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SOCIAL PRAGMATISM

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MORALITY AND HAPPINESS

PRAGMATISM

A Study in the Pragmatic Approach
to Problems of Conduct

by

LAN FREED

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PART ONE

MORALISM

CHAPTER I

SELF-DENIAL

" EVERY experiment, by multitudes or by individuals, which has a sensual and selfish aim, will fail."

So wrote Emerson and, so writing, showed that although he was not a conventional moralist but a pantheist and humanist he accepted that view which, ever since the dawn of the Christian era, has been a dominant motif in serious thinking about human conduct and human aims—the view, namely, that self-denial, and physical self-denial more especially, is a supreme principle of action for mankind. That it is in addition the most expedient principle, the one which is most likely to lead to the success of our enterprises, is also implied in Emerson's dictum; and this too, strangely, is often also the contention of moralists, who are apt to exhort us to act from non-self-regarding motives on the grounds that so to act will—spiritually speaking at least—prove to be the most advantageous course in the long run. Cynics, indeed, might find it easy to explain all moral teaching as a rather highly coloured, rather emotional way of presenting certain counsels of expediency—relating to the long-term advantages to be gained by conduct pleasing to God, or to man—were it not for the fact that our moral teachers absolutely repudiate this interpretation of their doctrines, and exhort us specifically to act *less* from motives of expediency, and *more* from moral motives than we do, insisting upon the antithesis between self-regarding motives on the one hand, and moral motives on the other. And certainly we do seem to perceive, underlying such counsels of long-term expediency as Emerson's, a deep-seated conviction that to be self-denying is in itself ideal, and that if individuals and " multitudes " could contrive to act always in complete disregard of their own interests that would be best of all.

A clue to the nature of this belief is furnished, I think, by a judgment from the pen of another humanist, Carlyle, whose attitude towards religion seemed to display religious feeling in

general and at large, rather than consistent adherence to any particular interpretation of the meaning and purpose of life. The fact that Carlyle did not regard himself as an orthodox Christian seems to make all the more impressive his pronouncement that " want of humility and self-denial is simply the want of all religion, of all moral worth."

I believe that in this association of the concepts of humility, self-denial, religion, and moral worth we have a very fair, although necessarily a very vague statement of the ethical attitude of mind which is fostered in the children of our culture. The teaching is in fact circular, and encloses the docile mind on every side. Humility and self-denial are good because they belong to religion, and religion is good because it teaches us to behave morally, which is to behave humbly and self-denyingly. Thus we are encouraged to regard self-denial as a self-justifying principle of conduct—good *per se*, irrespective of whether it is a means to any desired end whatsoever. The extent to which we take this teaching to heart and believe that it represents the ultimate truth about the good and the bad in human conduct may be largely a matter of individual temperament, and in any case, most moral teaching is so closely interwoven with ideas of expediency that what is known as the moral sense is seldom pure and unmixed with ideas of what kind of behaviour will constitute " the best policy " in the long run. Nevertheless, the pure moral imperative is still universally reverenced, and is still regarded as having claims upon us superior to those of any self-regarding principle or motive. We on our side are assumed to be capable of acting in response to its demands.

This assumption is fundamental to all pure ethical theory.

CHAPTER II

ETHICS AND THE STUDY OF ETHICS

THE subject-matters respectively of ethics and the analytical study of ethics are frequently confused. One way of defining the distinction between ethics *per se* and ethics-study is to say that the former is a subject for moralists and the latter a subject for philosophers. The general failure to distinguish between what, in the interests of clear thinking, should be regarded as two separate fields of study is unfortunate. What is much more unfortunate is the frequent tendency of specialists in these two fields to confuse their roles. Thus, to give an extreme example, clergymen will write books which they believe, or which they claim, to be studies of ethics, which are in fact nothing but exercises in special pleading for the superior merits, on moral grounds, of their own ethical system over every other. On the other hand, philosophers setting out to examine the meaning of the idea of moral obligation and the concept of conscience—the proper subject-matter of ethics-study—will obscure the light which they are able to throw upon this intricate subject by reasoning from perfectly arbitrary ethical assumptions which they feel to be *a priori* to any consideration of it.

In regard to moralists, the trouble is not so much that their approach to the subject of ethics is necessarily biased—that they lack the objectivity essential for accurate study. It is rather that as moralists they cannot approach it at all—they are, so to speak, *in* it already. The excuse that the moral sense is a feeling, and that one cannot discuss a feeling without experiencing it oneself, may at first sight seem plausible; but the moralist by definition is not just a person who has at one time or another in his life experienced moral feeling. He is a person convinced that the essence of ethics is a fact of experience—the moral feeling or sense of moral obligation, which gives rise to a particular class of motives which, being distinct from all others, are not susceptible of examination from an extra-ethical standpoint. Psychology, he

might concede, could treat of ethics according to its own methods of interpretation, but it can never tell us anything about ethics as such; it can only try to describe its origins in terms of emotional associations; *accounting for* moral feeling according to its own system of analysis, but never penetrating to the heart of ethics itself, nor revealing the true nature of its unique demands. This the moralist conceives to be his own function, although when embarking upon the study of ethics he is really like a convinced spiritualist setting out to inquire into the nature of spiritualistic belief. Doubtless he will be able to contribute much valuable material, and also, it may be, illuminating comment, but for all that he will, on account of his preconception, be absolutely precluded from examining the subject in the round.

Yet the question remains: is it not perhaps the case that, as the moralist contends, it is impossible for anyone not already convinced of the *a priori* nature of moral feeling to say anything pertinent about ethics at all? Attempting to do so would he not be in the position of a blind man trying to make pronouncements about the phenomenon of sight?

To this one might reply, pursuing the metaphor of the blind man, that a blind man can very well discuss and describe the experience of seeing, and quite possibly with subtler perception than the sighted, who take their seeing for granted, so long as he has in the past been able to see. On this analogy, therefore, it is not necessary to be a moralist in order to think constructively about ethics; it is only necessary that one should in the past have experienced moral feeling and still be able to recall that state of mind.

Nevertheless, I think it would be true to say that if moral feeling, or the moral sense, were the fundamental fact of ethics beyond which ethical research cannot go, my contention that ethics-study is not the proper sphere of moralists would be invalid, for then it is clear, all consideration of ethics *as such* would necessarily have to proceed upon the basis of the primary ethical intuition; it could proceed from no other. We should in that case have to concede that even though the possession of *a priori* moral feelings may be detrimental to the objective discussion of them, the fact remains that nobody but a moralist is capable of understanding them—not even an ex-moralist, because, since he has repudiated them, their place in his mind has been filled by other

values which render them, for him, meaningless—so that the moralist, within the boundaries of his preconception, must just do the best he can. This would be equivalent to admitting that the objective study of ethics is impossible, and any non-moralist attempting it could quite legitimately be told that he does not know what he is talking about. The moralist then, consciously and deliberately renouncing all pretence of objectivity, would be left in undisputed possession of the field.

Evidently, then, any objection to surrendering the study of ethics into the hands of the moralists is rationally defensible only on the view that some part at least of what is claimed to be moral feeling can, in fact, be examined objectively, and this I hold; believing that it is possible to regard much of what moralists view as aspects of moral feeling in a different light and as susceptible of analysis in other than ethical terms.

This is by no means to deny to the moralist a very wide field of operations; a wider field, indeed, than that permissible to the philosophical student of ethics, for whereas the latter's concern is merely to examine what is the meaning of an ethical concept or an ethical judgment, the former, proceeding from his basic intuition, can evaluate any existing principles of conduct in terms of what he sees as their moral value, claiming the whole universe of purposive human activity as his province. What, as moralist, he may not do, however, is to evaluate ethical systems or principles of conduct according to standards of expediency, whether immediate or remote, for directly he does so he is no longer thinking ethically.

We may now go on to examine the proposition that it is possible for men to act from pure moral motives. It is usually held that this assumption is always implicit in any moral judgment, but if, as some moralists contend, the essential meaning of a moral judgment is that it would be *fitting*—according to some absolute criterion—that men should act in a given way, then the idea that they *could* so act is not absolutely implicit in such a judgment, although if it were not implied there would seem to be very little point in making the judgment. For purposes of the present discussion we will accept the view, implicit in most moral judgments, that " ought " implies " can."

CHAPTER III

THE "FREE WILL" PROBLEM

MOST moralists have always been deeply concerned to establish that men are, in some circumstances at least, the sole arbiters of their own actions, or, as it is often expressed, that the human will is free. The various confusions into which so many eminent thinkers have fallen in discussing this matter are in part due to their failure to decide from which point of view they are considering the question—whether from that of psychology or physics—with the result that they fail to reach conclusions satisfactory to anybody, even themselves.

As regards the moral issue, a complication is introduced by the existence of a school of moralists who believe that the will is not free, although they do not therefore find it necessary to abandon the conceptions of duty and obligation. These are the theological determinists, and their standpoint is not self-consistent or rationally defensible. The consistent moralist in this connection is he who holds that such phrases as "you ought" and "it is your duty" have no sense except as addressed to beings conceived as being capable of modifying their conduct in response to them.

It is sometimes argued that the question of whether or not the will is free is completely senseless, but this, I think, is not necessarily true. What is certainly true is that many, and perhaps most, of the discussions which take place on this well-worn topic are pointless and futile, but that is because the disputants have not agreed upon the meaning of the terms they use, or, having agreed, are unable or unwilling to stick to them.

The importance of a careful and consistent use of words in debate has over and over again been stressed, and is still too little recognized. It would help if people with a taste for abstract discussion could be brought to see that words, like money, are symbols which facilitate the exchange of goods, ideas being the goods which by their means are exchanged. It could then be

pointed out that words, like money, are subject to inflation, which, if carried far enough, can reduce their value to vanishing-point. Words which stand for abstract ideas—such words as " freedom," for example—are particularly liable to suffer in this way. Doubtless a cut-and-dried or filing-cabinet treatment of abstract words can be carried too far, so as arbitrarily to restrict their legitimate scope, but if they are to retain their usefulness certain limits, however broad, must be set to the expansion of their meaning. A useful minimal rule, surely, would be to regard as impermissible the ascription to a word of any meaning which is the direct opposite of that which it bears in normal usage. Thus, although in verse at least truth can be said to be beauty and vice versa, without permanent damage to either term, even poets should be discouraged from affirming, e.g., that Beauty is Ugliness. In dealing with abstract words the danger is great because they are apt to have such very wide and variable meanings anyway that a contradictory usage may slip in unnoticed and gain wide currency, until someone of the type too-clever-by-half proclaims that there is no such thing as happiness, or justice, or freedom, or whatever it may be—while others continue obstinately to die for what, to them, the words stand for.

The demand that the will should be free is often revealed as a desire to see it as more free than any other imaginable entity; freer, so to speak, than " free." People appear not to realize that the word " freedom " has no precise signification at all except as the antithesis of " constraint," and that using it to mean anything but this is to make certain in advance of the inconclusiveness of any discussion in which it figures. They continue to insist that the will must be *free*: not merely free from some specific agency of constraint, but " free " absolutely and unconditionally. It might, of course, be argued that this is because the very conception of " will " is bound up with that of absolute freedom, so that the question " Are our wills free? " can be resolved into " Have we wills? " and most people feel it to be self-evident that they do have wills. But since this question is in fact seldom debated, and since the question " Are our wills free? " can be and is continually debated, it seems evident that the bare conception of will is not that of something which is necessarily unconditionally " free."

It would seem that in the context of any remarks about the

freedom or otherwise of the will, the word "will" is usually to be understood in one or other of two senses. Firstly, it may mean that faculty of an individual person which determines those of his actions which he is conscious of purposing to perform. It is conceived as a kind of non-material organ of volition, operative when we act intentionally, but not otherwise. Thus the internal bodily processes are not controlled by the will, and reflex actions such as blinking and sneezing are not, like walking and talking, consequent upon its activity, although it can sometimes be brought into effective operation to control them. It is sometimes effective and sometimes ineffective, depending upon physical circumstances. In other words, whatever we do with *purpose*, according to this view, is the outcome of will-activity, but will-activity is sometimes unavailing.

Secondly, the term "will" may be used in another, more restricted, sense than the above, which is often in the course of ethical discussion confused with it. According to this usage it means a part of the volitional system which is capable of controlling the rest. It is a kind of super-will which can prevent the putting into effect of other volitions conceived to be in some way of other inferior. (This super-will is sometimes regarded as the transmitting agency of the will of God, sometimes as the conative product of the judgments of the intellect.) There is nothing logically impermissible about either of these uses of the word "will," but it is a pity to employ them haphazard, for their meanings are distinct. In the pages which follow it will always be apparent from the context which sense of the term is under discussion.

The desire underlying the insistence of people that the will should be free often finds expression in the saying that it would be intolerable to have to regard ourselves as mere machines. This is essentially a protest against that aspect of human life presented in T. H. Huxley's famous statement:—

> "I take it to be demonstrable that it is utterly impossible to prove that anything whatever may not be the effect of a material and necessary cause, and that human logic is incompetent to prove that any act is really spontaneous."

Thus Huxley, propounding the view that all human activities, including those of thinking and desiring, are attributable to material causes; and it is this idea which most people find so

distasteful. They are ready to concede that " matter " may sometimes and to a limited extent exert power over " mind " even within the individual organism—disorders of the digestive system producing lassitude and gloom, and so forth; but they cannot tolerate the idea that all our thoughts and actions, from the most bestial to the most sublime, are in the final analysis physically determined in exactly the same sense as are the motions of the planets or the processes of growth and decay in the vegetable kingdom.

The average man in the street, indeed, not only dislikes the idea that he is an automaton, he feels perfectly certain that he is not one, and that there must be something wrong with an argument which purports to prove that he is. I think there is a good deal to be said for this attitude, but for the moralist there is no such easy means of escape from the problem, since he is concerned with the ascription of responsibility for human actions in the sense that he wishes to be able to regard some of them as blameworthy; and this he cannot very well do if he has to acknowledge that their agents, even though feeling themselves free, had in fact no choice but to act as they did. Are we all to be let off on the Day of Judgment on the grounds that we were not responsible for our actions? There may be comfort in the thought, certainly; but the idea is humiliating all the same, particularly for such of us as hope, by contrast with others, to receive a positively favourable verdict.

It is not my business to assist the moralist out of his predicament; nevertheless it will be necessary to go a little further into this well-worn topic because it has important implications for the subject we set out to discuss—namely, the meaning of the idea of moral action.

In what sense or senses, then, is it possible to regard the " will " as " free "? Firstly, can its operations be regarded as exempt from determination by physical agencies—Huxley's " material and necessary cause "?

Bertrand Russell states this aspect of the moralist's dilemma very succinctly as follows :—

> " If physical determinism is true . . . then, although there may be a concurrent world of mind, all its manifestations in human and animal behaviour will be such as an

> ideally skilful physicist could calculate from purely physical data. Physics may still be unable to tell us anything about a man's thoughts, but it will be able to predict all that he will say and do. Under these circumstances a man will be, for all practical purposes, an automaton, since his mental life can only be communicated to others or displayed in action by physical means. Even his thoughts can be inferred from physics, unless he is content never to give utterance to them."[1]

To which one might add that if physical determinism is true all mental events must have their immediate cause in physical events within the brain; so that the ideally skilful physicist equipped with ideally efficient instruments would be able to predict mental events with the same certitude as physical ones, in which case no amount of secretiveness would enable a man to avoid an automatism in thinking parallel to that of his overt activities. Be that as it may, the conclusion is unavoidable that according to the materialist interpretation of events the "will" is not free to influence in the minutest degree the motions of the organism which it is supposed to inhabit, and must thus be regarded as absolutely ineffective.

Now, there can obviously be no such thing as an absolutely ineffective force, or an agency which never works, and so it would seem that if the definition given above of the popular idea of the will as the organ of volition is an accurate statement of what this term does mean (except when it means what I have called the super-will) it follows that acceptance of the materialist view involves denial of the will's existence. Yet in spite of this it is a matter of experience that even those who find themselves unable to escape the logic of materialistic determinism in its fullest implications continue to believe in the "will" as something at least potentially effective, even if they find themselves forced to imagine it as struggling, eternally impotent, in the nightmare grip of the inevitable. Is this due to some innate disposition of the human brain which compels it to entertain this amorphous idea of will in defiance of reason, or does there remain some *sense* in which, in face of a full acceptance of mechanistic determinism, it can yet be a self-consistent concept?

[1] Russell's Introduction to *The History of Materialism*, by F. A. Lange.

This is a large question, and in the attempt to answer it we shall have to try to analyse certain other related psychological concepts which seem to be almost equally indispensable to thought about the springs of human action. It will, however, be convenient to begin with a hint at the origin of the idea of the " organ of volition " as I conceive it to have arisen in minds as yet untroubled by confrontation with the principle of mechanistic determinism.

It seems that the common-sense idea of will is rooted in the individual's experience of purpose, followed by action leading to the attainment of an object. On the assumption that there must be *something* in operation to translate purpose into purposive action, the will is conceived so as to fill this role. This aspect comes out very clearly in the comparison often made between people with strong and with weak wills respectively. The strong-willed person goes all out for the attainment of his purpose and is not to be deflected from it; the weak-willed soon gives up. At the same time, the idea of will seems to be *contained in* the idea of purpose, on the view that there could be no such thing as purpose if there were not also a will to carry it into effect. So the two concepts seem to be inextricably involved. The idea of purpose, however, demands analysis, because it is not ultimate, any more than is the idea of will; certain other concepts are fundamental to it.

CHAPTER IV

CONSCIOUSNESS

CONTINUING this inquiry still along the lines of superficial psychological analysis we find that what we call purpose seems to depend upon imagination, which, again, is seen as an activity of consciousness.

The ideas of consciousness and imagination would always, I think, be conceded to be involved in the idea of purpose by anyone using the word to define the type of experience which normally goes by that name. Consciousness must be present, because the *idea* of an object potentially attainable is a prerequisite of purpose, and there is—except in the loose terminology of some psychologists—no such thing as an unconscious idea; and imagination must be present, since there can be no purpose without visualization of the "end in view."

The word "consciousness," as commonly used, has been subjected to criticism in recent years by philosophers who believe that what it is generally used to define can more accurately be understood in other terms. Bertrand Russell, for example, who, in certain moods at least, inclines towards a behaviouristic view of human activity, at one time wanted to dismiss it as "mainly a trivial and unimportant outcome of linguistic habits,"[1] and Dr. John B. Watson, the founder of the behaviourist school, is even more emphatic in expressing his contempt for "this intangible 'something' called 'consciousness.'" Rather surprisingly he pours scorn on William James for making use of the term, although James was among the first to point out its ambiguities in common usage and argue that it should not stand for "an entity" but for "a function."

Certainly it is hard to see how consciousness can be an entity in the sense that it can be conceived of as a distinct and self-contained "thing" like a tune or a mathematical formula, but few people, I believe, suppose that it is. In fact I see no reason

[1] B. Russell, *The Analysis of Mind*, 1921, p. 40.

to presume that anyone thinks so, unless we catch him using such expressions as "*the* consciousness" or "*a* consciousness," meaning something equivalent to "the self" or "the individual personality." This usage is certainly highly objectionable, in that it impairs the value of the word as used synonymously with "the state of being capable of experience"—surely a perfectly definite concept and an extremely useful one. It is surprising that James the pragmatist apparently failed to notice this. No doubt it is true that from the pragmatic standpoint words which are begotten of muddles and which consequently beget more muddles—and there are more than a few such words in everyday use—are undesirable and should be done away with, but the mere fact that a word is capable of being used ambiguously is no good reason for disparaging it. James wished to diminish the status of "consciousness" to that of "a mere echo, the faint rumour left behind by the disappearing 'soul' upon the air of philosophy."[1] But he cannot do without it altogether.

> "I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function."

By this James seems to mean that consciousness is only to be regarded as an *aspect* of reality (not as, according to common usage, that state of the living individual which makes experience possible). He argues that,

> "A given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context of associates"

plays the part of

> "a knower, a state of mind, of 'consciousness' while in a different context the same individual bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective 'content.' In a word, in one group it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing."[2]

By this means James seeks to do away with the duality between "mind" and "matter," making both aspects of "experience." The obvious difficulty about this conception, however, is that

[1] Wm. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 3.
[2] Ibid., pp. 9–10.

for there to be experience at all there must, according to everyone's way of thinking, be " consciousness " at work doing the experiencing, and once this is conceded—as by the very form of his argument James does himself concede it—" consciousness " bobs up again on the hither side of the barrier erected by the philosophers to keep it out. It may have been his awareness of this difficulty which pushed James from his uneasy perch on the knife-edge between " mind " and " matter " over on to the stony ground of strict mechanistic determinism, for only a few pages further on in the same work he writes :—

> " Let the case be what it may in others, I am as confident as I am of anything that, in myself, the stream of thinking (which I recognize emphatically as a phenomenon) is only a careless name for what, when scrutinized, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing. The ' I think ' which Kant said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the ' I breathe ' which actually does accompany them." [1]

(This, at least, should surely have been acknowledged with delighted appreciation by Dr. John B. Watson.) The process of introspective analysis whereby James was enabled to reach his conviction he does not, unfortunately, describe.

Russell found much to approve of in all this, although his own view of the matter was a little different from James's, implying acceptance, albeit grudgingly and reluctantly, of the inevitability of a dualistic position. He wrote :—

> " There are, it seems to me, *prima facie* different kinds of causal laws, one belonging to physics and the other to psychology. The law of gravitation, for example, is a physical law, while the law of association is a psychological law. Sensations are subject to both kinds of laws." [2]

It is hard indeed to see, in spite of Russell's subsequent elucidations, how a sensation or anything else can be subject to two different kinds of causal laws belonging to two different aspects of reality. The idea of a causal law involves the idea of the determination of *all* the events to which it applies in accordance with its rules. How can physical causal laws and psychological causal laws *share* the responsibility for an event? Or is one

[1] James, op. cit., pp. 36–7. [2] Russell, op. cit., p. 25.

sometimes effective, and sometimes the other, in the particular field? Do they take it in turns, one being suspended while the other operates? But, by definition, a causal law cannot be suspended; it must have universal application in the realm within which it operates, or it is no law at all.

I think there is real confusion of thought here. Probably what Russell had in mind was the fact that it is possible to *regard* a psychological event *either* as determined by physical laws *or* as determined by psychological laws, and that in regard to sensations it is often difficult to decide which way of looking at the matter is the most useful for purposes of description.

Through the subsequent pages of *The Analysis of Mind* various mental processes are examined and analysed with much penetration and with a salutary disposition to replace the woolly abstractions of common usage by exacter definitions, but in regard to consciousness little emerges for the mind to take hold of—unless the statement that " consciousness is far too complex and accidental (*sic*) to be taken as the fundamental characteristic of mind "—together with fresh evidence of the disposition of philosophers in behaviouristic mood to place the word " consciousness " between inverted commas.

There is little need to attempt its rescue from this state of ignominy, for whatever it is that the behaviourists suppose themselves to have confined between the prison bars of their quotation marks, it is not the concept of consciousness as symbolized by that word in the one distinctive and unambiguous sense in which it is normally employed—namely, the antithesis of unconsciousness. It is remarkable that Russell in his chapter headed " Recent Criticisms of ' Consciousness ' " never once refers to this usage of the term; he seems indeed to be completely oblivious to it. One more quotation will be sufficient to show how, by failing to take this conception into account at the commencement of his analysis, he never afterwards makes contact with it.

He begins his critical examination by referring to the popular view that " consciousness " is that which above all characterizes mind. He continues:—

> " We say that we are ' conscious ' of what we see and hear, of what we remember, and of our own thoughts and

> feelings. Most of us believe that tables and chairs are not 'conscious.' We think that when we sit in a chair, we are aware of sitting in it, but it is not aware of being sat in. It cannot for a moment be doubted that we are right in believing that there is *some* difference between us and the chair in this respect: so much may be taken as fact, and as a datum for our inquiry. But as soon as we try to say what exactly the difference is we become involved in perplexities. Is 'consciousness' ultimate and simple, something to be merely accepted and contemplated? Or is it something complex, perhaps consisting of our way of behaving in the presence of objects, or, alternatively, in the existence in us of things called 'ideas,' having a certain relation to objects, though different from them, and only symbolically representative of them?"[1]

Starting thus from the example of the self and the chair—the self conceived as being conscious and the chair as non-conscious—he goes on to state a series of problems which would never have arisen at all if, instead of contrasting the condition of the self, on the one hand, as conscious, and that of the chair, on the other, as non-conscious (a no more significant contrast than that between, e.g., a musical "self" and a non-musical chair), he had contrasted the condition of the self perceiving the chair with that of the self not perceiving it; or better still, because nearer to the root of the matter, that of the self aware of the chair's existence with that of the self not aware of the chair's existence; or again, best of all, and dropping the chair, that of the self aware of *something* and that of the self aware of nothing, as—to raise the chair again for a moment—might be the case if the chair were brought down with adequate impact upon the self's head. According to common usage the self or person involved would then be said to have been in a state of consciousness before the chair fell, and in a state of unconsciousness afterwards.

Here, in the language of everyday life, we have assigned a perfectly definite meaning to the word consciousness. It stands for the antithesis of unconsciousness; it is a convenient term to define a state of being, the detailed description of which no doubt affords as many problems as any scientist or philosopher

[1] Russell, op. cit., p. 11.

could desire, but which we are all aware of as a definite positive state, through having encountered its opposite.

The failure of Russell and others to take account of this sense of the term " consciousness " is probably due in part to its being often used, grammatically speaking, without an object. A person will be said to be " in a state of consciousness " or, simply, " conscious," without any mention being made of that of which he is supposed to be conscious; and this, to the mind trained in habits of precision, suggests that those who use the word thus think of consciousness as a vaguely " absolute " condition. If asked what they mean by this " consciousness " of which they so glibly speak, ordinary people may well fall into confusion, and under a skilfully conducted Socratic grilling will be quite likely to capitulate finally and confess themselves unable to say just what they do mean; which the interrogator takes as conclusive proof that they did not mean anything in particular. Nevertheless, it is possible that he errs; for it is not given to all of us to be able to analyse our concepts or translate them into terms of something else.

In this particular case, however, it hardly seems necessary to embark upon such an attempt in order to prove to the philosophers that our word has a definite significance and value. All we need to do is to confront them with an illustration of a person in a state of consciousness, and then with a person in a state of unconsciousness, and say that by consciousness we mean everything appertaining to the former state which differentiates it from the latter. If pressed to enter into detail, we could oblige by saying that the conscious person can, if possessed of the necessary physical equipment, see and hear and answer questions. (We need not invite conflict with the disciples of William James by saying that he can think, because if a person is unconscious he may still be breathing and therefore, presumably, according to this school, thinking also, although we cannot help feeling there is some kind of difference here too.)

Dr. Watson would doubtless be roused to ecstasies of contempt at the suggestion that seeing and hearing and replying to questions are evidence of " consciousness ! " Maybe they are not, but we are speaking here not of " consciousness ! "—whatever that may be—but of consciousness according to the usage which makes seeing synonymous with "visual consciousness" and hearing with

" aural consciousness " and which accepts rational conversation as evidence of " verbal consciousness " through the functioning of those faculties which enable their possessor to understand what is said to him. The term " understand " involves two other concepts which no one has ever succeeded in precisely defining—namely, memory and imagination. I think these are to be regarded as active components of consciousness, in that, without their activity in some degree there could be no consciousness at all. They are involved in all departments of consciousness, including those of sight and hearing, but as concepts are distinguished by the fact that we conceive of them as faculties having definable limits in each individual—which can be established by tests—normally extending beyond the minimum necessary to constitute the bare state of consciousness.

It can now be seen that in speaking of consciousness—regarded as the antithesis of unconsciousness—the term is not really being used in any more imprecise way than when, for example, we speak of the consciousness that somebody is following us, or the consciousness of our inability to perform some physical feat. Obviously the usefulness of the word in such usages is that, in cases where we do not feel sure what particular senses—whether those of sight, hearing, smell, etc.—were involved in the experience we are describing, it enables us to avoid any attempt to specify them. The term, nevertheless, remains an accurate statement that a set of circumstances was experienced. In these two examples the word " awareness " would convey exactly the same meaning as " consciousness " and could be substituted for it; as also, to take the converse examples, we might speak of unawareness of being followed, or unawareness of inability to perform a feat. " Aware," however, requires a stated object, and so we cannot substitute the phrase " he is aware " for " he is conscious," which fact is probably supposed to lend weight to the charge of vagueness unjustly levelled against this word. It is really one of its chief merits that it can be used in this way, for it thus makes possible a notable economy of words without detriment to exactness of meaning. For in describing, for example, the condition of a person restored to consciousness after being under an anaesthetic we need not say " He is aware of his surroundings " but only " He is conscious."

The idea of *self-consciousness* is far harder to define than that of

simple consciousness, because in a normal human being in a state of consciousness a degree of self-consciousness seems always to be present, or at any rate to be capable of being invoked, so that we are unable to define any state of human consciousness which does not also involve the idea of potential self-consciousness and the faculty of introspection. We can give perfectly clear examples of introspection and say they were made possible by the faculty of self-consciousness, but we cannot with any exactness define the condition of non-self-consciousness in a human being.

I believe this difficulty might be met by reference to a difference which we perceive between the character of our own mentality and that of the higher animals who are possessed of the same " five senses " as ourselves. They, according to the above definition of consciousness, can be said to be capable of consciousness in the same sense that we ourselves are capable of it, in the same sense and in the same degree. An illustration may serve to explain what I mean by this.

Once when riding a nervous filly along a narrow lane, I saw that we were approaching a washing-line hung with flapping laundry a little way back beyond the hedge. I expressed my apprehensions to the friend who was with me. He answered consolingly, " Well, we can only hope she won't notice it." He recognized that the question of whether or not she would " notice " it represented the crux of the situation. What would have happened then, if she had done so, would have been the consequence of her act of noticing, i.e., of her becoming conscious of the washing-line. Subsequent events might then have made it possible to regard the whole episode as representing a notable triumph of (equine) mind over (human) matter, or equally, of course, as an instance of " behaviour " ; but in regard to the given situation the fact of the animal's capacity to become conscious of something of which she was previouslv unconscious was quite correctly seen to be the decisive thing—the potential initiating factor of a whole train of subsequent events.

In this sense, then, we say that animals, like human beings, are capable of consciousness. Can we with equal assurance say that they are unlike human beings in that they are incapable of self-consciousness? As a simple relevant example we might take the case of " liking sugar." Most horses and many people like sugar, and both are capable, although removed from sensual

contact with the substance, of desiring it and taking action to secure it. A horse will nuzzle a pocket in the hope of finding sugar there, displaying in this relation similar faculties of memory and imagination to those which cause a sugar-loving human being to enter a shop and buy it by the pound. A human being, however, in addition to being able to imagine and desire sugar, will be capable of the thought which is expressed in the statement, " I like sugar." This is a judgment based upon an act of interpretation. I do not think a horse is capable of passing any such judgment, and I think he is incapable of it because he lacks self-consciousness, that is, consciousness of his own mental entity as an experienced phenomenon.

I will not attempt to discuss the mechanism, whether conceived as psychological or physiological, whereby it is possible for a mind thus to pass objective judgments about its own contents, because I am concerned only to discuss whether or not the term self-consciousness, like " consciousness," is a word of *value* to us, as conveying a specific meaning not equally well conveyed by any other term; a word not so vague as to be susceptible of such varied applications as would render its meaning necessarily obscure or doubtful. I believe that the word " self-consciousness " does meet these requirements. Certainly it is not proof against abuse, but it is, I believe, of sufficient definiteness for its abuses to be detectable and definable.

Self-consciousness, then, I see as that faculty, peculiar to human beings, which enables the individual to observe his own mental content (" I like Mr. Brown "), that process which goes by the name of introspection. It makes possible the subjective causal interpretation—not necessarily always accurate—not only of actions but of motives, tastes, antipathies, and predilections (" I like Mr. Brown because he is rich " or, " . . . because he was kind to me when I was small "); and also the subjective assessment of mental dispositions in accordance with a criterion of values (" I feel it is wrong of me . . . " or, " I feel it is nice of me to like Mr. Brown ").

If, then, consciousness, both of the environment and of the self, means certain specific types of experience, the idea of purpose—which, it will be remembered, was the starting-point of our inquiry into the meaning of " consciousness "—cannot be dismissed as chimerical because dependent upon belief in a mere

"indefinable something" called consciousness. Nevertheless, the meaning of purpose, unfortunately, remains to be examined, because although it is impossible to conceive of purpose existing without consciousness, the converse is not the case.

The following brief discussion of the idea of purpose will bring us to the subject of voluntary action, and what we understand by this idea, and so, via a discussion of psychological determinism, to ethics proper, which could not be usefully considered in detail before we had decided upon the meaning of the various concepts essential to the belief that voluntary action is possible—the necessary basic assumption of all ethical theory.

CHAPTER V

PURPOSE

PURPOSE, unlike consciousness, is conceived as something essentially dynamic, being always directed towards an object, whether concrete or abstract. If we define purpose as that product of consciousness which, through the operation of imagination, determines what action shall be performed on any given occasion, then we should regard conscious, non-human individuals—i.e., the higher animals—as capable of purposive action; and I see in this no reason for avoiding this usage as it marks a useful distinction between reflex actions, such as switching the tail or twitching the skin, and actions directed towards the attainment of an imagined satisfaction, the taste of a lump of sugar, for example.

Yet, if we consider the more complicated mental processes of human beings, it becomes clear that no definition on the above lines is really satisfactory, since with us the imagination, not of one, but of several different forms of desirable experience might all contribute to produce a given action—the desire for praise, for fame, and for money might all lead to the purchase of a typewriter—and in such cases we say, not that the agent acted from a combination of purposes, but from a combination of motives. In other cases we say that a person acted " with the single motive of——" producing some specific effect by his actions, in which case the word " purpose " substituted for " motive " would convey exactly the same idea, meaning the (inferred) psychological determinants of the act; but since " purpose " and " motive " are not in all contexts interchangeable, as we can speak of a person having several motives for an action but not several purposes, we must look for an *exclusive* significant content in the word, and this I believe subsists in the emphasis upon *volition* in the abstract which it conveys.

In the word " motive " in the various contexts in which it is used the idea of volition is admittedly always implicit; without

this idea it would be meaningless, but it is not stressed. But when we speak of "purpose" in certain contexts in which it is *not* synonymous with "motive" the conception of volition comes clearly to the fore in marking the distinction between voluntary and involuntary action. Accordingly, it would in the interests of clarity be desirable to drop the usage of "purpose" which makes it synonymous with "motive," and restrict its use to contexts in which it is desired to stress the conative element in the contemplation of an act. This is the more desirable because this loose usage makes possible another, even more confusing—namely, its application to mechanical contrivances, as in "What is the purpose of that little screw?" or to features of natural objects, as in "What is the purpose of the horn on its nose?" The phrase, "What does it do?" or "What function does it perform?" would serve in such cases.

It might, of course, be contended that a word of such diverse application that it is habitually used both to mean "motive" and "function" would be better done away with altogether. Yet, as already pointed out, in view of the widespread misuse of words it would not be possible to eliminate from our language all those words which lend themselves to ambiguous use. So long as a word *can* be employed to convey a definite meaning it is of value, and the contrary charge that it is a fairly exact synonym for another word is no good ground for condemning it either; at least it enriches the language and is of service to poets and literary stylists generally.

In regard to "purpose," I think that if, for the above-stated reasons, we reject it as a synonym for either "motive" or "function" there is only one *exclusive* meaning which can be ascribed to the word; that meaning which is conveyed in the following formula: *Purpose is the* sine qua non *of all voluntary action.* From which follows, no purpose, no voluntary action. This formula can be inverted as follows: *Volition is the* sine qua non *of all purposive action.* From which follows, no volition, no purposive action. This does not seem a very fertile conclusion, but if it is accepted one fact does seem to emerge—namely, that *the idea of "the will" is not, after all, necessary to the idea of purpose, or, accordingly, to that of volition.* Given the concept of consciousness, and of action performed in the state of consciousness, the ideas of purpose and volition emerge, as it were auto-

matically, in the psychological causal analysis of any consciously performed act. (The fact that we can be conscious of performing acts which are involuntary, such as sneezing, has, of course, nothing to do with the case, since we recognize them as not being psychologically determined.)

To the objection, How can there be volition, i.e., willing, without a will? the reply is that the statement that willing could not take place unless there were wills is analogous to the statement that growth could not take place unless there were "grows." For "volition," like "growth," is a name for a process, and there is no more rational justification for insisting that it must issue from some quintessential source in the one case than in the other. Volition is an activity of the conscious individual, which the self-conscious human individual is aware of in himself through introspection, and which he infers by means of observation to be operative in others.

CHAPTER VI

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

THE concept of the will as a kind of organ of volition seems now to be largely denuded of significance. There is nothing in the analysis contained in the preceding chapters which demonstrates that the will does not exist, but, on the other hand, it seems to show that the concept of the will is without much positive value, and no help to the understanding of the mysterious process which we define by the name of volition.

Nevertheless, it might be contended that if it comforts people to believe in the existence of this shadowy entity, the will, why should they be deterred from doing so? I think the only answer is that its consolation-value is probably only slight, whereas it gives rise to much worrying over an essentially false problem—the problem of Free Will. If the will is conceived of as an actual "thing" existing within our breasts and, like a muscle, capable of exertion of varying degrees of effectiveness according to its own strength and that of the force it is set to overcome, then the question of whether or not it is "free" is a matter of at least as much concern to its possessor as whether his arm or his leg is free or chained to a post. But if we are content to dispense with the idea of this thing the will altogether, and regard volition simply as a psychological *process* belonging to the state of consciousness and interpretable only in terms of its manifestations, nothing corresponding to the "problem" can arise, because the idea of causal determination is *contained in* the idea of process, no part of a process being conceivable as undetermined.

It is to be noted that the last thing the common man really wants is to see his volitions as undetermined. Whether by divine inspiration or by reason, they must, he feels, be caused by some agency operating within his own mind to produce them.

It is a matter of observation that we *cannot help* thinking of certain of our actions as being psychologically determined, the distinction which we make between the voluntary and the in-

voluntary act being a matter of immediate experience. What does it mean to assert that there is " really " no such difference?

The mechanist-determinist would say that it makes no *practical* difference; that the events which cause the actions and the events which the actions cause would have happened anyway; the involuntary blink and the lascivious wink, the stumble and the arabesque, the scribble and the sonnet, with all their train of consequences, are all equally bound to play their allotted part in contributing to the predetermined shape of things to come. He might add that the time is not far distant when we shall be able, by minute observation of the physical processes accompanying " so-called " thought in the human brain, to predict exactly what actions the possessor of the brain is going to perform and even what " thoughts " he is going to " think."

We may concede that some sort of physical process probably does accompany thinking, but still deny that it *is* thinking, because when we say " thinking " we do not as a rule mean a physical process in the brain but a quite different sort of experience, peculiar to the state of consciousness and impossible without it. It may be, and probably is, always accompanied by a physical event, but it is not the physical event itself.

This being so, we seem to be confronted with a difficulty, in that certain physical events can be ascribed either to psychological or to physical causes, according to our way of viewing them.

Let us take the following example: I see a plate beginning to slide off a tray. I put out my hand and push it back, and I feel that if I had not done so it would have fallen to the floor. That means that I believed my action could be effective in preventing an event. Subsequently I might say that it was physically predetermined that I should perform just that action, and that, accordingly, the plate was never really in danger. But if *before* the event I had thought it was not in danger I should never have pushed it, and so it *would* have fallen. Therefore my consciousness of the situation, involving sight, memory, and imagination, was an effective instrument in the determination of events, but only by virtue of the fact that I was in a condition of uncertainty as to what would happen. Therefore my uncertainty, my nescience regarding the future course of events was an actual factor in the shaping of them.

Anyone who has ever been conscious of performing an involun-

tary action will be sure that it differed in some respect from his voluntary actions; his consciousness of its involuntary character will, in fact, be based on his perception of that difference, but, for all that, he may find himself unable to answer the mechanistic determinist who tells him that the only " real " difference was in the degree of complexity of the reactions of his brain-mechanism to the respective stimuli. His desperate protest that he feels, he *knows*, that there is much more to it than that, will only broaden the mechanist's superior smile. And yet he may have a better case than he knows, only, if he is to be consistent in stating it, he must be prepared to adopt a deterministic standpoint and stick to it.

The man who declares that his volitions are " free," in the sense that he can choose his own courses of action, speaks, if he is consistent, willy-nilly as a *psychological* determinist. For in the very conception of choice the conception of motive inheres, motive determined by rational deliberation which, again, is determined by ideas whose causal ancestry can all be traced—or at any rate are seen to be traceable—to memories and images derived from memories, conceptions in each one of which the idea of causal continuity is implicit. Unless this is understood and accepted by anyone who sets himself to combat the standpoint of materialistic fatalism, he is not in a position to throw down any effective challenge.

But now, suppose the psychological determinist and the materialist-determinist joined in battle. Is it possible for one ever to defeat the other, so that an impartial auditor would declare him the winner?

Let us suppose them to be debating their fundamental point of disagreement. The psychological determinist asserts that some of his actions are psychologically determined, while the materialist affirms that on the contrary they are all physically determined. This is a straightforward issue, both arguing in causal terms.

They may take as example the posting of a letter. A man posts a letter. His doing so was, like every other event in the world, causally determined. So the question is, what caused this particular event? The psychological determinist (who for the sake of brevity will hereafter be called " the Psychologist ") affirms that every past experience of that man—" every psycho-

logical experience" he may add, to make his meaning perfectly clear—contributed, in however infinitesimal a degree, to the posting by him of that letter at that time and in that place; the immediate cause being the purpose behind the purposive act of pushing the letter through the slot. "In other words," he may add, raising his voice as the Materialist begins to interrupt him, "if he had *not* had that purposive impulse his act of posting the letter would *not* have been performed."

"How do you know?" says the Materialist, with a provocative air. "He might have done it in a trance, under hypnosis, for instance, and so have had no 'purposive impulse,' as you call it, at all."

"Of course he'd have had the purposive impulse," the Psychologist retorts; "the only difference would have been in his antecedent motives. As you should know, when a person is under hypnosis all his actions are actually motivated by the desire to obey his hypnotist, so all you are saying is that the psychological causal background of his action would have been different according as there were different antecedent circumstances. I've no wish to deny that. Obviously any number of different motives could be postulated for him, but whether his main motive in posting the letter was to obey a hypnotist, or to please his Uncle James, or to annoy his Aunt Fanny, is not the question, although I'm glad you gave me the chance of pointing out that in *every* case of effective purposive action there's always a motive underlying it."

"Now you're introducing your mythological concept of purpose again," says the Materialist. "But that won't do, because, as you know, I absolutely deny that there is such a thing as purpose, except as a vague concept in your head. I don't for a moment accept your notion of purpose as an effective force. What do you *mean* by purpose, anyway?"

"I didn't say purpose; I said purposive action."

"All right, then. What do you mean by purposive action?"

"Really, I thought you knew. Give me a clip just under the knee-cap, will you? My leg jerks. I can't help it. That action of mine I call non-purposive—or involuntary. And now I'm going to jerk my leg again. This time, you see, I did it on purpose. That illustrates the essential difference between a purposive and a non-purposive act. The time when you clipped

me the air was disturbed by an *involuntary* kick, the second time by a voluntary one. And my voluntary kick, *unlike* the other, was immediately psychologically determined. I had a motive—the motive of illustrating a point in my argument. If I had not had that motive, I should not have kicked. As with the man posting the letter."

"But will you not see that the essential difference you think you perceive between the causes, respectively, of your first and your second kick is, and must be, ultimately reducible to a difference in the degree of complexity of the mechanical processes in your brain which led up to your act of kicking? You are not going to say, I take it, that the muscular contraction in your leg and the motor impulse in your brain which produced it were less effective causes of your kick in the second case than in the first? Well then, why invoke mystery and magic to account for the earlier phases of the causal process? You admit that at every overtly sense-able stage of the process, as far back as you like to go, physical factors were at work—my voice producing waves which impinged upon your ear-drums and so forth—and then, directly you come to processes which are not observable, you imagine some kind of taking-over of the causal process by non-physical agencies that you are pleased to call memory and imagination and purpose and I-don't-know-what; closing up the gap in our knowledge of the physical process with a lot of mystical stuffing that makes nonsense of the idea of causality altogether."

