widely in their sentiments from the author. In this number Mr. Hume should be particularly mentioned, who, admiring the liberal manner in which his doctrines had been controverted, conceived so favourable an opinion

¹ *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Richard Price* (1815), p. 19.

² Quoted from R. Thomas, *Richard Price*, p. 31.

of the writer, that it gave rise to an acquaintance, which was continued on both sides with uninterrupted esteem and friendship. . . . In a subsequent interview with Mr. Price, when Mr. Hume visited him at his house at Newington Green, he candidly acknowledged that on one point Mr. Price had succeeded in convincing him that his arguments were inconclusive.¹

Hume's philosophy had its influence not only on Kant. It is the pivot of all subsequent eighteenth-century philosophy in Britain. Hume's opponents owe at least as much to him as do his followers, and among the acknowledged debtors is Richard Price.

1. THE FOUNDATION OF MORALS

At the end of the Introduction to his work Price states the aim of the author:

'His principal view has been to trace the obligations of virtue up to the truth and the nature of things, and these to the Deity.'²

We may compare the last sentence of the Preface to the first edition, where he says:

'I cannot help considering it as some reproach to human reason, that, by the late controversies, and the doubts of some of the wisest men, it should be rendered necessary to use many arguments to shew, that *right* and *wrong*, or *moral good* and *evil*, signify somewhat *really true* of actions, and not merely *sensations*.'

Chapter I of the book is the most important for our purpose. Its first section defines the scope of inquiries about 'the foundation of morals'; the second is an attack on the empiricist epistemology, aiming to show that reason is a source of new ideas; the third attempts to prove that moral ideas are among those perceived by reason. That Price himself regarded this first chapter as the most important may be seen from the Preface to the first edition, in which he says:

'There is nothing in this Treatise, which I wish more I could engage the reader's attention to, or which, I think, will require it more, than the first Chapter, and particularly the second Section of it. If I have failed here, I have failed in my chief design.'

¹ *Memoirs*, pp. 16-17. Unfortunately Morgan does not say what that one point was.

² 3rd ed., p. 5.

The second section here referred to is 'Of the Origin of our Ideas in general'. Price realizes that if he has failed to show that reason is a source of new ideas, the foundation of his whole system is undermined.

The chapter begins with a few general remarks stating that there are three different 'perceptions' relating to the actions of moral agents, which should be distinguished.

(1) 'The *first*, is our perception of right and wrong.'

(2) 'The *second*, is our perception of beauty and deformity.'

Price says little of beauty in general; he is speaking here of our feeling of pleasure and admiration at the performance of moral action. This, he thinks, is an instance of the 'perception of beauty', and in his distinction between this perception and that of right and wrong lies his distinction between aesthetics and ethics.² Both these 'perceptions', Price holds, occur when we judge an action to be right. He agrees with Butler that

'in contemplating the actions of moral agents, we have both a *perception of the understanding*, and a *feeling of the heart*'.³

He rightly remarks that Hutcheson's mistake was to have concentrated on the second 'perception' and neglected the first.

'It was, probably, in consequence of not duly considering the difference I have now insisted on between the *honestum* and *pulchrum* (the *δίκαιον* and *καλόν*;) or of not carefully distinguishing between the discernment of the mind, and the sensations attending it in our moral perceptions; that the Author of the *Enquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, was led to derive all our ideas of virtue from an implanted sense. Moral good and evil, he every where describes, by the effects accompanying the perception of them. The *rectitude* of an action is, with him, the same with its *gratefulness* to the observer; and wrong, the contrary. But what can be more evident, than that *right* and *pleasure*, *wrong* and *pain*, are as different as a cause and its effect; what is *understood*, and what is *felt*; absolute truth, and its *agreeableness* to the mind.'⁴

¹ p. 7: Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, vol. ii, p. 105.

² The 'perception of beauty' in actions should not be confused with the perception of goodness. Price holds that 'perfection' or 'intrinsic excellence' is on a par with right and wrong and is perceived by the understanding. (Cf. *Review*, pp. 104-7: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 139-41.)

³ p. 96: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 137.

⁴ pp. 97-8: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 137-8.

(3) 'The *third* we express, when we say, that actions are of *good* or *ill* desert.'¹

This kind of judgement, Price holds, is reducible to a judgement of the first type, i.e. to a judgement in which the only ethical word is 'right' or 'ought'; the statement 'This action is of good desert' is equivalent to the statement 'It is right for the doer of this action to be made happy' or 'The doer of this action ought to be made happy'.² The proper application of this kind of statement is to actions which have been done because the agent thought them right.

The remainder of Chapter I is devoted to the first of these three 'perceptions' and gives us Price's answer to the problem we are here discussing. It is divided into three sections, of which the first is entitled 'The Question stated concerning the Foundation of Morals'.

'Some actions we all feel ourselves irresistibly determined to approve, and others to disapprove. Some actions we cannot but think *right*, and others *wrong*, and of all actions we are led to form some opinion, as either *fit* to be performed or *unfit*; or neither fit nor unfit to be performed; that is, *indifferent*. What the power within us is, which thus determines, is the question to be considered.'³

We must not take Price here to be identifying the *feeling* of approbation with the thought of rightness. For him the expressions 'to approve' and 'to think right' both have the same meaning and both refer to an act of the understanding.

'*Approving* an action is the same with discerning it to be *right*; as *assenting* to a proposition is the same with discerning it to be *true*.'⁴

Price then goes on to give an account of Hutcheson's theory of moral sense. He assumes Locke's view about primary and secondary qualities, and takes Hutcheson to class moral attributes among secondary qualities.

'A late very distinguished writer, Dr. *Hutcheson*, deduces our moral ideas from a *moral sense*; meaning by this *sense*, a power within us, different from reason, which renders certain actions pleasing and others

¹ p. 8: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 105.

² Cf. *Review*, chap. iv, *passim*.

³ p. 8: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 105-6.

⁴ p. 169: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 155.

displeasing to us. As we are so made, that certain impressions on our bodily organs shall excite certain ideas in our minds, and that certain outward forms, when presented to us, shall be the necessary occasions of pleasure or pain. In like manner, according to Dr. *Hutcheson*, we are so made, that certain affections and actions of moral agents shall be the necessary occasions of agreeable or disagreeable sensations in us, and procure our love or dislike of them.¹

Hutcheson has indeed shown, Price continues, that we approve of actions *immediately* without any thought of private interest. Had he meant no more than this by the moral sense, his view would have been free from objection. But then his theory would contain nothing new or peculiar, as he seems to think it does.

'From the term *sense*, which he applies to it, from his rejection of all the arguments that have been used to prove it to be an intellectual power, and from the whole of his language on this subject; it is evident, he considered it as the effect of a *positive constitution* of our minds, or as an *implanted* and *arbitrary* principle by which a *relish* is given us for certain moral objects and forms and aversion to others, similar to the relishes and aversions created by any of our other senses. In other words; our ideas of morality, if this account is right, have the same origin with our ideas of the sensible qualities of bodies, the harmony of sounds, or the beauties of painting or sculpture; that is, the mere good pleasure of our Maker adapting the mind and its organs in a particular manner to certain objects. Virtue (as those who embrace this scheme say) is an affair of taste. Moral right and wrong, signify nothing *in the objects themselves* to which they are applied, any more than agreeable and harsh; sweet and bitter; pleasant and painful; but only *certain effects in us*. Our perception of *right*, or moral good, in actions, is that agreeable *emotion*, or feeling, which certain actions produce in us; and of *wrong*, or moral evil, the contrary. . . . 'Tis therefore, by this account, improper to say of an action, that it is *right*, in much the same sense that it is improper to say of an object of taste, that it is *sweet*; or of *pain*, that it is *in fire*.²

In the first edition the last clause of this passage read: 'in much the same sense that it is improper to say of an object of sight, that it is *coloured*, or of an object of taste, that it is *sweet*.'

¹ pp. 8-9: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 106.

² pp. 9-11: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 106-7.

Now whatever view we may hold of secondary qualities, it is certainly not improper to *say* of an object of sight that it is coloured; the emendation in the second and third editions seems to show a recognition of this. Price believed, like many people in his day and in ours, that it is improper to say of a thing which *can* be an object of sight that it is coloured when it is not being seen. He wants to hold that actions are right or wrong whether or not anyone is contemplating them or judging them to be right or wrong. He states this in his own words.

'The present enquiry therefore is; whether this be a true account of virtue, or not; whether it *has* or has *not* a foundation in the *nature* of its object; whether *right* and *wrong* are real characters of *actions*, or only qualities of our *minds*; whether, in short, they denote what actions *are*, or only *sensations* derived from the particular frame and structure of our natures.'¹

This, Price affirms,

'is the *only* question about the foundation of morals, which can rationally and properly be made a subject of debate. For, granting that we have perceptions of *moral right* and *wrong*, they must denote, either what the actions, to which we apply them, *are*, or only our *feelings*; and the *power* of perceiving them must be, either that power whose object is truth, or some *implanted power* or *sense*. If the former is true, then is *morality* equally unchangeable with *all truth*: If, on the contrary, the latter is true, then is it that only which, according to the different constitutions of the *senses* of beings, it *appears* to be to them.'²

The method of proof, then, is to be this: if it can be shown that the moral faculty is reason, then its objects, i.e. moral attributes, must be objective. Price assumes the truth of a realist theory of knowledge. What he calls 'understanding' is called 'apprehension' by Cook Wilson and 'knowledge' by Professor Prichard. On their view the objects of knowledge, in this sense of the word 'knowledge', must exist independently of being known; otherwise they could not be *known*. Now Price simply assumes the truth of this theory, and it might be thought by some that the assumption is unwarranted. But in fact it matters little to Price whether the assumption

¹ pp. 11-12.

² p. 12.

be granted or not. All he is concerned to prove is that moral attributes have the same ontological status as have primary qualities and necessary truths, and not that of secondary qualities or feelings. If you grant him this, he is prepared to allow moral attributes to stand or fall with primary qualities and with necessary truth.¹ His argument does depend on the assumption that the objects of the same faculty have the same ontological status. But even if this be not self-evident, there can be no reason to disbelieve it, for it is difficult to see how any evidence could be brought against it. If, therefore, Price can show that moral attributes are apprehended by reason, we must allow them to have the same ontological status as all other attributes apprehended by that faculty. Whether secondary qualities have a different status is more doubtful, but that question does not concern the present argument.

First, however, Price must establish that the words 'right' and 'wrong' do stand for a distinct class of ethical attributes and are not merely synonyms for words denoting non-ethical attributes. He therefore deals briefly with 'the schemes which found morality on self-love, on positive laws and compacts, or the Divine will'.² Of these theories there are two possible interpretations.

'They must either mean, that moral good and evil are only other words for *advantageous* and *disadvantageous*, *willed* and *forbidden*. Or they relate to a very different question; that is, not to the question, what is the nature and true *account* of virtue; but, what is the *subject-matter* of it.'³

The distinction between these two interpretations is expounded at greater length at the beginning of Chapter X of the *Review*, and a note to our present passage refers us to it. There Price tells us:

'When now we ask, what the FOUNDATION of *virtue* . . . is, we may mean
(1) "what is the *true account* or *reason* that such and such actions are

¹ Cf. *Review*, p. 137 (Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 150): 'What I have hitherto aimed at has been, to prove that morality is a branch of *necessary truth*, and that it has the same foundation with it. If this is acknowledged, the main point I contend for is granted, and I shall be very willing that truth and morality should stand and fall together.'

² p. 13: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 107.

³ Ibid.

right, or appear under this notion?"—And *but two accounts* of this can possibly be assigned.—It may be said either, that *right* is a species of *sensation*. . . . Or, on the other hand, it may be said, that it denotes a *real character of actions*, or something *true* of them . . . and, therefore, that no other account is to be given, why such and such actions are right, than why the natures of things are what they are.¹

(2) 'Again; when we enquire what is the *foundation* of virtue, we may mean, "what are the *primary principles and heads* of virtue; or, the considerations inferring obligation in particular cases and rendering particular actions *right*?" . . . And, in this sense, there will be as many *foundations* of virtue, as there are *first* principles of it. This, probably, is what those mean by *foundation*, who will allow no other *foundation* of virtue, than *private happiness*; that is, they mean that nothing *obliges*, nothing renders actions, in any circumstances, *fit* to be performed, but some prospect of obtaining private happiness, and avoiding private misery. Should we enquire farther of such persons, what it is that renders promoting our own good *right*, and how we are to account for its being the object of our desires and studies; they would not, probably, be against recurring to truth and the natures of things; and thus we should be agreed about the *foundation* of virtue, in the former sense, and differ only about . . . the *subject-matter* of virtue."²

(3) 'We may once more observe, that by the *foundation* of virtue, may be meant, "the *motives and reasons*, which lead us to it, and support the practice of it in the world." This must be the meaning of those who are for uniting the several schemes, and represent *the will of God, self-interest, the reasons of things*, and the *moral sense*, as all distinct and coincident *foundations* of virtue. 'Tis indeed undeniable, that these, with their joint force, carry us to virtue. But, if we keep to the first sense of the term *foundation*, it will appear that only one or other of the two last can be the true foundation of virtue."³

This is an excellent piece of analysis. Hutcheson had distinguished between the faculty of approbation and the faculty of election; this is the same distinction as that made by Price between (1) and (3). But Price also makes the important and necessary distinction between (1) and (2). As Professors Sidgwick and Moore reminded us in recent times, all non-naturalistic theories of ethics are in some degree intuitionistic; all must agree that at least one kind of action is obligatory or

¹ pp. 401-2.

² pp. 403-4.

³ pp. 405-6.

fitting, or that at least one kind of end ought to be pursued; they differ among themselves only about the number of the principles stating such obligations, and on the question whether certain of the principles which appear *prima facie* to be intuited and basic may in fact be derived from some more general principle. Price is making the same point. He holds that *some* kind or kinds of actions or ends must ultimately be perceived immediately as fit to be done or pursued for themselves and not as means to some more ultimate end. For this fittingness no more ultimate reason can be given. The fundamental question for him is whether the immediate discernment of this fittingness is a function of reason or of sense (the latter word being taken, presumably, to cover also the introspection of feelings). Theories which purport to dispense with an immediate perception of an ultimate fittingness cannot be concerned with this question, but deal with the enumeration of *what* kinds of things are perceived to be fitting to be pursued, or else with the psychological question of discovering all the causes and motives which lead men actually to pursue the things whose pursuance is thought fitting. Naturalistic theories, if they are not doing either of these things, must be denying that *any* things are discerned to be fitting to be pursued; they are, in fact, denying that there is any such special attribute as fittingness or rightness, and are concerned with a verbal question, namely, 'With what word or words that do signify real attributes (these of course being non-ethical attributes) is the word "right" synonymous?' This approach must be shown to be misguided before Price can go on to his fundamental question, with which naturalistic theories have no concern, namely, 'Assuming that the words "right" and "wrong" are not merely synonyms of words denoting non-ethical attributes but stand for a particular class of ethical attributes, are these attributes apprehended by sense or by reason?'

The theories which attempt to define 'right' are given short shrift. Three arguments are presented to refute them.

1. If any of these theories were true,

'it would be palpably absurd in any case to ask, whether it is *right* to obey a command, or *wrong* to disobey it; and the propositions, *obeying a command is right*, or *producing happiness is right*, would be most trifling, as expressing no more than that obeying a command, is obeying a command, or producing happiness, is producing happiness.'

This argument is now perfectly familiar to us from *Principia Ethica*.² It is to be noted that, although Professor Moore used it with great effect in determining whether 'good' could be defined, he assumed that 'right' could be defined in terms of 'good'.³ But of course his own argument can be here turned against him.⁴ In his later book, *Ethics*, Professor Moore himself realizes this, though hesitantly in the case of 'right', and agrees that the word 'duty' at least cannot be identified with 'expediency',

'for, if it were, then it would be a mere tautology to say that it is always our duty to do what will have the best possible consequences'.⁵

I understand that many people do not find this form of argument cogent. I suggest that it is because they confuse the meaning of a word with its extension or denotation. Price makes a similar point when he says that some accounts of the foundation of virtue give, not a definition of rightness, but 'the primary principles and heads of virtue',⁶ i.e. a list of the things which are right. Obviously one method of showing a proposed definition to be faulty is to show that it fails to denote some thing or things denoted by the term to be defined, or that it does denote some thing or things not denoted by the term to be defined. But this is not the sole method, nor is it always open to us; there are some pairs of terms which have exactly the same denotation, but which nevertheless do not have the same meaning for us.

'The correctness of a definition may be tested by two methods: (i) by asking whether the denotation of the term and that of the proposed

¹ p. 14: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 108.

² pp. 12-16.

³ Cf. *Principia Ethica*, pp. 18, 25, and especially 147: 'What I wish first to point out is that "right" does and can mean nothing but "cause of a good result", and is thus identical with "useful".'

⁴ Cf. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 8 ff.

⁵ *Ethics*, p. 173.

⁶ Cf. p. 109, above.

definition are the same, whether the definition applies to all things to which the term applies, and to no others. But that is not enough. "Equilateral triangle" and "triangle having all its angles equal" have exactly the same denotation, but the one is not a correct definition of the other, since what we *mean* when we call a triangle equilateral is not that all its angles are equal but that its sides are equal. We must therefore ask a second question, (ii) "does the definition express explicitly what we had implicitly in mind when we used the term?"¹

Price and Professor Moore are using a perfectly valid argument when they ask that a definition should be tautologous with its *definiendum* not only denotatively but also connotatively. Of course a definition can also be refuted by showing that it is not even denotatively tautologous with its *definiendum*, i.e. that the two do not denote exactly the same things. This follows *a fortiori* from the validity of the connotative test, for connotative tautology includes 'denotative tautology'; we could not mean the same by two terms unless we also used them to refer to exactly the same things. The denotative test is the one usually employed to refute a false definition, but the greater familiarity of this test should not prejudice us against the validity of the connotative test.

I have suggested here two uses of the word 'tautology'. One of these, the one I have called 'denotative tautology', may well seem odd; we should not, in ordinary language, say that the expressions 'equilateral triangle' and 'equiangular triangle' are tautologous. Nevertheless many philosophers to-day do say that these expressions are tautologous, or that the proposition 'Equilateral triangles are equiangular' is 'tautologous' or 'analytic'. It would seem that by the words 'tautologous' and 'analytic' these philosophers are referring to one or other of the following characteristics which a proposition may have:

- (i) They may be referring to propositions of the sort which Kant calls analytic, i.e. propositions whose predicate is contained in the subject. An example of such a 'tautology' would be 'Paradoxical philosophers are philosophers'.

¹ Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*, p. 259.

- (ii) They may be referring to propositions of the kind I have called denotatively tautologous, i.e. propositions whose subject and predicate denote exactly the same things. At any rate I can find no other reason¹ for the view that all mathematical propositions are tautologous.

It is in any case odd to call propositions of the first kind *tautologies*. To call propositions of the second kind tautologies runs counter to ordinary usage since in common speech the word 'tautology' is used only for connotative tautology (e.g. 'Mares are female horses'), but it might be said that both uses of the word are etymologically justified owing to the equivocal meaning of the Greek word λόγος. If I am right about the use of the word by some modern philosophers, the paradoxical nature of their view of mathematical and other necessary propositions arises simply from their unfamiliar sense of the word 'tautology'. And if so it would avoid

¹ The philosophers to whom I refer say their reason is that the contradictory of such a proposition is self-contradictory, and they cite in support of this usage Kant's alternative definition (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 151) of 'analytic'. But the contradictory of a true mathematical proposition (unless it also happened to be an identical proposition or a proposition that was analytic in the ordinary sense) would not itself ordinarily be called a self-contradiction, though it, *combined with* the acceptance of certain other true mathematical propositions, will entail a self-contradiction. For example, 'Equilateral triangles are not equiangular' would not ordinarily be itself called a self-contradiction, as would 'Equilateral triangles are not equilateral'. I reach a self-contradiction only if I accept certain other facts about triangles which lead me to agree that equilateral triangles *are* equiangular, and am thus led to say both that equilateral triangles are not equiangular and that equilateral triangles are equiangular. This conjunctive proposition is the self-contradiction, and it is entailed by the assertion of 'Equilateral triangles are not equiangular' combined with the acceptance of the other facts about triangles.

It may be said that the situation I have described justifies us in calling the proposition 'Equilateral triangles are not equiangular' a self-contradiction, but in that event the expression 'self-contradiction' is not used in its normal sense. When I say 'equilateral triangles' I am certainly not saying or meaning 'equiangular triangles'. I am talking about, and thinking of, a characteristic of the sides of certain triangles, not a characteristic of their angles. It is true that when I talk of 'equilateral triangles' I am denoting the same triangles as I denote when I talk of 'equiangular triangles', so that the class of triangles denoted by 'equilateral triangles' excludes all the triangles denoted by 'triangles which are not equiangular'. But such a relation of exclusion between the classes of things denoted by two terms is not what is ordinarily meant by saying that the two terms are contradictories.

confusion to label the new use 'denotative tautology' and the old use 'connotative tautology'.¹

2. Price's second argument need not detain us long. It runs as follows.

'Besides; on the supposition, that right and wrong denote only the relations of actions to will and law, or to happiness and misery, there could be no dispute about the faculty that perceives right and wrong, since it must be owned by all, that these relations are objects of the investigations of *reason*.'²

If 'right' simply meant 'what God', or 'the law, commands' or 'what produces happiness', then to decide whether an action is right would clearly require the use of reason, looking up the list of commands in the Bible or the laws of the land and deciding whether a particular action is a member of any class of actions there commanded; or, on the hedonist theory, calculating the consequences of the action and comparing them, in respect of their pleasantness, with the consequences of alternative actions.