"The *idea*, did you say, of causality?" says the Psychologist. "The gap in our *knowledge*? Well, I certainly see what you mean."

The Materialist is duly provoked by this. "Now, look here; you know perfectly well that when I use terms like 'idea' and 'knowledge' I use them purely for convenience as symbols for certain physical processes of great complexity whose working, *so far*, we are not able to observe. I can say 'rainbow,' and you'll know what I mean without my going into detail about what combination of physical factors produces the phenomenon which goes by that name. I don't deny, and I never have denied, that words like 'knowledge' and 'idea' are useful terms to designate certain types of experience; all that I *do* deny is that they are *factors* in any causal process. How *can* they be? Will you tell

me how a physical event can have a psychological cause—because that, you realize, is what you are trying to make out?"

"That's not a proper statement of my position. I don't know anything about physical events as such, or whether there are such things; but if you talk, not of physical events, but of physical phenomena, then I do most emphatically tell you that *every* phenomenon is psychologically caused, for every phenomenon is a psychological event. You chose just now to call knowledge 'a physical process of great complexity.' Well, perfect your instruments; construct your mind-reading apparatus, fix it to your own brain; and watch your own mind in a mirror-attachment. What will you see but a phenomenon, a series of events proceeding from your own consciousness, behind which you can never go?"

"So now you're adopting an Idealist standpoint, and denying the existence of the physical world altogether."

"By no means. I'm not denying anything. I leave that to you. Let's get back to the man posting the letter. You say his act was physically determined. I say it was psychologically determined. Now when I say it was psychologically determined I don't mean to say that every stage in the process leading up to his posting the letter could not, theoretically, be described in terms of physical events, including your minute discharges of electrical energy, and so forth. But what *you* refuse to see is that you are only using the language of physics to explain a process which in fact you don't *understand* any more than I do, but which I at least can *describe* in the language of experience, whereas you can't actually describe it in any language at all. All you can say is that according to your way of thinking, that's how it must be."

"No!" cries the Materialist. "*Not* 'according to my way of thinking,' but according to anybody's way of thinking, including your own. That's the fatal weakness of your whole position. You find physical causal laws in operation everywhere in the physical world; you see a man as a physical entity in and of that world, and just because there are technical obstacles to observing his processes as thoroughly as we can observe the processes of a great many other entities you claim that the physical causal law is somehow, in some way, suspended for his benefit in favour of another sort of law which it is impossible to reconcile

with the rest of experience. You're forced into a dualistic position which breaks down at the point of interaction between the two systems. So-called psycho-physical parallelism works beautifully—up to the precise point at which the man begins to post the letter."

"I hope you're not accusing *me* of psycho-physical parallelism," says the Psychologist frostily.

"No, no. I only wanted to show you that your interpretation leads you straight on to a point at which you must either give up, or else invent some more or less arbitrary and fantastic solution, which has no relevance to the facts of experience."

"I wonder," the Psychologist remarks, "how many times you've used the word 'experience' in the past five minutes. At least half a dozen times, I should think. Would you mind defining it—in your physical terms?"

"Delighted. Any reaction of the living brain-organism to external stimuli."

"Oh, come!"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Plenty. You spoke just now of something not being relevant to the facts of experience. You're not going to tell me you meant that it was not relevant to the facts of 'any reaction of the living brain-organism to external stimuli'! Something wrong there, isn't there? And now I'll tell you just what *is* wrong. Your definition of experience is completely arbitrary and artificial. And it is so because you could only try to derive it from data which are part of the *content* of experience and therefore can't possibly embrace it. So when you try to discover the nature of experience by studying physical processes you're like a man putting on his spectacles so as to look for them; or you're like a pair of forceps trying to pick itself up. I personally wouldn't attempt to define experience, unless by saying that it is the consciousness by any conscious being of whatever it is that he is conscious of. That really makes it synonymous with consciousness in detail. Yes, that is my definition. Consciousness in detail. That doesn't say much; but no definition on *your* lines can mean anything like what you yourself mean when you use the word in any other context. In your thinking about human actions and the cause of human actions you're guilty of that very dualism that you accused me of just now. You can get along all

right in your physical causal analysis of human behaviour only so long as you can manage to ignore the fact of consciousness as a factor in the process. Your man posting the letter is an impossible conception simply because he has never *experienced.* His brain has merely gone through the motions of experiencing. *My* man's brain has reacted to external stimuli too, but how? By how I don't mean, with what result; I mean, in what manner. The answer is, of course, consciously—according to your way of thinking and my way of thinking and everybody else's as well. It's not, as you make out, a mere limitation of our knowledge, preventing us so far from being able to trace the course of the physical causal nexus in its passage through the brain, which makes it convenient for us to use the fiction that thinking is effective. Thinking *is* effective simply because we cannot but think that it is effective. It is effective even when it's cock-eyed. . . . I'll tell you who that man is who's posting that letter; and I'll even tell you what's in it. The man is a mechanist, just like you, and he has discovered that the idea that thinking is effective is a delusion. So he wrote a long article proving all that, and put it in an envelope and addressed it to the editor of *Mind,* and then he went out to post it. His wife, who had read the article and did not think much of it, tried to dissuade him, but he answered, 'I have made up my mind. I'm *determined* to send it.' And, as events proved, he was quite right."

"All very witty, no doubt," comments the Materialist. "Of course all seekers after the truth have to put up with a lot of that sort of thing, because it's really very easy to do. You see, *our* business is to co-ordinate all our data and form them into a consistent pattern, and that puts us at a disadvantage, sometimes, as against others like yourself who are content to go leap-frogging to and fro between mutually incompatible concepts. I maintain that my scheme, in spite of technical difficulties, is more capable of yielding a coherent pattern embodying the whole of experience than yours, which can be maintained only by carefully keeping well within the margins of your own little circumscribed scheme, and refusing to reckon with anything that lies beyond, except in a different context. It's a pity you can't see that *as a determinist* you've taken up a position that's completely untenable, unless you are prepared to argue that in some peculiar way or other

psychological' events are the only ones that are determined, and that all other events occur haphazard."

"I'm quite as anxious as you are to get an overall picture of the world, only I'm not prepared to construct it at the price of ignoring one particular department of my experience," returns the Psychologist. "You maintain that for the sake of consistency I ought to convince myself that my idea that my thoughts affect my actions is a delusion. Well, in the first place, I can't; and, in the second place, even if I could, would it really help? I should still be aware that my delusion had been effective in influencing my attitude towards my own behaviour, and therefore also my actions; and I should also be aware that similarly my *recovery* from the delusion would affect my behaviour. So that in the very renouncing of it I should embrace it again. I don't see any co-ordination of experience emerging *there*."

"That would only be the loosest kind of retrospective interpretation and completely unscientific. The events you'd be pleased to ascribe to your ideas could all be seen as physically determined, and if only we could trace them out they could be co-ordinated with the rest of events as a part of the whole causal process. On the basis of your psychological determinism you can't make any predictions about human behaviour—or only the sketchiest kind. *We* can predict an eclipse of the moon a thousand years ahead. We could predict your actions with the same accuracy if only we could observe the physical processes in your brain. Laplace's Intelligence could infer every future event in your brain-cells as accurately as the future movements of all the stars."

"I understand that cat won't jump any more; the electrons jump instead. Isn't there something called the 'Principle of Indeterminacy'?"

"The Principle of Uncertainty. That won't save you. It only means that we have to handle microcosmic events with statistical forceps; it doesn't mean that things won't go on happening according to the same causal laws as they did before."

"I don't expect it to 'save' me. I only wanted to point out that the Laplacean super-brain is no good as a stick to beat me or anybody else with now."

"Don't be too sure of that. You should read Planck . . ."

The Materialist and the Psychologist need no longer detain us.

If there is anything in the universe which determines nothing, it is this kind of argument. Nevertheless, such discussions, so familiar and so interminable, do illustrate a very real difficulty of interpretation, and draw attention to the felt need for a conception of experience more satisfying than either a materialist or a psychologist *per se* can provide.

In regard to human conduct I think the psychologist, in spite of the seeming " impossibility " of his position, is right in maintaining that there is rational justification for upholding the standpoint of psychological determinism in the teeth of the physical causal law. I will state as briefly as possible my reasons for holding this view:

If the question " Why did you do that? " is asked about any action which is not of the type classed as involuntary, the answer will be given in terms of volition; " I did it because I wanted to—— " or, " I did it because I was afraid that—— " etc., because the person addressed will understand that he was not being questioned concerning the physical processes in his brain. He will understand this because he will be aware that his questioner is aware that he cannot observe them. He will understand that he is being asked for a causal explanation in terms of the only type of analysis which the questioner could apply to the causal interpretation of *his own* actions.

Thus the idea of volition is *a priori* to the causal interpretation by any individual of his own actions, in so far as he recognizes them as belonging to the second of two types—those which he cannot help performing and those which he feels that he can perform or not, as he wishes. Now, this distinction is a matter of direct intuition. Every other kind of causal analysis is made through the medium of the " five senses " in contact with the phenomenal world. These are the vehicle through which impressions are collected and transmitted back to the brain, which then " assimilates " them according to its own peculiar methods, which, in the case both of the most primitive and of the most sophisticated type of human brain, involves the assumption of the objective existence of a world of entities external to the self, and also of causal inter-relations between them.

The idea of cause as applied to external phenomena seems to precede in every human individual the idea of psychological cause as applicable to the individual's own actions, but that may be

because self-consciousness is not primary. (The "phenomenonalization" of the self as a whole distinct entity is, I think, a very considerable and a distinctively human mental feat, perhaps associated with the human parents' practice of naming their young.) Now, once the idea of the self as an entity is conceived, the activities of that phenomenon-self are seen to be subject to a determining agency whose operations are taken for granted, that agency being *volition*. "I did it because I wanted to do it" would be the essential element in any young child's reply to a question as to why he performed any action which he was not conscious of having been "compelled" to perform. This taking-for-granted of volition as determining action is a causal intuition which remains unshakable so long as self-consciousness persists. Physiological analysis will leave it untouched, psychological analysis will only elaborate it in detail without affecting the basic assumption.

Now, acceptance of the fact of this intuition of determinism by volition is not incompatible with the most rigid mechanistic determinism, so long as the mechanist deliberately excludes consciousness from his calculations. This he must, as mechanist, do in any case, because he is concerned only with measurable entities and processes, and an intuition cannot be measured. Yet, as a self-conscious being, he, equally with the psychologist, is aware that he regards all his actions, except reflex ones, as volitionally determined. He will be aware, that is to say, that he has a sense that he *chooses* to perform each act, as the alternative to *not* performing it. This he may dismiss as a delusion, and in so doing he acknowledges its existence as an experience. Here, as one dedicated to the mechanistic life-view, he must leave the matter; it lies altogether outside his province. His scientific line of advance takes him ever further away from the incalculable subjective factor, on to the outermost boundary of the physical causal system, where he is again confronted with the incalculable.

It is the pure psychologist's business to investigate that field of experience which the mechanist must ignore. His subject-matter is every mental event which issues from that primary intuition of thought as a process—initially of *his own* thought, for what others think is, of course, only an inference, sensually transmitted, from his own experience of thinking. The psychologist's line of research, therefore, leads off in the opposite direc-

tion from that of the physicist, for he begins with the fact of the incalculable—his own basic intuition of conscious selfhood—and from it seeks to derive the calculable; discovering in his own mind logical thought-processes, and volitions determined by an interaction between ideas and earlier volitions; so spiralling inwards, with thought pursuing thought like a kitten chasing its tail down the interior of an ever-narrowing but bottomless cylinder.

The philosopher seeks to co-ordinate the systems of the physicist and the psychologist into a self-consistent world-view. He refuses to regard any type of experience as intrinsically less "valid" than any other. At the same time, he differentiates between primary intuition, which "knows" those impressions that are *not* directly transmitted to the mind by the medium of the five senses, and secondary intuition, which consists in the belief, acquired through sensual experience, that certain impressions reflect objective reality, while others do not. He inquires, then, how we shall reconcile the apparent incompatibilities which seem sometimes to occur between the content, respectively, of primary and secondary intuition. Thus, in regard to the matter under discussion, he inquires how it is possible to reconcile the intuition of determinism by volition with the secondary intuition of determinism by physical causal law. He cannot, like the materialist, dismiss the idea of determinism by volition as chimerical, since he does not, like him, accord any intrinsic validity to the material of secondary intuition; but neither can he declare it the victor in its clashes with the idea of determinism by physical causal law, since both interpretations are equally aspects of experience, which is the one *fact* which the philosopher will never call in question.

Now, secondary intuition, so far, yields no material for the calculation of the physical power-potential of the human brain. All it can do in this sphere is to record the physical consequences of its activity. But this, the mechanist insists, is without prejudice to the possibility that in some manner as yet undiscovered its operations could be calculated in the same way and in the same terms as the operation of any other physical agency.

It is my contention that it is, strictly, *inconceivable* that this could ever be done; the technical difficulties are insuperable. This is because of *the inevitability of interaction between the brain*

observer and the brain as phenomenon, rendering calculation hrough introspection impossible. On the other hand, the difficulties f calculation from the observation by one brain of another are o less insuperable.

Suppose the scientist to be observing by means of instruments he physical processes taking place in another brain. Previous bservations of his own brain conducted by means of a similar pparatus have led him to associate the act of introspection vith, we may suppose, a spiralling motion of some part of the rain-matter. He will, let us assume, perceive a similar motion n the brain of his subject, but will have no means of determining vhether it corresponds with his own efforts at self-observation xcept by asking his subject, " Were you introspecting just now? " f he receives an affirmative reply, he may then note that the eaction of this particular individual to an inquiry as to whether e is introspecting, consequent upon the incidence of a spiralling notion in his brain, produced the word " Yes." If then he eneralizes to the effect that this represents a causal sequence, e will be disconcerted, on *repeating* the observation and the xperiment, if he hears, instead of the anticipated " Yes," " Go to ell." Yet this might occur. There is, indeed, no telling what night occur, for what at any given moment in the way of speech r other action will be thrown off from the spinning vortex of he self-conscious brain can only be seen to depend upon volitional mpulses arising from the infinitude of possible interactions etween the mind—i.e., the brain in its cognitive aspect—and its henomenal world, *which includes the mind itself.* The intuitive ense of the determination of human action by volition is thus stified in the terms of what I have called secondary intuition—he system of thought based upon assumption of the objective eality of sensibly-given experience—through the observable fact hat it is impossible to predict human actions with anything pproaching scientific accuracy.

Here, then, we see a " principle of uncertainty " pervading that ection of the realm of human experience which involves the per-eption of experience itself; even as it appears again at its outer-ost margins in the incalculability of microcosmic motions. n neither region is the idea of causality excluded—for the con-eption of an uncaused event is senseless in the terms both of rimary and secondary intuition—that is to say, it is incon-

ceivable in any thought-context. Accordingly, in the one field we speak of statistical laws, by means of which accurate prediction of macroscopic events is made possible, and, on the hither side we speak of volition, which may be seen as the total effect of all the incalculable number of mental events which determine our actions.

In this sense, then, volition determines all human actions with the exception of those which can be understood as determined by the operation of calculable physical forces, and it is a valuable concept by no means to be dispensed with by those who desire to understand the springs of human action in order to discover how human action can be modified.

To sum up: The view that there are two sets of causal laws, the psychological and the physical, is unhelpful because it introduces an element of dualism into our world-view, involving insoluble problems at the point of interaction between "mind" and "matter," and unnecessary so long as we recognize, on the one hand, the inevitable ultimate subjectivity of all our causal interpretations of experience, and, on the other hand, the fact that "volition" comprehends within its scope a whole realm of presumed causal determinants governing all those of our actions which, because of their immediacy in experience, we cannot—we can never—understand as physically determined. Thus in regard to the earlier example of the man posting the letter, we are correct in using the blanket-conception "volition" to cover all the factors leading up to his action which are of this intrinsically undeterminable type. Undeterminable, *not* undetermined, for primary intuition, no less than secondary intuition, refuses to admit the idea of indeterminacy in any experiential context.

This idea of the intrinsic indeterminability of certain types of phenomenon, now familiar to us all thanks to the work of the contemporary school of physicists, has been rashly hailed as a way of escape from Huxley's "nineteenth-century nightmare" of the absolute predetermination of all events including human actions the unpredictable "jumping" of electrons being taken as evidence that our idea of causality is a delusion not corresponding to the "real facts." Sir Arthur Eddington, for example, proclaimed that it appears that "nature abhors accuracy and precision above all things," the consoling inference being, apparently, that since electrons can act in a haphazard manner, anything can

including the human unit. The various logical difficulties involved in this view have been ably and entertainingly reviewed by Dr. Susan Stebbing in her *Philosophy and the Physicists*, and there is no need to reproduce her devastating analysis here. Here I am only concerned to acknowledge the very real gift of the physicists, with their " principle of uncertainty," to minds distressfully struggling in the thicket of the supposed " problem of free will." For the conception of inevitable uncertainty, of a limit to the possibility of causal analysis of phenomena, due to the interaction between the instrument of observation and the object observed, most beautifully reflects the situation concerning our own mental processes. For here the " instrument of observation " is the brain itself.

Volition is thus a term for a type of experience given in primary intuition, untranslatable into other terms, although analysable in detail as " motive " or " aim " in the language of causality, which is the only language available to convey to our minds, or to other minds, the particulars of that experience we know as " understanding."

CHAPTER VII

THE MORAL MOTIVE

HAVING now accepted psychological determinism as the only satisfactory approach to the analysis of human conduct, we may hand back, as it were, the conceptions of consciousness, volition, and purpose to the moralist, at least provisionally. His contention that there is some sense in which it is true to say that people ought to act otherwise than they do, is not refutable on the grounds that all human actions are physically determined, and that therefore people *cannot* act otherwise than as "mere-machines." If "ought" implies "can," then "ought" is not to be dismissed on the grounds that it implies twaddle. The moralist will be able to show that the belief that we "can" is *a priori* to voluntary (as distinguishable from involuntary) action in every self-conscious mind.

Against the moralist some might still argue with a good deal of cogency that, as volition always determines voluntary acts, the moral imperative, which demands action running counter to existing trends of volition in the individual, must always be ineffective. This, however, is to ignore the fact that the desire to "act morally" may itself form an ingredient of motivation and therefore be effective in determining action. At the same time, the statement that people's actions may be motivated by a *desire* to act morally is not the same as saying that it is, in fact, possible for them to act morally. That is quite another matter for, manifestly, action may be directed towards the attainment of an object which actually is not attainable at all.

Now, the moralist asserts that to act morally means to act as one *ought* to act, and so, in order to discover in what sense, if any, the moralist's contention that it is possible for men to act morally is true, it is necessary to investigate the meaning or meanings which attach to the term "ought" as used by a moralist, and the idea of moral obligation. Such questions would be far easier to decide if only moralists would refrain from investi-

gating them, but unfortunately they seem to have an irresistible attraction for them. If the moralists would only begin with the statement of their own moral predilections and content themselves with expounding the types of conduct which conform with their particular criteria, we should not be bemused by elaborate seamless arguments which can all, after much labour, be reduced to the statement that we ought to act as we ought to act because we know that we ought to do so. How often has one embarked upon a work purporting to be an investigation into the meaning of the idea of moral obligation, only to discover that the author himself is living within the charmed circle of his own ethical preconceptions?

It appears to me as self-evident that the only possible standpoint from which investigation of the moral idea can be fruitfully conducted is one of complete detachment from the assumptions (*a*) that moral principles are given to the mind by direct intuition, and (*b*) that a moral principle can be inferred from the study of events in the external world. Anyone who adheres to either of these beliefs is self-debarred from any objective consideration of the *idea* of moral obligation (even although the principles he enunciates may be wholly admirable and conducive to the welfare of humanity), because adherence to either (*a*) or (*b*) or both as *beliefs* precludes consideration of them as *propositions*. Yet it is only by analysing them, or some version of them, as propositions that we can hope to discover what they mean and what they imply. I believe that if we *can* discover what they mean and what they imply, we shall have advanced a long way towards understanding the meaning of the idea of moral obligation and how it is related to the rest of experience.

"The moral sense" is a term used to denote a faculty which is held to be responsible for a particular type of experience—the experience, namely, of a feeling of which some people, at least, sometimes, at least, are conscious that some particular action, or type of action, conceived to be possible "ought" to be performed, or "ought not" to be performed. It is thus entirely subjective and personal. Whatever the *origin* of the moral sense is conceived to be, that sense, if it exists at all, can be effective only by influencing in some degree the volitional content of individual minds. It introduces, in fact, a distinctive type of motive, which may or may not be sufficiently strong to

determine action. It is often contended that the distinctive characteristic of this motive is that it aims at action in conformity with some general principle of conduct conceived by the individual to be binding, not only upon himself, but upon other men as well. But this view, I believe, is less the outcome of objective investigation into the nature of moral feeling, than of a desire to lay the foundations for a piece of special pleading in favour of a particular ethical system. It is a matter of experience that an individual may entertain a moral motive—that is, a sense that it is his moral duty to act in a particular way in given circumstances—without feeling any sort of conviction that even one other person ought so to act in the like external circumstances. People will say " I *know* it is my moral duty to do that "—for example, give up smoking, become a missionary, marry, or eschew marriage—" but whether you ought to do the same is a matter for your own conscience to decide." In this they reveal themselves as honest moralists, with a clear understanding of the essentially subjective nature of all moral feeling. For if a morally right action is an action performed in obedience to the dictates of Conscience, as the moral sense in its imperative aspect, then nobody can know what would constitute moral action on the part of another person unless he is as familiar with the relevant contents of that person's mind as he is with those of his own. The only person who might be in a position to know what would be the morally right action for another person to perform would be an ideally efficient thought-reader.

Thus the only possible answer which a moralist, *qua* moralist, could give to the question addressed to him by another person, " How ought I to act so as to act morally? " would be " You ought to act as your conscience tells you that you ought to act." This might be paraphrased as " It is your moral duty to do your moral duty."

This appears to me to dispose of all the claims of moralists to lay down specific rules of conduct for other people. Arbitrary moral systems have no foundation but in the particular predilections of their formulators in favour of conduct directed towards particular ends, even though as *advice* their content may be of high social value.

Kant's Categorical Imperative " *Act in conformity with that maxim and that maxim only which you can at the same time will to be*

a universal law" is completely arbitrary. For all that he claims to derive it from an investigation into the essential nature of any "pure" moral judgment—that is, any judgment untinged either by considerations of expediency or by prejudice in favour of any specific type of conduct as preferable to others—it is in fact clear, even from the passage with which Kant introduces his discourse upon the Metaphysic of Morality, that he has already made up his mind as to what kind of conduct is good, and what kind is bad—*per se*—and that his system of ethics has its source in these predilections. This highly revealing passage runs as follows :—

> "Nothing in the whole world, or even outside the world, can possibly be regarded as good without limitation, except a *good will*. Doubtless it is good and desirable to have intelligence, sagacity, sound judgment, and other intellectual gifts, whatever they may be called; it is also good and desirable in many respects to have by nature such qualities as courage, resolution, and perseverance; but all these gifts of nature may be in the highest degree pernicious and hurtful if the will directing them, or what is called the *character* (*Character*) is not good. Similarly in regard to the gifts of fortune, power, wealth, honour, even good health, and that general well-being and contentment with one's state which is called happiness, give rise to pride and frequently often to insolence, in the absence of a good will to correct and make generally purposeful their influence upon the spirit and thus upon the whole principle of action. . Not to mention that a rational, objective observer could never find satisfaction in contemplating the unbroken prosperity of a man who is not graced by any trace of a pure and good will. Thus we see that a good will is the indispensable condition without which no one even deserves to be happy."

From this short passage we can extract a veritable catalogue of goods and evils. The misuse of the "gifts of nature" by employing them in ways which are "pernicious and hurtful" is assumed to be bad. That this is an arbitrary judgment and not just a provisional assumption is evident from the context which makes "good will" pre-eminent *because* it prevents the use of intelligence, sagacity, and the rest in ways which are pernicious

and hurtful; which must mean either detrimental to the spiritual or physical well-being of the individual guilty of the perversion of his gifts, or detrimental to the well-being of other individuals, and which almost certainly means the latter.

Again, " pride and insolence " are in the same way assumed to be bad as a matter of course, without any necessity of proving them to be so, for the statement that a good will can control them is assumed to be a *proof* of its goodness. Then again, we find the satisfaction of Adam Smith's " rational, objective observer " invoked as a criterion—the unstated assumption here being that what gives satisfaction to a " rational, objective observer " is, *ipso facto*, good (regardless of the difficulty that a *completely* objective observer could have no criterion of value at all, and would therefore be incapable of feeling satisfaction). Finally, we have the criterion of " worthiness to be happy." The implications of this are of the highest significance, as showing the *social* element in Kant's approach to ethics. But we shall return to a consideration of Kant's ethics at a later stage. Here I wished only to draw attention to the arbitrariness of his contention—which seems to arise from a prejudice in favour of socially desirable behaviour—that no action is moral unless it is motivated by the desire to act in accordance with some principle which its agent holds to be of universal validity, and also to reveal the ingredients of socially oriented pragmatism in the very foundations of his ethical structure.

We have seen that the only necessary minimal condition for a moral action is a feeling in the mind of its agent that he is acting in obedience to the dictates of his moral sense, and from this it follows that the question of whether a particular action is or is not in fact a *moral* action can never be judged by the nature of the action itself, but only by the motive in the mind of the agent. In theory, therefore, *any* action at all might be a moral action, from martyrdom to murder. The sole test of the morality of the act would be whether the agent's motive in performing it was to act morally, i.e., to do what he felt his moral sense telling him that he ought to do.

Now, from the average moralist's point of view this conclusion, even though it is the necessary corollary of his own conception of the " moral sense," is thoroughly unsatisfactory, because if the sole moral imperative is " Do whatever you believe to be your

moral duty," no particular action can be held to be intrinsically better—in the moral, as distinct from the pragmatical sense—than any other, so that morality can never furnish a particular principle of *action*, but only, as it were, a " principle of motive." This runs counter to that whole scheme of ethical thinking which demands that it shall be possible to regard certain specific types of *action* as morally right (even though most moralists feel bound to concede that no one sort of action is held by *every* morally-conscious being to be morally right, so that the ultimate criterion must always remain subjective). Further, even apart from the natural distaste which amateur and professional moralists alike must feel for such an arid conclusion as the above, any average person brought up according to the educational traditions of our culture, in which " oughts " play so large a part, will be inclined to feel that there is an inherent absurdity about the idea that there is only *one* moral principle and one, moreover, which is entirely impartial in regard to types of conduct. Here, indeed, we seem to be confronted with a paradox, for is not the judgment " you ought " to do so-and-so universally accepted as a *moral* judgment?

I believe that this difficulty is based upon a confusion of meanings which originates in an arbitrary ascription, in the ethical interest, of a particular meaning to the word " principle," which makes possible also the similar arbitrary ascription of particular meanings to a series of other terms, as will appear.

If a man performs an action because of a conviction that by doing so he is promoting intrinsically good ends,[1] he is said by moralists to be acting " on principle." On the other hand, if a man does something because he believes that it will promote ends which he himself desires, he will be said to be acting " from motives of expediency." So the term " principle " comes to be used as the antithesis of expediency motive. Yet, in fact, a principle of action may be, and often is, a principle of *expediency*; it may be a scheme for behaviour deliberately directed towards the attainment of a desired end.

Now, once the moralists have established, as it were, their claim to use the word " principle " in their own particular sense, they find it an easy matter to rope-in other terms for the same questionable purpose, and " right," " wrong," " good," " bad,"

[1] What is to be understood by an " intrinsically good end " will appear hereunder.

and " ought," are also quietly drawn in to the ethical stronghold. This is taken so much as a matter of course that morality is often thoughtlessly assumed to have an actual monopoly in these terms, although they all form part of the common terminology of every-day pragmatic judgments, and are applicable in relation to non-moral, no less than to moral, principles.

A non-moral principle is a principle of expediency. That is to say, it is consciously directed towards the attainment of desired ends. The principle is adopted on rational grounds, in the belief that action in conformity with it is more likely to bring about the desired end than other possible types of behaviour. The criterion of rightness and wrongness which will then be applied to particular relevant actions will be a pragmatic criterion ; the test will be whether or not the actions in question are believed to further or to obstruct the agent's attainment of his objective.

As an example we may take the case of a man who desires to improve his health. We may picture him examining a prospectus sent to him by a professor of gymnastics and debating within his mind as follows: " I don't know if it would be *right* for me to go to this man, because he seems to concentrate upon muscular development, whereas I'm sure I *ought* to go in for limbering exercises. It would certainly be quite *wrong* for me to do that dumb-bell stuff, yet I *ought* to try to get my weight down too."

Here we have not only the pragmatic " right " and " wrong " but also the pragmatic " ought " as commonly used. For in the context of a specific aim the action which " ought " to be performed is the action seen as most likely to help towards its realization. " Ought " is very often used in the pragmatic sense without the speaker mentioning the aim to which it relates, and this may result in a purely pragmatic " ought " being supposed to have an ethical signification which it does not, in fact, bear. For example, a man may say " I ought to go now," and his hearer may presume that this means he feels impelled to go by moral considerations. Yet, if he had added his unspoken thought " —or I shall miss my train, which might result in my losing my job," the pragmatic significance of his " ought " would at once have stood revealed.[1]

[1] The interesting question of *why* people apparently so often wish to place a moral interpretation upon a non-moral judgment is a psychological problem, consideration of which must be postponed for a later stage.

I have defined a principle of expediency as " a schemes of behaviour directed towards the attainment of a desired end." What, then, can a *moral* principle of action be? It is commonly supposed to be a scheme for behaviour directed towards the attainment of ends judged to be intrinsically good. I would maintain, on the contrary, that since there is and can be only *one* moral motive, as set forth above, there can be only *one* purely moral principle of action—the principle of acting in obedience to the moral imperative " Act as your conscience tells you that you ought to act."

One apparent objection to this view is, of course, that it is a matter of observation that people may devote the major part of their lives to the furtherance of ends which have nothing to do with their own material advantage, and may even run directly counter to it, and that they and others believe they do this because of their belief that the ends for which they are thus working are *intrinsically* good. Surely, then, they can be said, as in common usage, to be acting morally in thus selflessly devoting themselves to the promotion of those ends?

This objection cannot be discussed until we have decided upon the meaning of the conception of an intrinsically good end. Is it an end which all men desire? Manifestly not, for there are differences of opinion between men as to what ends are intrinsically good. Is it an end which *some* (the good) men desire? The attribute of being desired by some men, even good men, does not make an end intrinsically good, since, even among the good, opinions differ. At the same time an end, *per definitio*, is something which *someone* desires.

Can we say that an intrinsically good end is an end which *no* men desire? Although at first sight this may seem the most unlikely definition of all, I think that if there is any *specific* significance at all to be attached to this conception we shall find it here. For if an end, *any* end, is *desired* by a man, then for him it is good, not intrinsically, but as a means to his own satisfaction, and any principle of behaviour directed towards its attainment will, *ipso facto*, be a pragmatic principle. If this is correct, it follows that an intrinsically good end is one desired, and *only* desired, by a supernatural being conceived as being capable of volition.

This suggests that the only foundation for a moral system is

theological belief, and that the only specific *kind* of action which conscience dictates is action believed to further the aims, not of the agent himself, but of God (or " Nature," " Evolution," etc., etc.).

Essentially, I think this is true, although it would, of course, not be true to say that everyone who believes that he is under a moral obligation to act in a particular way has a clear idea of the character of that to which the obligation is owed. He may merely be conscious of a conviction that there is something, or someone, of transcendent importance making demands upon him.

This helps us to see what is implied by " the sense of duty " or " the sense of moral obligation "—terms which are often used synonymously with " the voice of conscience." All these terms have a common root in the notion of a supernatural volitional system making demands upon the volitions of men and requiring that they shall subordinate their other motives to the one supreme motive of obedience to its behests, whatever these may be.

Here, then, we seem to find a possible avenue of escape from the bleak conclusion that conscience can never furnish us with any more specific principle of action than that of doing whatever, on any given occasion, we may feel that we ought (absolutely) to do. For if conscience is the voice of a Super-Will telling us what it wishes us to do, in doing that, shall we not be acting morally? And if it should transpire that there is any type of action which that Will enjoins upon all men, then shall we not have an absolutely valid general moral principle of conduct after all? Even short of this, cannot the individual at least, if once he is certain that the Super-Will, speaking through his conscience, requires that he shall act in furtherance of a particular end, be sure that when he is, to the best of his knowledge and ability, promoting that end, he is acting morally?

To this we must reply, not necessarily. Whether he is acting morally or not will still depend upon the determining motive of his actions.

This must be true if we are to recognize any distinction between the pragmatic " ought " and the moral " ought."

This will be seen if we consider the case of an individual seeking to act in conformity with an intuition, conveyed to his mind by " the voice of conscience," that he ought to act in furtherance of a particular end. For present purposes it does not in the least

matter *what* end, but so as to be able to mark the essential distinction between the two types of motive known, respectively, as moral motives and expediency motives, we may once again take the case of a man who seeks to become as healthy as possible, only, unlike the man on page 48, *this* man seeks to become as healthy as possible because he believes that he is under a moral obligation to do so. We may imagine him in exactly the same situation as the other man, examining the professor's prospectus and soliloquizing in exactly the same words. Only the significance of the words " right," " wrong," and " ought " will in his case be different. They will symbolize moral, as distinct from pragmatic, concepts. For he, being a moral man, seeks to become as healthy as possible, not from the motive of becoming as healthy as possible, but from the motive of doing that which he conceives to be his moral duty. (If this were not so, there would be no difference at all between the respective mental attitudes of the two health-aspirants.) From this it follows that he will be acting morally *only* when he is acting from the motive of doing that which his moral sense has enjoined upon him. Now, since he believes that his moral sense dictates that he shall always act in such a way as he believes will conduce to his physical well-being (for convenience we may assume that he regards *all* his actions as in greater or lesser degree affecting his health), will this not provide him with an exact criterion for the morality or otherwise of all his voluntary actions?

Oddly enough, it will not. In some cases he will be able to apply the moral test to his actions and judge whether or not they are moral, but in other cases it will not be easy or even possible. This will become clear if we imagine him in a series of situations in which a decision is called for.

Suppose the health-moralist to believe that eating oysters will harm his digestion. Then, if he were to eat some oysters he would be certain that he was acting immorally, that is, disobeying the dictates of his moral sense. Conversely, if he were to believe that oysters would be good for him, and if, in a situation in which he had the opportunity of eating oysters, he were not to eat them, he would likewise be convinced that he had acted immorally. This would be so on condition that in each case his act of eating, or of not eating, the oysters, were performed voluntarily. For evidently, if in the first case he were forcibly

fed with the oysters he could not blame himself, he would not have been acting immorally; and in the second case, if he were forcibly prevented from eating them—if, for example, they were snatched away as he reached for them and devoured by somebody else—he would also not be guilty of any moral dereliction. It is the motive, and the motive alone, which counts in the assessment of the morality or otherwise of an act.

Now imagine the health-moralist confronted with oysters, believing that eating oysters is good for his health, and also desiring to eat them because he is, as we say, fond of oysters. As a moral man he desires to act in all situations morally, that is, from a moral motive; therefore his problem in this situation is, will he or will he not be acting morally if he eats the oysters? He might state the problem to himself thus: "Should I eat the oysters even if I had no ideas about whether it would be (morally) right to eat them? Yes, I should eat them because I *wanted* to eat them. So if I eat them now, will it be *because* I want to eat them, or *because* I think it is morally right to eat them?"

He might try to solve the problem by examining introspectively the relative strengths of the relevant motives in his mind, and might be able to decide that one was stronger than the other. Thus, "I do very much want to eat them, but I do not very much care whether to do so would be to act rightly, or not." Or, alternatively, "I do not very much want to eat them, but I do very much want to act rightly."

In the first case he would be certain that if he were to eat them, he would not be acting morally—i.e., from a moral motive—for the stronger, and therefore the decisive motive would be that of gratifying his sensual appetite. In the latter case, however, he would find the question by no means easy to decide. For if he were conscious of desiring in any degree, sensuously, to eat the oysters, he would know that he would have eaten them anyway, seeing that he wanted them, although only slightly. But stay: Is it after all so certain that, wanting the oysters only slightly, he would have eaten them anyway? Supposing some other, non-moral motive, in addition to that of gratifying his appetite, and running counter to it, had at the same time been present in his mind. Suppose, for example, that, slightly desiring to eat the oysters, he had also been aware that doing so might make him late for an appointment which, on hedonistic grounds,

he was anxious to keep, then it would surely be correct to say that if he were to eat them, even though he desired them, his action would be morally determined, because the moral motive was necessary to overcome the subsidiary negative motive. This might be the case, but it would only be so if, in the absence of the moral motive, the subsidiary motive would have been so strong as to overcome his inclination towards eating the oysters, so that in fact he *would not* have eaten them. Therefore the situation, ethically considered, would have remained substantially the same. For in that case the health-moralist would have " wanted-not " to eat the oysters *more* than he wanted to eat them, and the wanting not would have been effective in determining his action. So we see that whatever is the health-moralist's problem in detail, the *main* problem, of principle, remains the same. On the one hand he feels that he ought to eat the oysters because he believes they will be good for him, and it is his duty always to do what he thinks will be good for him; on the other hand, believing that it is his primary and essential duty always to act from the moral motive, he feels that he ought not to eat them *unless* the motive determining his act of eating them were to be that of acting morally, and this it cannot be unless he can say that but for its presence he would *not* have eaten them. Since, however, he is conscious of desiring the experience *per se* of eating them, he cannot say this. He must acknowledge to himself that he wants them, and even as he does so the hideous spectre of hedonism rises up again before his eyes.

It is probable that by this time the reader, after so long contemplating the deliberations and hesitations of the health-moralist confronted with the oysters, will be inclined to exclaim impatiently, " Oh, go on and eat them up for goodness' sake! " But if so, the reader, by the same token, would show himself as no ethicist, since this would be tantamount to urging the exemplary health-moralist to flout the ethical principle " Act as your conscience tells you that you ought to act," seeing that the conscience of the health-moralist, like any other, tells him that he ought to act from the single motive of obeying its commands.

This principle was clearly affirmed by Kant as follows:—

> " An action that is done from duty has its moral value *not from the object* which it is purposed to secure, but from the

maxim by which it is determined. Accordingly, the action has the same moral value whether the object is attained or not, if only the *principle* whereby the will is determined to act is independent of every object of sensuous desire. . . . It is not the objective aimed at, or, in other words, the consequences which flow from an act when these are the end and motive of the will, which can lend to an action an unconditioned, moral, value." [1]

And again :—

"The only thing I can revere, or that can place me under an obligation to act is the law which is associated with my will, not as a consequence but as a principle, a principle which is not dependent upon natural inclinations, but *overmasters them* (sie uberwiegt). (My italics.)

Again it must be emphasized that *only* in so far as this man's pursuit of health is motivated by the aim of doing his moral duty—or obeying the voice of conscience—do his motives differ from those of the health-aspirant of p. 48, whose principle of health-seeking is purely one of expediency, in that he adopts it because he desires to be healthy.

I think the health-moralist can find no possible way of escape from his dilemma. He must remain poised in a state of volitional equilibrium over the oysters until they putrefy upon the plate before him, when his problem will be automatically resolved because he will then presumably no longer either desire them or believe that they will benefit his health.

One fact seems to emerge from this analysis of a moral dilemma —namely, that the only circumstances in which a person can be said to be acting morally, in the strict sense, are those in which he is conscious of overruling, in the moral interest, a non-moral motive. Kant saw this clearly, although he did not accept its full implications, and gave an example so as to make his meaning quite unequivocal :—

"It is one's duty to preserve one's life, and, in addition, everyone has a natural inclination to do this. But for this reason the anxious care which the majority of men usually

[1] Kant, *Werke, Koeniglich Preugzigchen Akademie*, Vol. V, pp. 399-400.

> devote to this object has no intrinsic worth, and the principle itself no moral status. . . . They preserve their lives in accordance with duty, but not *from* duty. On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless grief have robbed life of all its attractions . . . so that the miserable man longs for death, and if, in spite of this, he decides to remain alive although he has no longer any love for life, and does so neither from desire nor from fear but from duty, then his maxim has moral status."

Thus moral duty involves self-frustration. If this were not so, then there would be discoverable no essential difference between a moral principle and a principle of expediency, or between the "ought" of pragmatism and the "ought" of ethics, and if there were no difference, there could be no such thing as morality. It is this fact which makes ethical hedonism an absurdity, impossible except on a basis of faulty definitions and false reasoning. There is, however, an ingredient of hedonism in many ethical systems, even in such as Kant's, which base their whole ethical approach on an overt repudiation of it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE APOTHEOSIS OF IRRATIONALISM

MORALISTS have always sought to justify ethical thinking on the grounds either that we cannot help thinking ethically, or that we ought to think ethically because only by so thinking can we learn to do what is right. I do not believe the former of these propositions to be true, and in regard to the latter, if it is not merely equivalent to the tautology "we can act morally only when acting morally," it is in fact a judgment of social expediency, for it contains the implication that certain types of conduct are socially desirable and advocates ethical thinking on the grounds that it leads to such conduct. In other words, these thinkers advocate morality on the grounds that morality is (socially) expedient.

That many moralists argue in favour of ethical thinking on both the above grounds without perceiving either the irrational element in each separate proposition or the logical impossibility of combining them only adds to the rich confusion of ingredients in the ethical Christmas pudding; and when moral philosophers notice this, as at some stage in their arguments they can hardly fail to do, they declare that in any case the flavour is sublime, and that that, after all, is all that matters. This, however, is purely an æsthetic judgment, and concerning such, differences of opinion are always possible. Moreover if there is reason to suppose that the æsthete's pleasure is in fact purchased at the price of avoidable human misery, some may find the spectacle of their enjoyment far from sublime.

H. Vaihinger is a notable example of a philosopher who, perceiving the irrationality inherent in all ethical thinking, proclaims this to be its greatest merit, although whether this is to be taken as a pragmatic or an ethical judgment he is not always careful to say.

A typical passage from his celebrated *The Philosophy of "As If"* is as follows:—

> "Just as science, and especially mathematics, leads to the imaginary, so life leads us to the impossible, which is quite justifiable—to absolute responsibility, absolute freedom, and good actions for their own sake (absolutely). Thou art a man and shouldst possess these noble sentiments—such is the command of the idealist and of society." [1]

My purpose in quoting this passage is not primarily to draw attention to certain obscurities of expression—the idea of life leading to the impossible, and this being "quite justifiable" and so on—but only to cite it as a typical expression of Vaihinger's sentiments and as showing the positive value which he seems to attach to rationally indefensible concepts, if not to illogical thinking as such. His attitude towards the concept of freedom is characteristic. Vaihinger agrees with Kant that "every rational being possessing a will must necessarily also be endowed with the idea of freedom, in virtue of which alone he acts." He interprets this "freedom" of Kant's as implying not what I have called psychological determinism, i.e., the idea that voluntary action is regarded as volitionally, not physically, determined, but the idea of "absolute and unconditional" freedom, which he calls "one of the most important concepts ever formed by man," and also, in the same paragraph, "a logical monstrosity, a contradiction."

Kant also knew that the idea of absolute freedom is a logical monstrosity, and because he was a pure philosopher as well as a moralist, he was careful to define freedom in terms which make it synonymous with psychological determinism. He writes:—

> "The will is a kind of causality of living creatures in so far as they are rational. And freedom is that property of this causality which enables it to act independently of external causes determining it, just as natural necessity is the property of the causality of all non-rational creatures, which are determined to activity through the influence of external causes. This explanation of freedom is *negative* and therefore cannot explain the essential nature of freedom,

[1] H. Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If,"* Eng. trans., by C. K. Ogden, Routledge, p. 44.

> nevertheless there arises from it a *positive* concept which is richer and more fruitful. Even as any concept of causality carries with it that concept of laws according to which, through something that we call cause, something else—namely, the effect—is determined, so also freedom, although it is not a property of the will according to the laws of nature, is not therefore lawless, but must be a kind of causality conforming to immutable laws; but laws of a particular kind, otherwise free will would be a monstrosity." [1]

Yet in spite of this recognition of determinism as applying to volition no less than to every other type of process, we can discern a sense of regret that freedom "pure and simple" is a rationally impermissible conception. "Freedom is only an idea of the reason, whose objective reality is, accordingly, doubtful." (Observe, *doubtful*, only.) The fact that it is an irrational idea—although, in Kant's terminology, a concept of "pure reason"—is quite clearly distasteful to Kant.

> "Freedom . . . is a mere idea, the objective reality of which can in no way be presented in accordance with laws of nature, and therefore not in any possible experience. . . . It has merely the necessity of a presupposition of reason, made by a being who believes he is conscious of a will; that is, of a faculty distinct from mere desire. . . . Nothing is left for us to do but defend this conception, by overcoming the objections of those who pretend to a deeper insight than ours and declare freedom to be impossible."

What a pity, Kant seems to say, that that is all we can do! The undertone of regret is unmistakable.

How different is the attitude of Vaihinger! How he revels in mystery and rejoices in paradox! Gleefully he drags out one after another of the rationally indefensible concepts which go to the making of Kant's ethic and admiringly points out their, to him, beautiful irrationality. Here is a typical passage in which Vaihinger calls attention to the arbitrariness of Kant's ethical fictions and their lack of correspondence with actual experience:—

> "On p. 44 (of the *Grundlegung*) we read 'Act *as if* the principle of your action were, through your will, to become

[1] Kant, op. cit., p. 446.

> a general law of nature '—a new and peculiar fiction. I know very well that the rules of my conduct are no laws of nature, that they are not even laws for the majority of mankind, but I think and act *as if* they were universal laws of nature ! " [1]

Vaihinger here seems actually to be approving these concepts for the very reason that they contradict experience. There is a faint flavour of intellectual perversion, a kind of wallowing in the irrational which comes out even more prominently in an adjacent passage :—

> " The ' realm of purposes,' this Kant acknowledges and teaches, are ' mere ideas,' concepts, that is, without any reality, only ' heuristic fictions,' only modes of approach, only a standpoint; we can, should, and must look upon the thing as if it were so."

I think the " can, should, and must " at least are a little unfair to Kant, but let that pass. Vaihinger continues :—

> " But in spite of this realization of the fictive nature of this mode of presentation, man, as a ' rational being,' orders his conduct in accordance with these fictions. Here we reach the highest pinnacle attained by Kantian thought, or, indeed, by any human thought. Only a few, only an élite can continue to breathe at all at this altitude: the vast majority need a different, a less rarefied atmosphere."

After a brief contemplation of these ineffabilities and sublimities we do indeed; and so we turn to look for the *grounds* on which Vaihinger bases his claim for the supreme value of these artificial conceptions, these fictions. Does their value for him actually *inhere in* the irrational element in their composition? Must we, for example, understand him to be praising the idea of " absolute freedom " *because* it is a " logical monstrosity " and, as such, in his view admirable?

Reading *The Philosophy of "As If"* we seem to discern a twofold basis for Vaihinger's approval of the irrational; on the one hand mainly æsthetic, and on the other, strictly practical. In regard to the former, it is true that Vaihinger never actually

[1] Vaihinger, op. cit., p. 292.

goes so far as to maintain that the value of self-contradictory thinking is that it yields us æsthetic enjoyment, yet his *own* relish for the irrational is constantly evinced, for example, in such passages as the following, taken from the autobiographical introduction to the work :—

> " This limitation of human knowledge seemed to me now to be a necessary and natural result of the fact that thought and knowledge are originally only a means to attain the Life-purpose, so that their actual independence signifies a breaking-away from their original purpose; indeed, by the fact of this breaking-loose, thought is confronted by impossible problems, which are not merely insoluble to human thought whilst possibly soluble to a higher form of thought, but problems which are utterly impossible to all forms of thought as such. This conviction has become one of the most solid foundations of my conception of the universe, and since that time it has grown within me and has crystallized with the years into an ever clearer form."

So now at last we understand our inability to cope with non-existent problems and answer unaskable questions. A man who thinks on these lines must surely greatly enjoy doing so. The passage just quoted is a part of a tribute to Schopenhauer, a philosopher chiefly distinguished for his procrustean feat of stretching the unfortunate word " will " so as to make it cover the entire field of separate physical events, thus altogether destroying its value as a term associated with a distinct and recognizable experience—namely, volition as determinant of the actions of sentient beings. " Schopenhauer's teaching gave me much that was new and great and lasting, pessimism, irrationalism, and voluntarism," writes Vaihinger. But here he is surely too generous. Irrationalism is not a gift which any man can bestow upon another, it comes naturally. Vaihinger himself would say that it is the consequence of the " necessary and natural breaking-away of thought and knowledge from the Life-purpose."

I confess that to me there is something displeasing about this cult of Pure Unreason. One seems to become aware of a faint sickly odour of intellectual decomposition exuding from these pages. However, *de gustibus*. . . .

We now come to the practical or pragmatic aspects of Vai-

hinger's thesis, for Vaihinger, while enjoying the flavour of irrationalism, also believed in its practical uses, and in his exposition of these we find an element of the matter-of-fact, and an appreciation of the system of thought he favours on the ground of its usefulness for securing certain human ends. Even material ends, we now and then gather from a footnote[1] in which he pays tribute to the value of Schopenhauer's pessimism:—

> "If Germany's leaders since 1871 had taken a lesson from Schopenhauer, Germany would not have fallen to this desperate condition."

(This was written in the period of the Weimar Republic.)

> "The development of the social question too might just as well have evolved towards the Right as to the Left if Schopenhauer had been the guiding influence instead of Rousseau and Hegel."

Subsequent events and the notable come-back of the Will to Power, if not exactly to be regarded as a triumph of pessimism, at least show Vaihinger's own pessimism in regard to the future of the political Right to have been groundless, and would have obliged him to find something else to be pessimistic about, which would no doubt not have been difficult.

In the chapter on Practical (Ethical) Fictions we find a very clear statement of the pragmatic value, in Vaihinger's view, of that "logical monstrosity" the concept of freedom, which he asserts to be necessary for all ethical judgments. (By freedom Vaihinger, unlike Kant in his initial definition, does not mean the idea of the determination of acts by volitions, or of volitions by other volitions which, as we have seen, so far from being a logical monstrosity, is necessary to our thinking about all voluntary acts whether ethical or otherwise; he means "the unthinkable"—which we nevertheless think.)

> "In spite of all these contradictions, however, we not only make use of this concept in ordinary life in judging moral actions, it is also the foundation of criminal law. Without this conception punishment inflicted for any act would, from an ethical standpoint, be unthinkable, for it would

[1] Vaihinger, op. cit., p. xxviii (footnote).

simply be a precautionary measure for protecting others against crime."

This is quite an interesting proposition, and it is a pity that Vaihinger did not further elaborate it. The motive of deterring people from committing further crimes is not, according to Vaihinger, an *ethical* justification for punishing them, and here I think he is undoubtedly right. But what *would* provide an ethical, as distinct from a pragmatic, justification for punishment? In Vaihinger's view the justification comes from the fact of our postulating, or pretending, that the criminal's act was absolutely undetermined, i.e., that it was " an absolutely free, chance act resulting from nothing." It is hard indeed to discover any sort of ethical principle which would justify punishment on these grounds. Surely, though, *vide* Kant and all pure moralists, there can be only one possible ethical justification for punishment, and that is the belief in the mind of the punisher that it is his moral duty to punish. If Vaihinger has discovered another, he does not state it. Actually the next sentence reveals that it is not ethical principles but principles of expediency with which he is here really concerned :—

> " Our judgment of our fellow-men is likewise so completely bound up with this ideational construct that we can no longer do without it. In the course of their development, men have formed this important construct from imminent necessity, because only on this basis is a high degree of culture and morality possible."

" Culture " we may take to cover all the abstract and imponderable values cherished by the mind of man, but " morality " here in its context evidently means something more specific, yet something whose value is taken completely for granted.

I think enough has now been said to show that even this dweller upon the heights, this high priest of obscurity and irrationalism, finds himself willy-nilly compelled to disclose the pragmatic content of his thoughts. His judgment, shorn of particularities concerning punishment, etc., amounts to this: that the idea of absolute freedom is both a necessary and a good thing because it tends to make people behave in ways of which he approves. Believing as he does that the idea of voluntary action

involves a "logical monstrosity"—the belief in absolute freedom—and also, this time correctly, that the idea of voluntary action is necessary for morality, he acclaims the irrational as the essential basis for moral conduct.

Now, Vaihinger's view that all ethical thinking is fundamentally irrational is undoubtedly absolutely correct; where he goes wrong is in ascribing its distinctive irrationality to the beliefs concerning freedom which it involves. For if the idea of freedom is necessary to moral thinking, it is by the same token necessary to our thinking about all voluntary actions, whether moral or otherwise. It is not the conception of absolute freedom which is essential for ethics, for moral systems of considerable influence have been elaborated upon a foundation of strict determinism, as Vaihinger might surely have noticed. No, what is essential for ethics is the ignoring of the *pragmatic* element which belongs to all judgments of value, in those judgments of value known as ethical judgments.

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CHAPTER IX

A CRITIQUE OF PURE ETHICS

ANY judgment concerning the value of ethical thinking is a pragmatic judgment; that is to say, it is made from a standpoint external to the moral standpoint, and completely detached from it. If morality is stated to be, or is assumed to be, a "good thing," then that statement and that assumption emanate from a mind thinking in non-ethical terms, and that "good" is a pragmatic, not a moral good.

Kant, in his intellectual greatness, perceived this dilemma, and in his statement of it we feel again the distress which the conflict between his epistemological and his ethical inclinations occasioned him. The following passage from the *Metaphysic of Morality* is of the utmost significance as implicit testimony, by the greatest of all moral philosophers, to that pragmatic basis of ethics which makes ethics in the final analysis nothing but an elaborate conjuring trick of the mind:—

> "But why, it may be asked, should I subject myself to this principle (namely, the categorical imperative) simply as a rational being. . . . Admitting that I am not *forced* to do so by interest—which indeed would make a categorical imperative impossible—yet I must take an interest in that principle and see how I come to subject myself to it." [1]

It will be noticed that the expression "interest" is here used ambiguously. In the context of the first part of the sentence—"Admitting that I am not forced . . ."—it definitely has a volitional-pragmatic significance, it implies "being interested" in the converse sense from "being disinterested." But then, followed by "and see how . . ." it seems merely to imply *intellectual* interest, as who should say "This is an interesting subject for discussion." This ambiguity is extremely revealing

[1] Kant, op. cit., p. 449.

as showing Kant's state of mind when he wrote this passage. It suggests a shrinking from his own dilemma even in the act of stating it, which caused him to blurr over the meaning of the all-important word "interest." It is almost a punning usage. The above sentence occurs in the course of a dissertation upon the idea of freedom—which takes up the major part of the paragraph in spite of the promise implied in the title, to deal with the question of "interest"—and in it we see the concept of "interest" for a moment peeping forth and being immediately thrust back again. Kant had to thrust it back, because if he had not done so, it would immediately have turned and played havoc with his whole ethical argumentative structure. He never even goes so far as to state the dilemma; he merely hints at it in passing, with a show of reluctance, "admitting," as ready, although unwilling, to concede in the interests of argumentative integrity that one is *not* "forced" by interest to accept the ethical imperative; as though the whole thing would be easier to understand if we *could* regard ourselves as being thus forced. Yet, manifestly, if we *were* to regard ourselves as impelled by interest to act in conformity with ethical principles the "logical monstrosity" not only of the idea of absolute freedom, but of the whole structure upon which ethics is based, would stand revealed.

Shortly afterwards Kant further fortifies himself against any acceptance of the implications of the idea of interest as applicable to moral ideas by "admitting" something else which has no direct bearing upon the moralist's real and inescapable dilemma—namely, the fact that if there is to be such a thing as a pure moral motive it can only be the motive of acting from no motive at all. He says:—

> "It looks as though we had posited, in the idea of freedom, the moral law itself, and as though we could not prove its reality and objective necessity, and yet we have gained something, because we have examined the principle more closely than would otherwise have been done. . . ."

Kant makes it clear that in his view it is unnecessary to believe in the reality and objectivity of the moral law; it is enough to assume it, and that will cause us to act in estimable ways. This, Kant claims, and it may be true, but what he does not admit is

that *if* this is so, morality springs from ideas of social *expediency*, and lays claim to our veneration by denial of its disreputable ancestry.

Kant then returns to the question of interest; it is as though he had felt that he could not after all permit himself to drop the subject as though it were of no consequence, and continues :—

> " In short, if somebody were to ask us why the universal validity of our maxim is a law and should be the limiting condition of our activities, and upon what we base the value which we attribute to this way of acting—this value which is supposed to be so great that there cannot be a greater interest—and how it comes about that man, solely through this thinks he can feel his value as a person, in comparison with which an agreeable or disagreeable state must be accounted negligible, we could not give him a satisfying answer. It is true that we can take an interest in a personal condition which contains no *interest* of that state, as long as it enables us to grasp the latter if reason should make it possible to isolate it. That is to say, that the mere worthiness to be happy even without the motive of achieving that happiness can be of interest. But this judgment is indeed nothing but the effect of the assumed importance of the moral law."

Here, where " interest " is used in a sense which definitely implies " advantage " we find Kant dismissing the idea that we can regard the sense of " worthiness to be happy " as a *desirable* feeling, a matter concerning which our emotional interests are involved, although, with great penetration, he notes that the desire to feel worthy of happiness can itself provide a motive for action. He shirks, in fact, the conclusion that such action in itself constitutes pursuit of a form of happiness—the enjoyable sense of righteousness—and falls back upon mystery and the taking-for-granted that it *is* in some way possible to act voluntarily without " interest," although admitting that he cannot explain how this is done. Naturally, on the basis of this major self-contradictory assumption, it is possible to admit anything concerning difficulties of interpretation without jeopardizing the ethical edifice. One might even use the term " interest " so as to make it exactly

synonymous with " disinterest," although Kant never does this in so many words.

It is very difficult to disentangle Kant's arguments concerning the idea of freedom from his main thesis, which is that we do believe in the absolute validity of certain criteria of behaviour and that it is this which causes us to act admirably or worthily or in such a way that we gain in self-respect. The elaborations and complications really represent Kant's titanic struggles with that ancient bugbear " free will." For, while believing that we are, normally, in no sense actually " free," he perceives that all his " imperatives "—which are ultimately nothing but the expression of his own " tastes " respecting human motives—are worthless and indeed meaningless except on the assumption that it would be possible to act *voluntarily* in response to them; that they can, in fact, furnish us with motives powerful enough to overrule all lesser motives. We must, in short, be able to believe that we can *choose* to act in certain ways rather than in other ways, and in order that this shall be possible we must, Kant thinks, possess wills distinguished and characterized by the fact that they are in some sense *free*. Yet at the same time, how *can* we regard our wills as free, seeing that we are aware of them as being composed of motives which must be by some agency or other determined?

Kant's solution of this problem has certainly the merit of ingenuity. He solves it by arguing that we regard our wills as being free in *some* circumstances only—namely, those in which we are conscious of acting in obedience to the moral law. This is, Kant contends, because the moral law is the only law which we impose upon ourselves—all other laws we recognize as laws of nature, determining our " natural desires and inclinations." (This is, of course, a supremely arbitrary and artificial construction, for it is simply not the case that people regard themselves as exercising choice only when they are acting morally. We shall return to this point in another context, however.)

The argument runs as follows:—

> " Morality is possible only to a free being, and hence it must be shown that freedom belongs to the will of all rational beings. Now, I say, that any being who cannot act otherwise than under the idea of freedom is for that very reason in practical respects actually free, i.e., for him are

valid all those laws which are inseparably bound up with freedom, just as though his will *per se* were declared free by practical philosophy."

This seems to contradict my statement above as to Kant's solution of the free-will problem. But wait. Kant continues:—

> " And I affirm that we must necessarily attribute to every rational being that has a will also necessarily the idea of freedom, under which *alone* he acts." (My italics.)

This seems to contain a perfectly clear statement of a fact of experience—namely, that we always regard all our (non-involuntary) actions as being by us volitionally determined, and this perfectly squares with Kant's definition of the idea of freedom previously quoted. But now see what follows:—

> " Now, it is impossible to conceive of a reason [mind] which is aware of being biased in its judgments by some external influence, since the subject would in that case regard its judgments as being determined, not by reason, but by a natural impulse. It must regard itself as arbiter of its principles of action, independently of external influences; therefore it must as practical reason, or as the will of a rational being, be regarded by itself as free. In other words, the will of a rational being can be his own will only in the idea of freedom, and therefore this idea must in the practical sphere be ascribed to all rational beings."

What has happened? Nothing less than a complete contradiction of the statement earlier in the same paragraph that all rational beings *always* act under the idea of freedom. We are now told that they act under this idea *only* when they are conscious of not being " biased " by influences external to themselves. If we examine the steps whereby Kant has arrived at this conclusion, we find it has been achieved by a sudden contraction of the meaning of the term " rational being." Repeatedly Kant writes of man as a rational being, meaning a being possessed of the faculty of reasoning, but now, in order to prove his point that men are only free when obeying the moral imperative, he makes them " rational beings " *only* when they are so acting, so that he can

say that as rational beings only are they free! This extraordinarily ingenious trick—for such it must be called—is repeated again and again throughout the *Metaphysic of Morality*, and it gives a spurious air of logical inevitability to the paradoxical proposition that men can only regard themselves as acting voluntarily when they turn their backs upon every volition but one—that one which inheres in the aim of acting in conformity with a self-imposed categorical imperative.

How does Kant avoid drawing the seemingly inevitable deduction from this that only when acting morally can we regard ourselves, or be regarded, as responsible for our actions, and never when we are acting immorally or non-morally? This is achieved by ringing the changes upon the term "freedom"; and the remarkable thing is that Kant comes near to admitting that this is what he has done, without however admitting that this constitutes a fatal flaw and self-contradiction in his argument:—

> "We assume that as efficient causes we are free, so as to be able to see ourselves as being, in the realm of ends, under moral laws; and then we think of ourselves as subject to moral laws because we have ascribed to ourselves freedom of will; for freedom and self-legislation of will are both autonomy, and therefore they are conceptions which imply each other; but for that very reason one cannot be used to explain or account for the other."

Freedom of will and self-legislation of will are both autonomy. So freedom of will is not, after all, simply "independence" of laws of nature, although Kant has just previously insisted upon this as the inevitable conclusion from his argument:—

> "What, therefore, can freedom possibly be but autonomy, that is, the property of the will to be a law to itself?"

And, again, "Hence a free will is *the same* (my italics) as a will that conforms to moral laws." But now we are told that there are two *kinds* of freedom—freedom of will and self-legislation of will—without ever being told precisely what is the characteristic of the first which enables it to be distinguished from the other. We are to understand it as that "freedom" which enables a man

to choose between submitting himself to the rigours of the categorical imperative and acting in conformity with the laws of nature, since he cannot be "forced by interest" to do the former; but since we have just been told that a free will is the same thing as a will that conforms to moral laws—which surely is equivalent to the statement that *no* will is free *except* one that conforms to moral laws—we are confronted not merely with a circular argument, but with a "logical monstrosity" of the most sublime dimensions. In spite of this, Kant, recovering from his temporary misgivings—("It must be frankly admitted that we have here a kind of circle from which it seems impossible to escape")—continues to contend that the will is to be regarded as free *only* when under constraint, the constraint of the "law of the intelligible world," i.e., the moral law which reason is supposed to discover for itself:—

> "As an intelligence I am therefore subject to the law of the intelligible world, that is to reason, notwithstanding that I belong on the other side of my nature to the world of sense. Now, as subject to reason, which in the idea of freedom contains the law of the intelligible world, I am conscious of being subject to the autonomy of the will. The laws of the intelligible world I must therefore regard as imperatives, and the actions conforming to this principle as duties."

Probably this passage has more often evoked in the student's mind a submissive, if slightly bewildered, response on the lines of "Yes. . . . I suppose that must be all right," than genuine intellectual conviction. Nevertheless to prove its actual spuriousness as an argument is difficult unless we can fasten upon the key device by means of which alone Kant has been able to weave the central pattern of his elaborate argumentative fabric. This device is on examination revealed as nothing less than to use the term "will" in two different senses throughout the whole of the main portion of his argument.

Let us see what is to be understood by the term "will" as first introduced in the opening paragraph of the *Metaphysic of Morality*:—"Nothing in the whole world, or even outside it, can possibly be regarded as good without limitation except a good will." A will, according to this, is something which may or

may not be good, and is the same as "character" or "personality." "All these gifts," i.e., intelligence, sagacity, etc., "may be . . . pernicious . . . if the will which directs them, or what is called the character, is not good." Here, then, "will" is used to mean the whole volitional system of an individual, his personality as judged by the motives which he entertains, irrespective of what determines them. If the motives are bad, then his is a bad will; if good, then it is a good will.

Kant goes on to elaborate the proposition that a will is good only if the actions which proceed from its volitions are determined by the desire to act in conformity with a principle given by *reason*, not by any object of sensuous desire. In the following passage taken from this part of the dissertation upon will I have ventured to substitute for the word "will" where it occurs the word "character," so as to draw attention to the subtle shift of meaning that has taken place:—

> "In what, then, can the (moral) value (of an action) consist, if it does not lie in the *character* itself as directed to the attainment of a given object? It can consist in nothing else but the principle of the *character*, regardless of whether the object sought can be attained or not. For the *character* stands in the centre between its *a priori* principle which is formal, and its *a posteriori* motive which is material."

Quite evidently "character" simply will not do as a synonym for "will" in the second of the above cases where it is employed. For manifestly "will" here means "volition" or "act of volition," and does not refer to the general volitional "make-up" of the individual. In the case of the third substitution it might seem at first sight that Kant's meaning is unaltered if we imagine the individual personality or character as being always confronted with the necessity of choosing between acting in conformity with a principle and acting in obedience to sensual desires. But the sentence concludes, "and as it" (namely, the will) "must be determined by something it will have to be determined by the formal principle of volition if the action is done from duty, as every material principle will have been removed from it." So we see that here again "will" means "volition", not character. Thus our minds are prepared for acceptance of statements about "will" which may apply *either* to the "character," or whole volitional

system, *or* to volition *per se*. Subsequently whenever Kant writes about the characteristics of "will," or the conditions within which it operates, his statements seem all right, because they always make sense as applied to "will" in one sense or the other. Emerging from a thicket of argumentation about "reason" and "duty" we presently come upon this pronouncement:—

> "Only a rational being has the faculty of acting in conformity with the idea of law, or from principles. Only a rational being, in other words, has a will. And as without reason actions cannot proceed from laws, will is simply practical reason."

Thus the feat has been accomplished of making volition and practical reason synonymous, and the idea of good will, as distinct from bad, or non-good will is—*ad hoc*—quietly dropped (a proceeding essential in order to give an appearance of logical inevitability to Kant's main conclusions), without anybody noticing that it has been done.

It is also worth remarking that the conception of practical reason has undergone a similar metamorphosis, for earlier Kant has affirmed:—

> "The true object of reason . . . in so far as it is practical, or capable of influencing the will, must be to produce a will which is good in itself."

Truly in the realm of ethics all things are possible, even an entity which has the motive of producing itself.

Kant, of course, does not, after this, stick to the use of will as synonymous with practical reason; this he cannot do, for it is necessary for him to present it as being capable of choosing whether or not to obey the categorical imperative, and so, in the very sentence just quoted, he reverts to the former usage and writes:—

> "If the will, as is actually the case with man, is not in perfect conformity with reason . . ."

It is not the use of "will" in one sense or the other which gives the appearance of substance to each part of the argument in isolation from the rest; it is the perpetual shifting to and fro from one to the other which is so successful in numbing

criticism, and which makes it possible for Kant to declare towards the close of his disquisition that:—

> "It is only as a member of the intelligible world that (a rational being) speaks of his own causality as will";

that:—

> "If a man were a member *only* of the intelligible world, all his actions would be in complete agreement with the autonomy of the will"

and that:—

> "As the will belongs *altogether* to the intelligible world (not the world of sense), it is the intelligible world that prescribes the laws which the will directly obeys. . . . Were I a member of no other world all my actions would as a matter of fact always conform to the autonomy of the will. But as I perceive myself also to be a member of the world of sense I can only say that my actions *ought* to conform to the autonomy of the will."

Thus the ethical structure is completed; the *ought* given, and the principle of the duty of self-frustration firmly affixed in its place, the austerity of its lines only mitigated by the constantly recurring motif that if it were possible for a man to deny all his desires he would be able to regard his will as free.

Cold comfort! And cold comfort Kant himself found in the farrago of unreason into which, as moralist, he found himself forced:—

> "And so, although we cannot indeed grasp the practical unconditioned necessity of the moral imperative, we can nevertheless comprehend its incomprehensibility; which is all that can fairly be demanded of a philosophy which seeks to reach the principles which determine the limits of human reason."

Is the function of ethical theory to enable us to comprehend incomprehensibility? Kant's theory has at any rate succeeded in *confronting* us with it; and he has demonstrated, as no other moralist before or since, the violation of all the laws of logic which belongs to the realm of ethics, that realm in which freedom

is constraint, volition the repudiation of volition, and reason—unreason.

I have now examined, as objectively as may be, an ethical system which claims to find its principles entirely in the realm of abstraction, intuitively, and without guidance from the experience of events in the external world. We have seen that, despite this claim, its actual starting-point is a series of pre-judgments of value concerning conduct and personality (see p. 45 above) and I have suggested that the fact that this most purely intellectual of all ethical systems actually bases its claim to our adherence on the presumption that certain kinds of personality and conduct are admirable and valuable, and that others are not, is striking testimony to the expediency-content which inevitably lurks in disguise at the core of every ethical system, no matter what its individual form and content may be, even as desire for the feelings associated with the sense of moral rectitude furnishes the subjective hidden motive behind every act which its agent performs with the *aim* of acting morally. We have seen that even Kant's system, despite the absence from it of specific recommendations for conduct, is no exception to this rule. He contends that people behave *better* when under the influence of the moral imperative than they would otherwise behave. Now this " behaving better " is nothing but a judgment of *social expediency*, good conduct being that sort of conduct which tends to conduce to the well-being of the community. Another conception of good conduct, of which Kant also makes use, is of conduct pleasing to God. This might, theoretically, be conduct actually detrimental to the well-being of man, since God might be imagined as one who desires nothing so much as the wretchedness of mankind, and in this case the only morally good conduct would be socially bad conduct. Such is the morality of Satanism, whose slogan is " Evil, be thou my good." This, however, might be described as a kind of moral hysteria or craziness, a subject for study by the psychiatrist rather than the philosopher. In general, duty towards God is conceived to be at least not inconsistent with duty towards one's neighbour, even although that duty, under guidance from above, may be to burn him at the stake in order to secure his soul's salvation. Yet the expediency-content of a system of conduct supposed to be moral is by no means always predominantly social; it may be highly individual,

as is the case with early Christianity, with its emphasis upon a heavenly reward for the individual and its neglect of social problems. Nevertheless, in so far as such a system is *overtly* one of expediency, as with early Christianity, it can hardly, properly speaking, be said to be moral at all, since it differs in no essential respect from any principle of conduct held to be worth while on account of the advantages which it is expected that it will ultimately bring. As previously shown, a moral principle is distinguishable from a principle of expediency *only* through the fact that the person subscribing to it believes, or pretends to himself, that in acting in conformity with it he is acting against his own interests and, indeed, against his will.

This, then, is the principle of conduct which moralists prescribe for other people—whether or not they believe in it for themselves is, for the present, beside the point—and with very few exceptions they prescribe it on the grounds that it leads to behaviour which is advantageous either to other men, or to God, or to both. For all that, it remains true that Kant's system is correctly upheld as an outstanding example of an ethic whose principles are evolved out of abstract ratiocination.

And now by way of contrast, and to show the expediency-sanction appearing in a guise very different from that which it wore at the pageant of Practical Reason, we may turn to brief consideration of the ethic of Herbert Spencer (resurrected in our day under the title of "Scientific Humanism"), whose principles are supposed to be given exclusively by experience, and which is openly directed towards the furtherance of specified aims.

CHAPTER X

THE ETHICS OF HERBERT SPENCER

IN contrast with Kant, Spencer claims to derive his ethical principles from the observation of events in the sensible world, and they are frankly directed towards the furtherance of specific ends held to be expedient. To the objection that if this is so, Spencer's system cannot be an ethical system at all, the reply is, firstly, that it claims to be such and has been generally accepted as such, and that the exponents of that now fashionable variant of the original which goes by the name of Scientific Humanism claim that it is the most truly moral, as well as the most practically helpful of all ethical systems. Secondly, we find that in spite of the many arguments from human expediency, the ultimate criterion in this system is not that of the maximum possible satisfaction of human desires, but of the maximum assistance which humanity can render to the forces of evolution.

If this were consistently upheld as the sole standard by which human actions could be evaluated, then we should, actually, have a kind of ethical system—or at least a system under which moral acts, as distinct from acts motivated by desire, might be possible, for, supposing that our aims were supposed not always to be consistent with those of the forces of evolution, we should in some circumstances be confronted with a true moral " ought " in the Kantian sense.

Spencer does appear to accept this as the ultimate criterion in a statement of his position contained in a letter to J. S. Mill, afterwards published in the *Principles of Ethics*, in which he defined the difference distinguishing his system from that of the Utilitarians, who held that the sole criterion of moral conduct was to be its effect upon the general sum of human happiness :—

> " The view for which I contend is that morality properly so-called—the science of right conduct—has for its object to determine *how* and *why* certain modes of conduct are detri-

> mental, and certain other modes beneficial. These good and bad results cannot be accidental, but must be necessary consequences of the constitution of things, and I conceive it to be the business of moral science to deduce, from the laws of life and the conditions of existence, what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness, and what kinds to produce unhappiness. Having done this, its deductions are to be recognized as laws of conduct; and are to be conformed to irrespective of a direct estimation of happiness or misery." [1]

The happiness test is thus to provide guidance for action, but happiness itself is not the end. Further on in his letter Spencer refers to Utilitarianism as the " Expediency-Ethic," and to his system as " Moral Science."

Spencer, as a moral scientist, conceives it to be his business to infer moral principles from the study of the trend of evolution :—

> " Conduct to which we apply the name good is the relatively more evolved conduct; bad is the name we apply to conduct which is relatively less evolved." [2]

Now, Spencer's failure to state in this passage to whom the important little word " we " applies, or even, it would seem, himself to be aware that it might apply either to himself and those who share his views—the moral scientists—or to the members of his own culture, or to mankind at large, is the key to one of the fundamental defects of Spencer's whole philosophy of ethics. For throughout the whole two volumes of the *Principles of Ethics* we are again and again confronted with an irredeemable confusion between the judgments of Spencer as interpreter of humanity's views as to good and bad conduct at various periods of history and under various cultures, and Spencer as the didactic exponent of certain principles of conduct as being conducive to that increase of human happiness which is requisite in order that human behaviour and human institutions shall harmonize with the evolutionary trend. Thus Spencer as moral scientist notes that there is an " ethic of enmity " which makes deeds of cruelty and violence praiseworthy, and he emphasizes that this ethic is

[1] H. Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, vol. 1, p. 57.
[2] Ibid., p. 25.

influential not only in primitive and savage societies but also in our own :—

> " When in the Hindoo epic, the god Indra is described as conquering a woman, we are astonished to find a victory which we should regard as so cowardly lauded by the poet. . . . But when with arms of precision . . . peoples possessed of feeble weapons are conquered with as great facility as a man conquers a child, there comes applause in our journals, with titles and awards to the leaders! Beyond question, then, the sentiment which rejoices in personal superiority . . . is still dominant. The social sanction, and the reflected inner sanction due to it, constitute a pro-ethical sentiment which, in international relations, remains supreme." [1]

There are at least some people, then, in our civilization, which Spencer regards as the most highly evolved of all existing civilizations, who regard aggression and aggressiveness as " good."

But in Spencer's view these principles ought not to be allowed to prevail, because these are not principles leading to actions " tending to produce happiness." They are " counter-evolutionary," so to speak. Now this seems to be straightforward and uncompromising moralism, and it seems here perfectly evident that the " we " to whom Spencer refers in his statement that " conduct to which we apply the name good is the relatively more evolved conduct " are himself and those who are like-minded with him in regarding it as the moral duty of man to advance the existing evolutionary trend by striving to increase human happiness. From this it would seem to follow that, from Spencer's point of view, those who hold that aggression and cruelty are good, are in error, since these things are not good but bad. This, be it noted, would not amount to the judgment merely that they are *mistaken* in their view that aggression is a satisfactory means to happiness—because, for example, it is dangerous, or because it debars them from enjoying the yet greater happiness to be found in peaceful co-operation. The judgment of Spencer, as moral scientist concerned to advocate evolutionarily-good conduct, would be that they *ought not* to seek happiness by such means, and that this

[1] Spencer, op. cit., p. 346.

would be true irrespective of whether or not such people's personal happiness would be increased by the practice of aggression.

In this role of " moral scientist " Spencer shows himself to be at least as much of a true moralist as J. S. Mill, who was, however, never able to reconcile his contention that it is the moral duty of everybody to try to increase his own happiness because by so doing he will be adding to the general sum of happiness in the world, with his dictum that everybody always does try to increase his own happiness anyway—which would seem to render the ethical imperative superfluous. This justified Spencer in designating Mill's system an expediency-ethic, which analysis shows to be the metaphorical equivalent of a " lowering-lever " or a " propulsion-tractor."

It was not, however, on the grounds of its irrationalism that Spencer found fault with Utilitarianism; he objected to it as moralist on the grounds that it furnished no other criterion for good conduct than that of happiness, whereas, according to Spencer, happiness was to be regarded merely as the infallible indication that action was proceeding in harmony with the trend of evolution. No other construction can possibly be placed upon his words on this subject in the letter to Mill. The happiness test was to determine what conduct was in conformity with—we must not say " pleasing to "—that to which Spencer elsewhere refers as " The Unknown Cause." Spencer's morality, in fact, seems to consist essentially in reversing the terms of the saying " Be good and you'll be happy " so as to make it " Be happy and you'll be good "; goodness consisting in evolutionary rectitude.

But now we turn from Spencer the moral scientist to Spencer the semanticist concerned to discover the meaning of " good " and " bad." (It is in fact this Spencer whom we encounter first, in Chapter 3 of the *Principles of Ethics*, but for purposes of analysis it was convenient to consider the standpoint of the moral scientist first.) Here Spencer shows that by good and bad we—and here " we " means all those who make use of these terms—mean by them respectively " well-adapted to achieve prescribed ends " and " ill-adapted to achieve prescribed ends." [1]

> " The good knife is one which will cut, the good gun is one which carries far and true. . . . Conversely, the badness

[1] Spencer, op. cit., p. 21.

> alleged of (an) umbrella or (a) pair of boots refers to their failures in fulfilling the ends of keeping off the rain and comfortably protecting the feet, with due regard to appearances."

He goes on to argue that *all* judgments of goodness and badness, no matter to what they are applied, whether to boots or to human actions, are of the same order essentially.

He begins by showing that even as we judge *things* according to their ability to serve our ends, so also do we judge:—

> "those doings of men which, morally considered, are indifferent. . . . A good jump is a jump which, remoter ends ignored, well achieves the immediate purpose of a jump; and a stroke at billiards is called good when the movements are skilfully adjusted to the requirements. Oppositely, the badness of a walk that is shuffling and utterance that is indistinct, is alleged because of the relative non-adaptations of the acts to the ends."

This is all a perfectly correct and valuable elucidation of the uses of "good" and "bad" in the passing of pragmatic judgments. Now Spencer continues:—

> "Thus recognizing the meanings of good and bad as otherwise used, we shall understand better their meanings as used in characterizing conduct under its ethical aspects. Here, too, observation shows that we apply them according as the adjustments of acts to ends are, or are not, efficient. This truth is somewhat disguised. The entanglement of social relations is such that men's actions often simultaneously affect the welfares of self, of offspring, and of fellow-citizens. Hence results confusion in judging of actions as good or bad; since actions well fitted to achieve ends of one order, may prevent ends of the other orders from being achieved. Nevertheless, when we disentangle the three orders of ends, and consider each separately, it becomes clear that the conduct which achieves each kind of end is regarded as relatively good; and is regarded as relatively bad if it fails to achieve it. Take first the primary set of adjustments—those subserving individual life. Apart from approval or disapproval of his ulterior aims, a man who fights is said to make a good

> defence, if his defence is well adapted for self-preservation. . . . The goodness ascribed to a man of business, as such, is measured by the activity and ability with which he buys and sells to advantage, and may coexist with a hard treatment of dependents which is reprobated. Though in repeatedly lending money to a friend who sinks one loan after another, a man is doing that which, considered in itself is held praise-worthy; yet, if he does it to the extent of bringing on his own ruin, he is held blame-worthy for a self-sacrifice carried too far. And thus it is with the opinions we express from hour to hour on those acts of people around which bear on their health and personal welfare. 'You should not have done that' is the reproof given to one who crosses the street amid a dangerous rush of vehicles. . . .' 'You were right to take a receipt'; 'you were wrong to invest without advice'; are common criticisms. All such approving and disapproving utterances make the tacit assertion that, other things equal, conduct is right or wrong according as its special acts, well or ill adjusted to special ends, do or do not further the general end of self-preservation. These ethical judgments we pass on self-regarding acts . . ."

It was necessary to quote so much in order that the reader might follow the sudden swerve of Spencer's argument. The term "ethical" has now been introduced, but this does not in itself vitiate the argument concerning judgments of expediency because Spencer makes it clear that he comprehends under ethical judgments merely those expediency-judgments which are made, not about inanimate objects or animals, but about the behaviour of people. (Nevertheless there is a slight lack of clarity here, in that we are not told whether the praise accorded to the man who repeatedly lends money to a friend who sinks one loan after the other would be accorded him on the grounds that in so acting he is in some degree furthering the end of self-preservation. I believe this could be contended on the grounds that action tending to produce friendly feelings towards the agent does conform to the above condition, although I do not think the popular judgment of approval upon an act of benevolence is as a rule actually accorded on the grounds that it tends to the self-preservation of the agent.) Spencer continues:—

> "These ethical judgments we pass on self-regarding acts are ordinarily little emphasized; partly because the promptings of the self-regarding desires, generally strong enough, do not need moral enforcement, and partly because the promptings of the other-regarding desires, less strong, and often over-ridden, do need moral enforcement."

What are we to understand by this? Wherein does the "need" inhere for moral reinforcement of other-regarding desires? We seem to have passed from an analysis of the meaning of good and bad to an assumption of the morally paramount claims of desires for the well-being of others over the desire for the preservation of the self. How does this fit in with the statement that "good" as applied to human behaviour means "well adjusted to desired ends"?

Spencer's answer would be that we are now dealing with the *collective* end of the preservation of our species; but unless he were able to show that we, that is, the majority of individuals composing that species, desire its preservation more than they desire their own personal well-being, so that, in their estimation, good conduct, whether of themselves or of others, is conduct conducive to the self-preservation of humanity considered as a whole, he has to abandon his role of objective inquirer into the meaning of the terms good and bad as used by the generality of mankind, and assume the existence of a criterion which does not depend for its validity upon individual values at all.

This, in fact, Spencer does, but without admitting that he does so, and now in the role of semanticist, now in that of moral scientist—or should it be scientific moralist?—he continues to try to make the best of both worlds, the world of pragmatic judgments and the world of ethics.

A "good" action, according to Spencer's later interpretation, is not after all necessarily an action which well serves the ends of its agent, although the judgment still implies that it serves *some* ends, and once this is admitted his whole argument begins to fall to pieces, for we are now to be free to judge for ourselves as to what ends "ought" to be served, and ends *themselves* become subject to assessment in terms of good and bad. This would not matter to Spencer as semanticist; it would enable him to note the important fact that moral judgments of good and bad

are basically subjective, and that the dispute which might succeed someone's comment upon an action "That was a good action" is not necessarily due to a difference of opinion about the aim which the agent of the action had in mind when he performed it, or even whether the effects of his action would in fact tend to increase either his own happiness or that of mankind at large. It may be, on the contrary, simply the expression of two fundamentally incompatible points of view, that of a moral scientist, for example, and that of a worshipper of Wotan.

But now, to Spencer as the champion of Evolution and the Unknown Cause, this inevitable deduction, from his own premisses, of the essential subjectivity of ends is fatal, simply because he is not content merely to give expression to his own opinions—based often upon very shrewd observations of the follies of humanity—as to what kinds of conduct and what forms of society would be more likely to conduce to a general increase in human happiness than prevailing forms of conduct and existing institutions. For Spencer as moral scientist feels that he must be able to discover principles for humanity which are right absolutely in that they are evolutionary, and vainly endeavours to infer them from palpably arbitrary assumptions of fundamental unanimity in humanity's judgments of right and wrong. His task is rendered even more arduous by the fact that partly in his wish to reason honestly, partly in his desire to refute all possible charges of secretly harbouring doctrinaire opinions, he repeatedly stresses the number of irreconcilable views concerning good and bad conduct which have always obtained, and still do obtain, among the members not only of different cultural groups, but among individuals and groups within our own heterogenous civilization.

Spencer, actually, was not unaware of the fatal flaw in his system, and sometimes resorted to desperate measures in order to defend it against criticism; measures which invariably resulted in his flounderings in the mire of self-contradiction becoming even more conspicuous than before. For example, on the principle, apparently, that attack is the best form of defence, he went out of his way to cross swords with the religious and intuitionist school of ethics.

"Religious creeds," he affirms, "established and dissenting, all embody the belief that right and wrong are right and wrong

simply in virtue of divine enactment." [1] This statement, of course, is flatly untrue. Not only is it not the case that *all* religious creeds embody this belief; but it is the fact that only in the most primitive types of religious community is religion so all-pervading that the right method of building a hut, planting crops, mending a bow, and feeding a baby are in each case right, not because they are the most efficient method of achieving the result desired by the persons performing these acts, but because they are prescribed by the deity presiding over each particular field of activity, or pleasing to the spirit dwelling in the material objects whose use is involved in these various activities. If Spencer's statement were true, then the rightness or wrongness of the method employed in installing a wireless-set or making a suet pudding would be judged by religious persons, not by the subsequent hearing or eating, but by whether or not the said methods were in conformity with " divine enactment."

Having thus saddled his religious contemporaries with views to which they certainly did not subscribe, Spencer, with an air of deepening severity, goes on to declare that it is not only by Quakers and those " belonging to so relatively unphilosophical a sect " that such views are held. They are, he says :—

> " . . . held ' with a difference ' by writers belonging to sects contrariwise distinguished. For these assert that without belief in a deity there would be no moral guidance; and this amounts to asserting that moral truths have no other origin than the will of God, which, if not considered as revealed in sacred writings, must be considered as revealed in conscience."

This, it is surely perfectly obvious, is not the same belief " with a difference," but an entirely different order of belief, since it concerns *only* those actions in which moral, as distinct from practical, issues are involved. Spencer, however, having decreed that theists, like himself, shall be unable or unwilling to make any distinction between ethical and pragmatic judgments proceeds to demolish the views which he has unfairly ascribed to them, without noticing that it is not their views at all but his own which he is subjecting to such merciless analysis. He proceeds :—

[1] Spencer, op. cit., p. 50.

> "This assumption, when examined, proves to be suicidal. If there are no other origins for right and wrong than this enunciated or intuited divine will, then, as alleged, were there no knowledge of the divine will, the acts now known as wrong would not be known as wrong. But if men did not know such acts to be wrong because contrary to the divine will, and so, in committing them, did not offend by disobedience, and if they could not otherwise know them to be wrong, then they might commit them indifferently with the acts now classed as right: the results, practically considered, would be the same. In so far as secular matters are concerned, there would be no difference between the two; for to say that in the affairs of life, any evils would arise from continuing to do the acts called wrong and ceasing to do the acts called right, is to say that these produce in themselves certain mischievous consequences and certain beneficial consequences; which is to say there is another source for moral rules than the revealed or inferred divine will: they may be established by induction from these observed consequences."

Which is also to say, one might add, that the pursuit of happiness, or of desired ends, may be carried on without any reference to the evolutionary trend.

Spencer concludes:—

> "From this implication I see no escape. It must be either admitted or denied that the acts called good and the acts called bad, naturally conduce, the one to human well-being and the other to human ill-being. Is it admitted? Then the admission amounts to an assertion that the conduciveness is shown by experience; and this involves abandonment of the doctrine that there is no origin for morals apart from divine injunctions. Is it denied that acts classed as good and bad differ in their effects? Then it is tacitly affirmed that human affairs would go on just as well in ignorance of the distinction, and alleged need for commandments from God disappears."