Holders of naturalistic theories would, I think, admit this and claim that the dispute between Price and Hutcheson is a bogus question and is simply a fight about the use of words.

3. The final argument is more cogent.

'Happiness requires something in its own nature, or in ours, to give it influence, and to determine our desire of it and approbation of pursuing it. In like manner; all laws, will, and compacts suppose *antecedent right* to give them effect; and, instead of being the *constituents* of right, they owe their whole force and obligation to it.'³

This argument is, of course, similar to the stock objection against theories of social contract. You may analyse the hypothetical use of the words 'ought' and 'right' in terms of commands or felicitic consequences, but the definition will always be incomplete unless it contains an ethical word used in the

¹ The word 'analysis' as used by some modern philosophers appears to suffer from a similar ambiguity. Professor Moore introduced the word to refer to the analysis of *meaning*, but this use often seems to be confused with the factual analysis of a whole into its constituent parts. We might call the first 'logical analysis', the second 'ontological'. (Ontological analysis is often practised by philosophers who deny the possibility of ontology.)

² *Review*, p. 14: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 108.

³ *Ibid.*

categorical sense. The analysis of 'X is right or obligatory' is never simply 'X is commanded' or 'X produces happiness', but 'X is commanded (or is felicitic), *and* it is right or fitting to obey commands (or to produce happiness)'. We must in the end arrive at some ultimate intuition, the discernment of a rightness which cannot be analysed into non-ethical elements. Price wants to know whether this discerning is done by reason or sense, regardless of just what things the discernment initially recommends.

Having thus disposed of naturalistic theories which attempt to define 'right', Price can continue on the assumption that some kinds of actions are perceived to be right or some ends as fit to be pursued, and that this rightness or fittingness is a distinct attribute of a particular kind. The section ends:

'Having premised these observations; the question now returns—What is the power within us that perceives the distinctions of *right* and *wrong*?

'My answer is. The UNDERSTANDING.

'In order to prove this, it is necessary to enter into a particular enquiry into the origin of our ideas in general, and the distinct provinces of the *understanding* and of *sense*.'

In short a re-examination is required of the ultimate presuppositions of epistemology, an inquiry which Locke and Hume thought they had settled once and for all.

2. THE EMPIRICIST EPISTEMOLOGY

We cannot expect, and do not find, a complete discussion of epistemological problems in a treatise on morals. But in Section II of Chapter I, and in Chapter V, Price gives us a number of observations on epistemology which are not only useful as an introduction to the epistemology of morals but are also of some intrinsic importance. Section II of the first chapter contains a criticism of the empiricist theories of knowledge current in Britain at that time; while Chapter V contains equally important criticisms of scepticism. In the latter task Price shows himself especially able, and objections of the kind he produces have to be reckoned with by any sceptic. Here,

¹ pp. 14-15: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 108.

however, we shall only be concerned with the criticism of empiricism.

Section II of the first chapter is entitled 'Of the Origin of our Ideas in general'. The first paragraph asserts the inadequacy or obscurity of Locke's statement of the origin of our ideas. With this we need not concern ourselves, but may go on to the addition which Price thinks should be made to the current empiricism.

'The power, I assert, that *understands*; or the faculty within us that discerns *truth*, and that compares all the objects of thought, and *judges* of them, is a spring of new ideas.'

He adds a note on terminology.

'By *ideas*, I mean here almost constantly *simple ideas*, or original and uncompounded perceptions of the mind. That our ideas of right and wrong are of this sort, will be particularly observed hereafter.'

Further, he adds, 'I all along speak of the understanding, in the most confined and proper sense of it'. Some have used the word to cover 'all the powers of external and internal sensation, as well as those of judging and reasoning'.

'There may be further some occasion for observing, that the two acts of the understanding, being intuition and deduction, I have in view the former. 'Tis plain, on the contrary, that those writers, who argue against referring our moral ideas to reason, have generally the latter only in view.'

'Judging' is equated with 'intuition', and 'reasoning' with 'deduction'. (From Chapter V we learn that Price regards induction as a branch of deduction or reasoning.) Price was, I think, the first to use the word 'intuition' to describe the act of knowing in ethics. The use of the particular word is not important, and in these days, when 'intuition' has been used by some for a mystical, non-rational faculty, it is perhaps misleading. But the distinction between the two acts of the understanding to which Price draws attention is extremely important. The remark that his opponents in ethical theory have directed their arguments against *reasoning* alone, is in general justified.

¹ p. 16: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 109.

² Ibid.

³ pp. 16-17: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 109-10.

⁴ p. 17: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 110.

⁵ Cf. pp. 29, 34, 55, 71, above.

There follow arguments to prove the distinction of understanding from sense.

1. 'The power which judges of the perceptions of the senses, and contradicts their decisions; which discovers the nature of the sensible qualities of objects, enquires into their causes, and distinguishes between what is real and what is not real in them, must be a power within us which is superior to sense.'¹

The activities here assigned to understanding are those of judging whether a sense-datum is the appearance of a physical object or illusory, and of ascertaining the physical causes of sense-data and their ontological status as opposed to that of physical objects. It should be noted that these judging activities are not strict knowing, so that the corrigibility of the information they supply is no objection to their existence. On the other hand, Price holds that this kind of activity is not inference or reasoning. There are, he thinks, degrees of clearness in intuition. Some of our intuitions, e.g. those of mathematics, are perfectly clear and the information they supply is incorrigible. The intuition of particular moral facts is usually not perfectly clear, though it would be to a finer intelligence; the more general principles of morality, however, can be seen with perfect clearness if sufficient effort is made.

To this argument the empiricist could reply as follows. He could say, rightly I think, that the impressions of *sense* cannot be contradicted by reason or anything else; what can be corrected is perceptual *judgement*, an activity which Hume assigns to the imagination, and it is corrected by the evidence of further impressions of *sense*. The empiricist would go on to say that to talk of 'enquiring into causes' and 'distinguishing between what is real and what is not real' is really to speak of the relations between successive sense-data. This too, he would hold, is a function of inductive reasoning (what Hume calls imagination); so far is this faculty from being 'superior' to sense, i.e. capable of correcting sense, that it is on the contrary to be itself confirmed or corrected by the evidence of future impressions of sense; if we are to talk of either faculty

¹ pp. 17-18: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 110.

being 'superior' to the other, we should rather say sense is the superior.

This reply is, I believe, just, *if* the empiricist's assumption is true that statements about causes and substances may be analysed without residue into statements about past and future impressions of sense. Price's criticism of this assumption will be found in later arguments; by itself his first argument proves nothing.

2. 'It is plain that one sense cannot judge of the objects of another; the eye, for instance, of harmony, or the ear of colours. The faculty therefore which views and compares the objects of *all* the senses, cannot be sense. When, for instance, we consider sound and colour together, we observe in them *essence, number, identity, diversity, &c.*'¹

Price, it appears, is not claiming that intuition is necessary for every sense impression, simple or complex, in order to discern the universal exemplified in the impression. But we surely observe 'number, identity and diversity' when contemplating the objects of a *single* sense. Price would doubtless agree to this, but would say that it is sufficient for his purpose to claim the presence of reason in a judgement about the objects of more than one sense. An empiricist might say that it is the sense of sight which discerns the difference between red and blue, and the similarity of two red objects. But what sense could discern the difference between a colour and a sound? Sight observes the colour, and hearing the sound; but sight cannot observe the sound, or hearing the colour, so that neither of these senses can compare the two data.

What would Price say of the so-called 'sense of beauty'? This can observe the objects of more than one sense, when we read poetry, for instance, or attend a play. It might be said that these forms of art admittedly require the use of reason, since they use an intellectual medium of expression, words; it is thus possible for the mind to take in together the objects of both sight and hearing: music and painting, which do not use meaningful symbols as their media, can be the objects of only one sense. But this reply does not cover all possible

¹ p. 18: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 110.

cases. Ballet, for example, appeals to both eye and ear without using meaningful symbols. Sculpture, again, is sometimes more appreciated if touched as well as seen.

Since Price agrees with Hutcheson and Hume about the perception of beauty, he would, I think, say something of this sort. The understanding compares together the impressions given to the different senses, and thus must comprehend them together into a complex whole; the whole thus held before the mind may then cause the feeling of aesthetic pleasure. It is the latter, strictly speaking, not the comprehending, which may be attributed to a 'sense' of beauty.

It might be said that Price has indeed shown there must be *some* faculty other than sense which can bring together before the mind the objects of more than one sense, but he has not shown that this faculty is the understanding; it might, for example, be the imagination (Kant's 'synthesis of the imagination' seems to be a function of this sort). Certainly there appear to be some instances of synthetizing data of different senses, which, whether or not we attribute it to the imagination, cannot with much plausibility be ascribed to reason. For example, psychologists tell us that in eating touch and smell play quite as large a part as taste. Would Price say it is reason which comprehends the impressions of all three senses in this instance? In fact Price need not, and presumably would not, make this admission. He says that reason 'views' and 'compares' the objects of diverse senses. In eating we are not ordinarily conscious of the part played by touch and smell. Once we try to 'view and compare' the different sensations present in eating we do use reason.

At any rate Price's argument does establish a valid objection against the initial statements of empiricist doctrine made by Locke and Hume that new ideas can only come from the impressions given to sense or from the feelings observed by introspection. We can compare the objects of more than one sense and yet obtain the new ideas of number, similarity and difference. These ideas, relating as they do to all the sense-data then before the mind, cannot be given by any one of the

senses, each of which gives us only some of these sense-data. (It should be noted that the 'impression' from which Hume derives the idea of necessity is said to be due to the imagination, which is thus regarded as similar to sense in being able to give us impressions, yet which in other respects is regarded as quite different from sense.)

3. 'Sense consists in the obtruding of certain impressions upon us, independently of our wills; but it cannot perceive what they are, or whence they are derived. It lies prostrate under its object, and is only a capacity in the soul of having its own state altered by the influence of particular causes. It must therefore remain a stranger to the objects and causes affecting it.'¹

The empiricist would agree that sense is passive, but would deny that any faculty can say 'what impressions are', e.g. that they are appearances of unsensed objects, or can discover their causes. He would have to admit, however, that there is some faculty which does not simply 'lie prostrate under its object'. On the other hand, Price would have to recognize that imagination, as well as reason, need not be passive, and he would have to give a criterion for differentiating between these two. He would probably give the following two grounds of difference:

- (i) A faculty 'superior' to imagination is required to judge that the objects of imagination are imaginary, not real.
- (ii) Reason is a source of new ideas, while imagination is not.

The second of these two contentions has yet to be substantiated. The first is valid; *some* faculty is needed to judge whether data are imaginary or real, even if the criterion used is that of coherence (though Price would hold, in my opinion rightly, that we usually judge immediately whether data are imaginary or not, without inferring from the evidence of coherence).

4. 'Were not *sense* and *knowledge* entirely different, we should rest satisfied with sensible impressions, such as light, colours, and sounds, and enquire no farther about them, at least when the impressions are strong and vigorous: Whereas, on the contrary, we necessarily desire

¹ pp. 18-19: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 110-11.

some farther acquaintance with them, and can never be satisfied till we have subjected them to the survey of reason.¹

This is a charge which no empiricist has, to my knowledge, satisfactorily met. If the objects of our knowledge are merely sense-data or combinations of them, why is it that common sense insists on postulating objects which transcend sense-data and of which sense-data are thought to be the appearances? To say that we do not postulate them and that the word 'body' is merely a convenient method of referring briefly to the sense-data, is just false. And to say that constant experience of coherent sense-data accustoms us to attribute them to something more permanent does not explain why or how we think of this something as a thing of quite a different order from sense-data.

5. 'Sense presents *particular* forms to the mind; but cannot rise to any *general* ideas. It is the intellect that examines and compares the presented forms, that rises above individuals to universal and abstract ideas.'²

This argument I shall assume to be unchallenged. It could only be met by an attempt to assert a nominalist theory of universals; and such theories have been so often refuted that no refutation is required here.

The arguments which follow, with the exception of the last, merely repeat those which have gone before. The final argument is this:

6. 'Sense cannot perceive any of the modes of thinking beings; these can be discovered only by the mind's survey of itself.'³

Here the empiricist can postulate an inner sense or introspection. But there is still needed some faculty beyond the senses to discern the difference between outer and inner sense; otherwise there would be no discernible difference between the data of the bodily senses and those of introspection. It might, however, be said that Price's argument involves an infinite regress. Reason is needed to discover that the senses

¹ p. 19: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 111.

² Ibid.

³ p. 21: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 112.

are senses, a further faculty to discover that reason is reason, and so on. Two replies might be made:

- (i) Reason can be conscious of itself as well as of sense; sense cannot be conscious of itself. Reason is essentially different in nature from sense in being self-conscious; we know that we know, but we cannot sense that we sense. The appeal on this point must be to every man's consciousness, and no argument is possible.
- (ii) We never are *acquainted* with the presence of reason, as we are with that of sensation: we can only infer it from the fact that the activities which Price ascribes to reason do take place. When we distinguish between sense and reason we do so on the basis of inference only, not of direct inspection, since there is no higher faculty to inspect the presence of reason.

The second reply seems to me paradoxical and directly contrary to experienced fact. The first seems clearly true, but if it is disputed there is no room for argument.

Price sums up the discussion by seizing on the most vital differences between the two faculties.

'In a word, it appears that *sense* and *understanding* are faculties of the soul totally different: The one being conversant only about *particulars*; the other about *universals*: The one not *discerning*, but *suffering*; the other not *suffering*, but *discerning*; and signifying the soul's *Power* of surveying and examining all things, in order to judge of them; which *Power*, perhaps, can hardly be better defined, than by calling it, in *Plato's* language, the power in the soul to which belongs *κατάληψις τοῦ ὄντος*, or the apprehension of TRUTH.¹

Until now Price has not tried to show that understanding is a source of new, simple ideas, but simply that it exists as a different, or, as he puts it, 'superior', faculty to sense, which fulfils a number of activities that cannot be carried out by sense. *En passant*, however, he has already shown that the occurrence of these activities entails the presence in our minds of certain ideas which could not have arisen from sense. When reason compares the objects of more than one sense,

¹ pp. 21-2: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 112.

we observe in them certain characteristics, namely 'essence, number, identity, diversity, &c.'¹ These, or at least some of them, are new ideas which sense could not provide. When reason, again, discovers the 'objects and causes which affect'² sense, it gives rise to the new ideas of substance and cause. And when it rises to universals or general ideas, even if none of those ideas themselves are new but are all derived from the impressions of sense, we have at least the new idea of generality or universality.

But now Price goes on to give explicitly a list of 'our fundamental ideas' which cannot come from sense or imagination and are supplied by reason. Most of these, and the efforts of empiricists to analyse them into sense-impressions, are familiar enough by now.

(a) *Solidity* and the implied idea of *impenetrability*

'The idea of *solidity* has been generally reckoned among the ideas we owe to sense; and yet perhaps it would be difficult to prove, that we ever had actual experience of that *impenetrability* which we include in it, and consider as essential to all bodies.'³

We could say we had experienced impenetrability, says Price, only if we were sure we had made two bodies really touch and had found that they would not penetrate each other; but we can account for the observed facts without supposing absolute contact between bodies. And even if we did the experiment, we could have no grounds for the necessity and universality of the property.

'All that would appear to the senses in such experiments, would be the *conjunction* of two events, not their *necessary connexion*.'⁴

Indeed, as things are, if we had to rely on sense alone we should have to say that two bodies *may* occupy the same place.

'There are many instances in which two material substances apparently run into one another. It is reason, that, from its own perceptions, determines such to be fallacious appearances, and assures us of the universal and strict necessity of the contrary. The same power that

¹ Cf. p. 118, above.

² Cf. p. 120, above.

³ p. 22: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 112.

⁴ p. 23: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 112.

perceives two particles to be *different*, perceives them to be *impenetrable*; for they are as necessarily the one as the other; it being self-evident, that they cannot occupy the same place without losing all difference.¹

(b) *Inactivity or vis inertiae*

Price is not so much concerned here to show that we have the idea of inactivity as that we know it to be universal and necessary to bodies. As in the case of impenetrability, his criterion for discovering whether an idea is due to reason is to ask whether it is necessary and universal. Sense can only observe what is particular and contingent.

The proof of the necessity and universality of the inactivity of bodies is taken from the assumed truth of Newton's laws of motion. Whether this proof is valid does not concern our inquiry. The important thing for us is Price's criterion of necessity. We shall expect him to prove that the ideas of right and wrong are given by reason from the fact that we know these attributes to be in some connexion necessary and universal.

(c) *Substance*

'Tis the understanding that discovers the general distinction between substance and accident; nor can any perception be more unavoidable, than that motion implies *something* that moves; *extension* something *extended*; and, in general, *modes* something *modified*.²

Again it is the notion of necessity that is important. An impression may not be an accident of a substance, it may be hallucinatory; but we know that *if* anything is an accident it must be *of* a substance. It may be doubted whether this 'knowledge' is more than verbal; but the important thing for Price is that since there is a necessary connexion between these two ideas, they are to be called ideas of reason, not of sense.

(d) *Time and space*

By sense we only observe succession, which presupposes duration but is different from it. Similarly we know by reason that all things must exist in space.

'This, as well as duration, is included in every reflection we can make on our own existence, or that of other things; it being self-evidently the

¹ pp. 23-4: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 113.

² p. 26.

same with *denying* the existence of a thing, to say, that it exists *no where*. We, and all things, exist in *time* and *place*; and therefore, as self-conscious and intelligent beings, we must have ideas of them.¹

'What may be farther worth observing concerning space and duration, is, that we perceive intuitively their *necessary existence*. The very notion of annihilation being the removal of a thing from space and duration.'²

Price does not deny that sense perceives spatial and temporal relations; it is the knowledge of some necessary facts about space and time that makes them ideas of reason.

(e) *Necessity and contingency*

'There are other objects which the same faculty, with equal evidence, perceives to be *contingent*; or whose actual existence it sees to be not *necessary*, but only *possible*.'³

Price's language shows that he would admit that the ideas of contingency and possibility may be reduced to terms of necessity and negation: 'X is contingent' is equivalent to 'X is not necessary', and 'X is possible' is equivalent to 'X is not impossible' or 'X is not necessarily non-existent'. Up to now Price has allowed that the empiricist may analyse ideas of reason to some extent but cannot account for the element of necessity in them. We now see that at least one other irreducible element, negation, defies the empiricist's analysis in the case of some ideas of reason.

(f) *Power and causation*

'What we observe by our external senses, is properly no more than that one thing *follows* another, or the *constant conjunction* of certain events. . . . That one thing is the *cause* of another, or *produces* it, we never see. . . . And were it in no one instance true; I mean, were there no object that contributed, by its own proper force, to the production of any new event; were the *apparent* causes of things universally only their *occasions* or *concomitants*; (which is nearly the real case, according to some philosophical principles;) yet still we should have the same ideas of cause, and effect, and power.'⁴

Price goes on to say that he is not maintaining that the idea of power comes only from the understanding.

¹ p. 27.

² Ibid.

³ p. 28.

⁴ pp. 29-30: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 113-14.

'It should be observed, that I have not said that we have no idea of power, except from the understanding. Activity and self-determination are as essential to spirit, as the contrary are to matter; and therefore inward consciousness gives us the idea of that particular sort of power which they imply. But the universal source of the idea of power, as we conceive it necessary to the production of all that happens, and of our notions of influence, connexion, aptitude, and dependence in general, must be the understanding.'¹

But surely Price has now admitted that the simple idea of power comes from 'inward consciousness' (which presumably means introspection), and that it is only the ideas of universality and necessity that come from reason. Now introspection may well be called an 'inner sense', and if Price admits one inner sense that is a source of simple ideas, Hutcheson might well ask why there should not be more than one. Price would reply that although the simple idea of power or activity may be given to introspection or inner sense,² the idea of cause cannot be because it presupposes the idea of necessity. Similarly all the other ideas of reason he has mentioned in his list presuppose necessity. They may include or be consequential upon ideas of sense, but they themselves cannot be ideas of sense.

I think Price has shown that these ideas are new ideas and yet cannot be sense-given. The objection to his list, however, is that it contains so few *simple* ideas. He began by saying that when he talks of ideas he is referring to simple ideas. But it is clear from his remarks as he goes through the list, that he would allow the empiricist to analyse almost all these ideas into empirical ideas joined with the ideas of necessity and universality. The only simple ideas that have been shown to spring originally from reason are necessity and universality (which are really identical), contingency (which is the negative

¹ pp. 31-2: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 114-15.