The rather bullying tone of this passage seems to suggest a certain uneasiness, ascribable to the fact that Spencer has noticed

that there is something wrong with his argument, but is resolved not to allow anybody to draw attention to it. Spencer " sees no escape " from the implications of his argument. There are none so blind as those who won't see, and what Spencer would not see was that he himself could find no way of escape from them. Spencer was the last man to admit that he had " digged a pit for his enemies " and fallen into it himself. Yet it is curious that this, in many ways very acute, thinker comes near to admitting, towards the end of the second volume of his *Study of Ethics*, the close similarity between his life-view and that of the theists.

This significant admission occurs in a comment upon a letter written to Spencer by the Rev. J. L. Davies, who had previously written contending that Spencer's use of the conception of duty was inconsistent with his " evolutionary " interpretation of human judgments. In the course of his subsequent correspondence with Spencer, Mr. Davies, contrasting his Christian conception of the duty of man with Spencer's, stated his own view as follows :—

> " The Unseen Power is gradually creating mankind by processes of development, and the human consciousness is so made as to be responsive to the authority of this Power; justice is the progressive order which the Maker is establishing amongst human beings, and it is binding upon each man as he becomes aware of it, and is felt to be binding, because he is the Maker's creature." [1]

Commenting upon this letter Spencer says :—

> " I may remark, respecting the more general question involved in Mr. Davies's closing paragraph (above) that there is a curiously close kinship between his view and that which I have myself more than once expressed."

He then quotes from a paragraph in his own *First Principles*, as follows :—

> " It is not for nothing that (the hesitating inquirer) has in him these sympathies with some principles and repugnance to others. He, with all his capacities, and aspirations, and beliefs, is not an accident, but a product of the time. He must remember that while he is a descendant of the past,

[1] Spencer, op. cit., quoted on p. 448.

> he is a parent of the future; and that his thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die. He, like every other man, may properly consider himself as one of the myriad agencies through whom works the Unknown Cause, and when the Unknown Cause produces in him a certain belief, he is thereby authorized to profess and act out that belief."

He further recalls that in that part of the *First Principles* which is headed " The Data of Ethics " he wrote :—

> " The theological theory contains a part. If for the divine will, supposed to be supernaturally revealed, we substitute the naturally-revealed end towards which the Power manifested throughout Evolution works, then, since Evolution has been, and still is, working towards the highest life, it follows that conforming to these principles by which the highest life is achieved, is furthering that end."

Did Spencer realize the full implications of this? There is certainly a startling admission in the preface to the second volume, that in regard to the ethics of social life " the doctrine of Evolution has not furnished guidance to the extent that I had hoped. Most of the conclusions, drawn empirically, are such as right feelings, enlightened by cultivated intelligence, have already sufficed to establish."

This passage is quoted with some satisfaction by Prof. H. Sidgwick, a vigorous critic of Spencer, in his book *The Ethics of T. H. Green, Herbert Spencer, and J. Martineau.* Prof. Sidgwick, himself a moralist, differed from Spencer mainly in that he did not believe it possible to infer moral principles either from data obtained by the study of evolutionary processes or, entirely, from analytical study of the current vocabulary of ethics and pragmatism. Perceiving that these two methods, between which Spencer alternates, and which he tries in vain to reconcile, are rationally incompatible, Sidgwick's attack takes the form of an exposure of these incompatibilities, and he effectively disposes of Spencer's claim to have discovered a satisfying criterion for moral conduct by these means. Yet because Sidgwick's own approach to problems of conduct is ethical, he never suspects that the fundamental defect of Spencer's system is the very same one which is

fatal to his own and to all ethical systems of the type which try to infer universal criteria for conduct either from existing trends of thought *or* from natural processes; the defect which inheres in the ignoring, essential to such systems, of the ultimate subjectivity of every moral judgment. Still less is it possible for Sidgwick, as moralist, to contemplate the possibility that the failure of Spencer, and of every other moralist so far, to construct a rationally satisfactory and logically consistent ethical system may be analogous to the failure of mathematicians, for all their labours, to square the circle; and attributable to the same cause—namely that it is impossible.

CHAPTER XI

ETHICS AND HEDONISM

SIDGWICK was an intuitionist, in the sense that he believed that the moral sentiment conveyed in the use of the term " ought " is immediate and intuitive, and thus that every ethical system of whatever form, involves this one intuition at least. At the same time, he did not believe that any ethical system as a whole could emerge from intuition unaided by common sense and the consideration of acts and their consequences. In order to construct an ethical system Sidgwick held that we must do two things :—

> " We have to arrive at a clear conception of the Ultimate End or Good, and we have to penetrate to fundamental universal intuitions determining the individual's duty of promoting general good. . . . I do not expect to find this true moral system . . . by introspection directed to the moral sentiments and apparently immediate moral judgments caused in my mind by the contemplation of particular acts, apart from systematic consideration of these acts and their consequences in relation to what I adopt as the ultimate end of action. That I should have such spontaneous sentiments, and, where prompt action is needed, should act on such immediate judgments, is at once natural and, in my opinion, conducive to the ultimate end; but I continually find that these immediate pronouncements have to be corrected and restrained by a careful consideration of consequences, and I do not regard them as having ultimate validity if they conflict with such calculations." [1]

Thus Sidgwick differs from Spencer in that he does not attempt to regard the moral " ought " as a form of expediency judgment (although he appears never once to have noticed that there is another type of " ought " which does in fact belong to the realm of expediency judgments), and is therefore able to be far more

[1] H. Sidgwick, *The Ethics of T.H.G., H.S., and J.M.*, pp. 352–3.

consistent than Spencer in his account of what constitutes a true ethical judgment. Nevertheless the process of reasoning whereby Sidgwick arrives at the conclusion that the Ultimate End or Good is happiness, is fundamentally unsound since, owing to the fact that he believed "duty" always to be traceable to the sense of obligation to promote the general good, he entirely excludes from consideration that conception of duty which arises from the pure sense of obligation to obey the divine will, no matter what type of conduct it may dictate, from human sacrifice to complete self-immolation, and whose spirit is well expressed in the phrase "Not my will but Thine be done."

Sidgwick's ethic, in fact, like that of the Utilitarians, like that of Hume, Butler, Spinoza, and every ethical social hedonist right back to Socrates, was formulated by a mind predisposed in favour of an increase in the general sum of happiness, and therefore unable or unwilling to notice that a system of at least equally pure ethical content could be constructed on the assumption that it is the moral duty of everybody to make everybody else as miserable as possible. (There have indeed been highly respectable systems which came very near to making this the ideal, although for obvious reasons their "imperative" was not actually formulated in these terms.)

Sidgwick takes Spencer to task for his failure to perceive that his arguments concerning the respective claims of egoism on the one hand and altruism on the other are based upon the unproven assumption that universal happiness is the ultimate standard and criterion of right conduct, while he, Spencer, attacks Bentham and his followers for taking for granted that very same assumption. Sidgwick himself is by no means sure that this proposition can in fact be either accepted as self-evident, or discovered by any method of inductive reasoning. He writes:—

> "I quite accept Mr. Spencer's view as to the necessity, with a view to the general happiness, of some such practical 'compromise' between Egoism and Altruism as he delineates in Chapter XIII—a compromise continually varying, as he says, with the stage in the evolution which has been reached. But I urge that the fact that compromise must be, does not determine the principle on which compromise is to be planned; for every individual here and now, the occasions

> of life may present alternative compromises—the compromise in which he pursues the happiness of others so far as it is consistent with his own, and the compromise in which he pursues his own happiness so far as it is consistent with maximum happiness generally. Mr. Spencer does not affirm that the two always coincide. . . . And if he does not, all his exposition of the growing implication of the interest of each with the interests of others and of the ultimate conciliation of the two, does not relieve him of the necessity of answering the question of the individual here and now: Which of the two alternative compromises am I to take?" [1]

Then follows the curious passage:—

> "It may be said to me: How do *you* deal with it? My answer is, that unless we assume or prove the moral order of the world, there is a conflict between rational convictions—Do I assume it? Yes, practically, as a man; provisionally, and with due recognition of the need of proof, as a philosopher. The assumption is normal to reflective man, and a postulate of Common Sense." [2]

Now what is this "moral order of the world" which Sidgwick as a practical man assumes, and which he thinks might be proved? If this had come from the pen of an orthodox Christian believer we should take it as the affirmation of a faith that every event which affects the life of man on this earth is just with a justness transcending man's understanding. But apart from the fact that such a view would be alien to Sidgwick's mode of thought, it would have little relevance to the context. I think the reference must be to an idea propounded in Sidgwick's other work, *Methods of Ethics*, that the notion that acts of self-denial will be compensated for by rewards in the hereafter is a valuable hypothesis in that it provides an expediency-motive for those altruistic acts which could not otherwise be justified on the basis of the Utilitarian ethic which Sidgwick favours. If this interpretation is correct, then the airy assertion that the assumption is normal to reflective man and a postulate of common sense hardly serves to conceal the arbitrary and artificial nature of this solution, or its worthlessness. For unless we happen to believe

[1] Sidgwick, op. cit., pp. 352–3. [2] Ibid., p. 188.

in the actuality of this impending reward for our self-sacrificing acts it cannot affect our actions by providing a motive. Moreover, supposing that we were to receive actual proof that self-sacrifice is the best possible investment—proof so convincing that a really effective motive *were* provided—the resultant competition in unselfishness would be as much a source of inter-human conflict as is the egoism prevailing in its absence, and a situation would be created to which only the pen of a Lewis Carroll could do justice. Sidgwick never gives an answer to the question "Why *ought* we to be altruistic?" and never even raises the problem of whether we ought to be altruistic at all, because his initial assumption that there is a Total or Universal Good, and that it is our duty to aim at maximizing it, contains within itself the proposition that we ought to try to increase the general sum of human happiness.

Professor C. D. Broad, in his valuable study *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (first published in 1930), expresses warm admiration for Sidgwick both as moralist and philosopher. Nevertheless, being himself a philosopher as well as a moralist, Prof. Broad notices the ineluctable dilemma at the heart of Sidgwick's system, which reveals it as nothing more, ultimately, than an elaborate attempt to justify ethically his personal bias in favour of a particular principle of conduct for mankind. From a careful analysis of Sidgwick's argument concerning the conception of the Good in relation to social conduct, Professor Broad concludes that:—

> "If the choice had lain simply between Intuitionism and Utilitarianism, Sidgwick would definitely have been a Utilitarian, though his Utilitarianism would have involved a few highly abstract intuitions,"

He continues:—

> "Unfortunately the position for him was not so simple as this. He had also to consider the relation between Egoistic and Universalistic Ethical Hedonism, and here he finds an insuperable difficulty. If it be admitted that there is a Total or Universal Good, then it is no doubt my duty to aim at maximizing this and to regard the Good which resides in me and my experiences as important only

in so far as it is a part of the Total Good. In that case I must be prepared to sacrifice some or all of my good if by that means and by that only I can increase the Total Good. But the consistent Egoist will not admit that there is a Total or Universal Good. There is my Good and your Good, but they are not parts of a Total Good, on his view. My duty is to aim at maximizing my Good, and to consider the effects of my actions on your Good only in so far as they may indirectly affect mine. Your duty is to aim at maximizing your Good, and to consider the effects of your actions on my Good only in so far as they may indirectly affect yours. It is plain that there is no logical inconsistency in this doctrine. And Sidgwick goes further. He says that it is plain that X is concerned with the quality of X's experiences in a way in which he is not concerned with the quality of Y's experiences, whoever Y may be. And it is impossible to feel certain that this distinction is not ethically fundamental. Thus Sidgwick is left in the unfortunate position that there are two principles, each of which separately seems to him self-evident, but which when taken together seem to be mutually inconsistent. To this logical difficulty he does not, so far as I can see, profess to be able to give any solution. For he proceeds to discuss what is clearly a different point, viz., whether there is any way of convincing an Egoist that he ought always to act *as if* he were a Utilitarian." [1]

Who shall blame Sidgwick the moralist for thus dodging the issue? Not Prof. Broad, whose own eye contains a moral mote which impairs his philosophical vision as effectively as any in Sidgwick's. In the whole course of this study of ethical thought, Prof. Broad never once calls attention to the fact that the words which are indispensable to the vocabulary of ethics—namely, "good," "bad," "right," "wrong," "ought," "duty" and "conscience"—are, with the exception of the two last-named, used just as often in the language of pragmatism, in the passing of expediency-judgments. He treats of all these words only in their ethical connotations and, in common with the great majority of moralists, seems to assume that they are actually meaningless except as having ethical import. At the outset of his "Analysis

[1] Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp. 158–9.

of Ethical Characters" which follows his discussion of particular ethical theories, Broad writes:—

> "I propose to give the name "ethical characteristics" to whatever characteristics are denoted by the words "good," "bad," "right," "wrong," "ought," and "duty," and by any other words which are plainly mere synonyms for some other word in this list." [1]

"Conscience," it will be noticed, is omitted from the list. Can this be because conscience is regarded by Prof. Broad as *a priori* to all judgments involving the use of the other terms? In any case we see here that Prof. Broad deliberately annexes these terms and, as it were, labels them "For the Use of Moralists Only." Having done this he proceeds:—

> "Now the first and most fundamental problem of pure ethics is whether these characteristics are unique and peculiar, in the sense that they cannot be analysed *without remainder* in terms of non-ethical characteristics."

By "pure ethics" Prof. Broad is to be understood to mean what I have elsewhere called "ethics-study," and I cannot think he is right in saying that the above problem is first and fundamental to this study. If his assumption that the terms "right," "wrong," etc., are exclusively ethical terms could be accepted—if they, like "conscience," in fact contained no other signification than an ethical one—then I think in a sense he would be right, although I do not think that in that case the problem could ever be solved. It would be insoluble because to the moralist it would necessarily appear self-evident that these terms cannot be analysed without remainder in terms of non-ethical characteristics, since, as Kant has shown, and Prof. Broad himself believes, the basis of any ethical judgment is a particular and unique intuition—the sense of pure obligation, sometimes called "the voice of conscience"; and the non-moralist could never by any process of reasoning prove that this moral feeling is really a sense of expediency in disguise, however much he might be inclined to suspect it. But as in fact these terms are all used extra-ethically, the problem concerning them for the student of ethical thought is wherein their meaning differs in their ethical usage from that

[1] Broad, op. cit., p. 257.

of their pragmatic usage, and this could be discovered, if at all, only by reference to the meaning of the moral sense, or conscience, to determine which must surely be the essential business of ethical analysis.

Prof. Broad's unfortunate classification of all judgments of approval and disapproval about human conduct as—by virtue of their subject-matter—ethical judgments (in conformity, admittedly, with the Socratic tradition) leads him to distinguish *two* main types of theory concerning ethics, both of which he sees as ethical theories. One school of thought, represented in this book by Spinoza and Hume, believes that ethical characteristics *can* be analysed without remainder into non-ethical ones, and the other school believes that they cannot. Now the fact is that both Hume and Spinoza came very near to giving a completely satisfactory and consistent pragmatic interpretation of all judgments containing the terms listed above by Professor Broad. Hume's argument indeed completely disposes of the distinction commonly drawn between an ethical judgment and a judgment of expediency. His exposition is brilliant and has never been surpassed for clarity and reasonableness. The pity is that he was apt to yield to the temptation to fling out with impish gusto such outrageous pronouncements as "Reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions," thus arousing in the breasts of the orthodox and devout passions ill-served by reason. This made it possible to regard Hume's analysis as a mere essay in perverse paradox, particularly since Hume himself never expressly stated that he was out to reveal the essentially irrational basis of pure ethical thought. It is also much to be regretted that he did not propound any theory of conscience, but instead preferred to equate judgments of approval and disapproval with æsthetic ones, ignoring the fact of the pure moral imperative. This to some extent justifies the criticism of Prof. Broad that Hume "has neither proved his own case nor refuted that of his opponents" concerning the essential nature of a moral judgment.

Prof. Broad in this book is not out to prove any case, but ethical bias, not in favour of any particular set of ethical principles, but in favour of ethical thinking *per se*, permeates the whole work. Nowhere is this moralistic bias so apparent as in his treatment of psychological hedonism. Whereas in his approach to various types of ethical theory he is scrupulously fair and allows

no personal preference for one system over another to affect his judgment, and seems always anxious to reveal whatever of truth he can discover beneath superficial slips and mistakes in presentation, his attitude towards psychological hedonism is one of prejudice, and he joins with the conventional moralist in resolving that there shall be no truth in it at all. He commences by defining psychological hedonism as " the doctrine that my volitions are determined wholly and solely by my pleasures and pains, present and prospective." [1] This statement is itself objectionable, because, unless immediately qualified and explained, it inevitably suggests that hedonists repudiate the idea that volitions may be determined by any motive other than the direct pursuit of personal pleasure or the direct avoidance of personal pain, so that a hedonist would dismiss as illusory the common man's view that one may *want* to behave virtuously, or benefit somebody else. This is of course a travesty of such a conception as Locke's, whose " pleasure " and " pain " are symbols enabling us to differentiate between two types of experience which are recognized as distinct —the type " sought " and the type " avoided "—without specification of their particular content. Yet Locke must certainly be classified as a psychological hedonist, and is so regarded by Broad himself. (Broad's summary of Locke's position is definitely misleading, for he states that Locke " holds that all desire can be reduced to the desire to remove pain or uneasiness." The term actually used by Locke to define this antecedent condition of volition is " uneasiness," not " pain," in the case of positive volitions. " Pain " is the term he uses for the determinant of negative volitions, i.e., the desire to avoid, or cease to have, a given experience, and is equivalent to a state of desiring a particular experience.) Prof. Broad is at no pains to guard against the misconceptions likely to arise from his initial statement of the standpoint of psychological hedonism, and continues :—" It is thus a particular species of Psychological Egoism."

He goes on to discuss the relation of psychological hedonism to ethical hedonism, and shows how easily Sidgwick disposed of poor Mill's attempts to reconcile the two; he then proceeds to deal with the question of " whether psychological hedonism be itself true."

[1] Broad, op. cit., p. 180.

The next sentence reads " Let us begin with certain undoubted facts which must be admitted." This is a most revealing phrase, showing how Broad takes it for granted that he and the reader are united in distaste for the idea that there may be something " in " psychological hedonism.

The admission in question is that " The belief that a future experience will be pleasant is *pro tanto* a motive for trying to get it, and the belief that it will be painful is *pro tanto* a motive for trying to avoid it "; and, further, " The felt pleasantness of a present pleasant experience is *pro tanto* a motive for trying to make it last, whilst the felt painfulness of a present experience is *pro tanto* a motive for trying to make it stop. The task is then to decide whether the pleasure and pain contents of experiences or anticipated experiences are the *only* determinants of volition in the situations involving them.

Prof. Broad then points out that all hedonists assume, even if they do not expressly state, that the factors of duration in time, relative remoteness and immediacy of events having hedonic quality, are taken into account and are therefore, as well as the pleasure-pain principle itself, to some extent effective in determining action, but he does not appear to regard this as a contradiction, but only as an inevitable tacit *qualification* of the hedonistic generalization. In this I think he is both accurate and fair, since it is clear that no generalization concerning psychological determination of motives would be at all possible without the assumption that the idea of the duration in time of any imagined experience might, in terms of the generalization, be a co-determinant of the decision taken.

Immediately after making this point Prof. Broad suddenly says :—

> " Now, so far as I am aware, no argument has ever been given for Psychological Hedonism except an obviously fallacious one which Mill produces in his Utilitarianism "

and proceeds to pull to pieces a particularly clumsy statement of Mill's to the effect that " to desire " anything and " to find " that thing " pleasant " are just two different ways of stating the same fact.

[1] Broad, op. cit., p. 184.

What on earth does Prof. Broad mean by this? That not Aristippus, Epicurus, Hobbes, Locke, Hutcheson, Hume, nor Bentham, to mention just a few of the more eminent psychological hedonists, ever gave any argument for their view but were content to simply affirm it dogmatically? We cannot take this statement to mean that in Prof. Broad's view no *valid* argument has ever been given for psychological hedonism, because if he had meant that he could not have cited Mill's argument as the only one of which he was aware, and then demolished it. I think we must simply say that goodness knows what Prof. Broad means, and leave it at that—except for the comment that his statement does not impress one as having been made in an altogether objective frame of mind.

After disposing of Mill, Prof. Broad continues :—

> "I think there is no doubt that Psychological Hedonism has been rendered plausible by another confusion."

This is the idea that because whenever I desire anything I foresee that if I get it I shall have the pleasure of fulfilled desire, it follows that my motive for desiring X is the pleasure of fulfilled desire which I foresee that I shall enjoy if I get X. Now, says Prof. Broad :—

> "It is clear that this will not do. I have no reason to anticipate the pleasure of fulfilled desire on getting X unless I already desire X itself. It is evident then that there must be *some* desires which are not for the pleasure of fulfilled desire."

Nevertheless he conceded that,

> "The fact that there must be (these kind of) desires is quite compatible with Psychological Hedonism, since it is quite compatible with the view that all "primary" desires (i.e., desires which are not for the pleasure of fulfilled desire) are desires for primary pleasures, i.e., for pleasures of taste, touch, smell, etc., as distinct from the pleasures of fulfilled desire. Still, introspection shows that this is not in fact so. The ordinary man at most times plainly desires quite directly to eat when he is hungry. In so doing he incidentally gets primary pleasures of taste, and the secondary pleasure of

> fulfilled desire. Eventually he may become a *gourmand.* He will then eat because he desires the pleasures of taste, and he may even make himself hungry in order to enjoy the pleasures of fulfilled desire."

In which latter case, we are to understand, he would be acting on the principle according to which psychological hedonists assert that everyone always acts.

Now, in the example with X, Prof. Broad does not let us know whether X stands for an object of desire such as a steak, or for a specific sensation like that of warmth or self-esteem. If the former, then the reply to Prof. Broad is that if any psychological hedonist can be got to affirm that it is *not* the steak, *but* " the pleasure of fulfilled desire " conceived in the abstract, which I am seeking when I impale it upon my fork, we shall be quite entitled to tell him that he is being ridiculous. In the latter case the matter is not quite so simple, because it is a sensation, not a thing, which I seek, and I seek it for its pleasurable content, in the case of warmth consciously, in the case of self-esteem, in all probability, in unconsciousness at the time of the nature of that which I was pursuing, although I subsequently recognize it for what it was—a particular *kind* of pleasure. Here too, then, it would be untrue to say that the object of my desire was " the pleasure of fulfilled desire," although it would certainly be true to say that the object of my desire was pleasure—of a kind. The fact of the matter is that Prof. Broad's suggestion, implicit in the paragraph quoted from, that the hedonist tries to make out that the only motive of action is to enjoy " the pleasure of fulfilled desire," is subtly misleading, although convenient for those who wish to make nonsense of this mode of interpretation, and does not even fit with his own initial statement of the standpoint of psychological hedonism.

It is characteristic of the opponents of hedonism, that they often choose to concentrate, as Prof. Broad does in the passage just quoted, upon the contention that pleasure, or the pleasure-content of felt or contemplated experiences, determines the desires to prolong or seek them respectively, and to pass over or minimize *ad hoc* the hedonist's necessary and complementary proposition that it is the pain-content of felt or contemplated experiences which determines the desire to curtail or avoid

them, respectively. On the basis of this lop-sided interpretation it is child's play to cite an example such as that of a martyr going voluntarily to the stake, and then ridicule some imaginary psychological hedonist for contending that he must have done it in the pursuit of pleasure. Even here, the hedonistic buffoon might be permitted to point out that some martyrs *have* gone to the stake in the anticipation of post-mortem pleasures so great as to compensate them for their relatively brief, although intense, sufferings in so dying, for few hedonists have sought to prove that no one ever submits to immediate discomfort in order to purchase ultimate satisfaction. Nevertheless, men often do act in such wise that no interpretation in terms of pleasure-pursuit is in the least appropriate, and it may have been his recognition of this fact, coupled with his familiarity with the usual type of objection raised by moralists against the hedonist position, which led Locke to stress the pain-avoidance motive in volitions, although by no means to the extent that he is represented as doing by Prof. Broad. Prof. Broad actually admits that he understands Locke as stating " that my uneasiness at the absence of X is not necessarily proportional to the pleasure which I believe I should get from the possession of X," and yet in reference to Locke's general theory, and as if in refutation of it, he observes :—

> " It seems plain on inspection that I may feel uneasiness at the absence of some contemplated object for other reasons than that I believe that the possession of it would be pleasant." [1]

" Obviously," we may reply on behalf of Locke, " for my uneasiness at the absence of the object may be due to my belief that if I possessed it I should feel less pain than I do now, as might be the case, to take a crude example, if the object desired were a bottle of aspirin and I a sufferer from headache." Such examples are not favoured by moralists. " I might feel uncomfortable," Prof. Broad goes on, " at the fact that I am selfish, without for a moment believing that I should be happier if I were more unselfish." Surely the desire to be more unselfish can perfectly well be seen as the outcome of the pain involved in the consciousness of being selfish ; the volition being determined,

[1] Broad, op. cit., p. 188.

not by the desire to find some positive pleasure in the being-less-selfish, but in the desire to be freed from that pain.

After this Prof. Broad proceeds to dispose of what he calls two more "lines of defence" for the psychological hedonist. (*a*) He may say that we may "unwittingly desire things only in respect of their hedonic qualities, but that we deceive ourselves and think that we desire some things directly or in respect of other qualities." To this he rejoins :—

> "It is plain that this assertion cannot be proved, and unless there be some positive reason to accept Psychological Hedonism there is not the faintest reason to believe it."

We must concede that if there were no positive reason to accept psychological hedonism there would be no reason to accept any of its assertions.

Line of defence (*b*) is stated as follows :—

> "He (the psychological hedonist) might say that our desires were originally determined wholly and solely by the hedonic qualities of objects, but that now, by association and other causes, we have come to desire certain things directly, or for other reasons."

Such an argument, Prof. Broad points out, would be irrelevant, since

> "the important question for ethics is what we desire here and now, not what we may have desired in infancy or in that pre-natal state about which the psycho-analysts, who appear to be as familiar with the inside of their mothers' womb as with the back of their own hands, have so much to tell us."

Supposing some psychological hedonist to have rashly tried to buttress himself against the attacks of the moralists by some such piece of etiological dogmatism, it is surely hardly fair to find fault with him on the grounds that his contention is of no importance for ethics, whatever else may be wrong with it. It would be about as reasonable to find fault with a pugilist on the grounds that he tries to hit his opponent.

Prof. Broad concludes with some observations about children, and argues that although in general what they desire is what will in fact give them immediate pleasure, they do not think of these

things as likely to be pleasant and desire them *for that reason*, nor do they shun what will in fact give them immediate pain on the converse grounds.

> "It is unlikely that they have the experience of desiring and shunning for a reason at all at the early stages. And if this be so, their experiences are irrelevant to Psychological Hedonism, which is essentially a theory about the reasons or motives of desires." [1]

If that is so, it seems fair to ask, why bring them into the discussion? The answer would seem to be that Prof. Broad sees in them another possible weapon with which to strike at the exponents of a school of thought of which he disapproves. After this Prof. Broad ends with manifest satisfaction:—

> "Psychological Hedonism is now refuted, and the confusions which have made it possible have been cleared up."

He does not actually add "So now we can safely go on with our ethics."

In the above summary of Prof. Broad's criticism of psychological hedonism I have omitted, for the sake of brevity, certain elaborations of particular points made by him, but I have, I believe, given all those of his arguments which Prof. Broad himself regards as most damaging.

My object in stressing particularly the signs of strong prejudice exhibited by Prof. Broad in this analysis was not thereby to suggest that psychological hedonism is invulnerable to all—even to fair—criticism, but rather to indicate that moralists are, as it were, the natural enemies of hedonists (except, of course, those remarkable prodigies the ethical or moralistic hedonists). The reasons why this must be so I hope soon to make apparent. In regard to the content of Prof. Broad's attack, I think that whereas he has been able to point to a number of rash and inconsistent arguments which have undoubtedly been put forward at one time or another in the name of this school—sometimes even by its more eminent exponents—he has not by any means shown it to be fundamentally self-contradictory, or that its basic propositions are impossible to reconcile with the facts of experience.

It is to be noticed that whereas practically all the most thought-

[1] Broad, op. cit., p. 191.

ful and analytical of moral philosophers, Prof. Broad included, are ready to concede that there are certain fundamental "difficulties" and "mysteries" about morality and the moral sense, and that no philosophy of ethics has yet been propounded which is both logically invulnerable and spiritually satisfying, they do not regard this as any serious defect of ethics itself, maintaining an attitude towards it of "For all thy faults, I love thee still," and their fidelity is proof against all criticism from without no less than against the shortcomings of the beloved herself. How different is their attitude towards psychological hedonism! Here, as we have just seen in a typical example, every awkwardness of presentation is pounced upon and emphasized, every ambiguity snatched up and magnified into a major defect of the system itself, every over-simplification held up triumphantly as proof that the whole thing is nonsense from beginning to end.

And this is necessary, absolutely essential in the ethical interest, for only by appealing to prejudice, and securing the whole weight of traditional thought-habits firmly on their side, can moralists maintain an appearance of rational integrity, and appear before the world, not as the apostles of mystery and obscurantism but as the sturdy upholders of common sense against the crankiness and perversity of those outside the ethical fold. Their task is undoubtedly made much easier by the well-meant comprising of many philosophers of the past who on the whole strongly inclined towards a hedonistic standpoint, but who, partly because their own minds were entangled in the ethical thought-tradition, partly because they wished to make their views acceptable to other minds already conditioned by that tradition, strove to bring about some sort of unification of the two actually irreconcilable systems of thought, and so laid themselves open to just charges of inconsistency, although at the same time often gaining the doubtful honour of the guarded approval of their natural opponents, the moralists.

All this, of course, is entirely without prejudice to the possibility that people are on the whole happier, or in some sense better, thinking ethically, even although ethical thinking is fundamentally irrational, than they would otherwise be.

This appears to me to be a question of cardinal importance, and it will form the main subject of a later section of this study.

CHAPTER XII

CONSCIENCE

ALTHOUGH many people who emphatically claim to have consciences, and to be effectively guided by them, hotly deny that there is the least taint of supernaturalism in their ethics, it seems pretty clear that even to such minds the idea of conscience often embodies the vague notion of some kind of quasi-supernatural pressure on one's volitional system which is not to be explained in terms of the ordinary processes of volition; some sort of "instinct to do right" which is certainly a near relation of Kant's Categorical Imperative. This latter, as we have seen, has the characteristic of being effective only in the act of overruling desire altogether, thus raising the insoluble dilemma of the voluntary-involuntary "moral" act which, as Kant demonstrated once and for all, cannot be understood at all or rationally accounted for. In face of this mystery those who believe in "conscience" are apt to revert to a furtive idea that Someone, or at any rate Something-which-Wills, external to their own volitional systems, has a transcendental finger in the pie.

I think the most convenient approach to the rather complicated subject of conscience will be to consider, first, whether this concept of conscience, or the moral sense, is a useful one, standing for a particular fact of subjective experience sufficiently distinctive to need a special term. Before going on, however, it will be as well to mention one point about the criterion of evaluation on which I shall stand in discussing this matter, because in spite of all attempts to be as objective as possible I shall not be able to prevent it from influencing my judgments. I shall show prejudice, then, in favour of the view that clear thinking is better, is more universally desirable, than muddled thinking, and that the use of words according to the rules of logic and semantics is better than their self-contradictory and mutually overlapping use. This is not for one moment to claim that I myself am innocent of muddled thought and the misuse of

words. I merely think it is important to state that I consider this undesirable. Therefore I don't propose after this to embark on any discussion of the pros and cons of muddled thinking, but shall let the cons have it without more ado. This does not mean of course that I refuse to recognize the benefits which may accrue to particular individuals from their own muddled thinking, or from the muddled thinking of other people—these may be very great; it means only that I hold that the less muddled thinking there is going on in the world, the better for humanity it will be.

It is not altogether easy to see how conscience enters into Kant's scheme of ethics, for in one place he calls it " the power of reason to judge the self," and " the *forum internum* which is a representation of the *forum divinum* "; but he also refers to it as " the ideal person," and nowhere makes it clear how these two aspects of conscience are to be reconciled. In the first case it seems to be just one—presumably the most important—of the judicial functions which reason performs according to some standard set up by itself deriving from its intimations of the divine purpose; but in the latter sense it appears as something to be aimed at, an ideal in the pursuit of which one tries to act morally. In any case it seems fairly evident that Kant was not able to make up his mind as to what he meant by conscience, or as to its position in his ethical scheme. In point of fact he does not write very much about " conscience " at all, and what other moralists from St. Paul to Prof. Broad have generally taken this word to mean—namely, an intuitive feeling as to what, ethically speaking, one ought to do—he covers with terms like " reverence for the higher law," " reason," and " the Categorical Imperative." In Kant it is only the conception of conscience as the " ideal person " which is of any particular interest or importance, and I shall return to this later on, in the present and following chapters.

Generally speaking, I think we can trace in ethical writings at least four conceptions of conscience, which are very apt to be confused together, but which it is at least possible to distinguish apart.

First, there is conscience as the " voice of reason "—reason not in Kant's sense, but as meaning intelligence and the capacity to calculate and foresee. It is the first half of the Daemon of Socrates which, according to all three of his chroniclers, he defined as " The inner voice of moral tact which prevents me

from doing unreasonable acts (such as do not harmonize with my ideal personality)." In this sense conscience is hardly to be distinguished from prudence, it is common sense writ large, or the faculty which enables us to act not, as we say, " on impulse," but reasonably. It is not often said that this is essentially what conscience *is*, and few moralists have ever said so. All the same, we can nearly always discern at some point in the moralist's writings a sort of tacit assumption that conscience has some connection with sound judgment as to ends, no matter how vehemently they may contradict this in other passages; and in fact, I do not think they can help themselves.

It is rather interesting that the view of conscience as that which enables us, or causes us, to act reasonably, does not as a rule find support among psychological hedonists, who seem on the whole inclined to dispense with the idea of conscience as a factor of any great importance in our behaviour. To the hedonist conscience is usually an irrational thing, which may have its uses, but which is always inferior to reason when decisions have to be taken. Locke, in his discussion of " practical principles," refers to conscience in only one place, where he is out to confute the arguments of his ecclesiastical critics that the existence of conscientious feelings proves that there is an " innate moral rule." " Conscience," he says, " is nothing else but our opinion or judgment of the moral rectitude or pravity of our own actions." After which he does not use the term again. Locke's conception, which seems to be the *forum internum* without the *forum divinum*, is conscience in its purely judicial aspect. There are, according to Locke, *three* " moral criteria ": the individual conscience may judge either according to the " law of God," " the law of politic sanctions," or " the law of fashion or private censure." [1] And its standards will in each individual be different according to what kinds of behaviour he has been brought up to regard as morally right and wrong. Thus Locke's " conscience " claims no absolute or divine authority for its pronouncements. Locke was not really much interested in ethics, and his definition of conscience approximates fairly closely to what is perhaps the most usual conventional view of it.

" Conscience," according to popular usage, seems to stand for something which causes the individual to pass evaluating judg-

[1] Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Routledge ed., p. 283.

ments on his own acts, and with the introspective person, upon his own thoughts, motives, and volitions, with the general effect of making people try to amend their acts, thoughts, etc. It is, more or less, the *forum internum*, and is often called the "moral sense." This conscience is regarded as a faculty for passing purely subjective judgments. People will say "My conscience tells me that I ought to do this," but they will not say "My conscience tells me that *you* ought to do that." By the religious this sort of conscience is held to be the receiving agency of God's instructions. Admittedly this popular conception is somewhat complicated by the fact that such a "personal" conscience is sometimes referred to as though it could on occasion be *shared*. Thus we read of "arousing the public conscience," but I think the idea is not really that a sort of collective conscience can come into being, but only that on certain occasions the individual consciences of the various members of a group all issue identical admonitions.

This conscience has also a dynamic aspect. It is supposed to be capable of acting as a kind of spiritual goad; it "drives" us, and "gives us no rest" until we have done what it dictates. In this form conscience is not so much judge as gaoler, it tries to force us, and is capable of overriding all other sorts of volition—in some people, that is; for conscience seen in its dynamic aspect can be relatively strong or weak in its ability to "master the will." To what extent its "power" is supposed to be relative to the clarity and non-ambiguity of its judgments seems a debatable question. Some people seem to believe that we always know what we *ought*, morally speaking, to do, but that we often lack the power to do it, but whether that which lacks the power is conscience itself or the individual to whom it speaks is by no means clear. It seems probable that the latter is meant, although if so it is hard to see what becomes of conscience as that which can be weak or strong and which goads us. Perhaps we are to regard some personal consciences as being armed with a goad and some not. I feel that we really have here two not altogether consistent aspects of conscience, but I shrink from further complicating this intricate subject by trying to classify them apart. The mainly coercive aspect of conscience is well brought out by J. S. Mill in his observations on the subject. He writes of "a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violations of duty, which in properly

cultivated moral natures rises, in the more serious cases, into shrinking from it as an impossibility. This feeling, when disinterested, and connecting itself with the pure idea of duty, and not with some particular form of it . . . is the essence of conscience." Mill, however, did not regard conscience as the most important influence upon conduct, and in general upholds reason—in the normal, not the Kantian sense—as our best guide to socially good behaviour.

We now come to an idea of conscience very different from either of the two so far discussed. It has more in common with the second than with the first, as being an essentially and entirely ethical conception, and it is never considered by moralists to be a different thing from the personal conscience, but only a kind of extension of, or extrusion from, that conscience which criticizes its possessor and tries to make him act morally. Isolated from the others, this conscience—number three on my list—would probably be denied the title by many moralists. Yet, as we shall see, not only is its existence implied in most moral philosophies, but every didactic ethic, no matter of what kind, bases its claim to acceptance upon the idea of it. This is the conscience which enables the individual to know what is the moral duty of *other people*. This is the faculty which is supposed to justify moral censure of other people's actions, and their punishment, not for purposes of deterrence, but because they *deserve* to be punished.

Now the only way in which it is possible to regard this faculty as an aspect of the personal conscience is by assuming that, in some relations at least, each individual conscience invariably demands the same conduct as every other. Suppose, for example, that each individual's conscience tells him that it is his duty in all circumstances to obey those in authority over him, no matter what they command, then *anyone* with a conscience seeing another person who also has one, infringing this law, would be able to assert categorically that this was an immoral act. (I here use "immoral" as synonymous with "contra-conscientious," to which I think all moralists would agree.)

Now by no means all moralists are prepared to accept the view that there are in fact any such universal laws of conscience. They maintain with Sidgwick that every kind of action except the purely impulsive, no matter how odious and inhumane, might be done in obedience to some conscience or other. At the same

time, it is easy to see why nearly all types of moral philosopher find it necessary to make extensive use of the idea of this universal-legislator conscience; even though they may refrain from mentioning it in inconvenient contexts, for in its absence it would be impossible to avoid recognizing the distinction, so glaringly apparent to the non-moral mind, between moral motives and moral conduct on the one hand, and good motives and good conduct on the other. And theoretical and didactic ethics rely respectively on the assumption that these mean, and are, the same thing. (I shall return shortly to the subject of the universal-legislator conscience.)

Fourth and last in this list which I have tried to compile of the most separable and distinctive conceptions of conscience, comes that conscience which has its place in the second half of Socrates' definition of the Daemon—although not as constituting conscience *itself*—namely, the ideal personality, or, as it appears in some versions, that part of the individual's desire-system which directs itself towards making him become, or live up to, his ideal personality. Some hint at this aspect also crops up sooner or later in most moralists' statements about conscience, although, as will appear, it is the least susceptible of being reconciled with pure, or Kantian, ethics.

Now, since I have been unable to find any account of conscience which is at the same time self-consistent and consistent with the conception of morality as something distinct and separable from that system of incentives which we all, moralists included, recognize as dependent upon interest and the sense of expediency, or "prudence," I think the best method for arriving at what the aggregate of "consciences" amounts to will be to consider briefly what is generally regarded as one of the most detailed contributions to the subject ever written. This is Bishop Joseph Butler's study of conscience or, as he often calls it, "the Moral Faculty," and he makes it include nearly everything which moralists have supposed conscience to be.

Butler was not content, like so many other ethical theorists, to write at large about morality and merely introduce the term "conscience" at some stage in the exposition where it happened to come in handy; for he explicitly made it the corner-stone of his whole ethical system. The key to Butler's philosophy, as also to the extraordinary dialectical contortions in which he sometimes

involved himself, is his desire to reconcile Christian theology with the aim of promoting human happiness. As a Christian clergyman trying to represent the religion of sacrifice and self-denial as something far more akin to a principle of universal expediency than an ethic proper, no wonder Butler should have failed to construct a rationally acceptable system, particularly as he had to claim actual *authority* for his views in the Gospel doctrines. Much of his work he in fact wrote in the role of Christian apologist against the agnosticism which was current in fashionable circles in his day, and it is quite possible to regard his arguments for the existence of God, for immortality, and so forth, as representing his main theme, and the rest as merely an elaboration of various aspects of the divine dispensation which seemed to him to reinforce his theistic argument.

It was Butler's contention that " the happiness of the world is the concern of him, who is the lord and the proprietor of it; nor do we know what we are about when we endeavour to promote the good of mankind in any way but that which he has directed, that is, indeed, *in all ways* [my italics] not contrary to veracity and justice."

It will be noticed that Bishop Butler felt he had to be careful here, and with rather endearing disingenuousness he introduces this statement by a passage which makes it seem like an argument *against*, or at any rate in severe modification of, the view that our prime duty is to make the world a happier place. For this sentence appears as an elaboration of a remark about the terrible mistake of supposing " the whole of virtue to consist in simply aiming, according to the best of (our) judgment, at promoting the happiness of mankind in the present state, and the whole of vice in doing what (we) foresee, or might foresee, is likely to produce an overbalance of unhappiness in it." [1] For, he says: " Some of the most shocking instances of injustice, murder, adultery . . . may, in many supposable cases, not have the appearance of being likely to produce an overbalance of misery in the present state, perhaps sometimes may have the contrary appearance," and yet they are certainly dreadful sins. But then, after saying that God has directed us to promote happiness in all ways save those which are contrary to veracity and justice, Butler goes on to state his opinion that in fact people hardly ever *do* try to promote human

[1] Butler's *Analogy and Sermons.*

happiness in ways which disregard these laws. They may *seem* to be acting from benevolent motives but really,

> " Such supposed endeavours proceed, almost always, from ambition, the spirit of party, or some indirect principle, concealed, perhaps, in great measure from (the) persons themselves. And though it is our business and our duty to endeavour, within the bounds of veracity and justice, to contribute to the ease, convenience, and even cheerfulness and diversion of our fellow-creatures, yet from our short view it is greatly uncertain whether this endeavour will, in particular instances, produce an overbalance of happiness upon the whole, since so many and distant things must come into account. And that which makes it our duty is, that there is some appearance that it will, and no positive appearance to balance this on the contrary side, and also that such benevolent endeavour is a cultivation of that most excellent of all virtuous principles, the active principle of benevolence."

The argument is all loops and loopholes, but the general purport is clear enough. It is our duty to try, according to our lights, to increase the sum of human happiness, within the bounds of veracity and justice, within which bounds, however, we practically always *do* remain when we are *really* trying to increase the sum of human happiness. And we are always doing our duty whenever we are acting from this motive while believing that our action is more likely than not to *have* this effect; and this is because the principle of benevolence is " the most excellent of all virtuous principles."

Now, how according to Butler are we so sure of all this? The answer is :—

> " Conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or Divine reason, whether considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart; or, which seems the truth, as including both."

Butler's conscience gives us " an universally acknowledged standard " of virtue; the standard being " justice, veracity, and regard to common good." (The " object " of this faculty, Butler emphasizes, is " actions, and active or practical principles.")