² I think this is false if the word 'introspection' is meant to refer to an awareness exactly similar to the awareness of feelings. Berkeley seems to me right in calling activity a 'notion', not an 'idea', i.e. in placing it in a different class of things from sense-data, feelings and mental images, and in holding that we are aware of that class of things in a different way from that in which we are aware of feelings.

of necessity and may be analysed in terms of necessity and negation), and possibility (which may also be analysed in terms of necessity and negation). So that the number of primitive ideas of reason may be reduced by a die-hard empiricist to two (or even one, if he thinks he can analyse the notion of 'not'). We see, therefore, the importance for empiricism of modern attempts to explain away necessity. For my own part I do not think these attempts succeed. We must, it seems to me, admit at least one primitive idea of rational intuition if we are to account at all satisfactorily for the complex ideas of entailment, causation, infinity, impenetrability, and so on.

Having allowed the possibility of analysing his ideas of reason, Price must admit that his list becomes far less formidable than it appeared. The empiricist agrees that complex ideas are not given to sense, though he holds that they are wholly made up of sense-given ideas. The second part of this view Price has shown to be false, but many of his remarks have little connexion with the thesis he is supposed to be establishing, namely that there are many *simple* ideas which come from reason. The fact is that Price has granted too much to the empiricist at the outset. He seems to assume that in essentials the empiricist psychology is correct though its epistemology is faulty. He appears to allow that we start from simple ideas (though he adds that the sources of these ideas are not as limited as the empiricist thinks) and combine them into complex ideas. Reid, with greater wisdom, attacks the empiricist psychology as well as its epistemology. Price should never have accepted the empiricists' dichotomy of simple and complex ideas as an exhaustive classification. There are some characteristics which are neither simple in the sense in which redness is a simple characteristic, nor complex in the sense of consisting of a whole whose parts are simple characteristics; I mean consequential characteristics, which do indeed presuppose constitutive characteristics that may be simple, but which are not wholes made up of those constitutive characteristics as parts. Price has really been giving us a list of characteristics, two of which may be called 'simple' in that

they do not presuppose other characteristics, but most of which are *consequential* characteristics; the important thing about these is that they presuppose the 'simple' characteristic of necessity.

Price is vaguely aware of this at times. Towards the end of the section we have been considering he says:

'The division of all our simple ideas into *original* and *subsequent* ones may not, perhaps, be improper. The former are conveyed to us immediately by our organs of sense, and our reflexion upon ourselves. The latter presuppose other ideas, and arise from the perception of their natures and relations.'

¹

But this is an afterthought which strikes him when he has already given his list of ideas of reason, doubtless because he saw, after he had given the list, that most of the ideas in it have a very odd sort of 'simplicity'. And even now he retains the term 'simple'. There is in fact no point in calling consequential ideas simple, and to do so is merely confusing. What Price should have done is to have rejected the simple-complex dichotomy at the outset.

However, he has provided us with a criterion for deciding whether a characteristic should be said to be given to reason. If the characteristic is analogous to the characteristic of necessity or if it is a consequential characteristic necessarily grounded upon constitutive characteristics, it cannot be given to sense and must be said to be discerned by the understanding. I have tried to indicate in the previous chapter that both obligation and goodness conform to this criterion.² Price himself of course, in saying why his list of ideas in this section must be ascribed to reason, has not used the criterion in quite these terms; he has said of each of them (omitting the idea of necessity and those ideas which are to be analysed in terms of necessity and negation, namely the ideas of contingency, impossibility and possibility,) that we know them to exist, where they do exist, necessarily and universally. We shall expect him to apply the same criterion to moral ideas.

¹ pp. 52-3.

² Cf. pp. 83, 85-6, 95 ff., above.

3. THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF MORALS

Having shown the inadequacy of empiricism for the theory of knowledge in general, Price devotes his next section to 'the Origin of our Ideas of moral Right and Wrong'. It begins with the reminder that moral ideas have been shown to be simple and unanalysable.

"Tis a very necessary previous observation, that our ideas of *right* and *wrong* are simple ideas, and must therefore be ascribed to some power of *immediate* perception in the human mind. He that doubts this, need only try to give definitions of them, which shall amount to more than synonymous expressions. . . . There are, undoubtedly, some actions that are *ultimately* approved, and for justifying which no reason can be assigned; as there are some ends, which are *ultimately* desired, and for chusing which no reason can be given. Were this not true; there would be an infinite progression of reasons and ends, and therefore nothing could be at all approved or desired."

Price wants to prove this power of immediate perception to be the understanding.

'I cannot but flatter myself,' he says, 'that the main obstacle to the acknowledgment of this, has been already removed, by the observations made in the preceding section, to shew that the understanding is a power of immediate perception, which gives rise to new original ideas.'

We may now proceed to Price's arguments to prove his thesis.

1. *Possibility of the thesis by analogy*

The first argument is designed to show nothing more than that Price's theory *may* be true. Since some ideas are given by the intuition of objective fact, those of right and wrong may be given in the same way. Empiricists would deny the premiss, but after our consideration of the criticisms which Price brings against the empiricist epistemology, we must, I think, agree that he has substantiated his view.

'First, Observe, that it implies no absurdity, but evidently *may* be true. It is undeniable, that many of our ideas are derived from our INTUITION of truth, or the discernment of the natures of things by the understanding.

¹ pp. 57-8: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 121.

² pp. 58-9: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 121-2.

This therefore *may* be the source of our moral ideas. It is at least *possible*, that *right* and *wrong* may denote what we *understand* and *know* concerning certain objects, in like manner with proportion and disproportion, connexion and repugnancy, contingency and necessity, and the other ideas before-mentioned.¹

Price further points out that nothing has been offered to prove the contrary of his theory. Hutcheson has shown, he declares, that right and wrong are simple ideas, but has left unproven the assertion that they come from a sense since he simply assumed the empiricist dogma. About this dogma Price makes some pertinent remarks.

'I do not at all care what follows from Mr. *Hume's* assertion, that all our ideas are either *impressions*, or *copies of impressions*; or from Mr. *Locke's* assertion that they are all *deducible from SENSATION and REFLEXION*—The first of these assertions is, I think, destitute of all proof; supposes, when applied in this as well as many other cases, the point in question; and, when pursued to its consequences, ends in the destruction of all truth and the subversion of our intellectual faculties.—The other wants much explication to render it consistent with any tolerable account of the original of our moral ideas.' Locke himself regards moral ideas as relations, 'and represents *rectitude* as signifying the conformity of actions to some rules or laws. . . . From whence it follows, that it is an absurdity to apply *rectitude* to rules and laws themselves.'²

2. *Appeal to common sense and introspection*

If a man doubted whether he perceived an external object by means of sight or touch, we could only refer him, says Price, to common sense. Similarly, if someone asked what kind of perception it is that we have of number, diversity, causation, or proportion, it would be sufficient to appeal to every man's consciousness.

'These perceptions seem to me to have no greater pretence to be denominated perceptions of the understanding, than *right* and *wrong*.

'It is true, some impressions of pleasure or pain, satisfaction or disgust, generally attend our perceptions of virtue and vice. But these are merely their effects and concomitants, and not the perceptions

¹ p. 59: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 122.

² pp. 61-2: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 123.

themselves, which ought no more to be confounded with them, than a particular truth . . . ought to be confounded with the pleasure that may attend the discovery of it. Some emotion or other accompanies, perhaps, all our perceptions; but more remarkably our perceptions of right and wrong. And this . . . is what has led to the mistake of making them to signify nothing but impressions, which error some have extended to all objects of knowledge; and thus have been led into an extravagant and monstrous scepticism.

'But to return; let any one compare the ideas arising from our *powers of sensation*, with those arising from our *intuition of the natures of things*, and enquire which of them his ideas of right and wrong most resemble. On the issue of such a comparison may we safely rest this question. It is scarcely conceivable that any one can impartially attend to the nature of his own perceptions, and determine that, when he thinks gratitude or beneficence to be *right*, he perceives nothing *true* of them, and *understands* nothing, but only receives an impression from a *sense*. Was it possible for a person to question, whether his idea of *equality* was gained from sense or intelligence; he might soon be convinced, by considering, whether he is not sure, that certain lines or figures are *really* equal, and that their equality must be perceived by all minds, as soon as the objects themselves are perceived.—In the same manner may we satisfy ourselves concerning the origin of the idea of *right*: For have we not a like consciousness, that we discern the one, as well as the other, *in* certain objects? Upon what possible grounds can we pronounce the one to be *sense*, and the other *reason*?'¹

On the grounds, it may be replied, that in the one case there is difference of opinion, and in the other not. Price is too neglectful of this important fact about moral judgements. We learned from Section II that necessity and universality are the marks of ideas of reason. It would seem that Price is here applying a sort of universality test (though not of course the one required), the test of universal consensus of opinion. It is plausible to apply this in the case of mathematical judgements, but certainly not in the case of moral judgements.

The appeal to introspection, and the comparison of the moral faculty with the faculties of sensation and intuition, is a valid test, but unfortunately the man who disagrees with Price asserts that the evidence of his introspection supports

¹ pp. 63-5: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 124-5.

his own view and not Price's. Price should have gone on to elaborate the comparison between the two faculties, as in Section II, and to state what characteristics moral ideas have in common with the ideas of sense, and what with the ideas of intuition. As it stands his argument is too cursory and will only persuade those already converted.

Price himself sees that the mere appeal to common sense and to majority opinion is insufficient, for it would bring equal evidence for the objectivity of secondary qualities and hence for an analogy between secondary qualities and moral attributes.

'It would, I doubt, be to little purpose to plead further here, the natural and universal apprehensions of mankind, that our ideas of right and wrong belong to the understanding, and denote real characters of actions; because it will be easy to reply, that they have a like opinion of the *sensible qualities* of bodies; and that nothing is more common than for men to mistake their own sensations for the properties of the objects producing them.'¹

A further point should be noted before we leave this argument. When Price was criticizing naturalistic analyses of 'right' in Section I, one of his arguments was that if 'right' meant 'productive of the greatest possible pleasure', for example, or 'in conformity with the law or the will of God', there would then be no dispute about the nature of the moral faculty, since all would agree that only reason can discover whether one action is likely to produce more pleasurable consequences than another, or whether the law forbidding killing covers homicide through negligence;² the argument implied that in fact there is disagreement about the nature of the moral faculty. How, then, can Price urge 'the natural and universal apprehensions' of mankind that the moral faculty is reason? He cannot have it both ways. Either there is dispute among ordinary men about the nature of the moral faculty, or there is not. One of these alternatives must be an ascertainable fact. My own observation leads me to the conclusion that there is dispute among ordinary men, as well as philosophers,

¹ pp. 66-7: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 126.

² Cf. p. 114, above.

on this question: it is therefore useless to appeal to the natural and universal apprehensions of mankind.

3. *The incompatibility of ideas of sense with those of external facts*

'If right and wrong denote effects of sensation, it must imply the greatest absurdity to suppose them applicable to actions: That is; the ideas of *right* and *wrong* and of *action*, must in this case be incompatible; as much so, as the idea of pleasure and a regular form, or of pain and the collisions of bodies. . . . A *coloured body*, if we speak accurately, is the same absurdity with a *square sound*. We need no experiments to prove that heat, cold, colours, tastes, &c. are not real qualities of bodies; because the ideas of matter and of these qualities, are incompatible.—But is there indeed any such incompatibility between *actions* and *right*? Or any such absurdity in affirming the one of the other?'¹

So long as Price confines himself to feelings, his argument is sound. But his opposition to the moral sense theory necessitates the consideration of sense-data too, so that we are given the curious view that the ideas of colour and hardness are incompatible with the idea of body. And this, apparently, is known, not from evidence, but *a priori*! Price's statements show that the argument is really about language. If we do not treat it as such, it sounds odd to common sense.

The argument depends on the two following alleged facts:

(i) 'Action' and 'right' are not incompatible.

(ii) 'Body' and 'coloured' are incompatible.

The second statement seems open to question. If we rely on the plain man's thought and speech, 'body' and 'coloured' are certainly compatible and perhaps are even, in a sense, necessarily connected. As we saw from a previous quotation,² Price would admit this. But, he says, 'a coloured body, *if we speak accurately* [my italics], is the same absurdity with a square sound'. In ordinary speech a 'square sound' is absurd, though a 'coloured body' is not. What is this 'accurate speech' to which Price refers? Clearly it must be the language of physics. Now how do 'coloured' and 'body' come to be

¹ pp. 67–8: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 126–7.

² Cf. p. 132, above. And cf. Price's doubts about colours mentioned on pp. 106–7, above.

incompatible in the language of physics? Clearly by postulated definition; colours and all other so-called secondary qualities are abstracted from the plain man's concept of body, and what is left is defined as the physicist's concept of body.

Now, how do we know that 'action' and 'right' are not incompatible? It is of no use to appeal to physics, for that science does not deal with actions. The word 'action' is of course used in physics, as, for example, when the physicist talks of action and reaction; but this is a totally different sense of the word from the sense in which we speak of right and wrong actions. The physical concept of action is incompatible with the concept of right, for ethical concepts are outside the field and language of physics. The actions with which we are concerned are actions which proceed from a free, or at least a self-determining, will; it is only in this sense of the word that actions can be called right or wrong. It is, therefore, of as little use to appeal to experimental psychology as to physics; for experimental psychology only deals with actions *qua* events, an abstraction, just as physical matter is an abstraction from common sense matter. It seems that we are driven to the language of common sense, but if so the argument falls, for in the language of common sense 'coloured' is not incompatible with 'body'. Can we say that in the language of *ethics* the ideas of 'right' and of 'action' are not incompatible, and that in this language there is a necessary connexion between the concept of 'action' and the disjunctive concept 'either right, or wrong, or ethically neutral'? Now the concepts of the ethical language are clearly taken from the concepts of common sense language. Can we say that the language of ethics is 'more accurate' than common sense language, just as we say that the language of physics is more accurate than the language of common sense? If we cannot say this, Price's argument falls. We could say it if there were a science of ethics. But even so, it might be possible to speak as accurately of colours in some science as it is to speak of actions in the science of ethics. It is sometimes said that there are sciences dealing with extension, motion and all other primary qualities but

there is no science dealing with secondary qualities, and that this is a strong argument in favour of differentiating between primary and secondary qualities as Locke does. I doubt if it is necessarily true that there could not be sciences dealing with secondary qualities: in fact, I think we have the beginnings of such sciences in certain aspects of contemporary psychology.¹ The reason why seventeenth-century science confined itself to primary qualities is that a standard of measurement for these qualities is more easily found than for secondary qualities; the influence of Descartes' prepossession with mathematics caused the thinkers of the seventeenth century to say that only the measurable is 'real'.²

It might be argued that in physics and ethics we apply attributes to subjects (or, if one prefers the 'syntactical mode' of speech, adjectives to nouns), whereas in the science of colour we could not apply the adjective 'red', for example, to 'body'. But we can apply the adjective 'red' to the nouns 'sense-datum' or 'visual expanse'. We could not, of course, apply the adjectives of our colour language to the nouns of our physical language; but no more can we apply the adjectives of the ethical language to the nouns of the physical language. Price could prove a difference between 'coloured' and 'right' if he could show that 'action', for instance, is a physical concept as is 'body', whereas 'coloured' is a psychological concept. But this cannot be done. It is only in the language of ethics that we can use the word 'action' in such a way that the adjectives 'right' and 'wrong' can be predicated of it.

4. *The possibility of error*

'How strange would it be to maintain, that there is no possibility of *mistaking* with respect to right and wrong; that the apprehensions of all beings, on this subject, are alike just, since all sensation must be alike *true* sensation?'³

This is a sound argument against a moral sense theory. In

¹ Cf., for example, *The World of Colour* by D. Katz (English edition published by Kegan Paul, 1935), to which Professor Price has drawn my attention.

² I owe the suggestion in this sentence to Mr. I. Berlin.

³ pp. 69-70: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 127.

moral judgements it is possible to be mistaken in a way in which it is not possible to be mistaken in judgements of sensation. I may of course judge that I am seeing pink, and then on closer inspection judge that I am seeing red. But I *was* acquainted at the first glance with a pink datum, and my judgement about that is incorrigible. What is corrigible is the judgement (which doubtless I implicitly believed when I made the first judgement) that I shall still see pink if I look again a moment later.

Equally, of course, a man may consider an action cursorily, and judge that it is right; then, after paying closer attention, he may decide that it is wrong. And it may be said that here, as in the case of the colours, the man did, during the first cursory consideration, have some 'datum' presented to his mind, and that his first judgement, in relation to that 'datum', is incorrigible. But this is not the sort of error Price is referring to. Once I pay attention to the colour and observe plainly that it is red, I cannot be shaken from my conviction and I cannot be mistaken no matter what another man may say to me. In the case of an action, however, I may consider it closely, pass judgement, and yet later admit that I was mistaken; further, I may be persuaded by another to change my opinion. The possibility of argument, and argument which is sometimes successful, shows that there is a difference between moral judgements and judgements of sensation.

But now, it seems, Price is presented with a dilemma. He has shown the moral faculty to be different from sense; but has he shown it to be understanding? The argument he has used against the moral sense theory is a two-edged weapon that can be turned against him. If Price admits the possibility of error in moral judgement, how can we be said to *know* that an action is right? In Chapter VII of his book Price declares that we know general moral principles with certainty but in judging of particular actions we can err. His explanation¹ of the grounds of error in particular moral judgements is itself very good. He points out (1) that instances of different moral

¹ pp. 280-96.

principles may conflict with each other in a particular situation and their respective weights be misjudged; (2) that we may mistake the facts of a situation, e.g. what the consequences of an action will be, and so err in thinking that the situation instantiates a particular moral principle when in fact it does not; and (3) that the feelings which naturally accompany moral perceptions may be altered by custom, education and example, and this alteration of feeling may cause the perception to be dulled and to pass unnoticed. In (2) the error is not an error of moral judgement; if the facts were what we take them to be, our moral judgement on them would be correct. In (3) there is not so much error of moral judgement as failure to use the moral faculty proper. In (1), however, there does seem to be real error of moral judgement, and it will be instructive to look more closely at Price's account of what happens here, for, whatever be thought of his theory that this function of moral judgement is an act of intuitive knowledge, his account of the facts is excellent.

'What creates the difficulty in morals of determining what is right or wrong, in many particular cases, is chiefly the interference now mentioned in such cases between the different general principles of virtue.—Thus, the pursuit of the happiness of others is a duty, and so is the pursuit of private happiness; and though, on the whole, these are inseparably connected, in many particular instances, one of them cannot be pursued without giving up the other. When the publick happiness is very great, and the private very inconsiderable, no difficulties appear. We pronounce as confidently, that the one ought to give way to the other, as we do, that either alone ought to be pursued. But when the former is diminished, and the latter increased to a certain degree, doubt arises; and we may thus be rendered entirely incapable of determining what we ought to chuse. We have the most satisfactory perception, that we ought to study our own good, and, within certain limits, prefer it to that of another; but who can say how far, mark precisely these limits, and inform us in all cases of opposition between them, where right and wrong and indifference take place?—In like manner; the nearer attachments of nature or friendship, the obligations to veracity, fidelity, gratitude, or justice, may interfere with private and publick good, and it is not possible for us to judge always and accurately, what degrees or circumstances of any one of these compared with the others, will or will

not cancel its obligation, and justify the violation of it.—It is thus likewise, that the different foundations of property give rise to contrary claims, and that sometimes it becomes very hard to say which of different titles to an object is the best.—If we examine the various intricate and disputed cases in morality, we shall, I believe, find that it is always some interference of this kind that produces the obscurity. Truth and right in all circumstances, require one determinate way of acting; but so variously may different obligations combine with or oppose each other in particular cases, and so imperfect are our discerning faculties, that it cannot but happen, that we should be frequently in the dark, and that different persons should judge differently, according to the different views they have of the several moral principles. Nor is this less unavoidable, or more to be wondered at, than that in matters of mere speculation, we should be at a loss to know what is true, when the arguments for and against a proposition appear nearly equal.

‘The principles themselves, it should be remembered, are self-evident; and to conclude the contrary, or to assert that there are no moral distinctions, because of the obscurity attending several cases wherein a competition arises between the several principles of morality, is very unreasonable.’¹

It will be observed that Price compares the weighing of conflicting moral principles against each other with the weighing of arguments for and against a proposition. The comparison must be with inductive reasoning, with weighing evidence in order to consider the balance of probability for and against an hypothesis. The comparison is in my opinion just, and I believe that the act of mind in both cases is much the same.² It is in fact what is meant by ‘judging’ in one of the commonest senses of that term. When we say that a man, in administration for example, ‘has good judgment’, we mean that he reaches sound conclusions both in the weighing of evidence and in the weighing of moral arguments. Similarly the ‘judgement’ of a court of law is reached by weighing evidence on matters of fact and weighing the respective force of legal principles that are relevant to the case.

Now Price thinks that this act of moral judgement, as well as the discernment of moral principles, is a function of intuitive knowledge. If we hold that knowledge must be certain

¹ pp. 280–2.

² Cf. p. 200, below.

and incorrigible, and is a different thing from a judgement of probability, we must disagree with Price here. His confusion of the two is reflected also in his view that induction is a branch of deduction. Deduction, he says in another place, 'supplies us with all the degrees of evidence, from that producing full certainty, to the lowest probability'.¹

I think the reason why Price ascribes to intuition both the discernment of moral principles and the judgement of the moral character of particular acts and situations is because the judgement in both cases is often immediate. The confusion arises from using the criterion of immediacy to determine whether a discernment is to be called knowing. We shall have occasion in the next chapter to refer in greater detail to this criterion of immediacy, and for the often immediate but corrigible judgement passed on particular actions we shall have to introduce a different faculty from that which knows moral principles.

Now what has Price's argument, quoted on page 135, proved? The possibility of error in particular moral judgements, if the error be one of moral judgement proper and is not due to a mistake of fact or to failure to use moral judgement, proves that moral judgement cannot be sense. But equally it proves that such judgement cannot be knowledge if we hold that knowledge is incorrigible. In the discernment of moral principles, Price holds, there cannot be error, and so the argument from the possibility of error does not apply to that discernment. So far as this argument is concerned, the discernment of moral principles might be an act of intuitive knowledge or it might be a function of sense; while the judgement of the rightness or wrongness of particular actions, being liable to error, can be neither an act of knowing nor a function of sense.

5. *The unvarying character of moral attributes*

'Is there a greater absurdity, than to suppose, that the *moral rectitude* of an action is nothing absolute and unvarying; but capable, like all the modifications of pleasure and pain, of being intended and remitted, of

¹ *Review*, p. 161. Cf. p. 116, above.

increasing and lessening, of rising and sinking with the force and liveliness of our feelings?¹

Price argues that an action does not change its nature according to the circumstances in which it is contemplated. If it is right, it is absolutely and universally right. On the other hand, sensible qualities and feelings vary in different conditions.

As we saw in the last chapter,² this objection is valid against a theory of moral feeling, and we decided that it shows the falsity of Hume's theory in spite of his ingenious attempt to meet it. But, as Hume's reply illustrated, the objection is not valid against a moral sense theory proper, that is, a theory which compares the moral faculty to the *external* senses. Now in fact neither Hutcheson nor Hume held such a theory; they both compared the moral faculty to *inner* sense, i.e. the introspection of feelings. The moral sense theory proper, if it was held by anyone, was held by Reid³ (though not in a form which Price would consider objectionable). But Price all along has been speaking of the moral sense theory as if it compared the moral faculty to the external senses, and he has wanted to refute such a theory as well as a feeling theory. All his arguments in this section are indirect arguments; they attempt to prove that the moral faculty is intuition by proving that it cannot be sense or feeling. Price must show that it can be *neither* of these, if his refutation of possible alternatives to his own view is to be complete. We cannot, therefore, be satisfied with the fact that his present argument refutes theories of feeling, but must consider it also in relation to a theory which compares the moral faculty to the external senses.

Now the holder of such a theory could reply to Price's argument as follows. 'I concede that in one sense the moral character of an action is something stable and does not vary with the circumstances in which it is contemplated by different people. In the same way, however, there is a sense in which the colour of a body remains the same and is not affected by differences of conditions. In another sense the attribute in

¹ p. 70: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 127.

² Cf. pp. 88 ff., above.

³ Cf. Chapter V, Section 4, below.

both instances does vary according to the conditions in which a particular person contemplates it. There is an objective usage of colour words as of moral words, and there is a usage in which moral attributes no less than secondary qualities are subjective.'

That there are two such usages of moral words is clearly and explicitly recognized by Price himself in a later passage. In Chapter VIII of the *Review* he distinguishes between 'abstract or absolute virtue' and 'practical or relative virtue'.

'ABSTRACT virtue is, most properly, a quality of the external action or event. It denotes what an action is, considered independently of the *sense*¹ of the agent; or what, *in itself* and *absolutely*, it is right *such* an agent, in *such* circumstances, should do; and what, if he judged truly, he would judge he ought to do.—PRACTICAL *virtue*, on the contrary, has a necessary relation to, and dependence upon, the opinion of the agent concerning his actions. It signifies what he ought to do, *upon supposition* of his having such and such sentiments.¹ . . . Moral agents are liable to mistake the circumstances they are in, and, consequently, to form erroneous judgments concerning their own obligations. This supposes, that these obligations have a real existence, independent of their judgments. But, when they are in any manner mistaken, it is not to be imagined, that then nothing remains obligatory; for there is a sense in which it may be said, that what any being, in the sincerity of his heart, *thinks* he ought to do, he *indeed* ought to do, and would be justly blameable if he omitted to do, though contradictory to what, in the former sense, is his duty.—It would be trifling to object to this, that it implies, that an action may, at the same time, be both right and wrong; for it implies this only, as the rightness and wrongness of actions are considered in different views.'²

Similarly there is a subjective and an objective sense of some, though not all, words standing for secondary qualities. In one sense, if a man who is colour-blind sees a leaf as grey we say that what he sees *is* grey, and if I see it at night as black we can say that it *is* black.³ But, in another sense, we say that the leaf *is* green, although the man who is colour-blind can

¹ The words 'sense' and 'sentiments' here both mean 'opinion'.

² pp. 298–9: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, pp. 175–6. For the whole of this passage cf. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*, Chapter VII.

³ This particular usage is not common in ordinary speech. The adage 'In the night all cows are black' is a *paradoxical* statement.

only see grey and in the dark I can only see black. Nor do I think that when, in the second sense, we say the leaf really is green, we mean that most people in normal conditions see it as green. I think we mean just what we say, that the leaf is green, no matter what the conditions or what colour people actually see at the moment. It may be that we have no justification for saying this, that is, no justification for the second usage of colour words, since our sole evidence relates to the first usage. But equally it might be said that we have no justification for the objective usage of moral words, for thinking that there is such a thing as 'abstract virtue', since our sole evidence relates to 'practical virtue', to judgements of right and wrong in relation to the opinions which men have of the facts of a situation. In practice the two usages exist in both cases, and the holder of a moral sense theory might say that the relation of the subjective to the objective sense is the same in both cases. I think that Price could give reasons why this is not so, but so far as the particular argument we are considering is concerned he has not shown a difference between moral characteristics and all secondary qualities. This argument does not refute a moral sense theory which compares the moral faculty to sight, touch, or hearing.

6. *Reductio ad absurdum*

All actions, says Price, have a nature and, therefore, some character.

'This may be, that some of them are right, others wrong. But if this is not allowed; if no actions are, *in themselves*, either right or wrong, or any thing of a moral and obligatory nature, which can be an object to the understanding; it follows, that, in themselves, they *are* all indifferent. This is what is essentially true of them, and this is what all understandings, that perceive right, must perceive them to be. But are we not conscious, that we perceive the contrary?'¹

The argument is: Actions, like everything else, must have some character. If this character be not rightness or wrongness, it must be indifference. Therefore, if no actions are

¹ pp. 70-1: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 128.

right or wrong, they must have the character of indifference. And this we perceive to be false.

I grant the last statement. But the inference depends on two assumptions. The first is that 'right', 'wrong' and 'indifferent' are an exhaustive list of the characters that could belong to an action. Actions must have some character, true; if this be neither 'right' nor 'wrong', the only alternative is 'indifferent'. Why is this the only alternative? It is the only alternative left among *ethical* attributes, but Price's opponents can deny all ethical attributes to actions without necessarily depriving actions of a character of any kind. For example, a character which an action might still have would be the purpose which forms its motive; one action might be selfish, another benevolent. Hutcheson's theory allows for this. The second assumption is that 'indifference' is a positive character. We may compare Price's phrase 'they *are* all indifferent' (his italics). If indifference were a negative character, actions would lose all character sooner than Price's argument requires, so that his refutation would be out of place; for he too admits that some actions are indifferent without being thereby robbed of all character and existence. And surely indifference is in fact a negative character; to say an action is morally indifferent is simply to say it is neither right nor wrong. Of course an action will be indifferent in virtue of some other character which it has and which is positive, but this is simply to admit that the consequential characters of right, wrong and indifferent are not the sole characters which an action may have. Price's opponents may deny consequential characters to actions while still leaving them with constitutive characters.

We must, then, consider this argument invalid. Price tries to save it by a final remark on a theological consequence of his opponents' position. If all actions are indifferent, God cannot approve or disapprove of them; his end and ruling of the world must be indifferent, so that no foundation is left for the goodness of God. We have already seen how Hutcheson and Hume in turn regarded this consequence,¹ and we decided

¹ pp. 45-6 and pp. 86-7, above.

that it is a real objection to their theories. But Price was to establish his position from epistemological considerations alone, and we cannot be altogether satisfied, in an epistemological inquiry, with a theological consequence of an epistemological argument. That argument itself, we have seen, is invalid.

In conclusion Price summarizes some of the consequences of the moral sense position.

'That no one being can judge one end to be better than another, or believe a real moral difference between actions; without giving his assent to an impossibility; without mistaking the *affections of his own mind* for *truth*, and *sensation* for *knowledge*.—That there being nothing intrinsically proper or improper, just or unjust; there is nothing *obligatory*; but all beings enjoy, from the reasons of things and the nature of actions, liberty to act as they will.'

Price's opponents would probably assent to all this quite cheerfully, for it would still be true that in practice our moral sense leads us to do certain actions we do not like.

Now what has Price proved in this section? Argument 1 proved that the moral faculty *may* be reason. Argument 2 stated that introspection finds the moral faculty analogous to intuition rather than sense; I think this is true, but the analogy was not elaborated, and opponents of intuitionism can and do deny that introspection provides the evidence which Price finds. Arguments 3, 5 and 6 we found to be invalid. Argument 4, which referred to the corrigibility of moral judgement on particular actions, showed that this judgement can be neither sensing nor knowing, while it had no application to the discernment of moral principles since this is, according to Price, incorrigible.

It is curious that Price does not attempt to use the criterion of necessity and universality, which, we were told in the preceding section, accompany all ideas of the understanding. The reason why he hesitates to use the criterion for moral ideas is not far to seek. There seems to be no universality about any

¹ *Review*, pp. 73-4: Selby-Bigge, vol. ii, p. 129.

ethical principle. It is always possible to conceive of circumstances where an action is an instance of the principle and yet is not the right action for us to do. Price has himself pointed out that moral principles may conflict, and when they do, he says, the obligation of the weaker principle is 'cancelled'.¹ The modern view that such principles are *prima facie* obligations² or responsibilities which are applicable necessarily and universally as *prima facie obligations* or *responsibilities*, not as duty proper, would allow Price to use his criterion and to declare that these general principles are apprehended by the understanding as necessarily true. But he would then have to give a different account of the corrigible moral judgement that decides between conflicting principles in particular situations. And he would also have to give an account of the discernment that a particular action instantiates a moral principle, and to use some other criterion as a reason for saying that this discernment is performed by the understanding.

Price's positive contribution to our problem has been (1) to refute the empiricist dogma which claims to resolve the whole controversy at once, and (2) to give us a criterion for saying that a fact is discerned by knowing. He himself has not used this criterion for the discernment of moral facts, but only because his moral theory, which is quite plainly on the lines of modern intuitionist theory, is insufficiently worked out. In fact we can use this criterion, at any rate for moral principles. On the discernment of particular moral facts Reid will be able to help us more and thus supplement the assistance given to us by Price.

¹ Cf. p. 138, above.

² Cf. particularly Ross, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 19 ff.

CHAPTER V

THOMAS REID¹

IT is a pity that Thomas Reid is rather neglected nowadays. While the empiricists are given a perhaps unduly large share of attention, this hard-headed opponent and fellow-countryman of Hume, his reply delivered with both feet planted firmly on ground familiar to all and his language comprehensible to any intelligent man, tends to be forgotten. Those who wish to oppose Hume turn to Kant. Those who follow Hume disdain the labour of unravelling Kant's meaning, and are content to assert, without examination, that his criticism has failed to dislodge Hume.

I conceive Reid's chief contribution to philosophy to be this, that he protests against applying the conditions governing the behaviour of matter to the workings of the mind. This procedure, he thinks, results from a natural but false analogy, assisted by the materialistic metaphors of the language used of mental processes. From this false analogy, he believes, follow the empiricist dogma, resulting in scepticism, and an incorrect view of causation which gives rise to the non-existent problem of free-will *versus* determinism. Reid insists that mind and matter are wholly different and subject to wholly different processes and conditions. Yet there is no need, he thinks, for the Cartesian perplexity concerning the possibility of contact between these two different forms of being. There clearly is contact between mind and matter, Reid holds, but we must not view the relation between them as we view the relation between two pieces of matter in

¹ All my quotations of Reid's words are taken from the *Essays on the Intellectual and Active Powers of Man* (I have used the edition of 1812 in three volumes), which give Reid's mature thought on the whole of philosophy as he conceived it. His polemic against empiricism is probably better known from his earlier work, the *Inquiry into the Human Mind*. I have confined my references to the *Essays*, because these contain all that he had to say about morals while at the same time they re-state in fuller and more mature form most of the views of the *Inquiry*, omitting only the consideration of certain interesting puzzles about the physiology of perception which are not relevant to my subject.

contact; the word 'contact' is but a metaphor taken by analogy from a relation that is usually required for matter to interact with matter. Of Reid's view of causation and his consequent resolution, or rather dissolution, of the free-will controversy, this is not the place to speak. I shall say only that Reid seems to me in this to have retained the best fruits of Berkeley's subtle and suggestive thought.

Reid's admirers have sometimes placed him on a level with Kant.¹ This doubtless is an extravagant judgement. Yet Reid has this virtue in common with Kant, that he has for Hume both a respect and a reply. If the task of philosophy is to reach true conclusions, Hume was not a good philosopher; but he was a thinker both ingenious and, I believe, ingenuous. His reasoning deserves all respect, and his honesty calls for a re-examination of his premisses. Kant professes to find flaws in Hume's deductions; Reid denies his premisses. Of the two I am not sure that Kant's method of reply is the right one. It would be extravagant to judge Reid's own system of philosophy, taken as a whole, to be on a par with Kant's; but taken simply as an answer to the sceptical conclusions of Hume, it is perhaps more useful than the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

At any rate Reid deserves serious study, if only for his denial of the principle underlying the whole philosophy of ideas or presentations, of which Kant is as much a supporter as Locke, Berkeley and Hume, and for his consequent reversal of the empiricist psychology. The empiricists held that ideas enter the mind simple, and are compounded by reflective synthesis. Reid holds that 'nature presents no object to the senses, or to consciousness, that is not complex',² and that simple notions are reached by reflective analysis. In this respect the Scottish dispute of the eighteenth century is to be found in the Cambridge of the early twentieth century. Reid is to Hume as Professor Moore is to Mr. Russell. Apart from the substitution of analysis for synthesis, there is the

¹ e.g. Campbell Fraser in *Thomas Reid* (Famous Scots series).

² *Intellectual Powers*, Essay iv, chap. 3.

further, and indeed consequent, similarity between Professor Moore and Reid, that both avow themselves adherents of the metaphysics of common sense. The issues between Hume and Reid are fully alive to-day. Most modern students of philosophy pay close attention to Berkeley and Hume. They would be well rewarded by a study of Reid also. He appreciates what is of value in Berkeley and Hume, and yet provides a critique of their principal dogma that may be understood by the veriest tyro to whom Kant's *Critique* is and must remain incomprehensible.

1. THE ATTACK ON EMPIRICISM: SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS

Reid is aware that the critique of empiricism has its relevance not only for epistemology in general but also for the epistemology of ethics. Believing that subjectivist theories of ethics are false, he perceives their origin and rightly commends Price for re-examining the sources of such views.

'That judicious author saw the consequences which these opinions draw after them, and has traced them to their source, to wit, the account given by Mr Locke, and adopted by the generality of modern Philosophers, of the origin of all our ideas, which account he shows to be very defective.'¹

Reid's own method of showing that account to be defective is partially the same as Price's. That is to say, he points to such notions as space, time, power and cause, which cannot be derived from sensation or consciousness, the latter word being used by him for introspection. There are, he says, 'no ideas or notions that have a better claim to be accounted simple and original than those of space and time',² yet Locke's account of simple ideas must deny these to be such. In reply to Hume's denial that we can have any idea of cause proper, he points out that

'the very dispute, whether we have the conception of an efficient cause, shews that we have. For though men may dispute about things which have no existence, they cannot dispute about things of which they have no conception.'³

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, viii. 3.

² *Ibid.*, iii. 5.

³ *Active Powers*, iv. 2.

On the allied notion of power he holds that power is not an object of consciousness (i.e. introspection). This faculty is aware of the mind's operations, but not of the powers behind those operations. We may *infer* the power from the operation.

'Our having any conception or idea of power is repugnant to Mr Locke's theory, that all our simple ideas are got either by the external senses, or by consciousness. Both cannot be true. Mr Hume perceived this repugnancy, and consistently maintained, that we have no idea of power. Mr Locke did not perceive it. If he had, it might have led him to suspect his theory; for when theory is repugnant to fact, it is easy to see which ought to yield.'¹

Quite apart from mentioning these notions, which many have laboured to show can or cannot be fitted into the empiricist scheme, Reid opposes Hume's specific doctrine 'that reason alone can never give rise to any original idea'.

'This appears to me so far from being a very obvious principle, that the contrary is very obvious.

'Is it not our reasoning faculty that gives rise to the idea of reasoning itself?² . . . Do not the ideas of demonstration, of probability, our ideas of a syllogism, of major, minor, and conclusion, of an enthymeme, dilemma, sorites, and all the various modes of reasoning, take their rise from the faculty of reason? . . . This principle, therefore, is so far from being obviously true, that it appears to be obviously false.'³

In all this Reid is simply following the method of attack used by Price and others. But it represents the less important part of Reid's polemic. To point out that *some* notions are not given by sensation or introspection is to accept by implication the view that *most* notions do reach us in the way described by the empiricists. Reid, however, denies the whole empiricist theory of simple ideas as the primary materials of thought. This is the kernel, and the chief merit, of his opposition. We are not presented with simple ideas which thought synthetizes into complex. We are presented with complex objects, which

¹ Ibid., i. 1.

² Cf. the comment which the dogma *Nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerit in sensu* provoked from Leibniz: '*Excipe, nisi ipse intellectus.*' *New Essays*, Book II, Chap. I, Section 2.

³ *Active Powers*, i. 4.

thought may analyse into their simple components. Perception includes intuitive judgement, and it is only by analysis that we distinguish the sensation and the judgement.

'Instead of saying, that the more complex operations of the mind are formed by compounding simple apprehensions, we ought rather to say, that simple apprehensions are got by analysing more complex operations.' Locke's view 'that our simplest ideas or conceptions are got immediately by the senses, or by consciousness, and the complex afterwards formed by compounding them' is false. 'Nature presents no object to the senses, or to consciousness, that is not complex.' By the powers of the understanding 'we can analyse the complex object, abstract every particular attribute from the rest, and form a distinct conception of it.

'So that it is not by the senses immediately, but rather by the powers of analysing and abstraction, that we get the most simple, and the most distinct notions even of the objects of sense.'¹

Locke is led into error by confusing two senses of the word 'reflection', one having a narrow, the other a wide denotation. Locke says reflection is 'the notice which the mind takes of its own operations, and the manner of them'. This, says Reid, is commonly called consciousness, 'from which, indeed, we derive all the notions we have of the operations of our own minds'. If reflection is taken in this narrow sense, it is not true that all our ideas come from sensation or reflection, that is, 'that every thing we can conceive is either some object of sense, or some operation of our own minds'. Both Hutcheson and Price, he continues, have pointed to notions that cannot come from either of these sources.

But reflection is also used in a wider sense, to cover 'recollection, attention, distinguishing, comparing, judging'. In this wider sense reflection

'may be justly said to be the only source of all our distinct and accurate notions of things. For, although our first notions of material things are got by the external senses, and our first notions of the operations of our own minds by consciousness, these first notions are neither simple nor clear.' By reflection in the wide sense 'our minds are furnished not only with many simple and original notions, but with all our notions, which

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, iv. 3.

are accurate and well-defined, and which alone are the proper materials of reasoning'.¹

Locke has used the word in both senses without distinguishing them. Succession, for example, cannot be the object of sense or of consciousness (i.e. reflection in the narrow sense), since these two faculties are confined to the present; in the observation of succession memory of the past is included.

'Mr Locke very properly calls consciousness an internal sense. It gives the like immediate knowledge of things in the mind, that is, of our own thoughts and feelings, as the senses give us of things external.' But 'consciousness, being a kind of internal sense, can no more give us distinct and accurate notions of the operations of our minds, than the external senses can give of external objects'.²

For such distinct notions, reflection, in the wider sense of remembering and distinguishing, is needed.

Reid thus reverses the whole epistemological procedure of empiricism, and thereby undermines the foundation of many of the most characteristic doctrines of Hume, which, in Reid's view, represent the logical conclusion of the philosophy of ideas. I make no criticism of Reid's attack on the empiricist theory of knowledge. He seems to me wholly right.