But it does even more than this, for it tells us—all of us—what sort of conduct on our part is ultimately in *our own best interests.* Butler notes two aspects of this function of conscience in giving us counsels of expediency. First, it is the means whereby God intimates to us his wishes concerning our conduct:—

> "Consciousness of a rule or guide of action in creatures who are capable of considering it as given them by their Maker not only raises indirectly a sense of Duty, but also a sense of security in following it, and of danger in deviating from it. A direction of the Author of Nature, given to creatures capable of looking upon it as such, is plainly a command from him, and a command from him necessarily includes in it at least an implicit promise in case of obedience or threatening in case of disobedience."

That is one reason why it is prudent for us to obey the voice of conscience, but there is another reason, reinforcing the first and appropriate to conscience as "the principle of reflection" (Butler repeatedly uses this expression synonymously with "conscience"):—

> "Conscience and self-love, if we understand our true happiness, always lead us the same way. Duty and interest are perfectly coincident, for the most part in this world, but entirely and in every circumstance if we take in the future, and the whole, this being implied in the notion of a good and perfect administration of things. Thus they who have been so wise in their generation as to regard only their own supposed interest, at the expense and to the injury of others, shall at last find, that he who has given up all the advantages of the present world, rather than violate his conscience and the relations of life, has infinitely better provided for himself, and secured his own interest and happiness."

This is the sentence with which Butler concludes the last of his three sermons "Upon Human Nature," and it summarizes his highly characteristic views about the relation between individual self-interest and social good conduct. The one, if intelligently conceived and pursued, produces the other. Sometimes Butler only contends that this is the case in general and on the whole, but here he states it unequivocally. Here conscience

figures simply as the faculty which enables us to know what, as social beings, it is most expedient for us to do. How far is this consistent with the account of conscience given by Butler elsewhere?

In an earlier Dissertation Butler introduces conscience as the faculty of approving and disapproving of various kinds of conduct, and regarding them as respectively worthy of reward and punishment, according to an "in general . . . universally acknowledged standard." This seems on the whole compatible with the idea of conscience as the "principle of reflection," although Butler certainly gives it plenty to do; for if each conscience tells its owner how it is in his own best interests to behave, according to principles which are valid for *everybody*, then any unit conscience is as much entitled to pronounce judgment upon other people's actions as upon those of its owner, assuming, of course, that it knows the circumstances in which the actions are performed.

There is yet another aspect of conscience in Butler's scheme which has to be squared with the rest, and this is the conscience that tells us we ought to obey it. This is more like the categorical imperative, which is certainly not identical with the "principle of reflection," for it is primary, its claim is paramount over reason. Butler perceives this difficulty, and deals with the question as follows:—

> "Yet it may be asked, what obligations are we under to attend to and follow it? I answer: It has been proved that man by his nature is a law to himself, without the particular distinct consideration of the positive sanctions of that law; the rewards and punishments which we feel, and those which from the light of reason we have ground to believe, are annexed to it. The question then carries its own answer along with it. Your obligation to obey this law, is its being the law of your nature. That your conscience approves of and attests to such a course of action, is itself alone an obligation. Conscience does not only offer itself to show us the way we should walk in, but it likewise carries its own authority with it, that it is our natural guide, the guide assigned us by the Author of our nature."

Thus Butler manages to include within his scheme of ethics

almost all the aspects of conscience as it has been conceived by other moralists, as well as others distinctively his own; even the "ideal self" is included and frequently stressed:—"This principle in man by which he approves his heart, temper, and actions, is conscience."

This seems to complete the list, and Butler has succeeded in making the word "conscience" stand at once for common sense, self-interest, good will, good judgment, the personal ideal, the sense of duty (categorical imperative?), and the law of God; and by making it the "law of our nature" which provides all mankind with an identical, and correct, conception of universal expediency, he offers it as a ready-made solution to all our problems of conduct, so that whenever anyone does what his conscience dictates he can be sure that he is acting in his own best interests and also to the advantage of humanity at large.

Now there is no logical objection to Butler, or anybody else, taking a vague word like conscience, which has never been satisfactorily defined, and which has been used to mean so many different things, and making it mean all the lot of them, so long as he can show that none of these meanings are actually incompatible with any of the others, and I think that on the whole Butler succeeded in doing just this. He showed that it is possible to imagine and to describe an entity which embodies within itself all the various attributes catalogued above, and although we may think it rather a monstrosity, like a beast with horns and wings, two heads, and eight legs, we cannot assert that it is inconceivable, like a beast with eight legs and yet only four. We may, however, say that we feel quite unable to believe in the creature, and this I think must be the verdict on Butler's comprehensive conscience. For one major assumption is necessary before we can accept the arguments for the existence of this faculty of conscience as he conceives it—namely, the assumption that all individual consciences or "principles of reflection" dictate identical principles of conduct. If we accept the definition of conscience as "that principle in man by which he approves and disapproves his . . . actions," then we must surely also accept the plain matter of observation that one individual's "conscience" will approve one type of action, and another quite a different type of action, and that this will depend, not only upon the kind of behaviour which has general approval in the community of which

he is a member—e.g., whether he is a Red Indian, an Englishman, or a Dobu Islander—but also upon the type of person he admires and wants to emulate, which in a richly varied culture like our own may be anybody from a bishop to a successful car-bandit. It is perfectly true, as Butler points out, that there are certain qualities which hardly anybody will praise by name as "cruelty," "injustice," and "dishonesty"; but that is because these happen to be opprobrious terms. Under the approving titles of "toughness," "justice," and "realism" however, characteristics are not seldom openly approved nowadays which would certainly have been abhorrent to Butler and entirely incompatible with his notions of "benevolence, justice, and veracity." Nor were things so very different in his own day.

This does not mean that Butler is wrong in his belief that the great majority of human beings approve of kindness and honesty and disapprove of their opposities; on the contrary, his view of the matter was far sounder than was that of some of his cynical-minded contemporaries such as Hobbes—Butler detested Hobbes's ideas and effectively ridiculed his unbalanced and over-simplified interpretation of human motives—but for all that it was no use Butler's pretending that the exceptions to liberal and humane principles are too rare and insignificant to be worth bothering about, or that many people who sincerely approve of socially good qualities up to a point, do not regard them as insignificant in comparison with some other "virtues" such as physical courage or piety, and regulate their behaviour accordingly.

It is none of my business here to try to resolve the various ethical "difficulties" inseparable from Butler's idea of conscience as a kind of divinely-bestowed sense of expediency—if to obey our conscience is the same thing as doing what we really know to be expedient, where does "duty" come in? And if, on the other hand, it is our duty to do what is expedient, what becomes of the moral "ought," which according to Kant and his school can be effective only when it is acting against, and not in harmony with, our idea of what it is in our interests to do? These are problems for moralists, and they must deal with them as best they can. But the aspect of Butler's ethic which does concern us here is its thoroughgoing attempt to reconcile self-interest with benevolence, and both with morality.

As to the first part of this enterprise, Butler, although over-

stating his case, and although greatly hampered by the moralistic approach which he found it necessary to adopt, found a far more rationally defensible position than that of the self-sacrifice fraternity; and in his discourses about the pleasures of benevolence, love, and kindness, and the folly of associating them with unhappiness and self-chastisement, he wrote words of enduring wisdom and importance. Certainly he floundered badly in his efforts to make out that the interests of all men are entirely coincident, and had to fall back on arbitrary assertions about the Divine Purpose, but for all that his sermon on "The Love of One's Neighbour" remains full of wise and sound observations. And its implications are thoroughly non-moral. For whatever may be thought of Butler's more than Utilitarian optimism in insisting on the absolute coincidence of self-benefiting conduct with good conduct (and even he found it necessary to call in God to make good any temporary discrepancies), the effect upon any naive mind of his brilliantly persuasive advocacy of kindness and beneficence combined with common sense is to denude the moralist's dictator-conscience of all claim to importance in the human scheme of things. And again, if conscience is indeed nothing else but an echo of the approval and disapproval which we feel for the particular experiences which are human actions, what is morality itself but a sprinkling of the odour of sanctity upon the body of plain common sense? But if conscience *is* that approval and disapproval, as Butler also maintains, it can have no greater authority than that which belongs to itself, and cannot be superior to any judgment of desirability about our own or other people's actions. Further, to say that conscience is a "principle of reflection," or our judicial faculty, leads to just as lame and impotent a conclusion, for since Butler repeatedly insists that to act in accordance with our reasonable judgments *is* to act in our own best interests, all that we get by way of a positive moral maxim is "You ought always to act in your own best interests," or, negatively, "You ought never to act against your own best interests." (How much nicer, if less logical, than Kant's Imperative!) When we ask why, Butler tells us, because it is God's will; but since we have our own reasons anyway, the fact that it is God's will cannot make the slightest difference, particularly since Butler says that it is in our best interests to do God's will.

It is hard to believe that a man who could reason and argue so brilliantly as Butler at his best, could have failed to notice how effectually he was stripping away one after another of conscience's claims to indispensability—indeed to existence, except as a complicated figment of bewildered minds; and reading carefully one certainly gets the impression that whether or not he perceived this awkwardness at the outset, Butler was not completely unaware of it all the time, for ever and again he inserts into the middle of an argument all tending to the conclusion that our whole duty is to promote our own happiness and that of other people, and that these are identical activities, an implicit qualification, such, for example, as occurs in the passage previously quoted where he says that we have to promote happiness in all ways *not contrary to veracity and justice*. It would surely have been perfectly easy for Butler to argue that being truthful and just is integral to the process of being at once self-interested and beneficent, to show that conformity with these principles is both individually and socially expedient, and so bring them into harmony with his main thesis. In fact, however, he preferred to treat these virtues as though they had a claim to consideration *superior* to that of beneficence, on the grounds that it is a part of our nature to approve them. Possibly, Butler suggests, the reason why God has made everyone feel this instinctive aversion from injustice and deceit is because his aim is to make men happy, and he knows that the effects of these vices are detrimental to human happiness. But, in any case, he continues, all we know certainly is that they are sins. It is really as though Butler, noticing that he was well on the way to completing his demonstration of the utter superfluousness of conscience and leaving it without a leg to stand on, hastened to provide it with these two props lest it should collapse altogether in abject ruins.

Butler on various occasions also invokes other moral feelings, representing them as primary or intuitive with the apparent object of defending conscience against the assaults of his own reasoning, and on one occasion in particular makes use of a footnote whose apparent effect is to modify, if not to cancel, the argument of the main text, which is about the duty of benevolence—which, as he has been at pains to show, is in perfect conformity with prudence and self-love. The footnote runs :—

> " As we are not competent judges, what is upon the whole for the good of the world, there may be other immediate ends appointed us to pursue, besides that one of doing good or producing happiness. Though the good of the creation be the only end of the author of it, yet he may have laid us under particular obligations, which we may discern and feel ourselves under, quite distinct from a perception that the observance or violation of them is for the happiness or misery of our fellow-creatures. And this in fact is the case. For there are certain dispositions of mind, and certain actions, which are in themselves approved or disapproved by mankind, abstracted from the consideration of their tendency to the happiness or misery of the world; approved or disapproved by reflection, by that principle within, which is the guide of life, and judge of right and wrong. . . . There are pieces of treachery, which in themselves appear base and detestable to every one. There are actions, which perhaps can scarce have any other general name given to them than indecencies, which yet are odious and shocking to human nature. There is such a thing as meanness, a little mind; which, as it is quite distinct from incapacity, so it raises a dislike and disapprobation quite different from that contempt, which men are too apt to have, of mere folly. On the other hand, what we call greatness of mind. . . . Fidelity, honour, strict justice, are themselves approved in the highest degree, *abstracted from the consideration of their tendency*." (My italics.)

I should not have thought that this really was so in regard to fidelity, honour, and justice, but there is such a thing as being " shocked " at certain types of behaviour, particularly among primitive peoples, which has to do solely with the conventions obtaining in the particular society; but that people are shocked at entirely different and even opposite kinds of behaviour in different periods and places, one would have thought that even an eighteenth-century English bishop must have been aware.

If it *were* the case that all men agree as to what is indecent, or as to the primary rightness of strict justice, or as to what constitutes fidelity, greatness of mind, and the rest of the various qualities of which Butler and his friends approved and dis-

approved, then we could say that there is need for a word to express this universal identity of taste in human motives and behaviour, and take "conscience" for that word. But if the moralists are driven to concede that this postulated universal sense of the morally right and wrong is completely fictitious, then they will, I think, have to fall back upon what Professor Broad would call their "second line of defence." That is, they will have to say that conscience, as a feeling about conduct, our own or other people's, is strictly individual in its manifestations; that it speaks to each man with a distinctive voice, and none the less so because it may often happen to say the same thing to a number of minds at the same time.

Rallying their forces about this strong-point the moralists gain a breathing-space, until a fresh assault opens with the question "What claim to authority has a feeling of approval or disapproval about some action, which may just as well be based on envy or unreasoning prejudice as on a Christian, or Jewish, or Hottentot upbringing, and which in some sorts of people is subject to radical alteration through the impact of new experiences? Are you content to say that conscience is the faculty for spontaneously liking and disliking our own and other people's behaviour according to how we happen to be feeling at the time?"

This does not necessitate an immediate further withdrawal, for the fortress of subjective-social conscience comprises a highly intricate system of defences, enabling delaying tactics to be kept up for some time. Suppose they counter the attack as follows:—

"It is not a case of spontaneously liking and disliking, nor is it mainly a question of judging *behaviour*. Conscience's ultimate concern is with motives, and when it feels that it understands what the motives are, *then* only it judges the conduct, and always applies the same rules to others as to its possessor. It *feels* that it knows what sorts of conduct other people feel to be right and wrong, and that is why it feels justified in blaming them when they do things which its owner would condemn in himself; and to say that conscience *feels* justified is the same as saying that it *is* justified, for conscience is the ultimate judge beyond which there is no appeal. Conscience is as conscience does."

"Then no conscience passes better judgments than any other conscience, and the pronouncements of a Dobu Islander's

conscience upon your behaviour are as valid as those of yours upon his?"

To this, I think, the moralist's only possible counterblast is, "It is extremely doubtful whether Dobu Islanders *have* consciences in any acceptable sense of the term"; followed by a dignified withdrawal to line of defence No. 3, which is called "Purely Self-Judging Conscience" (including self-propelling and self-restraining conscience or the Sense of Duty). Here the defenders take up their penultimate stand, for the much more formidable system of earthworks lying parallel with it, and labelled "The Voice of Reason," looks suspiciously like a trap.

"Conscience," they now proclaim, "makes no claim to judge the rightness or wrongness of other people's actions; in fact there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as conscience in the abstract, but only consciences, one to each person, the function of each being to control its owner's spontaneous impulses and regulate his behaviour according to a criterion furnished by itself, and with authority bestowed upon itself by itself. It is indeed a wonderfully complicated little mechanism, for it recognizes only its own authority. That is to say, strictly speaking, that it only functions *as* conscience when it is prompting its owner to do what he does not want to do, or to refrain from doing what he does want to do; so that while it claims supreme authority over all his voluntary actions it is only effective in influencing them when he is unaware of being influenced by any motive whatsoever, except, of course, the supreme motive of obeying it, or of acting morally, or of doing what it feels to be right, which are all the same thing. And if you ask us why anybody should wish to obey his conscience, rather than do whatever it is that he prefers to do, we can only reply that there is something in the heart of man—some have called it conscience—which makes him strive after perfection, even if he knows it to be unattainable. A desire to be better, a desire for self-improvement . . ." and the moralists, even as they utter these words, are seen to be backing towards the last fortress of all in the line of their retreat, a small compact structure labelled "The Ideal Self." But as they turn and face it they blench, for about it hangs the odour, not of sanctity, but of the clinic, and before the entrance stands with folded arms the grim, sardonic figure of Psycho-Analysis.

CHAPTER XIII

CONSCIENCE
(continued)

If moralism had not been so successful in surrounding with an aura of mystery and the occult every human motive which is not immediately connected with the gratification of crude sensual appetites, the fact that self-conscious beings should sometimes want to try to alter those features of their own personalities which displease them, and cultivate those of which they approve, would not seem more wonderful than self-consciousness itself. It is a plain matter of observation that people often do wish, not merely to appear, but actually to *be* different, and this not only for the sake of winning the approval of other men but also in order to win, as it were, their own approval by conforming to ideals of character and conduct which they happen to admire.

The man with a personal ideal is not content with merely thinking and doing the kind of things his "ideal self" would think and do, but also wants to have the same kind of desires and contra-desires his ideal self would have. He will wish, for example, that he were fond of good literature, or that he were more sociable, or more self-sufficient, and so forth, and all these elements may combine to produce a very powerful system of incentives. There is nothing essentially irrational about this tendency, nor does it necessitate pretending anything or concealing anything from oneself; it is simply the pursuit of a personal ideal, and self-deception enters only in the wishful pretence that one has more nearly attained to that ideal than in fact one has.

Now what sort of ideal a person will set up for himself and whether or not he will aim at becoming a good, benevolent, or socially desirable individual will mainly depend upon his general conative make-up as determined by his past experiences. This seems indeed perfectly obvious, and yet it is necessary to stress it, because thanks to the ethical practice of assuming that a kind of divine compulsion is operative whenever human beings

are found not behaving like ferocious beasts of prey, it is apt to be taken for granted that any kind of self-control is good, and that the more of it there is the better. Hence the belief that all ideals are good ones (Plato's teaching is also greatly responsible for the prevalence of this mischievous and muddling view), and thus that every ideal personality is good, whereas in reality, of course, the attempt to live up to an ideal may lead to almost any kind of behaviour, from the most aggressive to the most snivelling, and from the most beneficent to the most barbarous.

Nor has the self-ideal any necessary connection with the desire to be virtuous, i.e., to obey the voice of conscience or the behests of a God or a Super-Will. It need no more lead to moral conduct than to good conduct, a fact which moralists, one would have thought, must surely have noticed, but one which they implicitly ignore when they associate personal ideals of conduct with conscience, and conscience with morality.

The disposition of human beings to try to alter their own personalities has always been of great interest to psychologists, and their interpretations have done much to dispel the atmosphere of pious awe and mystery which had surrounded the phenomenon ever since St. Paul wrote his epistles. The Freudian concept of the Ego-Ideal as an aspect, or an ingredient, or an activity, of the Super-Ego, associated with feelings of aggression, guilt, shame, narcissism, "sado-masochism," and so forth, cast a wholly new, and, from the moralist's point of view, most unwelcome light upon the self-discipline and personal idealism which they were in the habit of upholding as the most exalted expressions of man's moral nature. Certainly the psychologists gave a sort of scientific backing to what the cynics had denied the existence of—conscience—but at the price of revealing it as something more akin to a pathological symptom than a proof of our kinship with the angels.

The moralists had been quite happy to accompany William James on his friendly explorations below the threshold of consciousness, for what they found in his company, although often surprising, was perfectly reconcilable with their conception of the higher nature of man—James's excursions into crude behaviourism they could ignore, as he himself did for nine-tenths of the time, for they were completely irrelevant to his psychology proper—and he was at once so tolerant and understanding, and

so essentially reverent in his approach, even to religion, that one had no feeling that even one's most sacred convictions were in danger. After all, was not James a religious man himself?

But the Freudians' approach was very different. While they were most patient and gradual in their methods, and only acted as accoucheurs to the unconscious mind, once they had persuaded it to reveal itself the effect upon the bystanders was as that of the sudden erruption of an oil-well in their midst, and those who wore the whitest garments were naturally the most resentful. From that day to this the only class of moralists who have been able to achieve some sort of *modus vivendi* with the modern schools of psychology are the scientific humanists, who have little truck with the intuitions of conscience, except in so far as its dictates tend to produce sound evolutionary conduct. For this reason it might be supposed that the scientific humanist's approach to conduct is hardly more satisfactory, from the neo-Christian moralist's point of view, than is that of the Freudians themselves; but in fact it is not felt as anything like such a menace as the latter with its ruthless, almost contemptuous, debunking of all that was supposed to be best, morally speaking, in the heart of man. The scientific humanists may claim to have banished God from the universe, but every word they utter of their creed most reassuringly reveals that they have done no such thing; at worst they are heretics, not heathens, and where religion is, there will morality be found also, no less because the religion is overtly repudiated and the morality goes by another name. But what the old-fashioned moralists find so infuriating about the psycho-analytic approach is the psychologists' *acceptance* of religion and morality, conscience, duty, and the rest, not however as intimations of man's spirituality, nor yet as ultimate irreducible facts of experience which, despite their "inexplicability," are the agency of all that is good in our thoughts and deeds, but on the contrary as a curious and interesting kind of psychological viscera, as to the usefulness of which they debate among themselves, some holding that, like tonsils and appendices, a good many of them could be extirpated with benefit to the patients, and others maintaining that all without exception have a useful function to perform, while conceding that they have an unfortunate tendency to become unhealthily enlarged.

All the same, it is open to question whether the moralists'

continued hostility to Freud and all his works is, from their standpoint, altogether justified on a long view. It is very arguable that indirectly, through lending a new kind of respectability to forms of irrationalism of which through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries men of culture increasingly tended to be ashamed, its effect has been on the whole to foster and preserve old modes of thought which without the kind of oblique justification it lent them would have gradually succumbed under the assaults of reason. I am not talking about psycho-analytic therapy, or even the very considerable influence of Freudian ideas on methods of education and the treatment of criminals, all of which show much to the credit, socially speaking, of psycho-analysis. I am here referring only to the probable, and I think to some extent actually observable, effects upon the public mind of the new approach to the subject of human motives which, first introduced towards the end of last century, became, first fashionable among the intelligentsia and then, largely because of the glamour surrounding much of its subject-matter, and also because of the handiness of its jargon, widely popular.

The initial shock was considerable. In contrast with their own air—not invariably too well sustained, however—of impartial scientific detachment as they laid bare the inner springs of human action, the early popularizers of psycho-analysis never failed to provoke in their vast audiences of laymen the most violent reactions of horror and amazement. These feelings, after the first shock had subsided, were apt to give place in one type of person to cynical resignation about human nature, and an impartial contempt for nearly everybody save those, including himself, who were in the know and "could take it"; and in other more sensitive souls who, despite these sardonic disclosures, could not help still longing to be good, distress sometimes bordering upon religion. Often when the dissection was completed, the psycho-analyst, with the air of a surgeon washing his hands after an autopsy, would rouse his audience from their stupor of gloomy introspection with a few consoling words on the following lines:—

"I realize that you will naturally have found all that I have just told you profoundly humiliating, but remember this: It is all perfectly normal and necessary, *all* of it, except those aberrations, over-compensations, and so forth, which I have described. For the rest, all these complexes and taboos and elaborate self-

deceptions which as you see, go to make up your characters, are necessary to enable you to adjust yourselves to your highly artificial environment. Don't think that because I cannot help smiling when I hear you describe yourselves as rational beings, I want to rob you of your comforting delusions; quite the contrary, for you would be of very little use to yourselves or anybody else without them."

Such was the spirit of the epilogue to many a psychological lecture and treatise, and the effect was not altogether happy. While there was a considerable advance—in certain circles—in tolerance both for one's own and other people's foibles, there was a parallel tendency, because psycho-analysis was the latest thing in popular scientific novelties, and in a field which was of absorbing interest to nearly everyone, to dwell upon and even to cultivate interesting "complexes"—so much more glamorous than straightforward volitions—and it became clever to perceive, in anybody's pursuit of a rational aim, evidence that what he was really after was something quite different from what he supposed. Those who ventured to suggest that if people try to get bread it may be because they are hungry, and similarly with other things they try to get, received pitying looks and had courses of reading recommended to them.

Even after the analytical excesses of the early Freudian era had given way to soberer counsels both on the part of the psychologists themselves and their disciples, there was no general return to that respect for intelligence to which formerly all but the most consciously religious members of our culture had spontaneously subscribed. Between cynical "knowingness" on the one side, and resurgent "uplift" on the other, reason suffered an eclipse in public esteem precisely at a period when a rational approach to our problems was most vitally important. Psycho-analysis lent a kind of perverted respectability to the most unprecedented excesses in word-mangling and concept-blurring beside which Keats's pronouncement that beauty is truth and truth beauty looks like twice two is four; and through the new aperture in the wall of common sense Supernaturalism re-entered, to be received with cries of welcome from the assembled intellectuals, and accorded an honourable place at the Feast of Unreason. This kind of thing is still going on, and it is as well we should be aware of it, for its effects are far-reaching.

Just at present the tendency of most schools of psychology is in the direction of a more respectful and conciliatory attitude towards both religion and morality; still critical, but friendly. Not quite reflecting the large tolerance of James, or Adler's naive acceptance of the Christian ethic at its face-value, but conventional in retaining the view that moral principles are necessary to socially good behaviour, and in preserving the concept of conscience as a kind of controlling self-within-the-self, which may go astray if not regulated by reason, but which is not to be confused with reason itself. It might be said in defence of this attitude that the psychologist did not invent the term "conscience," but merely took it over from ordinary parlance as a term for a system of compulsions which his patients are aware of in themselves and identify by this name, and to which they ascribe their self-inhibiting feelings as well as their desires to do good. Also, the psychologist might say, he is not content, like his patient, to lump together these phenomena under the name of conscience, but recognizes that they represent processes of great complexity, and in particular, that what is called conscience has a purely inhibitive aspect, the "censor," and a dynamic aspect, as the source of our efforts to gain the good opinion of our fellows. This may be conceded, but for all that some of the most eminent psychologists seem perfectly willing to make use of the concept of conscience in the loosest way, seeming to take it for granted that the word stands for an abstract "something."

Thus the distinguished American psychologist J. C. Flugel concludes that "we may say that the existence of something corresponding to the popular idea of 'conscience' has been demonstrated by the most precise methods at present available." [1]

It is interesting to see how in Flugel's view the findings of psychologists have established the existence of this "something." To me they seem to point almost the opposite conclusion. He begins his examination of the nature and origin of "moral control" by recording the results of an investigation carried out by inquirers who "asked a number of persons trained in psychological introspection to call to mind what they would regard as certain characteristic 'wishes' and 'duties' respectively, and then to describe the differences between them."

[1] J. C. Flugel, *Man, Morals and Society*, Routledge.

> "These differences are found hardly of a kind to cause astonishment, but they amply confirm the general view that wishes are in a certain sense more spontaneous and natural than duties, which latter seem to involve the calling up of reserves of mental energy and which often seem also as though they were imposed upon our reluctant selves by some relatively extraneous force." [1]

"Wishes" were found to be chiefly distinguishable from "duties" through being "accompanied by more lively feelings and emotions," more vigorous in their impulsions to action, stronger in their appeal to imagination and more conducive to day-dreaming. The distinguishing characteristic of duties was found to be that "reasons are sometimes produced why they should be performed, although at other times there is only a sense of compulsion or necessity often accompanied by such phrases as 'I must,' 'I should,' 'I mustn't,' in inner speech."

So far, it will be noticed, no feature has been claimed as distinguishing a duty which would enable it to be differentiated from any course of action which, though possibly unpleasant, is chosen in preference to some other course of action, or to inaction. Even the "I should" and "I mustn't" have no more distinctively moral flavour than the "I'll *make* myself do it" of, for instance, the reluctant bather on a cold, rough day, who desperately forces himself to take the plunge either because he thinks it will do him good, or because he fears the derision of his friends, or for some similar self-seeking reason. If we see a man with horrible grimaces forcing a spoonful of castor oil down his own throat, we need not immediately jump to the conclusion that he is performing a moral act. He may be, but equally he may not.

Flugel here seems guilty of the moralist's typical evasion, introducing the word "duty" without defining it or stating to whom the duty is supposed to be owed. That the investigators themselves were guilty of the same ambiguity, and in being so were only accepting a usage sanctified by custom and tradition, is certainly nothing against Flugel's using their findings as material upon which to base a theory, but in subscribing to some of the questionees' highly conventional idea of the sense of duty as a particular and distinctive phenomenon of inner experience he is

[1] Flugel, op. cit., pp. 17–18.

surely about as uncritical as would be a psychologist who, because a child, using a term which grown-ups apply to its conduct, speaks of being "naughty," assumes that "naughtiness" is a real and ultimate childish characteristic, and leaves the matter there.

But now comes a really striking example of Flugel's almost obstinately superficial approach to the moralistic thought-nexus which he claims to be investigating. Among the characteristics of "duty" enumerated by the investigators, is that of being capable of "becoming as it were a part of oneself, so that its fulfilment becomes at least as much the concern of the self as the fulfilment of a wish." Not only so, but it was found that among older people "duties" were performed without the agent experiencing any sense of being compelled or having to compel himself to perform them.

> "'More like a self-appointed task which one gladly fulfils,' says a wife of her household duties. 'I've come to an agreement with myself that I shall do gladly everything that I have to do,' writes a middle-aged professional man. Still older subjects . . . can even say 'Things are wished because they are my duty.'"

Flugel, no doubt rightly, dismisses the idea that this only shows that older people are more priggish and self-righteous than the young (the majority of the younger people questioned distinguished most emphatically between "wishes" and "duties" and generally regarded the latter as more or less irksome), and ascribes the older persons' complaisant and even cheerful attitude towards their "duties" partly to their gradual formation through the years of "duty habits," which cause the duties to be performed almost automatically without any sense of effort or strain, and partly to their having lost the tendency of many young people to set themselves too "high ideals" and then fret because they find they are unable to live up to them. At a certain stage in life, according to this investigation:—

> "people seem to be able more or less definitely to reject such potential duties as they are not able to adopt and assimilate, and . . . it is only duties that have been success-

fully assimilated that are referred to as though they were obvious and *a priori*. Thus we find such statements as, 'I refuse to do things which one can't understand or assent to,' or, 'Duties! I don't think I want to recognize that I have any. True, I want to behave decently, I don't quite know why, but that's something *I* have set myself to do, not something that is imposed on me from without.' Duties that the subjects themselves have adopted are contrasted with those they have been unable or unwilling to assimilate, and these latter are often rejected. 'Duty! It sounds so external, as though it came from one's parents. . . .'"

Flugel continues:—

"Thus men and women in later life behave as though they had come to some sort of decision as to which kind of duties, of all those that originally made a claim on them, they will accept. . . ."[1]

That is the main point of interest for Flugel in these extraordinarily interesting revelations of personal feeling about duty, and the various remarks by the subjects themselves in virtual *repudiation* of the very concept of duty as a motive or a determinant of their actions is calmly passed over by Flugel, who seems to find nothing significant about this except a suggestion that "duties" can be more or less "assimilated," in some cases, into the general desire-system! This is even more striking in view of the fact that the younger subjects of this inquiry, who had not yet "assimilated" their duties, are not shown to have regarded themselves as having a stronger "moral sense" than their elders. Flugel does not say anything about this, but it is safe to assert that the average young man or woman regards "duties" not so much as things which he feels he *ought*, morally speaking, to perform, but as tiresome necessities, things which one does from a strict sense of expediency because the result of *not* doing them would be even more unpleasant than the doing of them.

Despite the admirably candid and profoundly revealing statements by the elderly people which he has quoted, Flugel continues throughout to write like any Christian churchman, as

[1] Flugel, op. cit., p. 19.

though the only conceivable explanation of why anyone ever chooses to control his impulses, or employ an unpleasant means to a desired end, or perform a service for somebody else, is that he possesses a sense of duty, a moral sense, or a conscience. *Nor does he once make use of the concept of a judgment of expediency throughout the whole of his book.* Positively every kind of action which is not completely instinctive or completely spontaneous he seems to ascribe either to more or less pathological processes of inhibition, censorship, and so forth, or to the sense of moral obligation. Again, he quotes in support of his moralistic interpretation the highly interesting finding of a certain " Character Education Enquiry " that there is " a general factor of integration or consistency which seems to play a part in every form of 'goodness.'" This surely suggests that " goodness " can be the outcome of a normal disposition to behave socially, bearing little or no relation to the apocalyptic " inner voice " or " sense of duty," or " conscience." Yet Flugel shows himself determined to preserve this concept even at the cost of inconsistency in his arguments and the cost also of ignoring the most significant results of researches cited by himself.

Nor is Flugel innocent of that typical self-confusing moralistic habit of using the word " moral " indifferently to mean both " ethical " and " beneficent." Thus he can write :—

> " But a well-knit organization of instinctive drives into a hierarchy of sentiments, though necessary, is not in itself sufficient for the attainment of a high moral character. Such character depends on content as well as form . . . in other words, the objects, aims, and ideals which form the cognitive [conative?] aspects of a sentiment must themselves be of a moral kind."

For the second " moral " should we read " socially desirable "? It does not seem so, for in a dozen other places we find the same kind of confusion between the good and the moral in motive and conduct.

How profoundly imbued is Flugel's mind with the ethical view of motive and conduct is brought out most clearly in the final chapter of his book, when he discusses the problem of finding what he calls " moral equivalents for war." The theory is, apparently, that men go to war to work off various aggressive

feelings, guilt feelings, and so forth, and the problem is to provide them with an alternative outlet, " a substitute for war that shall have something approaching war's peculiar combination of moral and instinctive appeal. . . . The joy of co-operation in a common purpose " must be preserved if we are to find a peaceful equivalent of war. Then comes Flugel's own proposal, which is to adopt the only suggestion which, he thinks, " has so far been made. . . . According to this view it is man's duty and destiny to carry on the process of evolution. . . ." [1]

Yes; we are to indoctrinate the public mind with the ethic of scientific humanism, as a substitute for the " fascinations " of war!

> " If we want to be dramatic (and it is perhaps well that we should be so if we would compete against the lure of war) we can say that the stage is set for the epic struggle of Man versus the Universe—a spectacle surely no less breath-taking in its audacity and splendour than the most famous exploits of purely inter-human warfare."

But no. It is not well to be dramatic, if the drama is at the expense of realism, and involves misrepresenting the kind of motives which really lead men to kill one another, to help one another, and to order their lives in general as they do. Not religion, nor moralism, nor hysterical pretendings will help us to a satisfactory solution of our very real problems. For this clear thinking is the first essential, and a clear recognition of common interests leading to the collective tackling of the many existing obstacles to our free pursuit of our infinitely various aims and interests.

Flugel is undoubtedly both a learned and a benevolent man; as to the latter nobody can be in doubt who reads his books. He is most genuinely anxious about the welfare of his fellows; nor, as a psychologist, is he bigoted or doctrinaire, but on the contrary—and this is why I have taken his standpoint for discussion in this study—he belongs to that younger school of psychologists who are concerned open-mindedly to review, modify, and supplement the work of the various pioneers in this field by the light of their own and each other's new data. But he is himself ensnared in the tangled thicket of the moralistic life-view, Imagining himself free—as when he says that conscience does not

[1] Flugel, op. cit., p. 318.

invariably dictate good conduct—he is never for one moment clear of it in reality, but shows by his continual muddling of the concepts of morality and goodness, conscience and kindness, duty and the social sense, that he accepts, without even noticing that he accepts, morality's claim to authority for everything in human nature and conduct of which wisdom and benevolence approve. Thus moralism again emerges triumphant over reason, praised, as it were, with faint damnings—" the sense of duty does not *always* lead to good conduct "—smug in the assurance that even the hard-bitten tribe of psychologists must pay tribute, if only unconscious tribute, to its supremacy.

We have seen that conscience in the moralistic sense does not stand for anything particular in experience; that moralists are unable to agree among themselves as to what it is; and that the effect of retaining this word to mean the various things which in different contexts it is supposed to denote, is to produce much confused thinking about motives and conduct.

It remains to be considered whether, if denuded of the ethical clouds of glory which it trails, the word " conscience " can usefully serve as a symbol for that one undoubted fact of experience which it is already sometimes used to define—namely, the system of incentives associated with the desire to live up to a personal ideal—to behave like, or even *be* like, the kind of person one would like to be.

Certainly it might be useful for psychologists to have one word for this, but it does not seem as though the need for any such term is likely to be much felt in the ordinary run of things. The personal ideal *itself* we can simply call " the personal ideal," and there seems no particular need for a term under which the various conative impulsions primary to, or dependent upon it, can be classified together. The ordering and classification of motives is an extremely complicated matter, and is probably best left to the psychologists themselves. In any case, while the common man is quite at home with the concept of " wanting to be brave," " wanting to be clever," and so forth, it is surely very seldom, if ever, that he looks for a word to define the *phenomenon* of that particular sort of wanting, covering all the various forms it may take.

But even if such a word were needed, the objections to taking

" conscience " to stand for it are formidable. For conscience, as we have seen, means so many and various things already that it is quite impossible at this time of day, when neo-Christian ethical thinking has become so intimately entwined with ideas about conduct, to try to capture any of the terms which form the main currency of ethics in order to employ them in rational contexts. Pragmatic terms such as " good," " bad," " right," and " wrong," we try to rescue and restore after the mangling they have sustained at the hands of the moralists; for these words are not and never were their property, and, we may be sure, were present and performing valuable functions long before the moralists flew down out of the sky. But " conscience " is their own word; they brought it with them, and there is little to be gained and much to be risked in attempts to wrest it from them now. It has done a vast amount of mental mischief among us, and it seems altogether better to treat it as entirely beyond redemption.

PART TWO

SOCIAL PRAGMATISM

CHAPTER I

THE IDEA OF HAPPINESS

MORAL conduct as such is neither good conduct nor yet wise conduct; it is conduct motivated by the aim of acting self-sacrificingly, in obedience to the " voice " whose first command is " Act *not* as you desire to act, nor as you consider it expedient to act, but as you feel that you ought, morally speaking, to act." Any other criterion but that of obedience to the voice can be revealed as a pragmatic criterion, involving the acceptance of our desires and loves, hopes and fears, likes and dislikes as the determinants of what we do. Accordingly, although as critics we may approve or disapprove of what someone does from these motives, we can neither praise it as moral nor condemn it as immoral, since we must confine these judgments to cases in which we can be sure that the act in question was done either in obedience to, or in defiance of, the moral imperative.

Such at least must be our attitude if we want to retain for the words " moral " and " morality " any specific meaning at all. In point of fact most moralists seem to be by no means anxious to recognize any consistent line of demarcation between the realms of morality and expediency, and seeking to extend their area of operations over the widest possible field they make free with the language of expediency-judgments, claim every " ought " as a moral " ought," and gratuitously confer the emblem of morality upon every principle of conduct recognized as socially expedient by the society to which they belong.

It is usual to hear this practice defended on the grounds that it is all but universal; that everyone understands by morality simply that kind of conduct which conforms to the laws of the community, or to the precepts of the accepted religious faith—the latter being generally regarded as paramount where the two conflict—and that none but philosophers find anything to worry about in the occasional interfusion of the ideas of morality and expediency thus caused. Indeed, if some line of conduct is seen

to be highly desirable, is it not a positive advantage if it can be represented as doubly enjoined upon us, as being both expedient *and* moral? After all, the argument runs, the distinction is never really lost, for in certain situations—those for example in which self-interest and the interests of other people are irreconcilably opposed—the moral imperative stands forth again in all its uncompromising sternness.

Now, I think there is a very great deal to be said against this view, and not only from the standpoint of philosophers, who deprecate confused thinking because they dislike it, but from that of social desirability, and it is from this latter standpoint that the above propositions will be criticized in a later chapter. Meanwhile, I think it is important to acknowledge that the unique contribution of the philosopher Kant to the theory of ethics lay in his uncompromisingly logical contraposition of expediency and morality. He was the first to argue from logical premisses that morality and pleasure or morality and pain-avoidance can *never* go hand in hand, and to perceive that morality, if it is to be anything else but a form of expediency-principle, must be based upon the repudiation of desire—any desire at all except the one desire to act morally. The sterility of this conclusion was at the same time distressing to Kant, whose efforts to make it bear some kind of fruit in the way of help or counsel for mankind led him to elaborate the most complicated sophistries—to whose fallacies later moralists complacently drew attention, without however being able to substitute for his system anything more helpful than their own arbitrary rules for conduct, which, no matter how ingenious the knots with which they affixed them to the moral root-stock, could not, any more than Kant's secondary categorical imperatives, ever really be grafted upon that uncompromisingly barren stem.

Kant, who delved deeper into the metaphysic of ethics than any of his predecessors, was unable to evade the conclusion that the essence of the moral imperative is self-frustration for its own sake, and so, as we have seen, found himself confronted with the difficulty that even self-frustration, if voluntary, must be somehow motivated—that even the desire to repudiate desire is still a desire. At this point only two courses were open to him: to accept the fact that the whole complex of ethical thought is

nonsensical in essence—the line taken by Vaihinger—or to allow morality to have one motive and one alone, that of overcoming all other motives. Kant appears on the whole to have chosen the latter course, although evidently with reluctance, for he strove through interminable chapters of elaborate qualification and chop-logic to find material to cover the nakedness of his own unlovely creation, the grim "Principle of Morality," the antithesis of the "Principle of Happiness"; turning in the end to Heaven for assistance, but all in vain.

Perhaps the struggle, the dust and turmoil, may best be understood as the necessarily inconclusive contest between Kant the philosopher in alliance with Kant the well-wisher of humanity on the one side, and Kant the moralist on the other—the moralist who would never admit defeat. Kant was far from wishing to deny that happiness is sought by men. Indeed, he was so far in agreement with psychological hedonism that he believed the state of happiness *per se* to be an object which all men seek, part of the time at least:—

> "We must not think of happiness as simply a possible and problematic end, but as an end that we may confidently assume *a priori* to be sought by everybody, belonging as it does to the very nature of man." [1]

He then argues that any action taken with a view to the realization of this end cannot be moral.

> "An imperative . . . which relates merely to the choice of means to one's own happiness, that is, a maxim of prudence, must be hypothetical; it commands an action, not absolutely, but merely as a means to another end."

Thus the "Hypothetical Imperative" is contrasted with the "Categorical Imperative" which demands action which is not a means to any end at all. Such action however was not, as we know, to be understood as involuntary, haphazard, or "aimless" action, but moral action, containing as it were the *concealed* aim of the consciousness of virtue. In the passage just quoted it seems to be suggested that *any* aim (except the moral one) is pursued from the motive of getting happiness, and elsewhere

[1] Kant, *Werke*, ed. Koeniglich Preuszischen Akademie, Vol. V, p. 415.

too the same thing is even more definitely affirmed. In the following passage we find perhaps more clearly stated than anywhere else Kant's recognition that the pursuit of happiness, of whatever kind, is essentially non-moral :—

> " It is a matter for surprise that men of intelligence should imagine that a true distinction can be drawn between the lower and the higher faculty of desire, because of the fact that some ideas which are associated with the feeling of pleasure have their origin in *sense* and others have their origin in understanding. . . . For it does not matter, if one is looking for the causes of desires and finds them in some agreeableness expected from something, *where* the idea of this pleasure-giving object comes from, but only how much pleasure it gives. The principle of one's own happiness, however much understanding and reason may be employed, would not contain any other motivation for the will than those appropriate to lower (*unteren*) desires; and therefore a high faculty of desire either does not exist, or Pure Reason is itself practical, that is, can determine the will by the mere form of the practical rule, independently of all feeling, and thus of all ideas of happiness and pain." [1]

It follows from this that reason, if it is directed to the attainment of *any end whatsoever* is not pure, is in thrall to the " lower " faculty of desire. Lower than what? we may ask, and Echo answers " What? " Kant, however, goes on, pursuing the phantom of the absolutely pure unmotivated motive, the purposeless aim, through interminable pages of repetitive argumentation leading nowhere and proving nothing :—

> " The essential for the moral value of any action is that the moral law should directly determine the will. . . . If the will should be determined, although *in harmony* with the moral law, by a feeling of any sort which has to be presupposed before the will can be determined, the will is *not* determined because of the law, and the act is only legal, not moral. . . . The essential thing in all determination of the will by the moral law is that the will, as free, should not only be determined without the co-operation of

[1] Kant, op. cit., pp. 72–3.

> sensuous desires, but that it should even oppose such desires, and restrain all those natural inclinations which might prevent the realization of the law, and be determined only by the law itself. . . . Hence we know *a priori* that the moral law in determining the will by thwarting all our inclinations, must produce in us a feeling which may be called pain, and here we have the first, and perhaps the only case, where we can tell from *a priori* conceptions the relation of knowledge . . . to the feelings of pleasure and pain."

So pain is the only indication we can have of having performed a moral act! After this it is rather startling to be told that:—

> "There is . . . nothing impossible in the idea that a moral disposition should necessarily be the cause of happiness; not indeed directly, but indirectly, through the medium of an intelligible Author of nature."

This would seem to imply that God will, or at least might, reward us for our moral actions so long as they are not motivated by the *desire* for the reward. But all such statements by Kant are so hedged about with qualifications that we can never take them literally, and here, as elsewhere, the inference seems to be rather that we should pretend to ourselves that we believe in such divine rewards, and not that anything in experience implies that we should really get them. Yet if we ask why we should pretend this, Kant can only reply, because by this means we shall be moved to act in such a way as will make us worthy of happiness, which is to act in conformity with the Golden Rule, re-emerging through a thicket of laborious dialectics in the formula "Act in conformity with that maxim, and that maxim only, which you can at the same time will to be a universal law"; a counsel of social expediency whose practical value Kant did not shrink from underlining, but exemplified with an illustration of the value for the individual of truthfulness and honesty in his dealings with others! Thus we see again how even Kant, that moralist of moralists, was unable to avoid arguing from *expediency*.

Kant's whole *Metaphysic of Morality* is founded upon the assumption that happiness is something which is habitually pursued *as an end*. He first defined happiness as "a general well-

being and contentment with one's lot," and in the *Metaphysic* he seems to be regarding happiness as a condition resulting only, or mainly, from the gratification of sensual desires :—

> " For man . . . not only possesses reason, but has certain natural wants and inclinations, the complete satisfaction of which he calls happiness. Now reason, refusing to promise anything to the natural desires and treating their claims . . . with a sort of neglect and contempt, issues its commands inflexibly. . . ." [1]

and his whole argument concerning freedom as only to be found in obedience to the moral law depends upon the use of the concept of happiness in this restricted sense :—

> " Were I a member only of the Intelligible World all my actions would be in perfect accord with the autonomy of the will; were I merely a member of the World of Sense, they would have to be regarded as completely subject to the natural law of desire and inclination, and to the heteronomy of Nature. (The former would rest upon the supreme principle of Morality, the latter upon that of Happiness.)"

Kant did not afterwards retract this statement—he never retracted anything—but, as we have seen, permitted the concept of happiness to expand through subsequent pages until it embraced not only sensual satisfactions, but the satisfaction of every kind of desire which a man is capable of entertaining. It must indeed have been apparent from the outset that this would be necessary, since " worthiness to satisfy " negligible and contemptible claims could hardly have appeared as the honourable insignia of moral worth. Be that as it may, the conscious pursuit of happiness *per se* was in Kant's view the normal preoccupation of non-moral man, and this assumption, enabling Kant to differentiate between the moral and the non-moral motive, was essential to his whole scheme of ethics.

Now, the view of happiness as an object commonly, although not invariably or inevitably, sought by us all, is the foundation not only of Kant's ethical system, but of all ethical systems which require obedience to a Higher Law; for unless we do

[1] Kant, *Werke*, Vol. IV, p. 405.

pursue happiness there is no point in exhorting us to abandon this object in favour of a worthier one. Nevertheless, I hold that the conception of happiness as an object of pursuit (although I myself formerly entertained it and made use of it in an earlier work [1]) is misleading, and productive of much confusion of thought concerning human motives, and that this confusion is nowhere better exemplified than in Kant's *Metaphysic*. The mischief inheres precisely in the fact that in the context of certain explanations and qualifications the statement that we do seek happiness is incontrovertible; and this has beguiled a number of hedonists into uttering rash generalizations which moralists have always found it easy to exploit in the ethical interest. It is perfectly true, they agree, that men have a natural tendency to seek happiness for themselves, but it is *not* true that they cannot help doing so, or that they invariably do so:—

"One has only to think of the self-sacrificing lives led even by some quite ordinary people, to see what cynical nonsense this is. What we have to do is to acknowledge frankly our disposition to seek our own happiness, and then try to overcome it; thinking more about making other people happy, and less about getting happiness for ourselves."

Kant, of course, did not favour such straightforward moralizing as the above, but both in premiss and precept the essentials of his teaching amounted to much the same thing, and furnish as good an example as any to be found of the moralist's typical view of happiness as an object of pursuit, and the ideal principles of conduct which can be enunciated only on the basis of that view. After postulating two types of motive; those directed to the attainment of ends, and those not so directed, as non-moral and moral respectively—Kant's problem was to prevent moral action from appearing as the exact equivalent of involuntary action; to arrange matters so that a sneeze and a sacrifice are not actions of the same order precisely. To this end he elaborated the conception of happiness as a limited objective; as something which men inevitably and by their very nature desire, but which they can school themselves to desire *less*, in the manner of a man controlling a craving for alcohol. Such a view of happiness can only be upheld, either on the basis of an arbitrary definition having little resemblance to the meaning which this word bears as used

[1] *Morality and Happiness*, 1944.

in the language of everyday life, or, as Kant characteristically did, by using it in several different senses in different contexts.

Kant knew well that if happiness is merely that feeling which always accompanies the consciousness of experiencing a sought experience, it must inevitably belong also to the experience of a sense of virtue; the feeling of "worthiness to be happy," if sought, must be a form of happiness itself, and it was this conclusion that, as moralist concerned to differentiate between self-regarding and non-self-regarding action, he was at all costs anxious to avoid. Therefore the state of worthiness to be happy was to be the moral aim, and not happiness itself. Committed to the view of happiness as the reward of virtue, yet also, for the ends of his argument, having to present it as an ignoble object of pursuit, Kant took refuge in a kind of dialectical sleight of hand; having, as it were, a number of different definitions of happiness concealed about his person, and exhibiting each in turn in such a manner as to appear to have only one.

Thus happiness in one context is "a general well-being and contentment with one's lot"; in another it is a feeling of sensual gratification; in another it is "the consciousness on the part of a rational being of agreeable feeling as continuing unbroken through the whole of his life." [1]

The latter definition surely makes happiness a purely academic concept, but on the strength of his earlier definitions, which he did not therefore find it necessary to abandon, Kant is able to remark: "Happiness is doubtless always agreeable to the person who possesses it," in the context of an argument about the *summum bonum*, which is, of course, Virtue. This juggling with the concept of happiness is so essential a part of moralism that I do not quote Kant on the subject in order to charge him with loose or dishonest reasoning, for doubtless, as a moralist, he conceived it to be his duty to make out a case for morality even at the sacrifice of his integrity as a philosopher, so that it would be unfair to indict him on grounds of his failure to adhere to a principle which he must be presumed to have voluntarily abandoned in obedience to the dictates of the Higher Law, and moreover, manifestly at the price of considerable mental distress. The point which I am here concerned to make, and to which this outline of Kant's theories of happiness has served for

[1] Kant, *Werke*, Vol. V, p. 22.

introduction, is that the idea of happiness as an end sought *per se*—essential to moralistic thought—is fallacious and productive of confusion, which is all the more serious because it places a whole armoury of weapons at the disposal of malevolent persons whose interest is in preventing others from enjoying that state which in popular parlance goes by the name of happiness.

The word happiness, like other abstract terms, is apt to mean very different things according to whether it is being discussed by philosophers or used in the course of ordinary conversation; although it must be admitted that even without the excuse of being philosophers many people will make generalizing statements about "happiness" which by their form cannot possibly be applicable to the state of being happy, to which nevertheless the term "happiness" is usually presumed to refer.

Now, I do not think the word "happiness" means anything in particular unless it means *either* the state of feeling we self-conscious beings know as "being happy" ("I felt a thrill of happiness")—the converse of the feeling we know as "being unhappy," which is called "unhappiness"—*or* the state of being happy on the whole ("I wish you all possible happiness"). It may seem unfortunate that the one word "happiness" should be used in two different, although closely allied, senses; but it really matters little, because if the word *is* being used to mean one or other of these things, the context invariably makes it apparent which sense is intended. Thus if I say "My happiness at this news was greater than his" it is apparent that the reference is to "being happy"; and if I say "Her chief concern is for her children's happiness" the reference is to being happy on the whole.

I believe that the word happiness only fulfils its function as a symbol for the communication of ideas when it is used to mean either "being happy" or "being happy on the whole," and further that even those who use the word in contexts which deprive it of either signification believe that they mean, or are thought to mean, that which is called happiness in one or other of the above senses. It seems fair to presume this in every case in which "happiness" is used without the user first expressly stating that he does *not* mean by happiness either of these things, but something else, and what that "something else" is, since he must be aware that he will be taken to mean one or the other in

conformity with normal usage. On the other hand, if someone should give his own definition of happiness, even if it does not conform with the usual sense, he can of course discuss that which he has elected to call " happiness " without any loss of clarity, on the basis of his definition. Thus we should have no grounds for objecting to Kant's arguing from his definition of happiness as " the consciousness on the part of a rational being of agreeable feeling as continuing unbroken through the whole of his life," so long as it were presented as a perfectly arbitrary definition; not as an explanation of what people usually *really mean* when they say " happiness "—as which, of course, it is totally unacceptable. But when, without any retraction of his definition, he remarks further on in the same paragraph " Happiness is no doubt always agreeable to the person who possesses it," we must, if we hold that the word " happiness " has any value at all as a symbol for an idea, object very strongly, on the grounds that by using it in two utterly incompatible senses, Kant is doing it damage. And further, if we believe that that for which the word happiness stands in the minds of ordinary people is important, we shall be more than ever inclined to deplore a disservice from a quarter having the responsibility of being able to inflict a unique sort of harm.

I do not think that any of the sages who are in the habit of making pronouncements about happiness would be prepared to deny that by happiness they usually mean either " being happy " or " being happy on the whole," and still less the people who are in the habit of using the word, rather than discussing the concept. Accordingly, I shall assume that " happiness " generally means one or other of these things, to all who speak our language, and on that assumption base the discussion of ideas about happiness which follows, with a view to criticizing the proposition that happiness is something which is habitually sought as an end.

Now, although by no means all types of pleasant feelings are regarded as forms of happiness, happiness as being happy—which is the converse of being unhappy—belongs to the class of pleasant as distinct from painful states; and as pleasant feelings are held to be liked rather than disliked, it follows that happiness in this sense is held to be liked. That people are sometimes heard to declare " I don't want happiness; I want adventure," or " excitement," or whatever it may be, may seem to con-

tradict this statement, but in fact, whenever " happiness " is used in such a phrase it is *not* being used to mean being happy, or being happy on the whole. On the contrary, we shall invariably find on inquiry that what the speaker means by happiness in such a context is some state of soft comfort or idleness or boredom which he imagines as in some way painful; such that if we were to ask him, " Would you be happy leading such a life? " he would feel impelled to answer " No."

This example provides a familiar instance of the devaluation of a word's symbol-value so complete that it is used with a meaning almost converse to that which it ordinarily has. Happiness, if it means anything in particular, means a pleasant or liked state (and so Kant's dictum that " Happiness is no doubt always agreeable to the person who possesses it " is certainly unexceptionable).

A further corollary of the use of " happiness " to mean being happy, or being happy on the whole, is that some people at least, sometimes at least, experience it. We sometimes hear the statement " There is no such thing as happiness," meaning that the speaker thinks happiness cannot be experienced, but as applied to " the state of being happy " the remark is practically nonsensical. As applied to being happy on the whole it is not nonsensical, for whereas the concept of " being happy " is primary and simple, that of " being happy on the whole " is secondary and complex, involving the combination of the idea of happiness in the first sense, with the idea of a " considerable " period of time during which it is preponderantly experienced, which there is no logical reason for regarding as impossible. Therefore it would not be *nonsense* to say that there is no such thing as being happy on the whole, it would be merely untrue. It would be untrue as belying the evidence afforded by such familiar statements as " I was happy in those days "; " I am so happy now that I have a home of my own," etc. The statement that *unhappiness* cannot be experienced would be objectionable on the like grounds and to the like extent.

Another similar statement sometimes made about happiness is that it is " unattainable," and as this is equivalent to saying that it cannot be experienced, the same criticisms would seem to apply to this as to the former generalization. Nevertheless, it is so very often asserted that happiness is unattainable that we cannot

dismiss the remark as mere twaddle, for we get the impression that those who make it are thinking of happiness not as a state which they can themselves identify through having experienced it, but, on the contrary, as something about which they have been told, and in whose existence they once believed, but can believe no longer. The statement is usually made in a mood of bitterness and disappointment by a person who is conscious of having believed at one time that he would be able to have certain experiences which he desired, or possess certain things which he coveted, and then of failing in his objects. Or the feeling of disappointment may be due to disillusionment, in that the person did get what he wanted, in the sense that he was able, e.g., to amass wealth or marry the woman he desired to marry, and then found that he was not in consequence happy, as he had expected to be. Generalizing from his own experience, and perhaps also from his knowledge of others having had similar experiences, he comes to the conclusion that nobody is ever made happy through getting what he wants, and this conclusion he expresses by the assertion " happiness is unattainable," in the teeth of those who affirm that they have experienced, or are experiencing it. Such familiar pronouncements about happiness are productive of much depression and discouragement, and when they are made the basis of a philosophical life-view, weightily propounded with all the authoritative airs and graces of oracular infallibility, their influence is by no means negligible. There can be no doubt that Schopenhauer's dictum " Happiness is a chimera and suffering a reality," backed up by so much argumentation and logical-seeming exposition, must have fed the growth of cynicism in many a once-hopeful mind. I do not say here that this was bad; but only that it was not justified on rational grounds. If Schopenhauer had been content to say, " When I say ' happiness ' I do not mean what *you* call happiness, I mean a chimera," we might complain that this observation was without significance except as an indication of his state of mind, but we could not accuse him of thereby encouraging muddled thinking and consequent despondency. But the statement " Happiness is a chimera " implies that what *we* call happiness is a chimera, and this is quite another matter. For this is to represent being happy, or being happy on the whole, as something which we desire and pursue, but which, because of its very nature, we can never obtain,

which is in the first case nonsensical, and in the second untrue.

This brings us to the question of whether or not happiness *per se* can in any circumstances be regarded as a possible object of pursuit. My own view is that it *can* be so regarded, but only within strictly definable limits. Firstly, I think it would be correct to say of a special class of persons that they are in the habit of pursuing happiness *per se*. These are the drunkards and drug-addicts who take alcohol or opium or cocaine with the *motive* of producing in themselves a state of happiness, that is, in order to be happy for so long as the effects of the drug last. Of such people we can say that happiness, as " being happy," is the end which they seek. And we can take their word for it that it is attainable, for they know. People will say that such means to happiness are " artificial," or that the happiness so obtained is " artificial happiness," but this, again, is to deprive the word " happiness " of its normal significance, and it is then up to them to state what they understand by " real " happiness—and this, we shall probably find, they are quite unable to do. As to what are " real " means to happiness, they will be found to mean either means which they themselves for some reason or another approve of, or means which they believe are productive of more lasting happiness than that resulting from the use of drugs; but all such statements of opinion tell us nothing more about the nature of happiness than we know already—that it is variously produced, and can be of relatively short or long duration.

A second method of pursuing happiness *per se* has probably been practised by most people at one time and another when in a mood of depression. In such a mood one may say to oneself " I will think about something pleasant to make me happy," and thus by deliberately directing one's thoughts away from present preoccupations and towards ideas from which one derives pleasure, seek temporary happiness. This may also accurately be called pursuing the object happiness, happiness *per se* being the object sought in this case.

There remain the mystics, and their case is extremely difficult to discuss because of the incommunicability of their experiences. On the whole their activities—or perhaps one should rather say their inactivities—are most easy to understand as being deliberately directed towards experiencing " non-unhappiness " rather than

any positive happiness; but this is no more than guess-work. These examples seem to exhaust the possibilities of pursuing happiness as an end or an aim or a thing *per se*, an *alternative* to other possible objects of pursuit.

It is to be noted that when happiness is sought as an end in one of the above ways, it is " being happy " that is thus sought, and not " being happy on the whole." This latter state cannot possibly be regarded as an object of pursuit, such that it could be chosen in preference to other objects; for it is simply the condition in which every self-conscious individual would by definition be if he were to experience more of " being happy " than of not " being happy " in his life over a given period of time.

Now, I think the nearest we can get towards a meaningful definition of " being happy " is to say that it is to experience preponderantly the state of feeling belonging to the experiencing of liked experience, which could be called simply satisfaction-feeling, and that it is the antithesis of being unhappy, which is to experience preponderantly the state of feeling belonging to the experiencing of disliked experience—which we might call " distress." (I say " liked *experience*," not " liked *objects*," because, as we know, it is possible to like such highly abstract things as, for example, a feeling of excitement, and in the case of this being liked it would be equally true to say that that which is liked is " the experience of feeling excited." In the case of a concrete object such as a picture or a bun being liked, the liking can also always be understood as liked *experience*. This is merely a matter of convenience in interpretation, enabling us to classify all particular " likes," no matter what their objects, as liked experiences.)

As to the word " preponderantly " in the definition :—In this word alone is my salvation, for without it the definition founders and falls to pieces immediately on contact with the hard fact that despite experiencing liked experience an unhappy person will not necessarily become happy, and that despite experiencing disliked experience a happy person will not necessarily become unhappy. For, of course, whether or not we become happy or unhappy in consequence of an event depends, ultimately, upon the circumstances in which we experience it. It depends, in other words, upon our existing hedonic situation [1] as determined

[1] A " hedonic situation " is a person's position on the scale between extreme happiness and extreme unhappiness.

by our antecedent experiences. Upon this will depend whether a liked experience makes a person happy, or happier than he was before, or merely less unhappy than he was before; or whether a disliked experience makes a person unhappy, or unhappier, or merely less happy. If, for example, a lover who has been jilted, and is in consequence unhappy, wins money at cards, the latter experience will, we may assume, not make him actually happy. Yet if we take it that he liked winning the money, and we can infer this from the fact of his having played cards for it, then, quite consonantly with ordinary usage, we should say that he was made, if only very briefly and slightly, less unhappy thereby. But his winning the money could not make him positively happy, because, owing to his existing hedonic situation, the satisfaction-feeling over it could not outweigh the distress he continued to feel over the love-affair.

Again, take the case of a person who is happy as being constantly absorbed in some interesting kind of work. Suppose he gets news of a heavy, although not crippling, financial loss. This experience will make him, if only briefly and slightly, less happy than he was before, but it will not be enough to destroy his happiness, because he owes this chiefly to his work, which he still has.

Now all this entirely conforms with the normal view of the matter, and so I think we can say, putting it as precisely as possible, that happiness is the condition of a person who is able to have a preponderant amount of by-him-liked experience, which simply means that in general, satisfaction-feeling preponderates in his mind over distress. So we see that the pursuit of happiness and flight from unhappiness are not to be seen as activities upon which we can engage or not as we choose, but rather as parts of a *process* carried on automatically throughout life by any self-conscious being in the course of performing voluntary acts. For a voluntary, as distinct from an involuntary, act is an act whose agent desires to perform it *rather than not*, which means that he expects it to bring him either liked experience, or less-disliked experience than he was having before, this depending upon what was his hedonic situation at the time. For that which we do voluntarily, is that which we *choose* to do, in the sense that we feel that, however reluctant we may be to do it, we *prefer* to do it rather than not to, and that if we had so

chosen, we could have not done it. That is the whole difference we perceive between our voluntary and our involuntary acts.

The statement that we always act " in the pursuit of happiness " is now clearly shown to be false, for the only circumstances in which we can seek to *become* happy are those in which we are *not* happy, but on the other hand, to represent the pursuit of happiness as something we can " go in for " or not, as we choose, is quite senseless.[1] For " happiness " is not a term for an object which we can pursue in the manner of a dog pursuing a rabbit, but a term which defines a state in which we are or are not according as we are or are not in general able to like our experiences. It means, moreover, a relative, not an " absolute " state, as evidenced by the existence of the comparative form as " happier." It also follows from this analysis that it is impossible for a person to act from the motive of *avoiding* happiness, for that would be equivalent to desiring to do what he prefers not to do. That this is very widely believed to be possible is due to a confusion of thought about motives.

If I desire to steal something, but voluntarily restrain myself from doing so, my self-restraint *as* voluntary, results from the fact that, from whatever motive or complex of motives, I ultimately desired to not-steal the thing *more* than I desired to steal it. If I had acted purely " on impulse," I should have stolen it, but after reflection I decide, for one reason or another, that it would be better not to.

Again, it is impossible for a person to seek unhappiness, for that would be equivalent to trying to do what one prefers not to do. This, too, is often supposed to be possible, and the case, for instance, of a woman who, so as to continue caring for an invalid, refuses to marry the man she loves, is often cited in support of this view. Yet it is surely apparent that since the act of renunciation and self-dedication was performed voluntarily, it must either have been performed in pursuit of some experience desired by the agent, e.g. the sense of filial piety, the parent's affection, etc., or in the avoidance of disliked experience such as the sense of being unkind or unfilial, the loss of the parent's affection, or simply the form of distress called remorse. Very probably in such a case a combination of many such

[1] Except in the strictly limited sense mentioned on p. 149, which can now be dropped from this discussion.

motives, both positive and negative, would produce the decision.

From all this it would follow that every voluntary action is performed, as far as possible in the given circumstances, *consistently with* the object of reducing the agent's unhappiness, or retaining him in happiness, or increasing his happiness. I think this is the only possible logical and consistent way of regarding the matter.

The reader may now complain with some justice that all I have really been saying is that when acting voluntarily we always do as far as possible what we want to do, which is a mere tautology and gets us nowhere. Against this charge I can plead only that a tautology is far from being always such a useless thing as is commonly supposed, since it can sometimes help to clarify thought by drawing attention to current illogicalities due to the loose and self-contradictory use of words. Thus, for example, the statement that we want what we want may be of use in refutation of the proposition, raised up to crown some imposing dialectical edifice such as moralists delight to erect, that we do not always want what we want, but sometimes something quite different. Such notions can only get an appearance of plausibility through an elaborate misuse of words, a use, that is, inconsistent with the particular and individual meanings they ordinarily bear, and if this treatment is applied to words standing for concepts which are important to those who make use of the words, not in philosophical exposition, but in the interchange of ideas in normal human intercourse, some of us may see this as a real disservice to humanity, and then we try to repair the damage as far as possible, even at the risk of stressing what among straight-thinking people must seem so obvious as to be hardly worth mentioning.

I have been trying to argue that the thing we call happiness is experienceable, is relative, and, as the state in which every human being would by definition be if he were to find himself in general more often liking his experiences than disliking them, is the kind of state we call good. This is intended to refute the idea that happiness is unattainable, or can be "absolute," or is to be avoided on the grounds that its pursuit is "ignoble"—Kant's view—or for any other reason. I wished to show that my objection to such views is not simply due to a personal predilection

in favour of happiness, but is rational, in that such pronouncements about happiness as the above are the outcome of muddled thinking and the misuse of words, whether by inadvertence or with intent to deceive.

At this point it may be useful to consider briefly what it is that our moralists suppose that they are exhorting us to do, when they urge us to give up the pursuit of happiness in favour of worthier objects. From their context we can usually gather that these sort of exhortations are meant to imply censure of certain kinds of activity, and the pursuit of certain classes of object, the general character of which is suggested by such phrases as "wine, women, and song," or "men, movie, and dance," the impression thus conveyed being, of course, that these sort of objects and activities are above all productive of happiness; indeed, are the only ones which are. By contrast, activities directed to acquiring knowledge, or creative activities such as writing stories or making objects by hand, are seldom referred to as "the pursuit of happiness," although it is sometimes said in moments of uplift that *true* happiness is best obtained by these sort of means. This, however, is not as a rule believed by people who have been taught, perhaps by the very same mentor, that the pursuit of happiness is ignoble or otherwise reprehensible, since this naturally makes them infer that this *true* happiness is not true happiness as they understand it.

This is an example of the way in which the misuse of words may have consequences reaching far beyond the irritation it causes to semanticists and logicians. Naturally, there are people who deliberately use words for the purpose of confusing the minds of their hearers, and since they know what they are doing, and do it on purpose, it is no use pleading with them to amend their ways. But there are others, genuinely well-meaning people, who sincerely desire the happiness of others, but who yet, as the victims of their own illogical habits of thought, do mischief unawares.

For my part, I cannot doubt that the misuse of words, of which we are all guilty in varying degrees, is on the whole a bad thing, and above all, perhaps, the misuse of the word "happiness," for which moralistic thinking is largely responsible. By saying that I think this is a bad thing I mean specifically, that I think it has consequences detrimental on the whole to human happiness.

CHAPTER II

THE EXPERIENCE OF HAPPINESS

HAPPINESS [1] is a word uniquely subject to abuse, but one which I believe is of vital importance to mankind in its present phase, because it can, consistently with its applications in normal usage, help us to formulate an ultimate criterion of value for all entities, events, and activities, more satisfying, consistent, and shareable than any system of ethics can provide, on the one condition that the principles of action derived from it are accepted as being, not moral principles, but principles of expediency. For only so can that false muddled dichotomy be abolished which has vitiated clear thinking about conduct ever since the first moralist drew breath to utter his first exhortation.

First, however, it will be well to examine a little further the nature of this feeling or state known as happiness and, in order to establish once and for all that it is experienceable, to consider the kind of circumstances in which it is, in fact, experienced. This is the more necessary because of the great weight of suggestion constantly emanating from the strongholds of moralism that happiness is non-existent, or, even if it does exist, or might exist, that it is not worth having.

Much muddled thinking in regard to happiness has been caused, not least by hedonists themselves, by speaking of happiness as a state of *satisfied desire*. This implies a condition of complete satiety in which " there is nothing left to be desired," which the imaginative person quite rightly sees as a state in which the pleasures belonging to novelty and the sense of achievement would be lost. Hence arises the apparent paradox that a really happy man would be incapable of feeling happiness. Quite evidently it is the definition which is at fault. Happiness is not a condition in which all our desires have already been satisfied but, as one in which we are conscious of often experiencing satisfaction-feeling,

[1] Unless otherwise stated the reference is also always to the equivalent of this word in other languages.

is dependent upon the frequent experiencing of desire. This fact is fairly generally recognized, and the sense of the desirability of desire has been expressed in such sayings as " Divine discontent," and " Cursed with the fullness of satiety." It has also been seized upon by pessimists and used to support their contention that happiness is less " real " than unhappiness. This is done by treating *desire* as though it were identical with *unhappiness*—in flagrant contradiction of normal usage, and irrespective of whether the desire is being felt in contemplation of an object conceived as being attainable, or doubtfully attainable, or completely unattainable. It is then possible to argue that happiness is always purchased at the price of an exactly equal amount of unhappiness, and is therefore not worth having—with variations upon this theme all directed to proving that it is better to be dead than alive. The simple fact which gives the lie to this contention is that there are people who call themselves happy, and whom others judge to be happy, which means that that which we call happiness is a " real " and attainable state. It remains for us to examine under what conditions it is possible for an individual to be and to continue in this state.

There can be no doubt that a number of important truths are embodied in that old pun " Is life worth living? It depends on the liver." In the first place, whether we take the word liver to mean the viscus, or the person doing the living, the general truth to which the saying calls attention is the same—namely, that the question " Is life worth living? " is unanswerable except as a request for the expression of an *individual* attitude of mind. A further implication of this wise old saying is that it is *normal* to find life worth living. For if we take the word " liver " in its visceral sense, it is fair to assume that the intention is to suggest, not that only those people with exceptionally high-class livers find life worth living, but merely that the enjoyment of life is *impaired* by possession of an imperfectly functioning liver.

The implications of this are of considerable importance, for the suggestion is that living is normally agreeable to the healthy human being; and I think that both on grounds of observation and interpretively this is what we should expect. If we think of human life as an aspect of a universal mechanical process in which the human liver and the human brain, with its characteristic attribute of self-consciousness, each plays its part, we can see the

enjoyment of life by human beings as a factor in the process, and the feeling on their part of "life being worth living" as one of the means for securing its continuity in them. We can see it as a kind of reinforcement of the instinct of self-preservation as manifested by less rational creatures, which man, the creature whose activities are least controlled by instinct, might otherwise come to dispense with on rational grounds. This view gains weight from the reflection that men sometimes commit suicide, whereas I believe there is no case on record of an animal's doing so. But whether or not we choose to look at the matter from this point of view, experience and observation persuade us of a kind of normality and appropriateness about the feeling that life is on the whole worth living; and a further, negative, merit of the "liver" dictum is that it lends no support to the demonstrably false, though not uncommon idea, that a person is happy only through contrasting his state with that of other people less happy than himself.

"It depends on the liver." The longer one contemplates this admirable saying, the more wisdom it seems to emit. For a person to find "life worth living" it is not only necessary that the external circumstances of his life should be such as are generally regarded as conducive to happiness—that he should be highly esteemed, or that he should be able to obtain a great many of the things that money can buy—it is also necessary that he should be in a state to appreciate these benefits. For this it is obviously necessary not only that he should be healthy, but that his general conative system should not be dominated by desires which he knows to be incapable of fulfilment. He must not, for example, be suffering from that most ineluctable of all painful experiences, the grief of bereavement, which is the terrible state of constantly desiring that a dead person should be alive again. This again emphasizes the fact that whether a person is happy or not—if we may take "finding life worth living" as equivalent to being happy on the whole—depends in the final analysis upon subjective factors: the character of the individual's reactions to the experiences which come his way, which, again, is to be seen as determined partly by his past experiences, which go to make up the structure of his conative system as existing at any particular time, and partly by his inherited disposition and his physical state as affecting his outlook upon life.

"Is life worth living? It depends on the liver," like other wise but ambiguous sayings, can be put to a great variety of uses, and one very doubtful use sometimes made of it is to take it as support for the view that so long as a person is healthy the material circumstances of his life will have no effect whatsoever in determining whether or not he is happy. This is really like saying that the hedonic situation of a healthy person is uninfluenced by any events external to his own organism, with the exception, presumably, of those directly affecting his physical state. This does not conform with the facts of experience.

Assuming now, in conformity with my earlier interpretation of the saying, that a degree of *joie de vivre* is normal, we may go on to inquire what kind of events and temperaments combine to produce the phenomenon we know as a happy person.

One can, I think, roughly distinguish two main sets of circumstances in which we self-conscious beings regard ourselves as happy on the whole. Firstly, we judge ourselves to be happy if, supposing that we are not suffering from the pains inseparable from primary physical need or positive physical disorders, we are conscious of finding preponderant satisfaction in the repetition of the gratification of such easily realizable aims as eating when we become hungry, walking when we want exercise, conversing when we feel sociable, and so forth, without feeling any strong desire for experiences outside the limited range of these recurrent needs and satisfactions. Of such are the people who affirm that they are happy because their wants are few; they are the eupeptic souls to whom the saying applies in its mainly visceral sense.

Secondly, we judge ourselves to be happy on the whole if, having the capacity to find satisfaction-feeling by a great variety of means—or, which is the same thing, being of such a temperament that we entertain desire for a great variety of experiences—we are able to obtain these means to satisfaction, to have the experiences we desire. Thus if we can, as we say, "appreciate" travel, art and literature, fine clothes and fine food, and, being rich, are able to purchase these things, we judge ourselves happy, unless, of course, we are through some cause so unhappy that the satisfaction-feeling thus experienced is inadequate to make us happy. The fact that the rich are very apt to represent themselves as being usually in this latter condition cannot be taken as certain

evidence that they actually are so, and judging by the anxiety which they show to retain or augment their riches, it seems reasonable to infer that whatever they may say they do find in riches a fairly effective means to happiness. And this is not surprising, for under existing social conditions in most parts of the world wealth confers on its possessors both the power to avoid many classes of experience which are by most people contra-desired, and to enjoy many classes of experience which are by most people desired, so that men are no doubt correct in their assumption that the rich are on the whole happier than the poor, although it remains true that a rich man may be unhappy and a poor man happy.

Naturally, the state of being happy because rich exemplifies only one particular state under which a man may regard himself as happy in that, desiring a great variety of experiences, he is enabled to have them.

If there is one classifiable group of persons more apt than others to regard themselves as happy and to assert that they are so, it is those who seek satisfactions mainly through the exercise of their minds. It is sometimes said that this is because "the pleasures of the mind" are those least affected by the course of events in the material world, and are therefore secure in a way that other pleasures are not, residing as they do where "neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Yet this is perhaps not really the most significant aspect of the matter. It is true, certainly, that if we compare, say, the pleasures of the table with the pleasures of abstract reasoning the onlookers may see the former as precarious in the sense that the latter are not, but it seldom seems to be the case that the gastronome's enjoyment is impaired by the thought that he may never again be able to have such a delightful meal. At least there seems no good reason for expecting this to happen more often than that the philosopher should be oppressed by the thought that his mental powers will one day begin to decline. I think that the happiness which people of avid brain so often ascribe to themselves is due to the virtually inexhaustible *variety* of the satisfactions they can find for themselves. This at any rate was John Locke's view of the matter. In the Epistle to the Reader with which he introduces his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he says of the Understanding :—

> " Its searches after truth are a sort of hawking and hunting, wherein the very pursuit makes a great part of the pleasure. Every step the mind takes in its progress towards knowledge makes some discovery, which is not only new, but the best too, for the time at least. . . . Thus he who has raised himself above the alms-basket, and, not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinions, sets his own thoughts on work, to find and follow truth, will (whatever he lights on) not miss the hunter's satisfaction; every moment of his pursuit will reward his pains with some delight, and he will have reason to think his time not ill spent, even when he cannot boast of any great acquisition."

This is zest for living, as only a human being can know it. Such people may well regard themselves as fortunate, both in the subjective and in the external circumstances which have enabled them to find satisfactions where they do.

One fact emerges clearly from any study of happiness and unhappiness as phenomena as we observe them in ourselves and others, which is that they are products of the interaction between personality and events, which means that we cannot rightly regard a happy or unhappy person as happy or unhappy either solely on account of his temperament or solely on account of the events external to himself which affect the course of his life. This being so obvious, it might seem surprising that people are so confident about certain classes of events that they will be hedonically favourable for those affected by them. Evidently there exists some broad basis of agreement as to what is favourable and what unfavourable to happiness, and a general belief in the existence of things which, given a state of healthy normality in any individual, are potential agencies of happiness for him.

Now if this belief is well-founded, and if further it were possible for human beings to multiply these means to happiness we should, believing in this possibility, be able to judge and evaluate human actions according to whether we find them conducive or obstructive to the securing or multiplying of the means to happiness, both concrete and abstract. This would furnish a criterion for conduct of *universal expediency*. It is my contention that this criterion is in fact, already widely accepted, and from it I derive that scheme of universal principles of conduct which I call Social Pragmatism.

CHAPTER III

FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE HUMANE

THE idea that there are " other people " who feel and understand even as we ourselves feel and understand is one of those assumptions that even some philosophers take so much for granted that they will argue in favour of solipsism, and prove very cleverly that we have no real grounds for believing in each other's existence, without ever noticing that they are testifying with every word they utter that they themselves, at any rate, cannot refrain from performing this one act of faith.

It is so very convenient to believe in other people, so much a part of our necessary thinking, that it seems we really cannot avoid it, however hard we may try. All words implicitly testify to this belief, but there is a particular group of words, of which " good " and " bad " (and their equivalents in other languages) are the commonest examples, whose existence demonstrates not only our belief in Man, and our belief that he believes in us, nor even only our belief that other people have feelings of pleasure and pain, liking and dislike, as we have ourselves, but also something even more intimate.

If I say " This is a good pudding," I do not mean merely that I like the pudding—if I did, I could say simply that I like it. Neither, if I say it is a bad pudding, do I mean merely that I dislike it. Certainly, by calling something good I always suggest that it pleases me in some way, but I also suggest more : I suggest that I believe *other people too* will approve of it, or that they do, or might, or could in some way benefit from it. Naturally, I may be mistaken in this belief, but that does not alter the fact that my use of the word " good " in this sort of connection expresses, and is understood to express, the idea that this thing which I favour will, or could, similarly affect not only the person I am addressing, but most people, or at least most " normal " people, as I conceive them to be. Now this kind of judgment which, when passed about a concrete thing like a pudding, is

essentially an expression of opinion about the likeableness, or dislikeableness, of the thing, clearly does not arise from the idea of " perfection," or an approximation to *absolute* goodness or badness; nor yet from a pre-conception about what people ought, morally-speaking, to like or dislike. The preconception is simply that other people have tastes and needs which are essentially similar to one's own.

This comes out clearly in our judgments about the kind of things we use for specific purposes. We assume, for example, that other people are like ourselves in wishing their implements and vehicles, their watches, cars, and textbooks, to be effective in satisfying the needs they were designed to meet. Therefore we pronounce quite confidently about the goodness and badness of such everyday things, and if we disagree about whether such a thing is good or bad we know quite well what we are arguing about, which is whether or not, and to what degree, the objects are in fact, relatively to other objects in their class, capable of satisfying the relevant needs of their users. Here then we have a kind of goodness and badness which have absolutely nothing to do with ethics, but everything to do with our *social* sense.

Evidently, however, we apply the words " good " and " bad " to things besides objects of use. We apply them to events, to people, and to actions, and, at least as applied to actions, they are, as " moral " words, supposed to convey a meaning entirely different from that which they bear in utility-contexts. Spencer indeed, as we saw, tried, though vainly, to lump together all goodness-badness judgments, including those of utility, into his ethical scheme. Other writers, such as Broad, have evaded the issue by completely ignoring the non-ethical use of " good " and " bad." But unless we are prepared to believe that the words " good " and " bad " are habitually used so variously as to render them almost meaningless, we shall still feel that it must be possible to discover one particular element in *all* the significant judgments involving their use, such that when we speak of a good (or bad) spade, or a good (or bad) deed, or man, we can be understood to have in mind some certain quality which we find common to all of these very different things.

Personally I believe that we can in fact find a common element in all *non-ethical* judgments of goodness and badness (or " evaluations," it will be more convenient to call them). I believe further

that the vast majority of evaluating judgments passed in everyday life are, in essence, non-ethical, which is to say that they are not derived from any ideas about possible perfection, or " the ideal " or " duty " or the Will of God. If this can be established, then we shall have rescued from vagueness what are perhaps among the most socially important words in any language.

Now it seems to me quite evident that (non-ethical) " good " and " bad " are *hedonic sympathy-words.* By this I mean that the basis of their use is a belief that we all like certain specific types of experience, and all dislike certain others, and that we get these types of experience through broadly similar agencies. So the thing we call good, whatever it is, is the thing we think will be, or could be, an agency of some form of liked experience; *as which we approve of it.* For we do not call anything good unless we ourselves like that feature of it to which we are referring when we call it good (although we may not like the thing itself). Thus the man we call good (unless we mean that he is godly) is a man we approve of because we think he benefits others by his actions, or at least would if he could, for we often call something good when we are thinking only of its *potential* beneficence; for example, we may call a knife good even before it has been used to cut anything if we think it is likely to be very efficient.

My purpose here is to rescue the words " good " and " bad " from the fumbling hands of the moralists, in order to devote them to the service of social pragmatism; not through any arbitrary restriction of their meanings, still less by attaching new or unfamiliar meanings to them, but by revealing their proper significance as we use them in our everyday communications, taking it for granted as we do, that they enable us to convey certain specific ideas to one another. I think it is worth while trying to do this because I believe that while the hedonic sympathy-words are already in the highest degree useful to us, they could be a great deal more useful than they are if they could be disentangled from the misleading and contradictory meanings which moralism is apt to force upon them.

For all that, it cannot be denied that even in non-moral contexts the use of " good " and " bad " presents a number of problems. This is not the place to go into them in detail—a proper semantic analysis of evaluations would need a volume to itself—but there is just one point which it seems necessary to

touch upon here because it concerns a difficulty which, if not cleared up, seems to contradict the view that good and bad, in non-ethical contexts, have an identical core of meaning no matter how they are applied. This difficulty is simply that we may in some circumstances call an object good although it is an actual or potential source of distress both to us and to those we are addressing, and though, moreover, we think it would be better for humanity if it did not exist. Similarly we may call a thing bad, even though we consider that " it's a good thing " it *is* bad.

A typical example of such a judgment would be " The enemy has very good bombers." We do not mean by this that the bombers are in any sense " a good thing." What we are doing in this case is to pass what might be called a utility-judgment about the bombers, and this is how our hearer will naturally understand it. We are saying that the bombers have " usefulness-goodness," but not that they have any other kind. We mean, in other words, that these bombers have the *universally liked* quality of efficiency, and just because this quality is, we know, *universally* liked, we can use the hedonic sympathy-word " good " about an object which has it, or " bad " about an object which lacks it, whether or not we personally desire that the object should function effectively, whether the plane belongs to ourselves or to the enemy. As a matter of fact, it is nearly always perfectly apparent from the context of an evaluation whether the criterion of utility is being applied, or some other wider criterion, because in utility-evaluations our judgments are almost always relative, in the sense that we reckon the object's goodness or badness by comparison with what we know of the efficiency of other objects used to perform the same or a similar function.

But now, if we speak of a *whole class* of things as good, or bad, or of an abstraction such as an activity or a process as being good or bad, e.g., " Peace is good," " War is bad " (or, of course, vice versa), what do we mean, if we are not speaking as moralists, but as socially-conscious individuals?

We mean, if we mean anything in particular, that in our view this entity, whatever it is, " does good " (or conversely " does harm ") or does more good than harm (or conversely more harm than good) to the people it affects, or that we think that it potentially does so. In other words, we are judging its actual or potential effects on the hedonic situation of " people." It is the

same—or but for the moralists it would be the same—in the case of judgments about actions. The "good action" means the actually or potentially beneficent one. The only other specific thing that someone may mean when he speaks of a good entity or a good action, is that he thinks it is likely to please or displease "God," whose conative disposition he believes that he understands; and in this case, of course, his judgment has no value as a communication except to another person whose conception of "God's" likes and dislikes tallies with his own. (Two theists may hope to agree in their evaluations if their God wishes everybody in the world to become happy, and equally, they may agree if they believe that we were not put into this world to be happy, but to become virtuous through suffering. But if one of them has the first God and the other the second, their respective "good" and "bad" will have almost exactly obverse meanings.)

Otherwise, an argument about whether or not, for example, war is a good thing will always ultimately turn upon the question of whether human beings in general are made happier, or less unhappy, by war than they would otherwise be, and the only way to decide the matter will be to evoke past experience and argue from the analogy of past wars and their effects, and the probable character of future ones. We cannot "know" whether a thing is good or bad in this sense, for we have only past experience to guide us as to the *probable* hedonic favourability or otherwise of anything, but we may hope to *agree* sufficiently to enable us to frame our policies and institutions in accordance with principles of *universal expediency*, which means in practice, to do what seems most likely to improve our, that is humanity's, general hedonic situation.

But why, some Christian moralist is certain to ask, should we care what happens to other people, or to foreigners, or to posterity, unless because we believe that it is our duty as Christians to do so?

Well, the answer is perhaps best suggested by William Godwin's phrase "universal benevolence"; and I think we can with advantage expand its implications rather more widely than Godwin himself ever did. Universal benevolence can be a vague feeling of goodwill towards mankind in general, but it can also be a desire for the betterment of humanity's state for definite reasons which may or may not have much to do with

love for our fellow-men. For if we take "benevolence" literally to mean well-wishing, we shall see on reflection that there may be perfectly "selfish" reasons for wanting other people to be materially better-off, healthier, better fed, freer, and so on; and this is surely to wish them well. (If other people have enough to satisfy their needs, they will not want to take away from us what we have, and if they are contented and free, they will not be nearly so likely to entertain aggressive impulses. So we may be benevolent for sound common-sense reasons.)

Again, though most Christians (with the eminent exception of Bishop Butler) have always seemed to find it hard to believe this, there are many people who have enough spontaneous sympathy to be personally distressed by the sufferings and pleased by the happiness of others, whether or not they are personally acquainted with them, and others, again, who have a sense of identity of interest with the human race which makes them hope that succeeding generations will be able to enjoy their lives. So we see that there can be quite a number of motives for universal benevolence, some of them strictly practical, others mainly emotive, but all in varying degree tending to the development of ideas of universal expediency. For if we desire something, no matter what or why, we set about devising methods for its attainment, and this applies to the desire for an increase of human happiness, or a reduction of human wretchedness, as to any other desire.

There is a word in common use nowadays whose essential significance has never, so far as I know, been examined. That word is *desirable*. It is often used to convey vague approval of a proposed course of action, or of a probable event, but, as with "good," it is never understood to be *merely* a statement about the speaker's subjective feelings. It is in fact another hedonic sympathy-word. If we call something desirable for somebody, then we always mean that we think he will benefit from it in some way or other—that is clear. But what do we mean if we simply say that an event "is desirable"? I believe that the essential core of meaning in any judgment of this form is that "people in general" will on the whole benefit by the event. Thus if during a war a member of a neutral country should express the view that it is "desirable" that combatant A should be victorious over combatant B, or vice versa, we should find that the judgment

is based on a belief that this result will be better for mankind at large. It is possible, admittedly, that we shall find on investigation that the speaker was merely thinking of the probable advantage to his own people of this result he calls desirable, but if this is the case, he will be obliged to concede that what he *really* meant was that the victory of his choice is desirable for (i.e., a good thing for) his own people, and *not* in fact, that it was just plain desirable, unless, of course, he is prepared to argue that whatever is good for his country is also good universally.