2. REFUTATION OF FEELING THEORIES OF ETHICS

The naturalistic theories of Hutcheson and Hume that moral ideas come from sense or feeling arose from the empiricist psychology and theory of knowledge, from the view that ideas must, if complex, have been put together by the mind from previously received simple ideas, and that such simple ideas could only come from the senses or feeling. Reid on the contrary holds, as we have seen, that simple ideas are obtained only by a process of abstraction and analysis of what is originally found. His method of attacking feeling theories of ethics is to show that correct analysis does not produce the result with which his opponents begin. At the same time he points out that their paradoxical views depend to a large extent on

¹ Ibid., iii. 5.

² Ibid., vi. 1.

misuse of language, on restricting or stretching the meaning of words of common usage without making it clear, and perhaps without always realizing, that the words are being used in an abnormal sense as technical terms.

'The meaning of a common word is not to be ascertained by philosophical theory, but by common usage; and if a man will take the liberty of limiting or extending the meaning of common words at his pleasure, he may, like Mandeville, insinuate the most licentious paradoxes with the appearance of plausibility.'¹

1. *Analysis of the moral faculty reveals judgement as well as feeling*

Reid is content to use indifferently the phrases 'moral faculty', 'conscience', 'reason' and 'moral sense'. Each of these expressions, he thinks, is sanctioned by common usage and is appropriate in different contexts. To call the moral faculty 'feeling', however, is, he holds, to ignore its complex character.

'The modern philosophy has led men to attend chiefly to their sensations and feelings, and thereby to resolve into mere feeling, complex acts of the mind, of which feeling is only one ingredient.'²

Analysis of the moral faculty reveals both judgement and feeling—feeling, moreover, which is itself more complex than Hutcheson and Hume recognize.

'Of this faculty the operations appear to be, the judging ultimately of what is right, what is wrong, and what is indifferent, in the conduct of moral agents; the approbation of good conduct and disapprobation of bad in consequence of that judgment, and the agreeable emotions which attend obedience, and disagreeable which attend disobedience to its dictates.'³

'When I exercise my moral faculty about my own actions or those of other men, I am conscious that I judge as well as feel. I accuse and excuse, I acquit and condemn, I assent and dissent, I believe and disbelieve, and doubt. These are acts of judgment, and not feelings.'⁴

Reid has no quarrel with the use of the phrases 'moral sense' and 'sentiment' to describe the moral faculty; for, he says,

¹ *Active Powers*, v. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, iii, part iii, 7.

² *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 7.

these phrases, as used in common speech, acknowledge the existence of judgement in the faculty so described. His objection is to the restricted use of the phrases so as to exclude judgement from their meaning.

'When Mr Hume derives moral distinctions from a moral sense, I agree with him in words, but we differ about the meaning of the word *sense*. Every power to which the name of a sense has been given, is a power of judging of the objects of that sense, and has been accounted such in all ages; the moral sense therefore is the power of judging in morals. But Mr Hume will have the moral sense to be only a power of feeling, without judging: This I take to be an abuse of a word.

'Authors who place moral approbation in feeling only, very often use the word *sentiment*, to express feeling without judgment. This I take likewise to be an abuse of a word. Our moral determinations may, with propriety, be called *moral sentiments*. For the word *sentiment*, in the English language, never,¹ as I conceive, signifies mere feeling, but judgment accompanied with feeling. It was wont to signify opinion or judgment of any kind, but, of late, is appropriated to signify an opinion or judgment, that strikes and produces some agreeable or uneasy emotion.'²

The holders of feeling theories could of course say that Reid's analysis does not really show that the operation of the moral faculty is complex, but merely that we use more than one mode of expressing the operation in words; that 'the judging of what is right in the conduct of moral agents' is merely another way of referring to the feeling of approval which we have when faced with the conduct in question. Reid meets this objection with the logical arguments that are by now familiar to us. The two statements 'Such a man did well and worthily; his conduct is highly approvable' and 'The man's conduct gave me a very agreeable feeling' cannot have the same meaning for two reasons. First, linguistic usage compels us to understand them as meaning different things.

¹ Reid is of course speaking of the usage of his own time. The *Oxford English Dictionary* shows, however, that he puts his case too strongly. In Chaucer's day, as in ours, the word means a feeling, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it is not seldom used in the same way; but more often at that time, particularly with reference to morals, the word is used, as Reid says, to signify a judgement that is accompanied by emotion.

² *Active Powers*, v. 7.

Secondly, the first statement may be contradicted without offence to the speaker; he simply expresses an opinion and is not offended if another's opinion on the question differs from his: contradiction of the second statement, however, would be an affront; for since everyone *knows* his own feelings, to deny that a man has a feeling which he says he has is to charge him with deceit. If the feeling theory is true, it follows either (1) that the first statement is identical in meaning with the second although the rules of all languages distinguish the two and although everyone thinks their meanings different, or (2) that the first statement is meaningless although every language contains expressions of this kind and although everyone attaches a meaning to such expressions; in either event the theory implies that the thought and language of all plain men (and of all philosophers when they leave the study) suffer from a universal delusion.

'This doctrine, therefore, That moral approbation is merely a feeling without judgment, necessarily carries along with it this consequence, that a form of speech, upon one of the most common topics of discourse, which either has no meaning, or a meaning irreconcilable to all rules of grammar or rhetoric, is found to be common and familiar in all languages, and in all ages of the world, while every man knows how to express the meaning, if it have any, in plain and proper language.

'Such a consequence I think sufficient to sink any philosophical opinion on which it hangs.'¹

2. *Moral feeling depends on moral judgement*

Reid's analysis of the moral faculty is not confined to distinguishing the operations of judgement and feeling and to pointing out the complex nature of the feeling. He also shows the relation between them. The feeling, he says, depends on the judgement, and consequently it is the judgement which is the basic element. In some instances of a combination of judgement and sensation, in perception for example,

'the belief or judgment is the consequence of the sensation. . . .

'But in most of the operations of mind in which judgment or belief

¹ *Active Powers*, v. 7.

is combined with feeling, the feeling is the consequence of the judgment, and is regulated by it.

'Thus, an account of the good conduct of a friend at a distance gives me a very agreeable feeling, and a contrary account would give me a very uneasy feeling; but these feelings depend entirely upon my belief of the report.

'In hope, there is an agreeable feeling, depending upon the belief or expectation of good to come: Fear is made up of contrary ingredients; in both, the feeling is regulated by the degree of belief.

'In the respect we bear to the worthy, and in our contempt of the worthless, there is both judgment and feeling, and the last depends entirely upon the first. . . .

'Let me now consider how I am affected when I see a man exerting himself nobly in a good cause. I am conscious that the effect of his conduct on my mind is complex, though it may be called by one name. I look up to his virtue, I approve, I admire it. In doing so, I have pleasure indeed, or an agreeable feeling; this is granted. But I find myself interested in his success and in his fame. This is affection; it is love and esteem, which is more than mere feeling.¹ . . .

'I am likewise conscious, that this agreeable feeling in me, and this esteem of him, depend entirely upon the judgment I form of his conduct. I judge that this conduct merits esteem; and, while I thus judge, I cannot but esteem him, and contemplate his conduct with pleasure. Persuade me that he was bribed, or that he acted from some mercenary or bad motive, immediately my esteem and my agreeable feeling vanish.

'In the approbation of a good action, therefore, there is feeling indeed, but there is also esteem of the agent; and both the feeling and the esteem depend upon the judgment we form of his conduct.'²

Clearly Reid is right in saying that moral feelings depend on a prior judgement, but this fact is a valid argument against naturalistic theories of the moral faculty only if it can be shown

¹ Reid here confines the word 'feeling' to the pleasure or hedonic tone that accompanies the approval. He is doubtless thinking of Hume's view (quoted on p. 91, above) that the virtue of an action consists in its *pleasing* us 'after a certain manner'. But of course naturalistic theories need not be so narrowly confined, and Hume himself does not normally so confine his view. In Reid's analysis the approval, the pleasure and the affection are all emotional elements as contrasted with the rational element on which they are said to depend. Reid's full account here of the complex nature of the emotional elements present in the mind in such a situation is a welcome qualification of the over-simplified accounts of feeling theories, but it does not affect the kernel of the present argument.

² *Active Powers*, v. 7.

that the prior judgement is a *moral* judgement.¹ Hume would say that the prior judgement is one of 'fact' and not of 'right'. He would say that when we reach a judgement of the facts of a moral situation, e.g. that someone has acted from a motive of benevolence, we immediately experience a moral feeling, in this case a feeling of approval and esteem. Hume would of course agree that if we later have reason to change our judgement to one that the man was moved to do his act by bribery, 'immediately our esteem and our agreeable feeling vanish'. But, he would say, the judgement is in each case one of fact and contains no ethical terms; the ethical term only arises when the moral feeling occurs, and really refers to that feeling. Hume would deny Reid's statement that there is an intermediate judgement that conduct of the kind judged to exist *merits* esteem. I think that such an intermediate judgement of meriting a particular kind of moral feeling does not often occur in situations where we experience moral feelings, and moral feelings do not depend upon such a judgement, though they do of course depend upon a judgement about the facts of the situation. In any event this judgement of meriting a particular kind of moral feeling is not the moral judgement we want in order to refute naturalistic theories. The moral judgement we want is a judgement that the action which we approve is right. If Reid had shown that approval always depends upon a moral judgement of *this* kind, his argument would have been sound. As it is, he has merely shown that approval depends on non-moral judgement, which no empiricist would deny, and has incorrectly suggested that it also depends on an irrelevant kind of moral judgement.

Later, however, Reid does meet Hume's objection with an agreeable combination of pleasantry and sound argument. He refers to Hume's view

"That in moral deliberation, we must be acquainted beforehand with all the objects and all their relations. After these things are known, the understanding has no farther room to operate. Nothing remains but to feel, on our part, some sentiment of blame or approbation.

¹ Cf. pp. 50-1 and 81 ff., above.

'Let us apply this reasoning to the office of a judge. In a cause that comes before him, he must be made acquainted with all the objects, and all their relations. After this, his understanding has no farther room to operate. Nothing remains, on his part, but to feel the right or the wrong; and mankind have, very absurdly, called him a *judge*; he ought to be called a *feeler*.

'To answer this argument more directly: The man who deliberates, after all the objects and relations mentioned by Mr Hume are known to him, has a point to determine; and that is, whether the action under his deliberation ought to be done or ought not. In most cases, this point will appear self-evident to a man who has been accustomed to exercise his moral judgment; in some cases it may require reasoning.

'In like manner, the judge, after all the circumstances of the cause are known, has to judge, whether the plaintiff has a just plea or not.'¹

This reply shows clearly that a particular moral judgement does not simply express an emotional reaction but states a genuine proposition since it gives an answer to a debatable question. Empiricists would have to argue that what is debated is not an ethical question but a question of fact. They would have to say that the deliberation whether the action ought or ought not to be done is a deliberation whether, for example, the action will or will not lead to a desirable result, whether it is the most suitable means to an end, and they would hold that the end itself is not a subject of debate but is approved without deliberation. Similarly they would say that the judge, in deliberating whether the plaintiff has a just plea or not, is considering whether the situation is one that comes within the scope of a particular law or legal judgement, and that the law or legal judgement has been laid down because it sets out a suitable means to a desirable end or because it expresses a general principle which has the unreasoned approval of most people.

The view that moral judgements proper express feelings alone, therefore, must refer to judgements of ends or principles and not to judgements of particular actions. We can now turn to Reid's elaborate attack on this form of the feeling theory.

¹ *Active Powers*, v. 7.

3. *Ends and principles cannot be supplied by feeling*

Reid's argument against Hume on this point provides one of the most valuable parts of his ethical theory. It is lengthy and scattered over many places; my statement of it must include a reference to Reid's excellent chapters on duty and interest. First, however, I must mention his brief argument against Hutcheson, who of course had not followed Hume's circuitous path to reach the view that ends and principles are supplied by feeling or sense.

3.1. *Argument against Hutcheson*

The brief attack on Hutcheson seems to me singularly unconvincing. It is not an attack on the expression 'moral sense', which is dealt with separately; I propose to examine in a later section¹ Reid's remarks on that. The discussion to which I refer here concerns Hutcheson's view of the actual nature of the moral faculty, and not the name which he gives it. The poor quality and the brevity of Reid's argument may be due to respect for a predecessor in his own chair at Glasgow, one moreover who was known as the father of Scottish philosophy. It is, however, more likely that Hutcheson is lightly treated because Reid is not convinced that Hutcheson is wrong. As we shall see later, Reid sympathizes with the moral sense theory proper; and he himself so often speaks of our common-sense judgements and of first principles being due to our constitution, that he must have realized the half-heartedness of his reply to Hutcheson's view that the truth of moral axioms depends on the human constitution.

He takes the usual² view of his age that morals and aesthetics must stand or fall together. Reid holds that there are self-evident axioms both of taste and of morality. His reply to Hutcheson, who holds that the judgements both of taste and of morality depend on our arbitrary constitution, is as follows.

¹ Section 4, below.

² Price is the only real exception. Even Balguy who at first accepted the feeling view of aesthetics, finally turned to the rationalist view, thus placing his aesthetic on a par with his moral theory.

'Some perhaps may think, that our determinations, either in matters of taste or in morals, ought not to be accounted necessary truths: That they are grounded upon the constitution of that faculty which we call taste, and of that which we call the moral sense or conscience; which faculties might have been so constituted as to have given determinations different, or even contrary to those they now give: That as there is nothing sweet or bitter in itself, but according as it agrees or disagrees with the external sense called taste; so there is nothing beautiful or ugly in itself, but according as it agrees or disagrees with the internal sense, which we also call taste; and nothing morally good or ill in itself, but according as it agrees or disagrees with our moral sense.

'This indeed is a system, with regard to morals and taste, which has been supported in modern times by great authorities. And if this system be true, the consequence must be, that there can be no principles, either of taste or of morals, that are necessary truths. For, according to this system, all our determinations, both with regard to matters of taste, and with regard to morals, are reduced to matters of fact. I mean to such as these, that by our constitution we have on such occasions certain agreeable feelings, and on other occasions certain disagreeable feelings.

'But I cannot help being of a contrary opinion, being persuaded, that a man who determined that polite behaviour has great deformity, and that there is a great beauty in rudeness and ill breeding, would judge wrong whatever his feelings were.

'In like manner, I cannot help thinking, that a man who determined that there is more moral worth in cruelty, perfidy, and injustice, than in generosity, justice, prudence, and temperance, would judge wrong whatever his constitution was.'¹

I take it that Reid is not thinking of a man who would say: 'Polite behaviour has great deformity; rudeness and ill breeding are beautiful: cruelty, perfidy and injustice have moral worth; generosity, justice, prudence and temperance have not.' To such a man we need not reply that 'we cannot help being persuaded he judges wrong'; we should *know* he was wrong, because he would be continually contradicting himself: the words 'polite', 'rude', 'ill bred', 'cruel', 'perfidious', 'unjust', 'generous', 'just', 'prudent', 'temperate'—all these words have an aesthetic or moral connotation. To say that injustice is morally better than justice is to misuse words.

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, vi. 6.

Reid must, therefore, be thinking of a man who would say such things as: 'Not paying back what you have borrowed is morally better than paying back what you have borrowed; striking someone for the sheer love of it is morally better than giving help to a poor man.' These, I take it, would be instances of what is meant by the verbally self-contradictory sentences 'Injustice is morally better than justice; cruelty than generosity'. Now if someone were to make judgements of the kind of which I have given two instances, Reid 'cannot help being persuaded' the man would judge wrongly.

Clearly this is no argument against Hutcheson. For, if Hutcheson's theory were true, the result would be that we should all be in Reid's condition; we 'could not help' thinking as we do on questions of taste and morality; we should be determined so to think. The proper way to meet Hutcheson's view is to show that there are *a priori* moral axioms, i.e. axioms which are known to be necessarily and universally true. It is the axiom itself, not my believing it, which must be necessary. From this it will follow that the axiom is objectively true, i.e. that its truth does not depend on my mental attitude to it.

3.2. *Arguments against Hume*

The attack on Hume is far more satisfactory and thorough. It shows that Hume produces apparently shocking paradoxes by the misuse of words, and is to be refuted by a re-statement of ordinary linguistic usage; this of course involves also a consideration of the facts denoted by such linguistic usage, in order to vindicate the distinctions which ordinary language assumes.

In speaking of reason in morals Reid always has in mind Hume's statement that reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions. His reply therefore is concerned with the distinction between reason and passion and with the normal and proper use of those two words.

'Mr Hume gives the name of *passion* to every principle of action in the human mind; and, in consequence of this, maintains, that every man

is, and ought to be led by his passions, and that the use of reason is to be subservient to the passions.¹

Hume's conclusion, Reid points out, is nothing but a tautology arising from the arbitrary definitions of 'passion' and 'reason'.

'When he says, that men ought to be governed by their passions only, and that the use of reason is to be subservient to the passions, this, at first hearing, appears a shocking paradox, repugnant to good morals and common sense; but, like most other paradoxes, when explained according to his meaning, it is nothing but an abuse of words.

'For if we give the name of *passion* to every principle of action, in every degree, and give the name of *reason* solely to the power of discerning the fitness of means to ends, it will be true, that the use of reason is to be subservient to the passions.'²

Reid's preliminary answer, drawn from the language of common sense and every-day life, is as follows.

'It is evident, that mankind, in all ages, have conceived two parts in the human constitution that may have influence upon our voluntary actions. These we call by the general names of *passion* and *reason*; and we shall find, in all languages, names that are equivalent.' The part called reason 'operates in a calm and dispassionate manner; a manner so like to judgment or reason, that even those who do not allow it to be called by that name, endeavour to account for its having always had the name; because, in the manner of its operation, it has a similitude to reason'. Passions, on the other hand, 'draw a man . . . by a kind of violence'.³

So much for the preliminary answer. We now come to a fuller reply, in which the facts themselves, as opposed to ordinary language about them, are subjected to an independent examination, and in which it is shown not merely that there are rational active principles but that the very *conception* of ends, as opposed to what a man may happen to desire here and now, involves the use of rational judgement.

Every deliberate human action, Reid holds, must be done either as the means to an end, or as an end itself.

'That it is a part of the office of reason to determine what are the proper means to any end which we desire, no man ever denied. But some Philosophers, particularly Mr Hume, think that it is no part of

¹ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 6.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, ii. 2.

the office of reason to determine the ends we ought to pursue, or the preference due to one end above another. This, he thinks, is not the office of reason, but of taste or feeling.

'If this be so, reason cannot, with any propriety, be called a principle of action. Its office can only be to minister to the principles of action, by discovering the means of their gratification. Accordingly Mr Hume maintains, that reason is no principle of action; but that it is, and ought to be, the servant of the passions.

'I shall endeavour to shew, that, among the various ends of human actions, there are some of which, without reason, we could not even form a conception; and that, as soon as they are conceived, a regard to them is, by our constitution, not only a principle of action, but a leading and governing principle, to which all our animal principles are subordinate, and to which they ought to be subject.

'These I shall call *rational* principles; because they can exist only in beings endowed with reason, and because, to act from these principles, is what has always been meant by acting according to reason.'¹

There are two such principles or ends of human action, 'what is good for us upon the whole, and what appears² to be our duty'.

Prudence is dealt with first. Reid believes that we come to a conception of this by reason. Animals cannot have it. It involves not merely desire but a consideration of past experience and, on the basis of past experience, of probable future consequences. From this complex process, involving reason as well as desire, we form the conception of our good on the whole. To think of something as good is necessarily connected with desiring it, so that

'it is a contradiction to suppose such a being [i.e. an intelligent being] to have the notion of good without the desire of it, or the notion of ill without aversion to it'.³

(This statement seems odd. But we must remember that Reid uses 'good' only in the sense in which a good is always somebody's good or the sense in which, if I think something to be good, I must think of it as my good. In this sense 'good'

¹ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 1.

² It should be observed that Reid, following Price, takes the so-called subjective view of duty; the principle of moral action is to do what I *think* right.

³ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 2.

means what is desired by someone or other. Even so Reid's statement is not true without qualification. If I think of a thing as *my* good, I cannot think of it without desiring it, and to say I could would be self-contradictory. But I can think of a good as the good of someone other than myself without necessarily desiring its existence; what I cannot be said to do without self-contradiction is to think of a good as someone's good without thinking of it as desired by that someone.)¹

Reid goes on to elaborate the point of calling the desire of one's good on the whole a rational or reasonable principle. A present desire (what Bishop Butler would call a particular propensity) often draws one away from one's good on the whole. A man who yields to such a desire is said to act foolishly or unreasonably. Therefore the contrary principle is justly called reason or a reasonable principle, and common language thus distinguishes between reason and the passions.

'The first not only operates in a calm and cool manner, like reason, but implies real judgment in all its operations. The second, to wit, the passions, are blind desires, of some particular object, without any judgment or consideration, whether it be good for us upon the whole, or ill.'²

Common usage reflects these facts. Hume misuses words of ordinary language. He includes 'under the *passions*, that very principle which has always, in all languages, been called *reason*, and never was, in any language, called a *passion*', and he takes away from the meaning of the word 'reason' the sense of prudence.