I think that in this word " desirable " we have an indispensable unit in the vocabulary of universal benevolence, a key word which, in complete conformity with its only consistent and exclusive significance as it is already used, can be taken to stand for " universally good," i.e., tending to the hedonic advantage of mankind as a whole. Its antithesis, " undesirable," will then have the exactly converse significance. The social pragmatist, whose standpoint, for one reason or another, is that of universal benevolence, thinks, when thinking socially, in terms of the relatively desirable and undesirable, in the above senses, and uses *no other criterion whatsoever* for the evaluation of events and entities seen as affecting, or potentially affecting, no matter how minutely, the fortunes of mankind at large. The principles of conduct which he calls " *desirable*," are principles of universal expediency, which he does not derive from any other source than past human experience as to what sorts of conduct are most conducive, in given circumstances, to human advantage.

It will be seen that social pragmatism is an optimistic philosophy, in that ideas of universal expediency would be pointless except on the foundation of a belief that humanity, considered as a whole, can, or at least could, act so as to improve its general state. The idea that this is in fact possible is based primarily on the observation that human groups, from the family unit outward to the federation of nation-states, have often functioned successfully, in that the units of which they were composed did in many ways benefit through thus collaborating. This in itself, however, would be no sort of proof that even if the majority of human beings actively desired a state of universal harmonious co-operation for the common good, such a state could ever in fact come into being. As with lesser groups, so with mankind as a whole, success in co-operation depends not only upon the desire of the

people concerned to realize that aim but also upon the external circumstances in which they are able to pursue it.

For many centuries past men of vision have played longingly with the idea of a world in which all men are brothers, and have comforted themselves through misery and strife by imagining a God who, unlike the primitive tribal deities, was not interested exclusively in the fortunes of one isolated group in its struggles for survival against nature and against the members of other groups, but who wished well impartially to all mankind. What a truly monstrous feat of imagination it was to conceive this God as being omnipotent as well as benevolent! For the cruel fact remained that the universal God was either unable, or else unwilling, ever to drive the wolf from humanity's door. We know of no period in history when it has been possible for every human community to get enough to eat; and the consequence, stated in biological terms, has been that the species survived by periodical drastic local reductions of its numbers. To speak sociologically, warfare is the immemorial method whereby human groups in times of shortage strive to improve their state. " Man is a social animal "; true. But it is his tragedy that he is also from necessity a cannibalistic animal, an unnatural monster preying upon his own kind for the means to survival (a state of affairs which cannot be remedied by preaching).

But now, as we know, the picture has changed. Looking out from a world half of whose inhabitants are still oppressed by the dread of starvation, we can see beyond the pointing finger of science a vision of potential world abundance only a few years distant, realizable by human effort, if only that effort is informed by intelligence and goodwill. In these circumstances universal benevolence is less a matter of sentimentality and wishful thinking than of plain common sense for those, the vast majority, who prefer the idea of peace and plenty to that of anguish and destruction, for it has been well impressed upon us in recent years that scientific ingenuity can affect our destiny in more ways than one. Social pragmatism is the philosophical outcome of this new situation; it could not have been conceived until a period in our history had been reached when to talk of universal expediency *made sense*.

The basic assumption underlying our social principles, then, is that it is practical to work for the social idealist's objective " a

happier world," since such a world is potentially realizable through our co-operative efforts. On this assumption the universally benevolent, i.e., those who *wish* (not, " who think it morally right ") that such a world should come into being, will direct their energies, and try to direct other people's energies, to working for its attainment, according to whatever policies they are able to agree upon as being the most expedient for their ends.

It is normal, although it may often be unrealistic and misguided, to be more preoccupied about our own immediate interests and those of the people closest to us, than about the interests of the large abstraction " mankind," but nowadays we do well to remind ourselves continually that there is no human group so isolated as to be immune from the effects of what is happening in other groups no matter how remote. " We " (i.e., the members of one social group) may become better off—more prosperous, safer, freer—because " they " (another group) become worse off; or, on the contrary, *we* may become better off because *they* become better off, but the former situation is almost certainly less favourable to " us " than the latter, because it contains the element of menace; it involves " their " desire to reverse the situation. When two people seem in danger of losing their tempers in public over an argument, some amiable outsider is nearly sure to remark soothingly that the world would be a very dull place if we all agreed about everything. This well-meant generalization—which is apt to have an effect the very reverse of what was intended—contains a germ of truth no doubt, in so far as it applies to matters of taste and abstract interest, but it is to be hoped that it does not hinder anybody from recognizing that the world would be a far, far safer place if we all agreed about a great many more things than we do.

The two main sources of the really dangerous kind of disagreement are misunderstanding and incompatibility of values. The former kind can be overcome only by a more practical use of words—a simple international language which every child in the world learns along with his native tongue would be of the utmost value in this connection. But even this would be less than half the battle so long as in every community both large and small (except the most primitive) people were to be found, as now, holding utterly incompatible views as to what is important. If

this were merely a matter of congenital temperament there would be nothing more to be said, at least in a work like the present one, but it is not. It is mainly a matter of what is taught, and of the response to, or the reaction against, what is taught—*this* being where temperament comes in, manifesting itself in submissiveness or revolt. It is seldom indeed that any middle path is found between docile acceptance of the values taught and outright repudiation of them, because they are put forward as moral, which is to say as *absolute*, values which must be accepted uncritically or not at all. And since there are as many moral systems as there are gods, and universal purposes, and historic missions, we live in a world of multiple, incompatible absolutes, which means that we are divided into groups differing fundamentally, differing as to what is Most Important Of All.

There is only one cure for this state of affairs, and that is for those who are capable of regarding anything at all as important to find some ultimate basis of agreement, something important enough to override all their various existing "importances." Now I think that from a simple awareness of our common understanding of feelings universally liked and disliked, such various feelings as love, fear, hunger, confidence, dread, etc., and the types of experience which give rise to them, we can derive a scheme of values to which all must subscribe who are imaginatively and temperamentally capable of universal benevolence, a scheme of values stemming from the general principle that the more *good* human experience there is, the better for humanity. Which, as the intelligent reader has noticed, is just another tautology. Yet I make no apology for it, since it will be found that its implications are very far from sterile.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH

ALONG with the widespread acceptance of morality's claim to be responsible for all good actions, goes an equally unthinking and automatic assumption that any theoretical system which advocates one sort of action in preference to another must be a branch of ethics. Because of this it is inevitable that social pragmatism should sooner or later be accused of being just another moral system. So, at this stage, I had better anticipate and refute the charge.

Presumably nobody, not even a moralist, would maintain that a gardening guide or a treatise on salesmanship, because its main subject matter is how to act for the best in order to achieve certain results, is an ethical work. Now the social pragmatist's approach to human problems is no more and no less ethical than that of a theorist issuing advice upon any matter whatsoever.

As a theory of conduct, social pragmatism denies that there can be any agency of voluntary action except volition, issuing either in acts performed spontaneously, without previous deliberation, or in acts felt as *chosen*, i.e., preferred to alternative acts presumed to be possible by the agent. In its didactic aspect social pragmatism *deals solely in counsels of expediency, derived from ideas of universal desirability.*

Social pragmatism employs terms which are also employed in the passing of ethical judgments, according to the following principles:—

First: the "good" and "bad" of social pragmatism, unlike the "good" and "bad" of ethics, have no other kind of feeling-content than that of hedonic sympathy. This means that in the language of social pragmatism the word "good" as applied to actions stands for the same quality—namely, that of actual or potential hedonic favourability, as when it is applied to any other abstraction or any material entity. This marks a fundamental distinction between social pragmatism and any system of

thought which employs the concepts of *moral* "good" and "bad."

Secondly: the "right" and "wrong" of social pragmatism, no matter to what they are applied, have meaning only in utility-contexts; standing for the ideas of suitability or unsuitability to perform a particular function.

Thirdly: social pragmatism dispenses entirely with the categorical "ought," the hall-mark of moralism. Its own "ought" serves merely as a formula in advice to show that it is based on the assumption of some specific aim, "You ought . . ." being always understood to involve the idea of "if you want . . ."

For these reasons I think it is rationally impermissible to regard social pragmatism as an ethical or moral system according to the accepted ideas of what is proper to and inseparable from an ethical or moral system as such.

The unifying concept which gives specific meaning to any social-pragmatic principle or maxim is the concept of what I have called "universal desirability." The social pragmatist argues from the assumption that some things have, and some things can be made to have, the characteristic of tending to the hedonic advantage of mankind as a whole, on the whole, and it is this assumption which gives significance to his judgments of relative goodness and badness (potential and actual), and potential and actual desirability and undesirability. Now since regarding anything as desirable or undesirable in this universal sense involves regarding it as in some degree potentially or actually desirable for *oneself*, all judgments of universal desirability are necessarily made from the standpoint of *universal benevolence*, which is the conative state of *wanting* humanity's advantage.

For example, if I say, "world peace is desirable," it is to be assumed that as well as believing that humanity is less unhappy under conditions of peace than under conditions of war, I *desire*, for whatever reason, that humanity shall be less unhappy. When I say that this "is to be assumed" I am not saying, of course, that the judgment will necessarily show what my subjective feelings are on the matter. Nothing I say can certainly reveal that; I may be speaking insincerely. But what I am asserting here is that to say "that is desirable" necessarily implies that the speaker in some degree desires human advantage; that this conative element is always implicit in any judgment of desirability;

and that without it, the judgment " that is desirable " (or " that is undesirable ") would not have any *prima facie* significance at all.

The concept of universal benevolence seems difficult to grasp, I think, mainly because ethics, and particularly Christian ethics, has insisted on regarding benevolence as both a peculiarly admirable and a peculiarly difficult and unnatural state of mind, associating it with " unselfishness " and the aim of benefiting other people at one's own expense. It is quite essential, if the basic idea of social pragmatism is to be grasped at all, that the concept of benevolence should be divested of every shred of this false and muddling connotation. Benevolence I take to be simply the relevant state of mind of a person who desires that another person, or some other people, or all other people should benefit—that is, should be hedonically favourably affected. Thus I call benevolent the desire of a parent that her children should thrive, the desire of a shopkeeper that his customers shall be satisfied, the desire of a schoolmaster that his pupils should pass their exams., and the desire of an internationalist politician that there shall be no more wars.

I give these examples to show that there may be any number of motives underlying what I call benevolence, and that if I employ normal usage and say that I believe someone's actions to be inspired by benevolence, I mean *only* that I believe they are due to a desire on the agent's part, for whatever reason or reasons, that the person, or persons, affected should benefit. And again, whether the agent is assumed to have intended the benefit to be of a material or spiritual kind is beside the point, as also, of course, the question of whether one thinks those affected by his action actually do, or will, benefit.

It can now be seen that to employ the concept of universal benevolence is not to introduce an arbitrary conative element into types of judgment which are normally made without any conative basis at all; for all judgments employing hedonic sympathy-words have implicit conative content. (This I believe is true even of *ethical* judgments using the terms " good " and " bad," although the nature of the desire or preference felt by the speaker is in such cases often very obscure.)

If someone under the influence of moralism says that some event or state of affairs is in his view a good thing, we may find on inquiry that he does not mean at all that he thinks the

human beings affected by the event are likely to be happier or less unhappy because of it. He may mean that he thinks it will make them more sensible of their sins, or more serious-minded or God-fearing, or, indeed, that it may affect them in any sort of way of which he and certain others who share his views—or even only he and his God—approve. The ethically-minded person's view as to what kind of events are "good" and what kind "bad" may depend upon one out of any number of arbitrary criteria of "goodness" and "badness" unrelated, or only remotely related, to the hedonic criterion which, as I have tried to show, is implicit in all *non-ethical* judgments of goodness and badness.

The practical advantage of the social-pragmatic approach is that it enables all those who desire that humanity shall become less unhappy to speak the same language of evaluation, and understand one another in all their evaluations of entities and events in contexts relating them to human welfare. Social pragmatism, by cutting out of our evaluations every last element of moralism, with its confusing and ambiguous use of the hedonic sympathy-words, makes it possible to apply reason single-mindedly to the working-out and co-ordinating of policies all directed to one single end—human advantage. Thus while among social pragmatists there will be differences as to means, no differences as to ends will be possible, since there is only one end implicit in, and giving significance to, all their discussions of principle and policy.

The terms "good," "bad," "desirable," "undesirable," "expedient," and "inexpedient," and their various equivalents in other languages, are already in use as symbols for the communication between men, of ideas arising from their sense of "common humanity," and social pragmatism insists upon their complete adequacy as terms of reference in *every* context where matters of universal human interest are at issue. We introduce no new concepts, nor call for any "new approach" to human problems, but only, on grounds of expediency, advocate the extended use of what is there already.

The time has now come to examine the application of social-pragmatic standards to a subject which moralism always claims as its exclusive province—namely, conduct.

CHAPTER V

GOOD AND BAD CONDUCT

A GOOD jump, says Spencer, is a jump which, remoter ends ignored, well achieves the immediate purpose of a jump. And by the same token a good shot is one which hits the target; and I suppose that if I were capable of that much objectivity I might call such a shot good even if the target were my dog. I might recognize that as a shot it was good, although as an event it was a cause of distress to myself; but it is none the less clear that in this case I should be using "good" in a very restricted sense, making it equivalent to "effective," as fulfilling the agent's immediate purpose.

As a matter of fact, however, such acts are usually judged good in proportion as they are assumed to be difficult to perform, rather than in proportion to their effectiveness as such, because for us their goodness is in ratio to the degree of the agent's success in overcoming obstacles. If a man presses a button which rings a bell, we don't say it was "a good push," although the action was perfectly effective; yet we might easily say something of the sort if a baby with difficulty accomplishes the feat of pushing a button, as we imagine its sense of triumphant achievement. Even a shot which misses the target may be held to be a good shot by someone who judges that for that particular shooter in those circumstances—which would have included his average form as known to the judge—the shot was relatively successful. But if such an effort is unsuccessful in cases where our knowledge of the circumstances has led us to expect that it would be successful, we say the result is bad, showing that for us there is badness in that kind of failure which is due to the agent's own relative incapacity to do what he set out to do. This is a very simple kind of action-evaluation, based on the shared idea of a specific aim, whose hedonic implications are manifest, and about which a high degree of agreement is possible; for here differences of opinion can exist only because of different ideas of

the circumstances in which the act was performed; not as to its motive, which is given, nor as to its result, which is known. I think, therefore, that there is a close correspondence between this kind of judgment and a utility-evaluation.[1] If we think of the action as a means to a specific limited end, then, just as we may judge an object good or bad according to the degree of its ability to yield, within the scope of the special function we ascribe to it, the universally-liked experience of being able to do what we want to do, we can regard an act of skill which has a limited specific purpose corresponding to the "function" of a utility-object as evaluable in the same way.

This gets over the seeming anomaly that an act of skill may be judged to be relatively good even though it does not, in fact, "come off." For if it affords the agent a sense of his own relative effectiveness as a shooter, kicker, hitter, etc., then it has to that extent hedonic favourability for him, whether it is seen as effective relatively to his own earlier performances, or to that of others whose skill approximates to his own. If, on the other hand, we say that an act of skill is bad, as, for example, "a bad shot," the badness can be seen as relative to the distress universally occasioned by the sense of relative inability to do what one wants to do. This appears to me the most satisfactory explanation of our use of the hedonic sympathy-words "good," "bad," "better," and "worse" in this kind of context.

Now evidently an act of skill, although judged "good" as relatively skilful, might be judged either good or bad according to some altogether different criterion. A person might judge two acts of shooting to be equally good-as-skilful and yet call one good and the other bad according to what was the target in each case. Spencer did not, I think, sufficiently allow for this fairly obvious fact, because he was so anxious to present relative adjustment of means to ends as the criterion upon which all evaluations are based, a very simple principle which, unfortunately for Spencer's scheme of ethics, is not reflected in practice.

Two shots, one of which kills a dog, and the other a policeman, might, according to the means-ends criterion, be judged by everybody witnessing them as equally good shots, but it does not seem likely that they would be judged equally good actions. Nor would there necessarily be unanimity among the onlookers as to

[1] See p. 164 *supra*.

which action was bad, or indeed as to either being bad. Moreover, any one of the persons evaluating these actions at the time of their performance might later reverse his judgment if he were to learn new facts relative to the circumstances in which they were performed. The whole matter is in fact fairly complicated, even if we assume that all these judgments would be entirely non-ethical; that is, that they would not be the expression of any opinion as to the virtuousness or sinfulness of the actions or as to whether or not they were likely to be pleasing or displeasing to a God (which in the last analysis amounts to much the same thing).

However, Spencer was certainly right in thinking that the only way to understand the nature of action-evaluations is to look for their common bases in normal usage, in short, to find out what people mean by them; for it seems likely that they do mean something, and something other than to express their opinion as to the degree in which they think the acts in question will tend to harm or benefit themselves personally.

Now it is the habit of most moralists to claim impartially all action-evaluations, *other* than those made according to the criterion of skill, as ethical judgments. This would mean that, assuming he accepts the distinction usually drawn by moralists between moral action and expedient action, when someone says that the shooting of a dog by a particular person was a bad action, he means that he thinks it was performed in defiance of the promptings of the shooter's conscience, or moral sense.

It is worth while to bear this fact in mind and understand its full implications, for otherwise it will be found quite impossible to ascribe any particular significance to an ethical judgment which will enable us to differentiate it from the non-ethical type of evaluation, so that we shall be left, like Spencer, trying to cram all judgments of goodness and badness about actions, including skill-evaluations, together into the ethical hold-all, a proceeding which is not only productive of chaos, but which cannot conceivably ever be successful.

If I try to maintain that an act can be morally good or bad irrespective of whether the agent *himself* regards it as morally good or bad, then I must posit some criterion of moral goodness and badness other than that furnished by the voice of conscience or the sense of knowing what is God's will in the matter. But

where is such a criterion to be found if not in a man's own mind? I might of course claim that *I*, the judge of the act, know that God wishes that this or that event should occur, and therefore call good the act which furthers it and bad the act which obstructs it, but then I should be in the position of having to maintain that even an involuntary act, or even an act which unintentionally brought about the divinely-desired event, is still morally good, and conversely. It may be that not all types of moralist would shrink from this conclusion, but none I think would be prepared to accept its corollary, which is that *no more* moral goodness attaches to the involuntary performance of an act which brings about an event desired by God than belongs to an act performed with pain and difficulty from the *motive* of bringing it about. Thus I think Kant was perfectly right in making the morality of an act inhere in the agent's motive, for otherwise moral action would simply consist of obedience to the dictates, not of conscience, but of high priests and such-like divinely inspired dictators of conduct, and would be equally good morally, whether performed from fear, or material self-interest, or from the desire to act virtuously. Thus the distinction between self-regarding action and moral action usually insisted upon by moralists would be lost, and in fact the only criterion for the morality or otherwise of an act would be whether or not it happened to conform with somebody else's idea as to what events are desired by a God, irrespective of whether the agent was acquainted with them; nor would the ethical evaluation of actions as relatively bad have any more significance.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that current ideas as to what constitutes good and bad conduct in the ethical sense are so chaotic and self-contradictory that one might easily find some moralist who would maintain, quite in the Kantian tradition, that *only* conscientious conduct is morally good conduct, and then in the next breath begin to lay down a whole scheme of behaviour as a " moral system," and call actions morally good and morally bad according as they do or do not conform with it. This would mean, although this necessary corollary is seldom pointed out by moralists, that an action performed from motives of expediency might be just as good morally as one performed from the motive of acting virtuously.

I think therefore that if the judgment that the act of shooting

my dog is *morally* bad is to have any specific meaning at all, as distinct from the meaning that it is not in conformity with the law of the land or with what the judge believes to be the will of God, and if at the same time it is not to be taken as the veiled expression of subjective distress at the action, then it can only mean that the act was one of disobedience to the voice of conscience. Evidently, whether or not it was such can be only a matter of conjecture; still, someone might feel tolerably sure about this, sure enough to feel able to pronounce his moral judgment. Thus if the moralist believed that the dog-shooter held it to be his moral duty to shoot my dog he would say it was a morally good or virtuous action, and if on the contrary he thought the shooter believed it would be sinful to do so he would say it was a morally bad action.

Now, manifestly, such judgments can have no pragmatic value whatsoever; they can have nothing to do with expediency, whether individual or social, as Kant, now and then, affirmed and emphasized. For if a moral judgment is a different kind of judgment from one of expediency, then no judgment is moral which takes into account any considerations of desirability, whether individual or social. The implications of this are worth pondering.

Suppose, for example, that the target hit by the "good shot" had been not a dog but a policeman, and the act were judged likewise according to an ethical criterion; then the different nature of the target in this case would not in the slightest degree affect the verdict. If the act was performed in obedience to the voice of conscience, it was a morally good act; if not, then it was not, and the same would be true if the target had been the shooter's own mother, or the President of the United States. Thus it would appear that, contrary to popular belief, moral judgments are not of the least value as general guidance for conduct. (A conclusion to which, it will be recalled, no less a moralist than Kant found himself reluctantly driven.)

All the same, we do have principles of conduct, nor is their function purely decorative; they serve a human purpose, enabling us to co-ordinate our behaviour as we pursue common aims.

It is sometimes argued that since what most people *really mean* by morally good action is simply action in conformity with those rules of conduct which obtain in the community to which

the person belongs, there is no sense in quarrelling with the use of the term " morality " to mean simply good conduct, or socially well-motivated conduct. It enables us to identify a certain specific form of action-motive and action, and is thus a useful specific term. That is the argument of one school of thought.

Another school maintains that the word " morality " is useful because if we take it to stand simply for " good conduct " as the antithesis of " immorality," which is bad conduct, we shall be able to use it as the touchstone for all those of our actions which we see as affecting, favourably or unfavourably, other people; so that calling actions moral and immoral according to whether we think they are or are not of benefit to other people, we have in these words useful and indeed indispensable symbols for the classification of actions.

Yet a third school of apologists for the term " morality " and its derivatives for judging conduct maintains that since there is not and never has been any kind of conduct which meets with universal approval, the word " morality " is needed to stand for conduct which its agent himself believes to be right even although nobody else in the world could be found to agree with him. Finally, there is the Kantian or neo-Christian school which holds that morality stands for self-denying conduct, by contrast with conduct motivated by the agent's desire for anything. Personally I think that the latter conception gives the term " morality " its only peculiar and distinctive significance; thus I should call moral conduct, " conduct motivated by the desire to act from no motive," and keep the term to mean this only. Let us by all means recognize the existence of the moral motive, and of moral conduct as that conduct, no matter what form it may take, which is inspired by the desire to act voluntarily without a motive—for it is perfectly possible to act from a desire to do that which is in fact impossible—but let us never confuse moral conduct with good conduct, for the two are entirely distinct.[1]

[1] There is a striking passage in Kant's *Metaphysic* which stresses morality's characteristic of demanding the impossible: " We must not . . . suppose the conception of duty to be derived from experience. On the contrary, we hear frequent complaints, the justice of which must be admitted, that no one can point to a single instance in which an action has undoubtedly been performed purely from a regard for duty; that there are certainly many actions which are not actually opposed to duty, but none which are indubitably done from

Now it seems very unlikely that any ordinary witness of such an act as the shooting of a dog by an indignant sheep-owner would bother to reflect about whether or not this was a moral act, before passing some kind of judgment upon it, and we might fairly assume that people who exclaimed "Good shot!" "Shame!" or "Well done!" were not even attempting to pass true moral judgments, even though the two latter comments may well have expressed the views that the dog-shooting was, in the one case a bad, and in the other case a good action. Anyone would in fact take it for granted that the man who said "Shame!" thought it a bad action, and that the man whose comment was "Well done!" thought it a good one. The question therefore confronts us as to what such non-moral evaluations of actions mean, and what connection exists between them and other sorts of evaluation. (It will be unnecessary to treat further here of the "effectiveness" or "utility" type of action-evaluation, which assesses actions purely as means to circumscribed specific ends, for their implications are strictly limited, since they do not touch upon any kind of relative "goodness" and "badness" beyond that belonging to the act in its mechanical aspect. We can now, therefore, confine ourselves to the other, more comprehensive, type of action-evaluation, which is concerned with acts in their wider aspect as they affect their agents and other people.)

Now whatever may be the motive in the mind of this or that individual in evaluating the actions of other people, we can perceive that the general function of action-evaluations, the human purpose they serve, is to influence behaviour by one particular method; that is, not by the speaker's promise of rewards or threat of punishments, but simply by an *expression of opinion*

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duty and therefore have a moral value. Nothing indeed can protect us against the complete loss of our idea of duty, and maintain in the soul a well-grounded respect for the Moral Law, but the clear conviction that Reason issues its commands on its own authority, without in the least caring whether the actions of a man have, as a matter of fact, been done purely from ideas of duty. For Reason issues its commands inflexibly that certain actions should be done which in fact perhaps never have been done, actions the very possibility of which may seem doubtful to those who base everything upon existence." Kant also frequently associates the moral sense with feelings of awe and reverence for the supernatural, linking it with religion and metaphysics and in this way emphasizing its remoteness from the practical affairs of life.

about the act in question, although the opinion expressed is understood not to be equivalent merely to a statement of the speaker's personal feelings of like or dislike of it. Often the judgment that an act is good or bad seems to contain within it the speaker's assumption that he has social support for it, or for the principle on which it is based. " That was a good action " may simply imply " That was an action of which ' we ' approve," or perhaps " That was an action of the kind which ' we ' approve," but sometimes an action-evaluation, far from voicing the supposed general concensus of group opinion, consciously runs counter to it, and in this case the judgment simply expresses the speaker's view as to the beneficent or maleficent character of the act, or in other words, *its goodness or badness in the universal sense.*

For example, the generalization " It is bad to defend one's country against invasion " might be upheld by someone on grounds of universal expediency—it has been done—and then the supporter of this principle might well call *bad* the action of a man who did defend his country, even in the face of disagreement by every other member of his community, or even, theoretically, in the face of disagreement by everybody else in the world. This shows that the necessary basis of a non-ethical action-evaluation is not the evaluator's belief that " all right-thinking men " must agree with him. The assumption may be there, in most cases no doubt is there, but behind it, discoverable by questioning, lie the primary ideas of goodness and badness—what " does good " and " does harm "—which ideas, according to the nature of the individual's mental make-up, he takes over intact and uncriticized from authority or convention, or works out for himself as the result of experience and reflection. In either case, the (non-ethical) evaluation of anybody's action contains the element of implicit benevolence, whether towards himself or towards the other people assumed to be affected by his action, whether these other people are seen as an isolated group, or as " people in general."

Any action-evaluation at all that does not derive from transcendental ideas is in its purport benevolent, and it is worth remarking that if this were not so, nobody's future conduct would ever be influenced by others' designating his past conduct good or bad.

Discussions about the meaning of our judgments upon actions are apt to centre on the retrospective form, as, " That was a bad

action," which is because such discussions are mostly ethical and therefore preoccupied with questions of guilt and blame. But this emphasis on judgments about acts which have already been performed obscures the fact that these are generally made only with the object of influencing future conduct. If we tell somebody that an action of his was bad with any other motive than to be disagreeable, we speak in the hope of preventing its repetition and imply " Another time don't do it. Do something different." In the case of remarks such as " It would be a good (or a bad) thing for you to do that," the benevolent " advising " intention is clear, and if it were not for the influence of moralism, it would be no less so in the case of judgments taking the form " That would be a good (bad) action " (taking " action," as is usual in such contexts, to mean " act affecting other people "). The significant additional element here is the speaker's assumption of benevolence in the person addressed. The underlying thought might be roughly expressed thus: " I want you to do what will benefit the people who will be affected by your action in this case, and as I assume that you want this too, I am telling you that I think what you contemplate doing will have this effect we both desire." Notice here too, that in the absence of social goodwill in the person addressed, the evaluating comment would be ineffective. It is useless to tell me that by doing something or other I shall be doing good, unless I *want* to do good.

" Wanting to do good," however, must not for one moment be identified with altruism or " the spirit of self-sacrifice." If we try to benefit other people, in small matters or in great, it is because, for whatever reasons, we *want* to, and the reason why we offer advice to one another is that we are aware that our interests are bound up together. Our practice of evaluating conduct is one part of the process whereby we strive to collectively-benefit ourselves; all evaluations reflect aspects of this striving, but those evaluations the purpose and effects of which are directly to influence conduct are the most powerful, and have the highest degree of importance for us.

The presence of goodwill in conduct-evaluations will be seen if we consider any typical series of judgments such as might be passed from various points of view on a particular act. For this purpose the dog-shooting example will perhaps do as well as any. Suppose then that three people, none of them moralists, pro-

nounce the shooting of my dog to have been "a bad action," and suppose we ask each of them in turn why he says it was bad, we can imagine that each would give a different answer.

A, for instance, might say "It will lead to no end of trouble in the village"; B, "He had no right to do it"; and C, "It was cruel to shoot the dog." The first answer in effect gives as a reason for the judgment a belief about the probable consequences of the act, but both the others are evidently based on acceptance of some *principle* the violation of which made the act in the judge's view bad. The first judgment is clearly one of particular social desirability, that is, it expresses A's view that the action will have unfavourable effects on a particular social group, "the village." So, here, the specific benevolent implications of the judgment are clear, and no further elucidation is necessary, for it implies only one thing. But in the case of the statement that the action was bad because the agent had "no right" to do it, the meaning is not self-evident, for there is here no suggestion that anyone at all has suffered or is even likely to suffer through the act. All of meaning that we can derive from the elaboration as it stands is that in B's view an act may be bad through the fact of its agent "having no right" to perform it. Similarly in the case of the third "reason"; all we learn from it as given, is that in C's view an act may be bad because cruel. Still, the benevolent implications of these "reasons" are not far to seek. Suppose we put a further question to B, and ask him why he thinks it bad that people should do things they have no right to do—which we can take to be the essential significance of his remark—then, if he is able or willing to reply at all, he will certainly pass to some generalization, as that if people left off respecting each others' rights there would be no trusting anybody; or that the established rights of the individual are the very foundation upon which civilized society is based, and so the meaning of his unfavourable evaluation of the act stands revealed. He was, we find, classifying it as belonging to a socially undesirable type of action, a type of action which he held to be harmful to people living in communities, or, which is only to express the same thing in a different form, he was expressing his view that the action was performed in violation of a principle of universal social expediency.

In the case of the explanation that the action was bad because

cruel, there is slight ambiguity, because we don't know until we ask whether this means that as inflicting suffering the act was bad, or that it was bad as (presumed to be) motivated by the aim of inflicting suffering. But if we inquire we shall find out, for then we shall be answered either on the lines of, " cruelty causes suffering and all suffering is bad " or, " cruelty as the disposition to inflict suffering is bad because it tends to increase the amount of suffering in the world (and all suffering is bad)."

It would be tedious and unnecessary to analyse for their benevolent implications three corresponding *favourable* judgments on the dog-shooting, which one might imagine to have been respectively: A, " It will teach So-and-So to keep his dogs tied up in future, they are a perfect nuisance—— " (particular-social desirability); B, " He was exercising his legal rights in shooting the dog " (derived from a principle); and C, " All dogs are mischievous vermin and should be shot at sight " (derived from a principle). The first two out of each of these sets of action-evaluations were of the type whose significance depends upon an opinion as to what is desirable or undesirable for a particular social group, without regard to the interests of anybody outside it; but the other four judgments were derived from ideas of universal (i.e., non-particular) social desirability. They were each based ultimately on an opinion that human beings in general would be worse off if individual human beings were to act in certain ways, or *not* to act in certain other ways. Such, essentially, are principles of universal expediency.

Now all such principles as enunciated have expediency-content (if they had not, nobody would ever willingly conform with them) for as schemes for behaviour directed to the furtherance of socially-desirable ends they advocate from the standpoint of benevolence that sort of behaviour which, in the view of those enunciating them, will be most expedient for the individual in his aspect as a social being. So conduct motivated by the desire to conform with a principle of this kind may be called *socially-principled* conduct, that is, it is the practice of a scheme for behaviour which the individual believes to be on the whole advantageous for all men as social beings, including himself, in the circumstances to which the principle applies. This is the only rational motive for conforming with a principle of conduct which can exist over and above the motive of avoiding the

penalties and winning the rewards of Authority. Authority, which as such does not advocate, but demand, certain kinds of behaviour, and which if strong enough throws away the mask of benevolence, discards the use of hedonic sympathy-words in relation to conduct, and says simply, " Do what I command or I will destroy you."

In this discussion I meant to examine only the *assumed purport* of action-evaluations; that is, what, in the absence of knowledge about peculiar predilections and idiosyncracies on the part of those pronouncing them, they are believed to imply. It is very necessary to say this because the fact that a person makes use of hedonic sympathy-words in passing a judgment is no proof whatever that his motive is in any way benevolent. The words " good " and " bad " are, unfortunately, peculiarly subject to a kind of " pirating," so that their value for us for the expression of our desires to recommend courses of action or promote co-operative conduct is vitiated, and they are exploited for quite different ends. *But it is possible thus to exploit them only because of the benevolent implications they bear.*

It is inevitable that the moralistic habit of applying the words " good " and " bad " to conduct in senses entirely different from those they bear when applied to anything else, should make it harder for people to grasp and act upon the idea that they themselves stand to benefit from their own " good " behaviour. This idea is as a rule far better understood among the members of closely-knit primitive communities, where good conduct is so evidently conduct which benefits " us," than in our own more complicated culture.

Early in our lives we hear the word " good " applied to things, such as food, which we like (" There! Isn't it good? "), or which we are being encouraged to like (" But it's *good*! "); and the word " bad " to things we dislike (" What a bad tumble "), or are being encouraged to dislike (" Bad, nasty. Don't touch it "); and at about the same time we find these words being applied to our own conduct according to whether it is being liked or disliked by those about us. This, from the adult's point of view, is perfectly consistent usage, since a " good " dinner and " good " conduct on the part of the child both represent liked experience for adults; but from the child's point of view it is a different matter, and the connection between the goodness of a lollipop

and the goodness of its own behaviour in refraining from snatching it is far from obvious. On the other hand, conduct on the part of the child which the adult calls " bad " is apt to be in the child's view " good " as yielding immediately liked experience, although disliked experience might of course be associated with its own act later on, if it should result in its hurting itself or being punished, and then it would find its own act to have had " badness " after all. Still, even under the most favourable conditions, it is hard for a child to learn the adjustments of its spontaneous behaviour which are socially necessary, and experience will only gradually teach it the positive expediency of some measure of self-control, so that the " goodness " of its own " being good " does not after all seem so utterly remote from the " goodness " of immediately liked experience; and also it may have a kind of " delayed-action " goodness, as it were, through being a means to liked experience in the shape of rewards. By degrees, also, the concepts of " good, and bad, for me " will inevitably expand, through the child's widening experience of other people, into " good, and bad, for anybody," so that the hedonic sympathy-words gradually take on their characteristic universal significance, but in order that the idea of " good, and bad, for *us* " shall become an effective influence on conduct, a feeling of goodwill in the people in the child's immediate environment is of the greatest importance. Spencer who, although a moralist, often stressed the desirability for the individual of recognizing the *expediency* of behaving well, was sound on this point :—

> " If a father, sternly enforcing numerous commands, some needful and some needless, adds to his severe control a behaviour wholly unsympathetic—if his children have to take their pleasures by stealth, or, when timidly looking up from their play, ever meet with a cold glance or more frequently a frown; his government will inevitably be disliked, if not hated, and the aim will be to evade it as much as possible. Contrariwise, a father who, equally firm in maintaining restraint needful for the well-being of his children or the well-being of other persons, not only avoids needless restraints, but, giving his sanction to all legitimate gratifications and providing the means for them, looks on at their gambols with an approving smile, can scarcely fail

> to gain an influence which, no less efficient for the time being, will also be permanently efficient."

Spencer, for all his primness, knew a lot about children.

It is apt to be supposed that the idea that a good action is one which benefits "other people" is peculiar to Christianity with its tradition of self-sacrifice for others' good, and that non-Christians, or at last people uninfluenced by Christianity do not have this usage, and even call actions good by virtue of the fact that they *harm* other people, and even sometimes call them good in proportion as they do this. In fact, I know of no cases where this is so, and the effect would be so confusing, so vitiating to the value of the word "good" that it seems very unlikely. This is not to say that an act may not be called good by someone who is aware of, and even glad of, the fact that it harms some other people; it is only to say that calling such an action good is always understood to mean that it benefits, not that it harms. Thus if Hitler were to have said of the murder of a Jew "that was a good action," he would have been understood to mean that the murder was beneficial, not harmful. For he would have explained this judgment in terms of what he considered desirable for the German people, making the goodness of the action inhere, for instance, in its making vacant the post of head-surgeon in a hospital, which could then have been filled by a loyal member of the Nazi party. "Good" always implies benefit for at least one other person besides the speaker.

On the social-pragmatic view the *entirely* good act is one which has hedonic favourability and no unfavourability, even for the agent; and the *entirely* bad act has unfavourability and no favourability even for the agent. Anybody (except a moralist) who regarded an act as fulfilling either condition would have to agree that it was entirely good, or bad, respectively, for there would be no possible human criterion to form a basis for disagreement, where "good" means good and "bad" means bad. There seems no reason for doubting that such acts may in fact be performed (though of course they can never in practice be identified), although in regard to the entirely good act it is worth noticing that the Christian ethic denies by implication that it is possible, because it is fundamental to Christian doctrine that good action necessitates self-sacrifice, or in other words, that an action

which benefits someone else *ipso facto* harms the agent. Thus according to this principle *your* gain is *my* loss, and vice versa.

Social pragmatism, as based on the view that the hedonic situation of mankind as a whole can be improved, repudiates this notion, for which in fact there seems to be no foundation in experience; indeed any case of human beings effectively co-operating in the pursuit of common aims gives it the lie. An absolutely bad action is possible if we exclude from the reckoning the minimal immediate satisfaction belonging to the effective performance of *any* act, which would be felt by the agent in the act of pressing the button, as it were, which caused the general catastrophe. But actually the subject of entirely good and entirely bad actions is quite sterile from any practical point of view, and I mentioned the concept of them because it only points the two extremes between which our actions, on the evaluation-scale, may be said to range.

As a matter of fact we often do not judge even isolated acts according to what we reckon will be the *probable* degree of their beneficent or maleficent effects, but necessarily content ourselves with classifying them according to type. Necessarily, because, for all our powers of self-deception and over-simplification, we often cannot pretend to be able to foresee whether some act will do more harm than good in a given case, and also, of course, because we often can't be bothered even to try. So we label the act as belonging to a class which experience shows to have in general good or bad effects as the case may be, and from these broad ideas we have evolved practical principles of conduct according to our notions of what sort of behaviour, in given circumstances, is best. These principles, in fact, represent a sort of crystallization of past human experience of the effects of our actions, and in so far as they are non-ethical, their validity can be judged only by the experienced hedonic results of practising them. So in the case of a conflict of opinion as to the "soundness" of any such principle, the conflict, if based on rational, not on transcendental, considerations, reflects a difference of opinion as to what sort of conduct is on the whole socially desirable, or, which is the same thing, expedient for the individual in his social relations.

Now on the view that a general improvement of the human lot

is possible, the question of what *sort* of behaviour would conduce to this end is of the utmost importance to anybody who desires it. So the social pragmatist looks for principles of conduct whose universal adoption is universally desirable. Universally desirable, not in the sense that it would be to the advantage of everybody now in the world, which is impossible, but only in the sense that it would be to the advantage of humanity considered as a whole made up of units the sum of whose individual hedonic situations makes the hedonic level of that whole. If any such principles can be found, they will be principles of expediency for all those who stand to benefit from a general improvement of the human lot. So we could call them principles of universal expediency, though again, without meaning by this that it is expedient for *everybody* to practise them, but only that their universal practice, in circumstances in which they are practicable, would tend to universal advantage.

But can we in fact maintain that any valid principle of universal expediency in this sense can be found?

Well, I do not think that as social pragmatists we can claim absolute and certain validity for any practical principle such as the moralists claim for *their* various principles. At the same time, I think we can instance one principle to which anybody will in fact subscribe who believes that universal advantage through human effort is possible, and who desires it. This principle one might formulate as a maxim as follows: "It is universally expedient to act so as to promote inter-human harmony and discourage inter-human conflict."

I believe this principle to be generally valid under any conditions of human life we have so far experienced, because whereas inter-human harmony is the necessary condition for willing co-operation in the pursuit of commonly-desired ends, and may result in advantage for everybody concerned, inter-human conflict almost always results in disadvantage to one party, and frequently, of course, to both, so that it is at the least very unlikely to lead to preponderant advantage, and could do so only by accident, as it were. Accordingly, although I do not claim absolute validity for this universal expediency-principle and its complementary universal desirability-principle (which can be formulated as "It is universally desirable that inter-human harmony should be promoted, etc."), I accept it as a working

social-pragmatic principle and shall hereafter argue on the assumption that it is valid.

From this assumption various other more and less debatable conduct-principles suggest themselves, as, for example, that it is universally expedient to be honest, because honesty is a co-operative, harmony-promoting practice. In regard to honesty I think that on this basis we may in any case assert that whether or not honesty is in fact "the best policy," conditions under which honesty *would* be the best policy are universally desirable conditions, and that it is universally expedient to promote them.

The idea that inter-human conflict is a bad thing is certainly not new, and, as I hope to have shown, the view that the kind of conduct that gives rise to it is bad conduct is not the outcome of moral teaching, any more than the idea, still current in some parts of the world, that aggressive conduct is good, is due to moral teaching, although moralists of one persuasion or the other may encourage either sort of conduct with exhortations in which the arguments of morality and expediency are both freely invoked.

From the standpoint of those who desire, and believe in the possibility of, man's hedonic improvement, that sort of conduct which obstructs this process is universally undesirable and therefore bad, and so we accept the familiar usage of our culture which calls bad those sort of actions whose favourability for their agents depends upon unfavourability for the people affected by them. On a superficial view this puts us in agreement with the Christian moralists, but if we remember that their "good" and "bad" are not primarily related to ideas of human advantage, but to ideas about God's will, we see that the principle can never, for them, be more than conditional on the interpretation of that will in any given circumstances, and so can be subordinated at any time to some other principle supposed to be "higher." The spectacle of Lazarus gloating over the sufferings of Dives is not one of which any social pragmatist could approve.

CHAPTER VI

MEN AND MOTIVES

CONTRARY to a basic assumption of ethics, social pragmatism holds that nobody ever performs a voluntary act in the belief that the effect of performing it will be more hedonically unfavourable for him than would be the effect of not performing it.

This is not to deny that someone under the influence of moralistic teaching may say to himself before doing something, "I shall do this although I know that the result of doing it will be to make me less happy" (or "more unhappy") "than I am now"; it is only to say that this will not in fact be true. For if we ask such a person *why* he wishes to do what he thinks will be hedonically unfavourable for him, and if he deigns to reply, we shall be sure of ultimately evoking an answer on the lines of, "I could not bear *not* to do it"; revealing that however little he may relish performing the action, and however greatly he may dread its consequences, he prefers to perform it rather than *not* to perform it. That is, he believes that he would suffer hedonically in some way or other—e.g., in pride, in sympathy, or in hope for his own future well-being—through not performing it; so that in performing it he is in fact choosing for himself what, rightly or wrongly, he believes to be the "lesser evil." Thus it would only be through inadvertence that a person performs an act which has *preponderantly* unfavourable effects for himself.

The conception of a disinterested motive is strictly nonsensical, since it is tantamount to a motiveless motive, but it is none the less true that an action may be motivated by another sort of desire than the desire to gain power or money. It may for instance be motivated by the desire to feel virtuous, or equally it may be motivated by the desire to harm or benefit another person. To the pure, or consistent Kantian, moralist, who like all moralists appropriates the terms "good" and "bad" for the evaluation of human actions according to his own particular scheme, there can properly speaking be only one "good" motive,

that of obeying the voice of conscience, and the goodness even of this one motive is dependent upon its being unrecognized *as* a motive by the person entertaining it; that is to say, it must not constitute a conscious *desire* for the particular experience which it yields—that of feeling virtuous. This is not to say that the pure Kantian moralist would regard all motives except this one as "bad"; he would hold them simply to be from the ethical standpoint non-evaluable; they would be morally-speaking neither good or bad.