'To judge of what is true or false in speculative points, is the office

¹ Reid never uses the word 'good' in the sense of intrinsic or absolute good, of which it cannot be said that it is someone's good. Would it be true to say of good in this sense that I cannot think of something as good without desiring its existence? One is inclined to say that this is true, but to deny it would not be self-contradictory. The connexion is not logically necessary, but it does almost always occur. I doubt if I can, as a matter of fact, think a thing good without desiring it to exist, but it is logically possible that the laws of the human constitution might have been different so that I could think a thing good without desiring its existence. And it is possible to think of actual human constitutions where this may be so: a jealous painter might know his rival to be executing a good work but might not desire its execution (this example was suggested to me by Sir David Ross).

² *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 2.

of speculative reason; and to judge of what is good or ill for us upon the whole, is the office of practical reason.¹

Here already is the Kantian distinction between speculative reason and practical reason. Reid was led to distinguish the two by his consideration of the extreme rationalist view that moral judgements are reached by deduction.² Yet 'practical reason' is not Kant's 'pure practical reason'. Reid recognizes that the principle of practical reason is akin to and simulates morality but is not the principle of morality proper. This recognition is an important advance. 'Practical reason', or 'the regard to our good on the whole', is of course the same as Butler's 'cool self-love'. The importance of Reid's account lies, first, in his pointing out that the *end* is discovered by practical reason, not by desire alone, and, second, in his observing that prudence, though it gains commendation of a sort akin to moral approval, is not strictly a moral virtue.

'This rational principle of a regard to our good upon the whole, gives us the conception of a *right* and a *wrong* in human conduct, at least of a *wise* and a *foolish*. It produces a kind of self-approbation, when the passions and appetites are kept in their due subjection to it; and a kind of remorse and compunction, when it yields to them.

'In these respects, this principle is so similar to the moral principle, or conscience, and so interwoven with it, that both are commonly comprehended under the name of *reason*.' The similarity has led many philosophers, both ancient and modern, 'to resolve conscience, or a sense of duty, entirely into a regard to what is good for us upon the whole'.³

But Reid believes they are distinct. He rightly points out that the virtue which comes from prudence, though it may issue in the same acts as that which comes from the sense of duty, is an inferior kind of virtue. We do not esteem and love the prudent man, but only the man who acts disinterestedly.

Reid's argument here is similar to that used by Professor Prichard in his Inaugural Lecture on *Duty and Interest*. Reid too has observed that many philosophers, ancient and modern, have wrongly tried to 'resolve conscience, or a sense of duty, entirely into a regard to what is good for us upon the whole',

¹ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 2. ² Cf. Section 3, below. ³ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 2.

while in fact the man who disregards his interest is thought to be not a knave but a fool.

'The notion of duty cannot be resolved into that of interest, or what is most for our happiness.' We may see this by attending to our conceptions or to the language of all mankind. 'When I say this is my interest, I mean one thing; when I say it is my duty, I mean another thing. . . . It is folly in a man to disregard his interest, but to do what is dishonourable is baseness. The first may move our pity, or, in some cases, our contempt, but the last provokes our indignation.'¹

It must, I think, be agreed that Reid's refutation of the naturalistic conception of ends is sound and marks an important advance in moral theory. Hutcheson had opposed egoistic hedonism by showing that some actions are done from motives other than self-love, but he retained the crude conception of motives as being simple impulses of feeling. Butler drew attention to the distinction between particular propensities and the principles of cool self-love, benevolence and conscience; he called the last of these, but not the other two, 'a principle of reflection'. Hume also distinguished, though less thoroughly, between 'calm passions' and 'violent passions'. Reid has now carried further the psychological analysis of Butler, and has shown the ground of the distinction between 'particular propensities' and 'principles'. The principle of 'cool self-love' or 'the regard to our good as a whole' is, like conscience, a reflective principle. The same could be said of the general principle of benevolence or regard for the good of others as a whole. These ends are not, as a crude naturalism would have us suppose, supplied by feeling alone; they involve the use of reason reflecting on feelings and providing us with the conception of an end proper to be used, not merely in a single situation where a self-regarding or other-regarding impulse happens to occur, but as a general rule of conduct.

3. CRITICISM OF EXTREME RATIONALIST THEORIES

We have seen that, in criticizing feeling theories of ethics, Reid constantly spoke of the moral faculty as 'reason'. He was careful to point out that this is the language of ordinary usage,

¹ Ibid., iii, part iii, 5.

which opposes 'reason' to 'passion'. Such language, Reid held, is legitimate, since the moral faculty operates in a calm and cool manner very like to reason. But he did not say it was the *same* as reason in the most common sense of that word, namely demonstration. In considering more carefully the nature of the moral faculty in its judging function, he shows that it cannot be equated with demonstration, i.e. deductive reasoning, as had been maintained by some of the more extreme rationalists.

Before coming to Reid's account of the differences between conscience and demonstration, we should note that he in any case denies that the moral faculty can be *defined* as 'reason' even in the loose and popular sense of the word. In this loose and popular sense the word 'reason' may be used to *describe* conscience, but not to define it, since the proposed definition would lack a differentia of conscience from 'practical reason', the judgement of prudence. The fact is that in describing both conscience and prudence by the word 'reason', Reid is referring only to one characteristic, which is common to both these faculties, the characteristic of setting up a general rule. The word can therefore be no more than a loose description whereby these faculties are distinguished from those faculties of the mind which influence us not by rule but by the mere strength of their present existence.

'As mankind have, in all ages, understood *reason* to mean the power by which not only our speculative opinions, but our actions ought to be regulated, we may say, with perfect propriety, that all vice is contrary to reason; that, by reason, we are to judge of what we ought to do, as well as of what we ought to believe.

'But though all vice be contrary to reason, I conceive that it would not be a proper definition of vice to say, that it is a conduct contrary to reason, because this definition would apply equally to folly, which all men distinguish from vice.'¹

It follows, Reid holds, that when Samuel Clarke and other rationalists define virtue and vice in terms of reason or some equivalent phrase, their definitions are faulty.

'There are other phrases which have been used on the same side of the question, which I see no reason for adopting, such as, *acting contrary*

¹ *Active Powers*, v. 7.

to the relations of things, contrary to the reason of things, to the fitness of things, to the truth of things, to absolute fitness. These phrases have not the authority of common use, which, in matters of language, is great. They seem to have been invented by some authors, with a view to explain the nature of vice; but I do not think they answer that end. If intended as definitions of vice, they are improper; because, in the most favourable sense they can bear, they extend to every kind of foolish and absurd conduct, as well as to that which is vicious.¹

I think Reid has misunderstood the purpose of Clarke and his followers in using these phrases. Their chief reason for adopting (or, as Reid puts it, 'inventing') these expressions was to emphasize the objectivity of moral facts; the truth of moral propositions, they held, depends on the nature of objective facts, not on the human constitution. The expressions are faulty, but not primarily for the reason which Reid gives. Not all the authors in question hoped to *define* 'right' and 'wrong', 'virtuous' and 'vicious', by these phrases. Price at least recognized that 'right' and 'wrong' are indefinable. The phrases are usually intended either to be *synonyms* for 'right' and 'wrong', or else to state the *grounds* of the rightness and wrongness of right and wrong actions. Neither of these functions is the function of a definition. The real fault of such phrases lies in this, that, with one exception, they signify non-ethical concepts; and an ethical concept can neither be equivalent to, nor be derived from, non-ethical concepts.² The one exception is the word 'fitness', a word sometimes used in an ethical sense;³ but the word has other senses in which it stands for non-ethical relations, and one or other of these senses is liable to be confused with the moral relation or to be thought to give rise to the moral relation.

But in so far as such phrases can be used to signify moral

¹ Ibid.

² Cf. Hume, p. 65, above, and the quotation from Professor Prichard in footnote 3 on that page.

Reid notes Hume's passage (*Active Powers*, v. 7), but fails to appreciate sufficiently its importance.

³ Cf. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp. 164-5, and Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*, p. 51. Professor Broad notes that 'fitting' is not . . . an analytical definition of "right". Sir David Ross notes in his discussion that both 'right' and 'fitting' have non-moral senses as well as this moral one.

concepts, they are subject to Reid's charge that they can be used of prudential actions as well as of moral actions. As Reid says, most of the phrases are in any case odd, but 'fitness' at least does not sound too strange to the ear of common usage; yet this word can certainly be used of prudential as well as of moral actions. The difficulty which we seem to have in agreeing that prudence is not a virtue, i.e. is not obligatory, arises from this fact; to seek one's own good on the whole is fitting in a sort of quasi-moral sense but not in the strictly moral sense of the word. Reid's awareness of the apparent similarity and real difference between morality and prudence enables him to see the consequent inadequacy of the word 'fitness' and all similar phrases to differentiate the moral relation from the quasi-moral fittingness of prudence. In this respect he may justly claim to be superior to his rationalist predecessors, for none of them perceived as clearly as he the falsity of the mask of morality worn by prudence.

In its loose and popular sense, then, 'reason' is an appropriate description, but not a definition, of the moral faculty. We must now turn to Reid's more critical examination of the use of the word. He follows the precedent of Price in ascribing to reason, properly so called, two functions, deduction and the perception of self-evident truths; but whereas Price had called the second 'intuition' or 'understanding', Reid prefers to call it 'common sense'.

'We ascribe to reason two offices, or two degrees. The first is to judge of things self-evident; the second to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are. The first of these is the province, and the sole province of common sense; and therefore it . . . is only another name for one branch or one degree of reason.'¹

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, vi. 2. It is perhaps needless to point out that Reid's account of deduction is sadly at fault; the premises of an inference need not be true, let alone self-evident, for the inference to be valid. In fact, the function of reason in both these 'offices' or 'degrees' is the same, the intuiting of self-evident necessities; the perceiving of implications is the essence of deductive inference, and to perceive the necessitation of one proposition by another is the same mental operation as to perceive the necessitation of a predicate by its subject. Intuition or understanding covers the whole province of reason in this strict sense of the word, and Reid's 'common sense', in its strict usage (see p. 174, below), is simply another name for intuition or understanding, i.e. reason.

Reid does use the word 'intuition' quite often, but usually in the looser and more popular sense in which it stands for immediate perception generally. Thus it is often used (as also is the phrase 'common sense') to cover what we should now call taking for granted, that is, an immediate but unreflective acceptance of a proposition which, were it subjected to reflection, could only be justified as probable on the basis of past experience; such acceptance in fact results from habit formed by past experience. By using the word in this loose sense Reid often slurs over the vital distinction between the clear and reflective understanding of self-evident truths, and the unreflective taking for granted of probable propositions. The confusion has, I believe, its relevance for our problem, as I hope to show in Section 4. However, in denying that moral judgement (which he takes to be the proper name only of the judgements that particular actions in particular situations are obligatory) is deductive reasoning, Reid is eminently sound.

He begins with Locke's view that morality is as capable of demonstration as is mathematics. He agrees

'that the names of the virtues and vices, of right and obligation, of liberty and property, stand for things abstract, which may be accurately defined, or, at least, conceived as distinctly and adequately as mathematical quantities. And thence indeed it follows, that their mutual relations may be perceived as clearly and certainly as mathematical truths.'¹

Locke gives two examples: (1) 'Where there is no property, there is no injustice.' This is, he says, 'a proposition as certain as any demonstration in Euclid'. (2) 'That no government allows absolute liberty.' On the first example Reid comments:

'When injustice is defined to be a violation of property, it is as necessary a truth, that there can be no injustice where there is no property, as that you cannot take from a man that which he has not.'²

Similarly, if part of the definition of government is the taking away of some degree of individual liberty in order to permit or promote something else, it will follow that the existence

¹ Ibid., vii. 2.

² Ibid.

of government of any kind is incompatible with the existence of absolute or total liberty.

'Such abstract truths I would call metaphysical rather than moral. We give the name of mathematical, to truths that express the relations of quantities considered abstractly; all other abstract truths may be called metaphysical. . . .

'It ought however to be remembered, that . . . the relations of things abstract, perceivable by us, excepting those of mathematical quantities, are few, and for the most part immediately discerned, so as not to require that train of reasoning which we call demonstration. Their evidence resembles more that of mathematical axioms than mathematical propositions.

'This appears in the two propositions given as examples by Mr Locke. The first follows immediately from the definition of injustice; the second from the definition of government. Their evidence may more properly be called intuitive than demonstrative: And this I apprehend to be the case, or nearly the case, of all abstract truths that are not mathematical, because the extraordinary distinctness of abstract conceptions of quantity allows us to see, in their case, long chains of implications.'¹

What Reid has apparently failed to observe is that if Locke's propositions 'follow from', i.e. are entailed by, the definitions of their subjects, the connexion is the same as the connexions that may be perceived in a long chain of reasoning. He is, however, right in saying that the mental process is immediate, not discursive; and he is also right in (a more important point) his suggested reason why no other abstract conceptions than those of quantity allow us to perceive long chains of implications. He points out elsewhere that metaphysical inferences, in sharp contrast with those of mathematics, are usually able to reach no further than two or three steps. This is of course a matter that metaphysicians have bewailed from ancient times onward, and for which they have sought a remedy. Reid does not utter a 'pointless lament' of this kind but instead searches for, and discovers, the reason for the difference, namely that the concepts of quantity have an unusual clearness that is difficult, if not impossible, to attain with most metaphysical and other concepts.

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, vii. 2.

He goes on to tell us how the concept of morals proper, obligation, stands in this connexion.

'The propositions which I think are properly called moral, are those that affirm some moral obligation to be, or not to be incumbent on one or more individual persons. To such propositions Mr Locke's reasoning does not apply, because the subjects of the proposition are not things whose real essence may be perfectly known. They are the creatures of God; their obligation results from the constitution which God hath given them, and the circumstances in which he hath placed them. That an individual hath such a constitution, and is placed in such circumstances, is not an abstract and necessary, but a contingent truth. It is a matter of fact, and therefore not capable of demonstrative evidence, which belongs only to necessary truths.'¹

I take this important passage to mean that we can never know for certain of a particular man in a particular situation that his duty is to do a particular action X, for two reasons: (1) The claims upon him are partially fixed by the nature of the situation, which we can never know in its entirety with certainty, but of which we may have a probable opinion. (2) What is his duty is also partially fixed by the nature of his constitution, which again we cannot know with certainty; it may be that he is not able to do action X but is able to do action Y, each of which will fulfil claims or responsibilities, and in view of these two facts action Y, and not X, is his duty. We may have a reasonably probable belief that John Smith could, if he chose, stop a runaway horse to save a child, but it is possible that he is just incapable of doing so though most men are not.

I think it likely that Reid (and also Price) would have accepted gladly the modern notion of *prima facie* rules of obligation, formal rules, responsibilities that are necessarily and universally incumbent on any and every man (though incumbent only as responsibilities, not as duties) simply in virtue of his being a man, a moral agent, a member of the moral world (Kant's realm of ends). These rules are necessary and perceived by intuition, or perhaps some of them can be intuitively discerned to be implied by others. But duties proper, involving as they do a reference to the particular

¹ Ibid.

aspects of the situations in which they arise, and also a reference to the thoughts and capacity of the agent, are not, as Reid rightly points out, matters of demonstration or knowledge. We may have concerning them highly probable belief, but not knowledge.

'I apprehend . . . that the obligation of the most general rules of duty is self-evident; that the application of those rules to particular actions is often no less evident; and that, when it is not evident, but requires reasoning, that reasoning can very rarely be of the demonstrative, but must be of the probable kind. Sometimes it depends upon the temper and talents and circumstances of the man himself; sometimes upon the character and circumstances of others; sometimes upon both; and these are things which admit not of demonstration.'¹

There follows finally the usual argument that if moral judgement required accurate reasoning, few men could be moral.

'In the common occurrences of life, a man of integrity, who hath exercised his moral faculty in judging what is right and what is wrong, sees his duty without reasoning, as he sees the high way. The cases that require reasoning are few, compared with those that require none; and a man may be very honest and virtuous who cannot reason, and who knows not what demonstration means.'

'If the rules of virtue were left to be discovered by demonstrative reasoning, or by reasoning of any kind, sad would be the condition of the far greater part of men, who have not the means of cultivating the power of reasoning. As virtue is the business of all men, the first principles of it are written in their hearts, in characters so legible, that no man can pretend ignorance of them, or of his obligation to practise them.'²

With all this I have no quarrel. Moral judgement is not deduction, or is rarely so. We may now turn to what Reid thinks it is.

4. THE MORAL SENSE ANALOGY

In the last section we saw that Reid properly distinguished knowledge of moral principles from probable opinion about particular obligations. Nevertheless our judgement of particular obligations is often made immediately without reasoning,

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, vii. 2.

² *Ibid.*

demonstrative or probable. It is this immediate judgement, Reid thinks, which may be called the operation of a moral sense. He rightly says the name is applied by analogy.

I think it is quite true that the holders of the moral sense theory had chiefly in mind the perception of particular actions as right and wrong. I think further that, given Reid's account of sense-perception (which I have already stated to be nearer to the truth than the empiricist account), there is some analogy between the immediate judgement that a particular action is obligatory and the immediate judgements of sense perception. This, however, is not the analogy of which Hutcheson was thinking, and it is not very near the analogy which Reid thinks may justly be drawn, or rather, it rests on different reasons from those given by Reid. But my dissatisfaction with Reid on this particular point is of comparatively minor importance. In general he has perceived the point of the moral sense theory, and in what sort of thing its truth lies: for this he deserves commendation.

A much more serious criticism which I have to bring against Reid is this. In speaking of the immediate perception of particular obligations, which may in some sense be likened to the perception of physical objects, he confuses it with the immediate intuition of moral principles, an entirely different thing. Forgetting his earlier wise remarks on the lack of certainty in the particular judgements, he infers from the fact that they may be perceived immediately the false conclusion that they have the same character as have the immediately intuited moral principles, the character of self-evidence. Self-evidence is a characteristic of a proposition, or rather of a fact, not a characteristic of our awareness of that fact or the proposition signifying it. It is really the characteristic of necessity, which implies the further characteristic of universality.

I think this fault is not peculiar to Reid's moral theory; it is contained in his general epistemology, and finds its way into the epistemology of morals as a consequence of the more general fault. The most typical phrase of his philosophy, 'common sense', has two meanings, which he confuses: it has

a strict sense in which it means the same as rational intuition or understanding, and a looser and more popular sense in which it means the immediate acceptance of a proposition, an acceptance which we all fall into as the unreflective result of past experience. It is to be noted that the word 'knowledge' is used in a similarly ambiguous way to refer to more than one state of mind. I think plain men *mean* the same thing whenever they use the word 'knowledge', but they often use it of states of mind which, on reflection, they must admit to be not strictly knowing. The word is confined to the strict usage by some philosophers, e.g. Professor Prichard; the looser usage, that of popular speech, is retained by others, for example by Professor Moore, the modern philosopher of common sense.¹ Thus, while Reid's attack on empiricism is eminently justified, his dogmatic realism concerning physical objects is not. We do, according to the popular usage of the word, have 'knowledge' of physical objects, but not in the strict sense of the term. (Physical objects are not the sort of things of which knowledge in the strict sense is possible.) Reid, by confusing the two usages of this word, or rather of its equivalent in his philosophy, 'common sense', thinks we do. He thinks we have knowledge of physical objects in the same sense in which we have knowledge of necessary truths. In this he is wrong. By a similar confusion he thinks we know or intuit particular obligations in the same sense in which we know or intuit *prima facie* obligations or responsibilities, i.e. moral principles. In this too he is wrong. In the popular usage of the word I can sometimes 'know' what it is right for me, or for someone else, to do in a particular situation, but not according to the strict usage. The frequent immediacy of such 'knowledge' further entitles it to be called 'intuitive' in the loose sense of that word also, but such apprehension is not intuitive in the strict sense in which the apprehension of moral principles is intuitive.

¹ I do not suggest that Professor Moore, like Reid, confuses the two uses. He is perfectly well aware of the distinction, but only maintains that each is a legitimate way in which the word is actually used.

I would not have it thought that I am charging Reid with making this confusion between acceptance and intuition throughout. When he considers explicitly the sort of knowledge given by sense-perception, he is well aware that it is different from the knowledge we have of axioms. In one of the essays on the intellectual powers entitled 'Of the evidence of sense, and of belief in general',¹ he says:

'Shall we say then that the evidence of sense is the same with that of axioms, or self-evident truths? I answer, *first*, That all modern Philosophers seem to agree, that the existence of the objects of sense is not self-evident, because some of them have endeavoured to prove it by subtile reasoning, others to refute it. Neither of these can consider it as self-evident.

'*Secondly*, I would observe, that the word *axiom* is taken by Philosophers in such a sense, as that the existence of the objects of sense cannot, with propriety, be called an axiom. They give the name of axiom only to self-evident truths that are necessary, and are not limited to time and place, but must be true at all times, and in all places. The truths attested by our senses are not of this kind; they are contingent, and limited to time and place. . . .

'*Thirdly*, If the word axiom be put to signify every truth which is known immediately, without being deduced from any antecedent truth, then the existence of the objects of sense may be called an axiom. For my senses give me as immediate conviction of what they testify, as my understanding gives me of what is commonly called an axiom.'

My charge against Reid is that too often he forgets about the second of these considerations, which is the important one, and thinks only of the third. Certainly he does so when speaking of the moral sense. In the sense given to the word 'axiom' in the third part of his answer, propositions stating particular obligations, if they are accepted immediately, as they often are, may certainly be called axioms. But this is a very peculiar sense of the word, and, more important, it slurs over the distinction between propositions that are axioms in the sense given in the second part of the reply and those that are axioms in the sense given in this third part. (It should be noted that propositions which are axioms in the former and proper sense

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, ii. 20.

need not necessarily be even included in the list of propositions which are axioms in the latter proposed sense; for the test in the latter case is a psychological one, and there are many propositions which are in fact necessary and universal but which most people do not immediately perceive to be so or even to be true.) In asking whether moral judgements are given by a faculty analogous to sense, Reid thinks only of the immediacy with which they are perceived, and forgets to distinguish those that are necessary and whose 'evidence' is therefore *self-evidence*, from those that are contingent and whose 'evidence' is analogous to the 'evidence' of perceptual judgements.

These then are my two criticisms of Reid: (1) that his analogy between the immediate acceptance of propositions stating particular obligations and between perceptual judgements, while true in principle, is incorrectly worked out; and (2) that in consequence of his confusing the immediate acceptance of particular moral judgements with the immediate intuition of moral principles, he wrongly extends the analogy from sense-perception to cover also the intuition of moral principles. The first of these criticisms I have not yet elaborated. I hope it will become plain in the course of my discussion of what Reid says, at the end of which I shall try to give some positive indication of just where I think the real analogy lies.

It will perhaps be as well to say first what is Reid's view of aesthetics. This is important because the moral sense theory arose in Hutcheson's mind as a consequence of the more easily conceived sense of beauty, and Reid, like Hutcheson, thinks that aesthetics and morals must be treated in the same way so that the two senses which give us our aesthetic and moral ideas must provide the same sort of results. Beauty is for Reid analogous to a secondary quality. His view of secondary qualities is that the sensation I feel is in my mind but is caused by an unknown quality in the physical object; to both the sensation and the quality we usually give the same name.¹

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, viii. 1. For Reid's view of beauty cf. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, p. 127: 'The view to which I find myself driven . . . is one which

So, he thinks, my delight on hearing music is in my mind but is caused by an unknown quality of the music, in virtue of which we apply to the music the adjective 'delightful', derived from the known nature of our feelings. Both with secondary qualities and with aesthetics his argument is, of course, taken from the language of common sense. It is one of Reid's primary maxims that the language of ordinary life reflects fact. If therefore ordinary language implies the existence of some fact, and if all languages show the same tendency, we should not deny the existence of that fact unless good reason be brought to show that the normal usage of all languages is mistaken.

Reid's view of beauty as analogous to secondary qualities, coupled with his premiss that aesthetics and morals stand on the same footing, implies that moral characteristics too are analogous to secondary qualities. If this implication were pointed out to Reid, would he be prepared to acknowledge it? Take the following passage:

'The testimony of our moral faculty, like that of the external senses, is the testimony of nature, and we have the same reason to rely upon it.'¹

Now just what, in 'the testimony of the external senses', is 'the testimony of nature'? Reid believes, not that a tomato is red when nobody is looking at it, but that it has an unknown quality which causes anyone who looks at it to experience a red sensation. This quality, as well as the sensation, we call 'red' but we really know nothing of it except that it exists. Would Reid say that a right action is not right if no one judges of it, but has some unknown characteristic, presumably other than rightness, which causes anyone who applies his moral faculty to it to perceive it as right?² I do not think Reid would be prepared to admit this. He would probably say that rightness is akin to a primary, not to a secondary, quality. For he

identifies beauty with the *power* of producing a certain sort of experience in minds, the sort of experience which we are familiar with under such names as aesthetic enjoyment or aesthetic thrill.'

¹ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 6.

² If the subjective view of duty is true, this account is not wholly false; but surely the objective characteristic is not unknown or unknowable.

holds that the senses give us direct and immediate knowledge of primary qualities. But in this event he must abandon the supposed equal status of moral and aesthetic concepts, which was the original cause of the framing of the moral sense theory. Furthermore, the analogy between the moral faculty and sense must be modified to cover only the perception of primary qualities. These two reservations are not made by Reid because, in speaking of the moral faculty as a moral sense, he has forgotten all about the distinction between primary and secondary qualities and about the supposed equal status of morals and aesthetics. The fact is that Reid's analogy is extremely vague. Once it is scrutinized and the necessity for modifications perceived, much of its plausibility vanishes.

So much for the bearing of Reid's aesthetic theory on the moral sense analogy by way of a preliminary caution concerning the plausibility of that analogy. Let us now turn to Reid's own statement of the justification of the phrase 'moral sense'. It is contained in a chapter entitled 'Of the sense of duty'.¹ He begins:

'We are next to consider, how we learn to judge and determine that this is right, and that is wrong.

'The abstract notion of moral good and ill would be of no use to direct our life, if we had not the power of applying it to particular actions, and determining what is morally good, and what is morally ill.' This implies that, at first at any rate, the sense of duty is for Reid the faculty which judges of particular actions that they are right or wrong, not the faculty which judges of moral principles.

'Some Philosophers, with whom I agree, ascribe this to an original power or faculty in man, which they call the *moral sense*, the *moral faculty*, *conscience*. . . .

'The name of the *moral sense*, though more frequently given to conscience since Lord Shaftesbury and Dr Hutcheson wrote, is not new. The *sensus recti et honesti* is a phrase not unfrequent among the ancients, neither is the *sense of duty* among us.'

It is important for Reid to make this last observation, for the following reason. He holds, as does Hutcheson, that moral

¹ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 6.

notions are unanalysable. For Hutcheson, and for any empiricist, this must imply that they are derived from a sense, either an outer sense like seeing, touching and so on, or an inner sense like introspection. (It should be noted that whereas Hutcheson's moral sense is an inner sense perceiving certain peculiar subjective feelings, Reid's is an outer sense perceiving or 'testifying to' objective characteristics.) But for anyone who, like Reid, holds that original ideas do not necessarily come from sense but may be given by reason, there is no need to invent a moral sense or to invent this name for the moral faculty. Reid is therefore rightly concerned to point out that the habit of calling the moral faculty a sense is not an innovation due to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, but is a part of the ordinary language of Englishmen and of the ancients. In accordance with his customary practice, he is really concerned to justify this ordinary usage, not the invented phrase 'moral sense' introduced by Shaftesbury and taken over by Hutcheson and Hume to serve the special needs of an empiricist epistemology. This becomes clear in his reference to Hume's use of the phrase.

'When Mr Hume derives moral distinctions from a moral sense, I agree with him in words, but we differ about the meaning of the word *sense*. Every power to which the name of a sense has been given, is a power of judging of the objects of that sense, and has been accounted such in all ages; the moral sense therefore is the power of judging in morals. But Mr Hume will have the moral sense to be only a power of feeling, without judging: This I take to be an abuse of a word.'¹

We find the same point made when we return to our specific chapter devoted to the subject, which chapter, be it noted, is entitled 'Of the sense of duty' and not 'Of the moral sense', showing clearly that it is the popular, not the technical, phrase which Reid wants to justify.

'It has got this name of *sense*, no doubt from some analogy which it is conceived to bear to the external senses. And if we have just notions of the office of the external senses, the analogy is very evident, and I see no reason to take offence, as some have done, at the name of the *moral sense*.

¹ *Active Powers*, v. 7.

'The offence taken at this name seems to be owing to this, That Philosophers have degraded the senses too much, and deprived them of the most important part of their office.

'We are taught, that, by the senses, we have only certain ideas which we could not have otherwise. They are represented as powers by which we have sensations and ideas, not as powers by which we judge.

'This notion of the senses I take to be very lame, and to contradict what nature and accurate reflection teach concerning them. . . .

'By my ear, I not only have the ideas of sounds, loud and soft, acute and grave, but I immediately perceive and judge this sound to be loud, that to be soft, this to be acute, that to be grave. Two or more synchronous sounds I perceive to be concordant, others to be discordant.

'These are judgments of the senses. They have always been called and accounted such, by those whose minds are not tinctured by philosophical theories. They are the immediate testimony of nature by our senses; and we are so constituted by nature, that we must receive their testimony, for no other reason but because it is given by our senses. . . .

'If this be a just notion of our external senses, as I conceive it is, our moral faculty may, I think, without impropriety, be called the *moral sense*.

'In its dignity it is, without doubt, far superior to every other power of the mind; but there is this analogy between it and the external senses, That, as by them we have not only the original conceptions of the various qualities of bodies, but the original judgments that this body has such a quality, that such another; so by our moral faculty, we have both the original conceptions of right and wrong in conduct, of merit and demerit, and the original judgments that this conduct is right, that is wrong; that this character has worth, that, demerit.'

Now what are we to say of this analogy? We should first observe that Reid's statement of the moral sense theory has two important advantages over that of Hutcheson.

(1) In the first place, Reid does not pretend to be putting forward a *theory* at all. That is to say, he is not claiming to have discovered a new faculty for whose existence he produces argument or evidence. This is what Hutcheson does, and as we have seen Hutcheson shows an alarming tendency to multiply hypothetical faculties. Reid does nothing of the sort. He does not pretend to have discovered the moral faculty. That there is such a faculty is for him an obvious fact which has always been known to everyone. He realizes that he is discussing, not a

theory, but a name, not a hypothesis of some new entity, but the propriety of a certain name for a perfectly well-known entity. In this Reid seems to me wholly right. The same point may be put in another way by saying that the question of the 'truth' of the moral sense 'theory' is really the question of the validity of an analogy between the moral faculty and sense. Reid sees that the only way to discuss the question is by discussing the justness of the analogy. Hutcheson fails to see that it is a question of analogy at all.

(2) Reid's account has this second advantage. In accordance with his usual practice, Reid discusses the name of 'sense' as applied by ordinary language, not as used in a newly coined technical phrase. He rightly says that the phrase of ordinary language comes about by an analogy with the *external* senses. It could hardly come about by analogy with anything else, for in ordinary language introspection is not called a sense. The name of 'inner sense' is a technical phrase introduced by the empiricist philosophers. Thus, if the analogy is justified (and it must have some ground in order to have penetrated into ordinary language), it does not prove that moral judgments are subjective unless we accept in addition the idealist view that all sense-data are subjective. And whether or not Reid's realism concerning the objects of sense is true, it is certainly the case that plain men think perceived qualities to be external so that perceptual statements have an objective *meaning*, no matter whether this objective import is justified or not. Equally, if the analogy between the moral faculty and the external senses is just, moral statements will still have an objective meaning, and on Reid's view of sense-perception the denotation will also be in fact objective. Reid of course would argue that in both cases the objective import implied in the language and thought of common sense must be taken to be true unless good reason can be shown to the contrary. Reid's analogy with the external senses, therefore, does get rid of the chief objection entertained in his time against the moral sense theory, namely that it implies the subjectivity of moral judgments. And he is quite right to urge this as the reason why

'offence is taken at the name' of moral sense. I do not think Price would have objected as strongly against Reid's use of the name as he did against Hutcheson's.

In these two respects, then, Reid's account is superior to Hutcheson's; and if it is to be accepted it does not have the unfortunate consequence of holding that moral judgements really signify subjective feelings.

What of the analogy itself? The purpose of an analogy of this sort is to apply the same name to two or more things in virtue of their possessing certain characteristics in common. Reid applies his analogy in virtue of a complex characteristic possessed in common by the moral faculty and the external senses, namely, the characteristic of giving us original 'conceptions' and also judgements that the objects of those 'conceptions' are attributes of certain subjects. Is this characteristic the real or the only reason why ordinary language calls the moral faculty a sense, and is it sufficient ground of analogy in virtue of which philosophy should retain the name?

In the first place I do not think this is the real, or at least the chief, reason why ordinary language calls the moral faculty a sense. It is more likely that the name arose because of the *immediacy* common to both kinds of judgement. Reid is right in saying that ordinary language means by 'sense' not the sensing of a sense-datum but the immediate judgement that a sense-datum belongs to a physical object. But when the plain man calls moral judgement a sense, he has mainly in mind, I think, not the fact that the operation consists in judging an attribute to belong to a subject, but the fact that this judgement is immediate; that is to say, he is thinking of the taking for granted or immediate acceptance which is a characteristic of normal perceptual and moral judgement. I hope to elaborate this point later.

Secondly, is the characteristic mentioned by Reid not only common, but also peculiar, to the moral faculty and the external senses? If it is not, it hardly gives a just ground of analogy. In fact this characteristic is not peculiar to these faculties. Introspection does not merely find that there is

some feeling but also judges that this feeling belongs to the mind that is introspecting, and often also judges that the feeling has some outward reference, e.g. that a feeling of anger is directed against Mr. A or that pleasure is felt at the news about Mr. B. Memory again does not merely find certain data, it judges or knows that the things of which it is conscious happened at some (usually definite) time in the past. And if it be agreed, as Reid holds, that some notions, e.g. the notion of power, are given by reason, it must also be agreed that reason does not simply find an instance of power, it judges that this power belongs to some substance and that it is the cause of some definite effect. Thus, if the ground of Reid's analogy were sufficient, it would be equally sufficient for using the name 'inner sense' and also for the coining of such names as 'recollective sense' and 'intellectual sense'. And it may fairly be asked why, if Reid's analogy is supposed to account for the plain man's phrase 'sense of duty', the plain man does not also call introspection, memory and reason by the name of sense.¹

It may be said that the common characteristic of immediacy which I give as the ground for the plain man's analogy is also not peculiar to the moral faculty and the external senses. Introspection, memory and rational intuition are all immediate in their operation. This is true, and is, I think, the main reason why the word 'intuition' is used in the loose sense of any immediate judgement. But the common characteristic to which I wished to call attention is not immediacy *simpliciter*, but that particular kind of immediacy which is involved in taking for granted, that is, the immediate and unreflective acceptance of a presented attribute as belonging to a subject. This does not happen in rational intuition, memory, or introspection. In all these operations I *know* that the judgement I make is true since I have direct knowledge of the fact it signifies.² Thus my immediate judgement is of quite a

¹ Price points out that the *empiricist* ground for the name of moral sense justifies also the name of intellectual sense, and asks why Hutcheson does not postulate it.

² I agree with Professor Moore that remembering implies knowing. If I make a mistake of 'memory', I am not remembering but only thinking I remember.

different kind from the unreflective immediacy of acceptance. This difference is nothing mysterious and is quite evident to introspection.

There is a third criticism to be made concerning Reid's common characteristic. Let us look back to his statement of the ground of the analogy in the final sentence of the quotation on pp. 179-80, above.

'There is this analogy between it and the external senses, That, as by them we have not only the original conceptions of the various *qualities* of bodies, but the original judgments that this body has such a *quality*, that such another; so by our moral faculty, we have both the original conceptions of right and wrong in conduct . . . and the original judgments that this conduct is right, that is wrong.'

I have italicized the two occurrences of the word 'quality' to bring out my point. Why does Reid not make the common characteristic more definite by adding 'quality' in the case of the moral faculty also? Simply because he does not believe that moral attributes are qualities. Of the quality of intrinsic goodness he does not of course speak anywhere. Of rightness or obligation he says this:

'If we examine the abstract notion of duty, or moral obligation, it appears to be neither any real quality of the action considered by itself, nor of the agent considered without respect to the action, but a certain relation between the one and the other.

'When we say a man ought to do such thing, the *ought*, which expresses the moral obligation, has a respect, on the one hand, to the person who ought, and, on the other, to the action which he ought to do. Those two correlates are essential to every moral obligation; take away either, and it has no existence. So that, if we seek the place of moral obligation among the categories, it belongs to the category of *relation*.'

¹

As an account of the category to which obligation belongs, I think this is excellent. But it makes the proposed common characteristic between the moral faculty and sense rather slender. Can it be said that we sense relations at all? Reid holds that it can. He says that by my eye I not only perceive

¹ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 5.

colour qualities but also that this colour is different from that; by my ear I not only perceive the qualities of sounds but also that this sound is concordant or discordant with that.¹ Now of course in ordinary speech we do say that we see and hear similarities and differences between colours and sounds, but does not this ordinary usage neglect distinctions that philosophy must recognize? Price would pertinently ask which sense it is, if sense perceives concordance and discordance, that perceives the concordance or discordance between a datum of sight and a datum of hearing. It is certainly the case that we can discern, not only that a colour is different from a sound, but also that some colours concord with, and others discord with, some sounds. Reid quite correctly holds that ordinary language sanctions our saying that we see or hear similarities and differences between colours or sounds, but the real point about the proposed analogy between moral and sense perception is this. Here we have two kinds of 'judgements' or 'perceptions'. In the second we can analyse out of the perception a quality, the awareness of which we know to be dependent on the possession and use of certain physical organs. In the first we can analyse out a peculiar relation, awareness of which is not, so far as we know, dependent on the possession and use of any specific physical organs. To justify the analogy of a moral sense we have to show that there are some points of similarity between this relation and the qualities which we find by analysis of sense-perception. It seems to me that there is no similarity between them, except that both are constituents in a specific kind of immediate judgement which is now called taking for granted or acceptance. The analogy is really with perceptual acceptance, not with sense. Since popular language does, as Reid says, call the perceptive operation as a whole the operation of sense, we may allow that ordinary language is justified in speaking of a moral sense. But since philosophy (Reid's philosophy as much as that of modern writers on perception) finds itself compelled to distinguish between sensing and perceiving, in order to

¹ Cf. quotation on p. 180, above.

mark real distinctions which ordinary language fails to mark, we should as philosophers allow the analogy to justify us in speaking only of moral perception, not of moral sense. And since further I think Professor Price is right in distinguishing between perceptual acceptance and perceptual assurance,¹ I think our analogy should justify us only in speaking of 'moral acceptance'. It is after all just this state of mind called 'taking for granted' or 'acceptance' which is common to perceptual and moral judgement. I do not think it is peculiar to them; when judgements of induction by simple enumeration are made unreflectively and in an almost automatic manner, as they often are, our state of mind there too is one of acceptance. I should not want to limit the name 'acceptance' to immediate perceptual and moral judgement alone. We must not extend the use of the name, or its equivalent, to any and every immediate judgement, but the proper limitation is to certain types of immediate judgement which all have a particular characteristic; that characteristic is the taking for granted of some proposition which, if we were to reflect, we could justify only by inductive reasoning from past experience that makes the proposition in question probable.

This completes my first main criticism of Reid's view of the moral sense theory. My criticism was that Reid is right in principle, in seeing that the name of 'sense' is given by analogy, but wrong in his conception of just where the analogy lies. I can now pass on to my second main criticism, which is that Reid commits just the fault which I have mentioned at the end of my last paragraph, the fault namely of extending the application of the name 'acceptance' or its equivalent (Reid's equivalent is 'sense') to mental operations which are indeed immediate judgements but not that peculiar kind of immediate judgement which constitutes taking for granted. In short, Reid extends the name 'moral sense' to the intuition of moral principles. He is able to do this only because he has not distinguished acceptance from the immediate knowing of rational intuition. His employment of the words 'sense' and

¹ *Perception*, chapters vi and vii.

'intuition' in their loose and popular usage assists his making the confusion.

As we have seen, Reid began his discussion of moral sense by confining himself to the judgements of particular obligations which are incumbent on some particular person in some particular situation. We further saw that when he considered the specific question of immediate perception (what I call acceptance) and its relation to the immediate intuition of axioms, he realized full well that they have only one point in common, their immediacy, and an important point of difference, namely that axioms are self-evident, necessary and universal, while particular judgements are contingent and usually only probable. But he apparently thinks that the points of difference lie only in the propositions, and that the states of mind are the same, namely immediate judgement. Thus in his discussion of the moral sense theory, despite his recognition at the beginning that the theory is properly applied only to particular judgements, he soon allows the intuition of moral principles to creep in too.

'When men's faculties are ripe,' he says, 'the first principles of morals, into which all moral reasoning may be resolved, are perceived intuitively, and in a manner more analogous to the perceptions of sense than to the conclusions of demonstrative reasoning.'¹

From this sort of remark, harmless enough in itself, there results the most hopeless confusion. First principles are confused with the particular instances from the contemplation of which we are enabled to see, by intuitive induction, the truth of the universal principles. The confusion is not made only between moral principles and particular judgements, but between first principles and their instances in general. Such instances provide of course the occasion, but not the ground, of our recognizing the universal principles. Reid makes the mistake of confusing intuitive induction with enumerative induction. What is more, as a consequence of this error, and by a careless use of the expression 'first principles', he confuses *a priori* principles both with the inductive generalizations of

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, vii. 2.

natural science and with the particular perceptual observations with which the scientist begins (hence they are called 'first principles'!) to build up his inductive generalizations.

Reid begins this bad lapse by the following perfectly justifiable statement.

'The testimony of our moral faculty, like that of the external senses, is the testimony of nature, and we have the same reason to rely upon it.'¹

He then goes on to say:

'The truths immediately testified by the external senses are the first principles from which we reason, with regard to the external world, and from which all our knowledge of it is deduced.

'The truths immediately testified by our moral faculty, are the first principles of all moral reasoning, from which all our knowledge of our duty must be deduced.'²

He next goes on to describe this moral reasoning. We reason to such conclusions as 'This action is right', or 'This action is wrong', or 'This action is morally indifferent'. The principles from which we reason are such as these: 'We ought not to do to another, what we should think wrong to be done to us in like circumstances', or 'We ought to promote the good of society'. Reid rightly compares these principles to 'the self-evident principles in all other sciences'. But he has become sadly muddled by his earlier statement that 'the truths immediately testified by the external senses are the first principles' from which we 'deduce' our knowledge of the material world. He is thus led to hold that each science has its own faculty for its first principles. 'In different sciences the faculties which dictate their first principles are very different.'³ In speaking of the various faculties and their proper sciences, he attributes sight to astronomy and optics; hearing to the science of music; consciousness (that is, he explains, introspection of how the human mind works as opposed to how it ought to work) to the science of politics; conscience (that is, the perception of what the human mind ought to do irrespective of what it in fact does) to morals. Understanding he assigns to mathematics alone. It therefore seems evident that he does not

¹ *Active Powers*, iii, part iii, 6.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

regard the understanding as supplying the first principles of morals, physics, or anything other than mathematics. He thinks all moral judgements, first principles as well as particular judgements, are supplied by the same faculty, the moral sense. About physics he is vague: 'The principles of natural philosophy [depend] upon the facts attested by the senses.' Which senses? According to his scheme there should be a particular sense which perceives physical substances and their causal and motive powers. The confusion between intuition and sense has run away with him, but this vagueness about the faculty for physics suggests a certain uneasiness in his mind concerning his conclusions.

Reid has seen dimly the reason why the moral faculty is called a sense, but he has failed to follow up his inkling. The 'first principles' of morals must be acknowledged to be perceived by the understanding. Their necessity and universality show this. Reid himself in another place admits that 'our senses testify only what is, and not what must necessarily be'.¹ But in a concrete situation we usually judge immediately that an action is right or wrong, without reading it off from a principle. We do not reason 'This man is in pain, and I have a responsibility to help creatures in pain; therefore I ought to help this man'. The immediate judgement which we usually make is akin to the immediate judgement of sense-perception 'This is a table'; there is this analogy between *particular* moral judgements and perceptual judgements. On the analogy of Professor Price's phrase, perceptual acceptance, I call this state of mind 'moral acceptance'.

I must now show more clearly the similarity between perceptual and moral acceptance. Perceptual acceptance comes about in the following way. Whenever in the past (or almost always when) I have sensed a sense-datum of a particular kind, I have later found good reason to believe it belongs to a table: when now I sense a sense-datum of that kind, I do not think about the past instances, but the unconscious effect of those past experiences is that 'by a smooth transition of the

¹ *Intellectual Powers*, ii. 19.

imagination', as Hume would say, I unreflectively take for granted that this sense-datum belongs to a table. If I were to think about my doing so, I should realize that the proposition I took for granted is probabilified by my past experiences. Moral acceptance comes about thus. On certain occasions in the past I have found myself in a situation of a certain specific kind, e.g. confronted by a creature in pain; I have found myself feeling an urge to help him or it; sometimes I have done so without further ado, but on other occasions I have said to myself rather crossly: 'After all why should I? If I do, it will make me late for my dinner, and I am hungry enough already.' (Or perhaps it is more usual to ask this sort of question after one has either helped the person in pain or failed to do so.) And when I have asked this question, I have reflected on the matter and perceived intuitively that I have a *prima facie* obligation or responsibility to help creatures in pain. I do not suggest that one thinks in this sophisticated way on the first occasion of asking the question; one just realizes rather vaguely that there is a principle in the matter (as the plain man says, 'It's a matter of principle'), that one *ought* to help people who need help. I now know (in the dispositional sense) that I ought to help creatures in pain. When I now find myself in a situation of the sort I have described, I do not usually think about the obligation or about the past instances in which I have thought about it; but the unconscious effect of those past experiences of finding myself in situations of this sort and of later thinking about them, is that 'by a smooth transition of the imagination' I unreflectively accept the situation as one laying me under an obligation. If I were to think about this proposition, I should realize that it is in fact entailed by the moral principle under which it falls.

This, then, is the real analogy. It has nothing to do with sensing. Nor ought we to call it an operation of the imagination, as Hume did; he describes the process well enough but gives it the wrong name. It is a state of mind *sui generis*, but by no means strange or unknown to any except a few philosophers; it is perhaps the most common state of mind in

which we find ourselves (if we trouble to look!) in ordinary life. Possibly this is why it has been unnoticed by most philosophers.

We must not carry the analogy too far. There are the following differences between moral and perceptual acceptance:

(1) Perceptual acceptance is based upon the experiencing of a sense-datum. I sense a brown patch of a certain specific kind and accept it as being part of the surface of a table. In moral acceptance there is no sense-datum having the 'quality of rightness'. The sense-data that I sense are those of the ordinary senses. But of course I am also perceptually accepting whenever I am sensing in ordinary life. My datum therefore is the perceiving a man in pain (I sense the signs of this, but neglect the signs and pass at once to the perceptual judgement), and I accept it as laying me under an obligation.

(2) In order to justify perceptual acceptance when we query, or doubt, or take up some other 'propositional attitude' to, the proposition which we have unreflectively accepted, we reach 'perceptual assurance' by inductive verification, that is, by such experiences as touching, or tapping, what we take to be the table, or by looking again, or by looking from other directions. Perceptual assurance is reached when our verifying experiences yield a reasonable probability that the sense-datum was not an illusion or hallucination. To justify moral acceptance is a much simpler process. We simply recall that our accepted proposition can be read off deductively from a universal principle which we know. By doing so we do not reach reasonably probable assurance, but knowledge. The only point in which we can now be mistaken is to have falsely accepted *perceptually* that the man was in pain.

Possibly a faint analogy to perceptual assurance may be found in the process whereby we consider which of conflicting instances of responsibilities is really our duty. I have spoken all the time of situations where only one responsibility is instantiated, e.g. a responsibility to help someone who is in pain. Very often, however, a moral responsibility does not simply involve some slight discomfort or the thwarting of some

desire (as with my desire to get home to dinner in the example given earlier). It may involve a conflict with some other responsibility or responsibilities. A common example is a conflict between the responsibility to spare people pain and the responsibility of not deceiving them. The problem of how we decide between conflicting responsibilities is a very difficult one, to which there is a brief reference in the concluding chapter but which cannot be dealt with here. From my examination of Reid I claim only to have located a fair analogy for the name of moral sense; it turns out, however, to be not a moral sense but moral acceptance.

CHAPTER VI

THE NATURE OF CONSCIENCE

THE question to which I have been trying to extract an adequate answer from the philosophers I have discussed is this: When I make the judgement that I am morally bound to do a certain action, do I make it on the basis of knowing some fact, sensing some quality, or experiencing some feeling? The answer to which my examination has led me is rather complex, and although its different parts have been suggested at various points it may perhaps be as well to collect them together here. I think a person who says he is obliged to do an action may be doing one of the following things.

(1) He may be following a dictate of some authority. If so, his statement does not itself signify a moral proposition, though it will usually presuppose a moral proposition, e.g., that he ought to obey the will of God since God wills what is right, or that he ought to obey the laws of a community of which he is a member since these laws are framed in order to provide means whereby the responsibilities of each member of that community to the rest may be fulfilled and the claims of each member against the rest may be safeguarded.

(2) He may be coming to know a moral principle by intuitive induction from the particular instance of it which he has before him. Such a process is always vague and confused in its early stages, and more so in the case of morals than of mathematics or pure logic because the facts to be taken into account have not the same clarity for thought as have the more simple and clear-cut concepts of mathematics. For this reason a man who is really engaged in the process of coming to know a moral principle may not be explicitly conscious of the state in which he is, and may mistake it for one of the following things:

(2.1) He may concentrate on the more easily recognizable feeling accompanying his cognition, and think he is judging simply in virtue of that feeling.

- (2.2) He may think he is in state (1), i.e. applying the commands of some authority, divine or human.
- (2.3) He may think he is using a wholly peculiar faculty, whether of mystical insight, or a special sense, or a specific feeling masquerading as a special sense or as mystical insight.
- (3) He may be explicitly knowing a necessary moral truth and reading off a particular application of that principle.
- (4) He may be taking for granted that a particular action is an instance of a moral principle without explicitly reading it off from the principle.

To processes (2), (3), and (4) respectively I have given the names of 'coming to know', 'knowing', and 'moral acceptance'. I think that feeling theories have been characterized by the mistake of (2.1), and that moral sense theories have been making the mistake of (2.3) or have been expressing (4) in an obscure and confused way. Though I hold the view of those who are called 'intuitionists', I have discarded the term 'intuition' since its vagueness and ambiguity tend to produce mistake (2.3) or at least the charge of having made that mistake, and because it fails to distinguish adequately (2), (3) and (4).

The states of mind described in (2), (3) and (4) are not peculiar to moral judgement but are common to other types of judgement. All are discussed by epistemology in general, and that described in (4) has a special importance for the theory of perception. I have called (4) 'moral acceptance' on the analogy of Professor Price's 'perceptual acceptance' since the state of mind is the same in both cases, acceptance or taking for granted; they differ in their objects only, just as (2) and (3) differ from other instances of coming to know and knowing only in their objects.¹

¹ Cf. John Taylor of Norwich, *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, chapter 8, paragraph 146 (1760; Taylor is a follower of Price): 'Conscience is not a distinct Faculty in the human Soul; . . . It differs from Reason and Understanding no otherwise, than as it is Reason or Understanding, exercised in forming a Judgment upon our own Actions, as morally right or wrong, according to that Knowledge and Conceptions of Things, which we have attained.'

The following two questions at once suggest themselves:

- (a) If moral principles are known, why is there disagreement about them and why am I not able to give an exhaustive list of them with the entailing relations between them?
- (b) What are the objects of the states of mind described in (2), (3) and (4)?

To the first question I should reply as follows. I agree with the view expressed by most of the moralists I have been discussing, that disagreement on moral questions is usually about the non-moral facts of the situation. Nevertheless I think it must be admitted that there is sometimes disagreement about the moral facts, and in particular about the relative strength of different claims or responsibilities. This may be due to a lack of insight into some responsibilities (just as there is usually a stage in the learning of geometry at which one just cannot see how such surprising results are achieved), or to the fact that moral concepts are less clear to us at present than mathematical concepts. I think it probable that some people have clearer insight than others into moral facts, that is, they have advanced, and are capable of advancing, further than others in the process of coming to know, and that this is most clearly exemplified in moral reformers or prophets (in the Biblical sense of that word). For these reasons one cannot give an exhaustive list of moral principles and the entailing relations between them. (Apprehending the entailing relations is particularly difficult.) However, I am inclined to think that all moral principles in some way or other fall under a single general principle, which is perhaps best expressed in Kant's maxim that we ought to treat humanity (but non-rational sentient creatures must also be included) in every case as an end and never as a means only.

In reply to the second question, I have tried to indicate that obligation or responsibility is a peculiar relation somewhat analogous in its peculiarities (though it also has its peculiar differences) to the relations of logical and causal necessitation. About goodness I am more doubtful, but I incline to think

it is a consequential quality necessitated by the constitutive qualities of the thing to which it is attributed.

But the answers to both these questions are more matters for the logic and metaphysics of ethics than for its epistemology.

One topic, however, I have omitted which is of importance for my subject, namely the question of how we choose between conflicting obligations. In one sense this is a question for psychology, not for epistemology, but in another respect it is clearly an epistemological question. I do not know on what principles I choose between conflicting obligations; but I think there may be some slight analogy to the principles on which we reach what Professor Price calls perceptual assurance, or rather, on which we would reach perceptual assurance if the perceptible world and our relation to it were rather different from what they are. I think the nature of the reasoning process in each case may be the same, but since the conditions in which these processes take place are so different in each sphere, it would be unjustifiable to call the process in the case of morals 'moral assurance'. The name of moral acceptance for the other process described earlier is justified since the process takes place in sufficiently similar conditions to those in which perceptual acceptance occurs. Instead of 'moral assurance' I propose to use the name 'moral decision'. My use of the word 'decision' here must not be confused with that sense of 'moral decision' in which the decision is an act of will, a decision to do something or other. I am using the word in a cognitive, not a volitional, sense; the decision is a decision *that* something is the case, not a decision *to* act in a certain way. The word 'decision' is of course used very commonly in this cognitive sense; for example, after weighing the evidence for alternative hypotheses, we decide that the balance of evidence is in favour of one, i.e. we decide that this one is the more probable; a moral decision, in this cognitive sense, is taken after weighing the claims of alternative responsibilities, and the decision is a decision that one of them is the stronger and therefore one's duty. A moral decision in the volitional sense would be a decision to do some action, e.g.

to fulfil the claim which had already been decided, in the cognitive sense of 'decide', to be the strongest and so one's duty. This example shows clearly the difference between the two senses of the expression 'moral decision', for in it a cognitive moral decision precedes a volitional moral decision. It is unfortunate that the phrase which I am here proposing for the cognitive act has already a common use as a name for the volitional act, but I am unable to find any more satisfactory expression. The words 'choice', 'resolution' and 'determination', which can all be used in a cognitive sense, are employed in morals even more commonly than 'decision' for a volitional act. Again, one might use the name 'moral judgement', for the cognitive act to which I refer is, in a very proper sense of the word 'judgement', moral judgement *par excellence* (cf. p. 138, above): but the expression 'moral judgement' is commonly used, and has been used throughout this book, in a very much wider sense to mean the framing of any moral proposition; it would therefore be very confusing to use 'moral judgement' here in the narrower sense of giving judgement in favour of one moral responsibility as against others. Consequently I am driven to propose 'moral decision' as the least misleading name available for this cognitive act.

Since the rather remote analogy between perceptual assurance and moral decision is put forward only as a very tentative suggestion, I beg leave to embark on a Platonic allegory.

Suppose I were told that if I go into a certain room I shall find two or more objects, each of which looks in some respects like a man. I must decide to call one of them, but only one, a man. I go into the room and I find (a) an object which to sight and hearing appears to be a man, but not to touch; and (b) an object which appears to hearing and touch, but not to sight, to be a man. In other words, in the one case I have visual and auditory sense-data of the kind usually taken to belong to a man, but lack tactual data; in the other I have the auditory and tactual data but lack the visual. Or, in the language of the plain man, I find on the one hand a ghost, and on the other an invisible man.

Now of course it would be said that ordinary language allows me to call neither of them a man.¹ But suppose I were compelled to give the name to one, but only one, of them. I might proceed as follows. I might examine each of the objects more closely, and obtain further evidence either for or against regarding one rather than the other as more like a 'proper' man. I might observe that the visual data belonging to object A flicker, and regard this as evidence against calling it a real man; on the other hand the tactual data belonging to object B might be unusual in some respect (e.g. its hand might feel like jelly while its head felt like granite). Again, if I attended to the auditory data, it might be that one of the objects discoursed high-mindedly about philosophy or psychical research while the other emitted noises proper to one of the lower animals. Or it might be that, although I can touch B and not A, yet when I saw A kicking me I felt a pain, and when I sensed with my hand that B was kicking me, and heard the impact of his foot against me, I felt nothing in the place where his foot landed. I leave it to the reader's ingenuity to determine which, if either, I should decide to call a man. I might decide that signs of intelligence are most important in this connexion; or that seeing is believing. Or I might just toss a coin.

Now suppose I am led away to another room, and am told that there too I must decide to call one of the objects in the room a man. I go in and find chairs and tables with one ghost. This time it is simple. I am now used to ghosts and decide at once to choose him even though he presents only visual data.

Now consider the moral world to be a place where there are lots of ghosts and invisible men as well as a few 'proper' men. And consider also that whenever I meet one or more of these denizens I am forced to choose my man and call him by that

¹ But suppose there were lots of ghosts and invisible men in the world. How would ordinary language adjust itself to the situation? It would, I think, say there were different kinds of 'real' things. Are sounds and mirror images real things? Are rainbows? It is certainly odd to say they are unreal. Our language as it is does not make provision for calling them either real or unreal in the way in which we say a chair is real and the drunkard's pink rat unreal.

name; I am not allowed to bestow the name on more than one at any single point in my travels. If I meet one ghost, or one 'proper' man, the decision is easy. If I meet one ghost *and* one 'proper' man, I shall not have much hesitation in choosing the latter, though I may feel a little uneasy about leaving the poor ghost in the lurch. Suppose I meet two or more ghosts, a decision will be more difficult. If they are 'only little 'uns' I might say to myself: 'I cannot stay here all day wondering which of these little chaps to prefer; there are bigger fellows waiting for me round the corner, between whom also I shall have to choose.' So I should choose the one who looked bigger to a cursory glance, and proceed round the corner. But what if I meet two really big fellows, each of whom presents several striking sets of sense-data? I should then have to make a careful inventory, as in the earlier of the two rooms where I first met these queer people, and I might sit examining them for days before reaching a decision.

Let us now come up from the Cave and translate. If ever I am faced with two (or more) obligations which demand fulfilment at the same particular time and which cannot both (or all) be fulfilled by the same action, I must decide that one and only one is my duty and to be done. If I am faced with a single action, which is either an instance of one obligation, or is an instance of more than one (e.g. I promised to take Johnny to the cinema, and in any case if I do take him his mother will have a long-needed rest), the decision is obvious. If I am confronted with two actions, one of which is a comparatively minor instance of one responsibility, the other a major instance of another responsibility or an instance of several, there too the decision will be easy, though I shall not be altogether happy about having to neglect the first. If I am faced with two actions, each of which is a comparatively minor instance of one or more responsibilities, I shall find a decision difficult, but I shall judge that I cannot spend much time examining the situation and shall decide from a more cursory examination than the lack of obvious differences justifies in itself. But if I am faced with two actions, each of which

is highly complicated and is a major instance of many interlocking obligations and disobligations, the decision will be extremely difficult and will call for prolonged examination.

It is not the task of moral philosophy to give rules for deciding in such cases. We should not expect Professor Price to tell us just what degree or range of evidence in a particular case justifies perceptual assurance. As for the 'rationality' of the process, it is but another instance, as is perceptual assurance, of the problem of induction, in that it consists of considering degrees and range of evidence for a conclusion which from the nature of the case could never be completely verified. The alternative answers concerning the rationality of induction are well known. One is that in situations where knowledge is impossible and induction our only guide, to be 'rational' is to act in accordance with the evidence at our disposal; this is the meaning of the word in such a context. The alternative answer is that induction is irrational or non-rational, and that rationality is not to be looked for where strict knowledge is unattainable. I should myself choose the first answer.

The nature of the moral 'data' for moral judgement I believe to be somewhat as follows. The knowledge or belief that I am confronted with facts of certain kinds (e.g. that someone is in pain or is unhappy or is being unfairly treated, or that I have made a promise or have been benefited)¹ entails an obligation or responsibility. Knowledge or belief of a single obligation entails that the agent has a duty to fulfil the obligation; knowledge or belief of two or more conflicting obligations entails that one or other of them is a duty; belief about the comparative evidence for conflicting obligations (the 'strength' of the conflicting claims) gives rise to duty by inductive, not by deductive, inference—there is no strict entailment here.

Ordinarily of course, as in perception, I do not explicitly deduce an action as obligatory, I take it for granted by moral

¹ These of course are only examples, and are not intended to be anything like a complete list.

acceptance. And often I do not explicitly infer by induction which of two conflicting obligations has more evidence in its favour. But to justify the acceptance in the first case I must reach knowledge by recognizing the particular as an instance of the universal principle; and to justify the acceptance in the second case I must reach assurance by moral decision made after considering the evidence for each of the alternatives.

As has already been remarked, the account given here of moral decision, with its rather far-fetched analogy with perceptual assurance, is not intended to be more than a highly tentative suggestion. I find the problem of moral decision between conflicting obligations extremely obscure, and have little confidence that my analogy with perceptual assurance is of any assistance for clarification. What I feel fairly convinced about is that the process of reasoning involved is somehow an instance of inductive thinking. It is a question of evidence, not of demonstration.

APPENDIX

Chronology of the philosophers and works discussed in this book

(Mainly taken from Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, vol. ii, pp. 385-92)

FRANCIS HUTCHESON (1694-1746)

Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue. Ed. 1, 1725;
ed. 2, 1726; ed. 3, 1729; ed. 4, 1738.

*Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions, with Illustrations upon
the Moral Sense.* Ed. 1, 1728; ed. 3, 1742.

Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria. Ed. 1, 1742; ed. 2, 1745.
A System of Moral Philosophy. Published posthumously in 1755.

DAVID HUME (1711-76)

A Treatise of Human Nature. 1739-40.

An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals. 1751.

RICHARD PRICE (1723-91)

A Review of the principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals. Ed. 1,
1758; ed. 2, 1769; ed. 3, 1787.

THOMAS REID (1710-96)

Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man. 1785.

Essays on the Active Powers of Man. 1788.

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PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
OXFORD
BY
CHARLES BATEY
PRINTER
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UNIVERSITY