Non-Kantian moralists on the other hand—and even every Kantian moralist is a non-Kantian more than half the time—evaluate motives, as they evaluate actions, according to whether they believe these tend, or do not tend, to produce events which are good, that is, hedonically favourable, not for men, but for a god. By a god I mean a being, whether concrete or imaginary, whether human or superhuman, endowed by some group of men with importance such that his desires are held to be paramount over all human desires, so that goodness and badness consist in hedonic favourability and unfavourability for him, and not for man, since what is good for man is on this view held to be "good" only if the god approves of it. Thus, for instance, to the scientific humanist, whose God is Evolution, that human behaviour is "good" and those motives are "good" which tend to secure the survival of the human species, which Evolution is believed to desire. In practice, therefore, the ethical "goodness" and "badness" of the scientific humanist closely conforms with the goodness and badness of normal non-ethical usage in our culture, since the beneficial is that which on the whole tends to the preservation of our species. The main practical objection to this mythos is the rational difficulty, which it shares with the concept of an "all-loving" omnipotent God, that whatever is by its essential nature omnipotent—and therefore voluntarily responsible for all events—cannot at the same time be seen as preferring one kind of event—one kind of human behaviour—to another. (I call this a practical objection because confused theory is apt to result in inconsistent and ineffective practice.)

We others do not wait for the moralist's verdict before ascribing goodness to certain kinds of human motive and badness to others. For us the bad motive is the malevolent motive, and

the good motive the benevolent, consistently with our other uses of good and bad. That misguided malevolence may have socially good consequences, and misguided benevolence socially bad consequences we know, but we are not thereby deterred from evaluating motives *per se*, since we believe that good intentions are at any rate more likely to produce good events than are bad intentions.

I think that when in non-ethical contexts we call a *person* good we mean, if we mean anything in particular, that we believe his motives to be good or relatively good. This being so it seems a rather odd fact that to call a person well-meaning often suggests an unfavourable judgment rather than a favourable one; but this is really because, as the context of such a remark always reveals, the speaker's preoccupation is with the contrast between a purpose he recognizes as good, and inadequate or misguided action arising from it. Thus we say that it is not *enough* to have good intentions, implying the ineffectiveness of good motives unless backed up by intelligence and that knowledge of the relevant circumstances necessary to translate benevolent aim into beneficent action. This was no doubt what G. B. Shaw had in mind when he remarked that to call a man well-meaning is to call him a fool. For all that, we prefer people well-meaning, and to call someone ill-intentioned is to pass an unequivocally unfavourable judgment upon him. To call a man ill-intentioned or malevolent is to call him a bad man, for badness in man, as in other evaluable things, is (except in an ethical context) the badness of any actual or potential agency of human distress.

We infer the general character of people's motives from their actions, and when we see these as potentially affecting the rest of us we are always interested in discovering as far as possible why they act as they do. But more than this, we feel the need to understand one another, and through understanding find common ground for concerted action in the pursuit of shared aims. As social beings dependent upon one another for so much of what we desire, and in general so much at one another's mercy, the personalities of other people are a matter of the deepest concern for us. This also makes us want to influence one another's conduct in desired directions, and among other inducements we make use of praise and censure to this end, which, in so far as these are not backed up by threats and promises, is our way of

turning to advantage the almost universal desire of human beings to be thought well of by other human beings. There is hardly anybody who does not like to be called a good man (so long as he does not think this means a virtuous man), and hardly anybody who does not dislike being called a bad man (so long as he does not think this means a sinful man, for virtue implies self-denial, and sin implies liberty).

From the (perfectly normal and familiar) standpoint of social benevolence we judge a man to be good or bad as we judge anything else to be good or bad except in a purely "utility" context—namely, according as we think he has actual or potential hedonic favourability or unfavourability for mankind. His potential favourability or unfavourability resides in his motives as related to other people; his actual favourability or unfavourability inheres in his conduct. Any part of his conative system, any part of his behaviour, which we do not see as socially significant, is not evaluable at all in this sense; we shall not call it good or bad, for it is no affair of ours.

It is often claimed as the peculiar merit of the Christian and Kantian ethics that they affirm the principle that men should not regard other men as means but as "ends in themselves." Yet after all the idea of men being "ends in themselves" is vague, and the only specific meaning that can be attached to this expression would seem to be that men have and should be conceded to have the characteristic of regarding themselves as acting voluntarily, of determining for themselves what ends they shall seek. This view of others we all, I think, actually entertain, although there are some who affect to find it superfluous and to regard the volitions both of themselves and of others as arising automatically in response to mechanical stimuli according to a process whose nature they are confident of some day being able to discover; but apart from these enthusiasts there are few who would not be ready to concede that they find the concept of motive integral to their thinking about human behaviour, so that it seems in fact quite unnecessary to exhort them to regard people as determining their own ends. If, therefore, the injunction to regard people as "ends in themselves" means this—and it is difficult to see what else it can mean—the injunction is really superfluous: we do this anyway. But then comes the complement, "and not as a means." (Kant's formula is "Act so as to

use humanity whether in your own person or in the person of another, always as an end, never merely as a means." The idea of " using as an end " seems to me completely devoid of meaning, and Kant never elucidates it.)

Now if we are to understand by this that it is detrimental to the dignity of the individual that others should regard him as a kind of tool, we may concede the point, and also add that to the extent to which a human being is coerced into functioning as a tool he will be unhappy, since under coercion volition is restricted to the avoidance of contra-desired experience, and the pursuit of *desired* experience is to that extent precluded. But if anyone claims that he does not regard those human beings with whom he is associated in any significant relationship as for him potential means to liked experience, that is only to say that he regards them either with indifference or hostility and, indeed, since it is practically impossible to maintain an attitude of complete indifference towards another person, hostility seems to be the only feasible alternative to regarding him as in one way or other a potential means to our ends—taking ends in the widest possible sense. In this sense a child who shows off before its parents to gain their applause is regarding them as means to its ends.

It will be said that obviously this is not the kind of attitude to which Kant would have objected, or to which latter-day moralists are objecting when they deprecate regarding other people as means to ends, and that the objection is to regarding the *whole person* all the time as a means to our ends, as the master, even the humane master, regards the slave. If so, then the injunction is of extremely limited application, and would seem to amount merely to an exhortation to those who hold despotic powers over others not to feel that they do so; but, in fact, whatever Kant had in mind when he laid down this imperative, I do not think that those who nowadays affirm this principle suppose themselves to be prescribing the proper attitude of mind for despots.

Are we then to understand the injunction as meaning that we ought not to *use* other people as means to our ends, as Kant also maintained? But again, unless we take it that the objection is to despotism, the advice is impracticable, for we cannot help using other people in this way (nor help being thus used by them). Every time I buy a loaf of bread I am using a human being as a means to my ends. Every time I consult a doctor or ask a friend's

advice; every time, indeed, that I ask for anything, I am using, or at least trying to use, a human being as a means to my ends. Some of these ends are material, some are not, but the principle is the same.

Yet it is certain that the moralist has something quite definite in mind when he utters his exhortation, and I think it is perfectly apparent that the maxim is really intended in deprecation of *coercion*; to discourage the coercing of human beings by other human beings. It is worth while pausing to examine why the moralist chooses this roundabout route for arriving at a conclusion which from the standpoint of social benevolence is plain common sense.

The explanation is undoubtedly to be found in the Christian moralist's most characteristic obsession—the fact that conduct which is expedient for one individual or group is sometimes harmful to another. This fact bulks so large in his mind that he believes, in face of all contrary evidence, that this is the case not merely sometimes, but always; that it is a kind of law of nature that *my* advantage is *your* disadvantage, and *vice versa*. Consistently, then, he argues, from the standpoint of benevolence (which, *mirabile dictu*, is often perfectly sincere, but which in any case he must affect if he is to hope to influence anybody) that since treating other people as means to our ends is precisely equivalent to treating them badly we ought never to do it. This is pessimism beside which the pessimism of Schopenhauer looks mild. If we cannot make use of one another without treating one another badly, then all men are each other's natural enemies, and "co-operation" is just a pretty euphemism for a process under which the strong eternally victimize the weak, and each one's happiness is bought at the price of another's suffering.

It is certainly the case that human beings are often to a large extent parasitic upon one another in this way; yet if moralists, along with other sorts of men, object to and combat this state of affairs where they find it existing, that must surely be because they do not regard it as inevitable. So let us accept the fact that we do constantly regard and use one another as means to our ends, and then ask in what circumstances there is harm in it.

Were it not for the prevalence of moralistic thinking the answer would be obvious, in fact a truism: there is harm in it when, and only when, there is harm in it. That is to say that

from the standpoint of social benevolence, any action of a human being, whether an act of coercion or not, which is or tends to be hedonically unfavourable for one or more other human beings is as such socially undesirable, both in its specific tendency or effects, and also generally, as tending to engender ill will and social disharmony. Then we can go on to consider what there is characteristic of coercion which causes it to be so widely regarded as bad *per se*.

Coercion is making people do things which, were it not for the pressure we bring to bear on them, they would not do. The essential difference between persuasion and coercion lies in this, that when we persuade we are influencing action by means of positive desires, and when we coerce we influence it through working upon contra-desires. In other words, persuasion is effective through the promise of liked experience and coercion is effective through the threat of disliked experience. But it is no more than that; it is not properly speaking compelling people to act " against their will," for that would be equivalent to making them act involuntarily. Nevertheless it is an infringement of liberty, for liberty, if it is anything, is relative—we have liberty to the degree in which we are able to do what we most want to do, whatever that may happen to be—and if liberty is regarded as a good thing, that is because the majority of human beings believe that in the state of being relatively able to do what they most want to do they are more likely to be happy than otherwise. There seems no reason for doubting that they are right.

I think the most acceptable definition of liberty is *scope for effective choosing*; for to the extent that we feel we are able to choose what we shall do or what we shall experience, we feel ourselves to be free, and to the extent to which we feel that our choice of action or experience is restricted we feel ourselves to be in bondage whether to ineluctable Destiny, or to other human beings whose volitions impinge upon our own. Thus under extreme coercion we may feel that we are confronted with only two alternatives: to do what is required of us, no matter how painful it may be, or to refuse and perish. Even so we can choose, to do or die. Essentially, therefore, coercion is the restriction by one individual or group of the scope for effective choosing of another individual or group, by narrowing down

choice to the sphere of avoidances, and cutting off the avenues to positively desired experience.

What then are the rational grounds for others besides those coerced to object to coercion? Is it in general expedient for the un-coerced to ally themselves with the victims of coercion rather than with its practitioners? The only reasonable answer seems to be that it is expedient for those who *believe* that the hedonic situation of mankind can be improved, and who *desire* that it shall be improved, to oppose the coercion of human beings. But if anyone desiring this end believes it to be unattainable, or if anyone believing it to be attainable does not desire it, then, supposing he neither feels menaced in his own person by the extension of coercive powers, nor is made unhappy by the fact of others being coerced, it is not expedient for him to seek to obstruct coercion, and in fact he will not do so, and neither moral exhortations nor the arguments of social pragmatism will have the slightest effect upon him, unless backed up by relevant information which he previously lacked, which might cause him to readjust his views.

It is a mistake to suppose that people living under dictatorship necessarily feel themselves to be coerced, for unless they should happen to want to do what is forbidden they have no sense of frustration and may therefore be happy, and in fact, the most strikingly effective feature of the technique of latter-day dictatorship is so conditioning the minds of young people that they have few or no desires which cannot be satisfied within the bounds of the permissible. The dictator prefers willing tools, willing instruments for the coercion of the unwilling. For that, of course, is what they are for; essentially they are like bombs and guns, the threat of dreaded experience for those whose positive desires clash with the desires of their master.

The reason why liberty is so highly esteemed nowadays is that whereas social benevolence is on the increase—because world-conditions are gradually bringing home to even the most obtuse the fact of universal human interdependence—malevolence is perceived to have greater potential powers than ever it had before. There is a tendency for ever greater powers of destruction and coercion to become concentrated in ever fewer hands, and even though the optimistic assure us that the owners of those hands are wise and kind, we cannot help feeling a little uneasy. So it comes

about that other people's liberty, so far from seeming a menace to our own, comes to be regarded as one of its best safeguards, and action which combats coercion or the conditions under which it is enabled to flourish is seen to be socially expedient in the highest degree. It is for "our" good, taking "us" as humanity in general, that coercion should be reduced to a minimum, the minimum necessary for the control of such unsocial behaviour as can be controlled by no other means.

In circumstances in which we have reason to fear coercion the motives of those in whom power is vested is naturally a matter of the greatest anxiety to us, yet the fact that we should so earnestly discuss the personalities of Dictator X and President Y is a sign that a stage has already been reached at which our opinions about them will in all probability count for little—an ominous state of affairs. For the dream of benevolent despotism is really lost for ever. We who are now relatively free know too much and want too much to be content with doing what we are told; and so we know that the despot, even if at first he is benevolent, will very soon become our enemy and tormentor. Thus circumstances in which we find ourselves preoccupied about the personalities and motives of those in positions of responsibility are apt to be unhealthy. Responsibility there must manifestly be, the responsibility of those who on account of their abilities are chosen to do specialized work in the service of the community, but their danger to us is least and their value surest when we evaluate them *qua* functionaries, as means to our collective ends, rather than as personalities.

There is really nothing novel or shocking in the idea of people, like things, being susceptible of utility-evaluation, according to the function they perform. We always have evaluated people in this way, and if the function is one in which the man's motives play an important role, a part of his goodness as utility will be seen to inhere in the character of those motives, but if not, then apart from the minimal requirement of zeal in the performance of his work, his motives will not be taken into account. In evaluating men according to the standards of utility we usually imply approval of the function they perform; it is only among thieves that an efficient thief would be called a good thief.

In a world so much dominated as ours is by ethical thought-

habits, to call a *person*, as distinct from a functionary, good or bad may be to say almost anything or almost nothing about him. Indeed, hearing such a judgment passed in an ethical context we shall certainly not know what to understand by it unless we are familiar with, or are able to guess, what is the speaker's general attitude towards life and humanity. Suppose, for example, that somebody expresses the opinion that the late F. D. Roosevelt was a good man. If we happen to know that the speaker is religious, then we shall probably be safe in inferring that he thinks President Roosevelt was a pious man. If we suspect him of Kantian leanings, we shall guess that he thinks the President was above all a conscientious man; if we know him as a Christian moralist, we shall understand him to be expressing the view that the President was a self-sacrificing man, and so on. But in each case the judgment will amount to no more, ultimately, than saying either "He was the kind of man of whom I approve," or "He was the kind of man of whom God and I approve." It is true that in the case of the Christian moralist's verdict we should, at least if the speaker were not a Catholic or a Puritan, probably be justified in inferring that his judgment implies the belief that Roosevelt was a benevolent man, but assuming him—the Christian moralist—to be of the logical Paulian school which holds "faith" to be the proper and essential qualification for a Christian, goodness as benevolence would be for him only secondary, so that he would have to ascribe essential goodness, i.e., that of being "a good Christian," even to a perfect monster of malignity so long as his piety as a Christian were not in doubt, and goodness in proportion to the degree of the piety. Thus, for instance, if Hitler had not vacillated between attempts to reconcile Nazism with Christianity and the policy of more or less representing himself as a rival deity; but instead, like the marauding Spaniards of the sixteenth century, had prefaced his depredations with prayer and pious ritual, and justified them as part of a divinely inspired mission, there would have been no lack of Christians to call him a good man, sincerely believing that he was good in the only important respect. Moreover, it should never be forgotten that such a man might be perfectly sincere in his faith, and convinced that in his actions he was carrying out the orders of his God in inflicting suffering upon his fellow men; history provides countless instances of this.

It is not even now widely recognized that a deity whose wishes are transmitted either through the medium of priests or by direct revelation to the individual, can give authority for *any* sort of conduct, and endow with virtue *any* sort of personality, save only that of the unbeliever. The standpoint of the humane, on the other hand, provides a consistent and universally acceptable basis for the evaluation of human beings, simply because it is consistent with our existing methods of evaluation, and leaves no room for the self-contradictory use of the socially valuable words " good " and " bad " in this important application. On this basis we shall at least know what we are talking about when we discuss the goodness and badness of individuals, and on this basis alone can our judgments have practical value for us collectively.

It must be repeated that there is nothing novel about this standpoint or its application according to the principles of social pragmatism. The extension in recent years of universal-social consciousness, fostered by events which include the rapid development of world communications; the obvious menace to the many of the new possibilities of power-concentration in the hands of the few; and the imaginative response of men's minds to the scientists' promise of a future of universal abundance, has transformed the Utopist's vision of a world in which all men are brothers into a widely accepted goal of endeavour, but, as though with prophetic vision of a time when this long-cherished dream should become a reality, wise men in all parts of the world for ages past have shown by their association of human goodness with benevolence, rather than with pride or courage or cunning or any other quality which may have particular social desirability, their sense of the value of a goodwill which embraces all humanity within its range. And it is for this reason that when anyone except a moralist says that he thinks Roosevelt, for example, was a good man, we feel we understand very well what he means. If, on the other hand, someone should express the view that Hitler was a good man we shall be a little puzzled, and suspect him of being some rather original kind of moralist or theologian, or of being guilty of an arbitrary and rationally impermissible use of the word " good."

As social pragmatists, consistently with our use of " good " in other contexts, we shall call a man good if we regard him as

preponderantly a potential or actual agency of human advantage within the limits of his capabilities, and a bad man we should similarly call a man whom we regard as preponderantly a potential or actual agent of human disadvantage—within the limits of his capabilities.

Yet, in general, the idea of evaluating human beings as we evaluate things and events is distasteful when all is said and done. Why is this?

Perhaps partly because most of us do not ourselves relish the idea of being evaluated in this way and so do not favour the extension of the practice. We mostly prefer to be liked rather than to be judged good, except in our work; that is, as performing a specific social function, and may fear that if people think of us in evaluating terms they may forget to like us. For that kind of warm immediate feeling which does not wait to evaluate; that sense of shared aims and interests, even only of shared *life*, which nearly all of us experience sometimes, remains the surest source of good feeling between one human being and another.

In any case we are surely right to see unhealthiness in social conditions under which the fate of many hangs upon the goodness or badness of the motives in one individual mind. Far better and safer for us if we were able to confine our evaluations of other men within the bounds of the utility-criterion, and so be free to like them as people, which, since we are social animals, it is natural for us to do except where there are positive reasons against it.

CHAPTER VII

SOME EFFECTS OF MORALISM

So far I have criticized moralism mainly on the grounds of its irrationality, and have left aside the question of whether or not it is, on balance, a good or a bad thing. It is, indeed, only from the standpoint of social pragmatism that such a question can significantly and usefully be raised at all, and for the moralist, of course, it is and remains entirely meaningless, since all his ideas of the good and bad are, so he believes, derived exclusively from moralism itself. But if the reader has been able to accept the conclusion that evaluating words such as " good " and " bad," " desirable " and " undesirable " are, and have always been, verbal instruments for communicating ideas about what things we believe are conducive, and what things we believe are inimical, to the satisfaction of human desires, then he will agree that we can use them significantly about anything, including moralism, which has up to now been so very successful in adapting them to its own ends.

If, therefore, we think that moralism is on the whole conducive to human advantage, we shall call it a good thing, and if we think otherwise, we shall call it bad, although, as non-moralists, we shall not pretend that this is anything more, ultimately, than a matter of opinion; one, however, which we may think sufficiently valid to find acceptance by the unprejudiced.

So we can now proceed to a brief evaluation of moralism, by the light of what we know of its social effects.

The children of our culture are taught ideas of moral duty and ethical right and wrong so early by their parents that they accept them at first as unquestioningly as they accept the parents' own claim to absolute wisdom and authority. In a static culture in which the authority of the elders is accepted throughout life as absolute, the conventional moral teaching is seldom or never questioned, but among us the older generation is by no means generally assumed to be wiser and better than the younger.

Therefore, it might be expected that the grip on our society of conventional ethical thinking would be correspondingly weaker. Yet this does not really seem to be the case. It is true that people quite normally reject their parents' politics, their parents' religion, and, along with these, their codes of ethical "ought" and "duty." Sometimes this is simply rebellion, part of a fight for independence in which the independence itself is the main objective and the particular issue merely a pretext; sometimes, on the other hand, there is a real incompatibility of tastes and temperament. In the former case the situation is usually provoked by over-strictness on the parents' part, and then the rebellion may take the extreme form of repudiating on principle *all* morality. And because in most cases of this kind the morality so rigorously enforced was all involved with teaching about good conduct, about truthfulness and honesty and kindness, as well as about duty and self-sacrifice, the rebel is apt, for a time at least, to reject with angry contempt every appeal or inducement to socially good behaviour, and pour impartial scorn on conventional ideas of moral obligation, and conduct-principles of the most obvious expediency. Thus the children of moralists become crooks and ne'er-do-wells and the parents are thus presumably fortified in their conviction that without morality we are no better than the beasts.

Yet to rebel and break the law is not to question the presence of the sovereign upon his throne; on the contrary, it testifies to a strong awareness of his being still there and still powerful, and so the young cynic who proclaims that he does what he likes, and be damned to morality is, whatever he may say to the contrary, still convinced that morality is what keeps the world of order and convention turning, and that he is exceptional in electing to act purely from motives of expediency. Philosophically, therefore, he is no more a social pragmatist than his upright and conscientious parents, and when, as often happens, the pleasure and novelty of rebellion wear off and sobriety comes with the advancing years, and he turns back with relief to the paths of convention and respectability, he may well end up as much a moralist as his fathers were before him. Thus the fact that social rebels are fairly numerous in our culture is not a sign that our thinking about conduct is able to be any more fundamentally rational and objective than that of our primitive tribal ancestors.

But there is another sort of rebel, whose defiance of the ethical code in which he was reared is not the outcome purely of a desire to have done with authority, but manifests itself as an actual disagreement, an emotional or intellectual difference of outlook, finding positive expression in the adoption of a new philosophy of life and a new scheme of values in place of the old. This generally represents an advance in freedom of thought and breadth of outlook so that for the children of Conservatives to become Socialists is more common than the converse phenomenon, and it more often happens that the children of devout parents become atheists than that atheists' children become devout, although of course there are plenty of exceptions to this rule. But, broadly speaking, those who break away, for whatever reason, from the thought-conventions in which they were reared do so in favour of a more liberal code, so that in this process the direction would seem to be away from conventional ethics and towards a more rational outlook. Yet the fact remains that comparatively few people, even among the most intelligently critical and objective, are prepared to unfasten the chain of conventional moralism from their minds. Benevolent, intelligent, and conscious of social interdependence, they still find ethical reasons for doing what they do. Like the earnestly emancipated young intellectuals of the nineteen-twenties deciding that marriage is wicked—" a sin against the Holy Ghost " I have heard it called —they proclaim that their world-view is more *truly* moral than the conventional Christian outlook, and that it is not in sheer frivolity that they attack our most sacred institutions, *but* from a high sense of duty—to God, or History, or Evolution, or something. Such people are ethical heretics, not heathens, with not seldom all the bigotry and conscious righteousness so characteristic of heretics the world over.

Sometimes it seems as though there were no middle path between a sort of social isolationism and nihilism on the one hand, and moralism on the other, a moralism, it may be, which claims to be completely new; the latest thing, as it were, in enlightened, rational ethics, but which none the less accepts as given the fundamental moral dichotomy between doing what one prefers—for whatever reason—to do, and doing what one feels *ought*, in the name of duty and conscience, to be done. This is the more astonishing when one remembers that it is our pride

that we have managed to preserve from the age of Pericles that spirit of critical objectivity which looks, or tries to look, at every accepted system of thought from a detached standpoint; not without predilections of some kind, for that is impossible, but with a readiness to take to pieces and examine, to question and re-assess, which in the field of natural science has enabled us so dramatically to " master our environment."

Up to a point we—that is, some of us—apply the same principle to our thinking about thought-traditions, but with few exceptions, not beyond that point, which is the point at which the figure of Morality stands sentinel, barring the way to further advance along the path of inquiry. And this, to take the allegory a little further, is because she holds before her like a shield the figure of Goodness, and says, "You cannot attack me without injuring her, for we are one." The obvious retort to this would be to take Goodness out of the hands of Morality and see what happens, for indeed we know, if only we reflect, that they are no more inseparable than Morality and the Badness which lurks behind her back; indeed, in a sense a good deal less inseparable, I think.

The very general refusal to dispute the claim of morality in one or other of its multifarious aspects to be the custodian of all that is good in our conduct and desirable in our policies is really not easy to understand, nor why most people are so disinclined to adopt a pragmatic approach to questions of conduct; for to try and account for this merely as the result of early indoctrination with Christian-ethical ideas is to neglect the evidence which goes to show that large numbers of people are perfectly willing to throw over some of the most cherished, most absolutely held certitudes of their childhood. Why then do they cling so tenaciously to this one system of ideas which lacks the obvious attractions of crude religious faith, in making life more colourful or hopeful, and which seems so profoundly unflattering in its implications about human nature?

This question is of crucial importance in any evaluation of ethics from the standpoint of social pragmatism. For supposing it were the case that people " think morally " not because it has never occurred to them to think in any other way, but because they, or at any rate the vast majority, find positive satisfaction in it, or defence against distress which they would suffer lacking the comfort, or reassurance, or the encouragements which it provides,

then even though ethical thinking can be shown to be both irrational in essence and ineffective in producing good conduct, the question remains as to whether it may not in spite of all be a good thing, as having on balance hedonic favourability for mankind. This, of course, is not a matter which can be put to the test and settled once and for all, but it can be inquired into. If we are able to arrive at some understanding, on the one hand, of what agencies are at work making for passive acceptance of a mode of thought which, on all the available evidence, has its roots in the earliest supernatural imaginings of self-conscious man, and dates its present most characteristic form in our culture to the early days of the Christian era, and, on the other hand, what it is that people get, by way of positive spiritual (i.e., non-material) advantage through thinking morally, we shall be in a better position for deciding whether in our view ethics is on balance and on the whole desirable or not.

There are no doubt vast and various advantages, both material and spiritual, accruing to the *purveyors* of moral doctrines. There are plenty of people who love preaching and exhorting, and who are far better equipped to talk uplift than to talk sense, and the readiness of others to react with automatic, if slightly embarrassed, reverence to anything which savours of the *higher* laws of our being, yields them both pleasure and profit. Thus in our culture there is a quite considerable body of persons to whose advantage it is that the minds of our children should be deeply moulded to this way of thinking in their most impressionable years. (Moralists, even when not priests, have this in common with them, that their interest lies in setting a certain hard boundary at some particular point to curiosity and objective inquiry; and it has been found that the most effective method of doing this is not to *forbid* questions, but on the contrary, to appear to encourage them, and then, when they threaten to go too far, gently deride them as "just a little bit silly," causing the sensitive and humble child-mind to shrink back like the touched eye of a snail. So, while it is profitable to teach moralism to the young, a technique has been perfected which makes it very easy.)

And it is not merely the professional moralists who benefit from the prevalence of moral thinking; it is all those whose business it is to sway public opinion, for whatever course of action they want others to adopt they can always find reinforce-

ments for their exhortations in the great arsenal of moral precepts which lies at their disposal. Any kind of action, from the most socially beneficent to the most malignant, can be advocated in terms of duty, or higher duty, or higher duty yet, and in proportion as the people are conditioned to moral thinking they will respond with pious ardour, so long as the action required offers them *some* kind of advantage which they can imaginatively grasp. Every scruple which is felt on grounds of human fellow-feeling, or the fear of retaliation, can, by sufficiently high-toned moral exhortations, be overcome, as has again and again been demonstrated in our history. In such circumstances the benevolent moralist's counter-appeals are like a feeble monotonous grasshopper chirping, drowned in the clash of cymbals and the amplified exhortations of the people's great new personified Conscience. Yet the benevolent moralist may console himself; he can afford to wait, for his turn will come again when the strain of living or dying up to the level demanded by the more exacting moralist becomes too great, and the people are tired and some of them, perhaps, remorseful.

Again, moral thinking, like Christianity, is conducive to humility in the less educated and intelligent members of our society, before those exalted persons who claim to know more about what they ought to do than they know themselves. And so it is customary even for democratic politicians, whether they represent a tiny minority of persons whose interests run counter to those of all the rest of the community, or whether they are genuinely committed to policies for the general improvement of the condition of the people, to fortify the public confidence in them by talking often in the language of "moral" and "immoral," knowing that it pays to do so. The custom of talking moral uplift on solemn occasions—that is, as a rule, when the public are being persuaded to make some special effort for the sake of an object which for some reason or another it is desired they should advance—is particularly convenient for those leaders of the multitude whose motives are of questionable benevolence for it lends them an air of "disinterestedness" as they appeal from their conscience to the public conscience, which makes it seem positively impious to inquire into the reasons for their concern that the public should vote for them, or support their policies, or believe that what they say is true.

All this goes some way to show how it is to the advantage of some people that other people should be morally minded, but it is not an adequate explanation of why those others should so readily accept the assumption underlying all these various teachings and exhortations—namely, that we can make ourselves do what we prefer not to do, and that we are always acting in some sense *better* when we are doing this. Neither our early training in the moral mode of thought nor the assiduity of those in authority to keep us in this state of mental grace can explain how it is that not only the conventional, but also even the most original types of mind submit themselves to the ethical yoke and, moreover, lash out furiously at anybody who offers to relieve them of it.

I think that at least as regards our own brand of moralism, which owes its distinctive character to the Christian religion, the clue is to be found somewhere in the region of the words " self-sacrifice."

I have already mentioned the phenomenon of that almost obsessional resentment evinced by many people when confronted with the standpoint of psychological hedonism, and sought to understand it in part as due to a nostalgic clinging to the sense of being spontaneously guided and looked after which is a part of the mental climate of normal childhood. But this is, as it were, a purely internal reason, the feelings of comfort and reassurance which the sense of being inwardly guided yields is cherished in secret unconfessed, and perhaps even sometimes unacknowledged by the individual to himself. But there is another element in this hatred of the rationally consistent approach to the subject of conduct, and this derives, not from the individual's subjective feelings about his motives so much as from the system of desires associated with what psychologists call the Super-Ego. In other words, it has to do with how the individual wishes to figure in the eyes of other men.

It is one of the most typical conventions of our culture that in order to seem good in the eyes of his fellows anyone, from the humblest to the most exalted, must impress them as being, what no human being in a state of consciousness ever has been or ever can be, namely, disinterested. If " disinterested " means merely not out to make money, then of course it is the case that we are often inspired by other aims than this one, and, on the other hand, if " disinterested " were restricted to mean this alone it would be a

useful and harmless term. But it is not so restricted; it is habitually used in contexts where it stands for the Kantian ideal of complete absence of desire for any experience anticipated from realization of a given aim. "Disinterested" really does imply *in no way* interested, in no way seeking advantage, either material or non-material, from what one does. It is conceded that we often cannot help being "interested," but this is represented by the moralists and their disciples as being rather regrettable, and the Kantian idea prevails that the more "disinterested" in the fullest sense, we were, the better we should be. Complementary to this view is the tendency to regard a "self-sacrificing" action as the most noble and exalted type of action that anyone can perform, and the person who is supposed to be in the habit of performing such actions is by the same token held up to be the most admirable and respect-worthy type of human being.

Now, I am sure it would not be possible to find any single satisfactory explanation to account for the prevalence of this remarkable idea. To say that it is evidently closely bound up with Christianity, which is the official religion of our civilization, is not to account for its persistence among so many who have come to reject the Christian dogma. The difficulty is, with all such deeply emotional, non-rational thought-systems that those who subscribe to them are incapable of understanding or explaining why they do so, and those who do not, lack whatever it is of mental twist or conative prepossession which would make it possible to enter into these feelings even for a moment so as to understand them. I think we must simply accept the fact that along with the universally normal habit of accepting voluntary acts as motivated, as directed either to the realization of positive ends or experiences, or to the avoidance of contra-desired experiences, many people *cannot help* having a feeling sometimes that their actions are neither reflex, nor spontaneous and unreflective, nor yet motivated, positively or negatively, in the normal way, but are in spite of being voluntary, contrary to *every* conative disposition of their minds antecedent to their being performed. Accepting this belief, or feeling, or whatever it may be called, as a fact, without attempting to explain it, we can then observe how it is turned to advantage, cultivated, and exploited, not by hard-headed schemers who take advantage of this weakness in others, which is the least significant thing, but

by those who have it themselves; for here I think we shall come nearest to the secret of why this particular nexus of sub-rational and irrational feelings is so much exalted, so clung-to and indeed almost worshipped, instead of being dismissed, as are others of our more unreasonable feelings, as something to be ashamed of and overcome if possible, but in any case not allowed to interfere with the normal operations of our brains, still less with our conduct of our affairs.

Now, as far as the individual is concerned it would seem that one of the great merits, if not *the* great merit of this belief in what we may for convenience call the motiveless volition, is that it gives us the concept of the self-sacrificing person. It makes it possible to believe that people, or at least some people, are capable of being inspired with a kind of sublime detachment from all the sorts of incentive by which we are normally actuated. The sign of their being in this condition is that they perform acts which benefit other people but do not involve any material advantage for themselves. These acts are called " disinterested," and those who are in the habit of performing them are called disinterested, or even " absolutely disinterested " people, and have a goodness attributed to them which is in a very literal sense not of this world. There is thus a faint aura of mystery and holiness diffused about a person who is seen to be particularly sedulous in doing things for other people, and he is regarded as superior to the common run of men as having a kind of transcendental goodness which is something different from either the goodness of goodwill or of good action, a superadded goodness " better " in some obscure way than either of the other kinds. And yet at the same time it is a goodness of which even the humblest are held to be capable, so that a man without any other kind of distinction, a man neither intelligent nor gifted in any way, can hope to win the esteem of his fellow-men and a reputation for " goodness " by exerting himself on behalf of some cause or other in which his material interests are not involved, whether or not that cause really appears likely to advance the well-being of the people affected. Thus even the most disagreeable, meddlesome, and mischievous persons are respected for their activities, even although the activities themselves may be quite deplorable in their effects, and are called " wonderfully good " and " perfect saints "; and so long as they do not display a too-obvious

appetite for this kind of praise, can throughout their lives enjoy a sense of righteousness and of fundamental superiority, even to the most notable of human benefactors, so long as the latter are known to benefit themselves, as well as other people, by what they do.

But, of course, it is not only the pious busybodies who enjoy this kind of praise. There are many people who, quite obviously one would have supposed, are of such a temperament that they are deeply distressed by the thought of others' sufferings, made happy by the thought of others' happiness, and so genuinely interested in improving the hedonic situation of their fellows that they prefer trying to help other people in some chosen way to any other single activity—they are at the very least as "keen" on this as other people are on painting pictures or on football or gardening. This is a plain matter of observation, and there would seem to be no sort of necessity for invoking ideas of the transcendental and supra-rational in order to account for the existence of such people. Indeed, it seems at first sight rather surprising that there are not more of them about, seeing that we are social beings, so largely dependent upon one another for our survival.

(Nietzsche's desire to apply the law of the "survival of the fittest" in human society shows his crass stupidity in failing to perceive that man has survived through developing not his biceps but his brain, an organism which perhaps more often than not reaches its highest level in a comparatively delicate frame, of a type which would soon be struggled out of existence in a ruthlessly competitive society, with consequences detrimental, if not fatal, to our species. It is clear, however, that Nietzsche's ideal was less a superman than a sub-man; a kind of ferocious gorilla-like being, although inhabiting a superbly strong and beautiful body. A most unattractive conception to the average civilized mind, but one which unfortunately has a considerable appeal for those turned sour by impotence and frustration.)

The outstandingly benevolent individual is a most valuable asset in our society, but he is in all too many cases not content to regard himself as merely this, nor yet to be regarded as merely this. He demands, perhaps mainly because he has been trained to demand, a halo of "disinterestedness," and finds, it often seems, a great subjective satisfaction in the knowledge that others

regard him as essentially different in his well-doing from themselves in their various "interested" occupations; a man inspired and exalted by a sort of mystical *animus* in contemplation of which we must bow our heads in reverence. A friend once told me that an acquaintance of his, well-known for his socially valuable work, had been "simply beside himself with fury" at an article I had written on the theme of "goodness is natural"; because, my friend explained "because, you know, he loves posing as a saint."

Thinking over this remark I found it seemed to explain a great deal of what I had at various times found most puzzling about people's attitude to the proposition that when in a state of consciousness they can never help doing whatever, in the given circumstances, they prefer to do, and that this is just as much the case when they are doing good as when they are doing evil. Why, I used to think, do people so dislike the idea that they can *want* to benefit others? Surely this is one of the most encouraging aspects of our whole situation. Admittedly, in past ages when men had often of necessity to fight one another to the death for their livelihood, freaks of good nature and kindness may have appeared so contrary to self-interest in the material sense, that they called for a supernatural explanation. But now, when it is a truism on the lips of every enlightened person that science has made world-wide co-operation for human advantage not only possible but even essential if we are to survive at all, why cling to ideas derived from the ancient Christian teaching which identifies social goodness with self-sacrifice in the most literal sense?

But here is a reason which even covers the case of the normally more objective and critical sort of mind, the sort of mind that is not in the habit of clinging through sheer inertia to conventional modes of thought: people still "love posing as saints," so much so that even some of the most genuinely beneficent prefer to be regarded as "disinterested" rather than as happy in their work, or at least happier than they would be without it. Yet this is not quite the way of it either. For they *are*, it seems, often ready to concede that they "find happiness in helping others"; only this happiness has to be regarded as an entirely and fundamentally different *kina* of happiness from *all* other kinds; a *holy* kind of happiness which only the saintly, the other-worldly, are capable of enjoying. And yet at the same time each one of us

can (thanks to the grace of God?) wear the halo sometimes for a little while and know that he wears it and that others see him wearing it. And this, I think, is the one great factor to the credit, hedonically-speaking, of moralism.

Not that moralism helps us to be more wise or kind—history affords no evidence that it has worked more in these directions than in the opposite ones—but that, like religion, it gives a complicated and yet most profoundly satisfying little system of secret satisfactions, of consolations and compensations, and is, in some, capable of yielding feelings so elevating and sublime that they are held more precious than any consciousness of being useful to others or of being loved and esteemed as good men are because of their good will and good work. In *this* regard social pragmatists must concede that moralism has positive goodness; to *this* extent it makes for happiness. Yet the price humanity pays for the enjoyment of its distinctive satisfactions we may still think altogether too high.

I have already argued that moralism is inimical to human advantage in one respect at least, i.e., in that it obstructs clear thought and hinders a rational approach to our problems. But it is, of course, still arguable that the good effects of ethical thinking outweigh the bad. Many people would say that clear thinking is not all-important; indeed that it is far less important than good conduct, and that since morality is an effective producer of good conduct, it is on balance desirable. This is a very familiar argument, put forward by those who take it for granted that moralism does lead to good conduct and that anyone who questions this self-evident truth would question anything.

In Part I I dealt mainly with the doctrines of the moral philosophers themselves, and attempted to show the various respects in which their schemes are unsatisfactory both as theories of motive and as guides to conduct. But this is not the whole story; indeed if it were, no great harm would have been done. The moralists would continue to be happily occupied in trying to fit together the pieces of their jig-saw puzzle, occasionally enlivening the proceedings by squabbles in which parts of the pattern laboriously fitted together by one moralist are snatched or pulled to pieces by someone else; but on the whole as contented and harmless as a company of alchemists in the midst

of their crucibles. Unfortunately, however, moralism, far from being an exclusive mystery of the intiated, is a part of the very climate of our culture, so that even the best minds are unaware of the extent to which it affects their thinking, and humbly bow before " mysteries " and " problems " which are really completely chimerical.

During the past few decades thoughtful people have been much concerned over the contrast between the enormous advances which men have made in the control of the material world, and their apparent inability to organize their own affairs intelligently in their own collective interests. The sense of this contrast is often expressed in the saying " Man has learnt to control his environment, but he has not yet learned to control himself," and when the respectful applause has subsided the speaker will go on to rub in the moral that only when we have " learnt " to practise greater control over our spontaneous impulses and to act more from moral motives and less from motives of expediency shall we be in a state to build the kind of world which the majority of us desire to inhabit. Subtly indoctrinated with the idea that the only thing which can prevent humanity from committing mass suicide is the adoption by human beings of policies which are *not* directed to the improvement of their lot, contemporary thinkers toil earnestly to work out principles of conduct which shall enable us to order our lives according to this plan. Taking it as axiomatic that our need is for more and better ethics and less " self-interest," some favour a voluntary retreat from the outposts of our too rapid scientific advance, and a return to some mode of living belonging to the pre-scientific era, although differing considerably among themselves as to how far back we should go; but others, holding this to be impracticable, try to reconcile the moralism they learnt at their mothers' knees with the apparently ineluctable trend of human endeavour in the direction of ever greater mastery of the world of things. But both parties are at one in their refusal to adopt a purely pragmatic approach to our problems, implicitly or explicitly insisting upon the ultimate dichotomy between the ethically " good " and the good; between the universally desirable and the " morally right." At the same time, even the most moral cannot possibly dispense altogether with the argument from expediency, and so all these discussions are rich in the confusions, cross-purposes, self-contra-

dictions and sterile conclusions typical of every excursion, no matter what its starting-point, into the philosophy of " practical ethics."

A striking demonstration of the fatally stultifying effects of trying to stand, as it were, with one foot on terra firma and the other up in the clouds, was contained in a symposium of arguments by eminent contemporary thinkers published during the late war under the title of *Science and Ethics*. The discussion was initiated by Dr. C. H. Waddington, a distinguished scientist and an ardent champion of the ethic of scientific humanism, in an article which was first published in *Nature*.

The book begins and ends with a statement by Dr. Waddington of his views on the function of ethics as a factor in the cosmic process, and the function of science as a factor in the development of ethics, and the rest of the book consists of comments on his theory, and also on one another's views, by various well-known scientists, philosophers, psychologists, and theologians. The discussion is none the less animated because it is not at all times apparent what is being discussed, and if any proof were needed that a debate about ethics will be fruitless unless the debaters first state what they mean by the term, this book would furnish it.

As to what Dr. Waddington himself means by ethics one is simply left to infer it from his many and varied observations on the subject. His purpose, he asserts, is to argue that " ethical judgments are statements of the same kind—having, as logicians would say, the same grammatical structure—as scientific statements," and also to argue that " an ethical judgment is better typified by a statement such as ' You are an animal of such a kind that you must consume 7 mgm. of vitamin C per diem, and should consume 100 mgm.' ; that is to say, by a statement which has scientific significance, than the typical ethical statement ' Thou shalt not kill.' " [1] But nowhere is he able to find any basis for his assertion as to the superior " ethicalness " of the above type of dictum, and indeed, he does not appear to feel the necessity of looking for one. Certainly the statement contained in his summing-up at the end of the book, which comes nearest to giving a definition of ethics, lends no sort of support to the claim of " you are an animal . . ." to be a more representative ethical proposition than " thou shalt not kill." This statement runs :—

[1] *Science and Ethics*, p. 10.

> "For every human being there are some propositions which he considers to be ethical, that is to say, to relate to goodness and badness. The qualities of goodness and badness are recognized as such [sic] and are not identical with any other qualities, such as pleasureableness, desirability, etc."

Now this seems to form a sound basis for definition, and agrees very well with the views of conventional moralists and theologians such as the Dean of St. Paul's, who in this symposium writes :—

> "The moral consciousness regards some (moral ideas) as absolute, and unless it does so the moral life is simply abolished."

Yet elsewhere Dr. Waddington is at pains to trace the origin of all ethical ideas to the *sense of expediency*, as when he writes :—

> "The most primitive relative notions of the good . . . are formed by the interaction of the strivings of the child (motivated by pleasure-pain feelings and physiological drives) with his surroundings. . . . An ethical system is as much an adaptation to the environment as a theory of chemistry. . . . Ethical propositions in fact fundamentally deal with the conditions for social existence."

Wherein then, we may ask, do they differ from the "propositions" of expediency? This objection is voiced by another contributor, Prof. de Burgh, who exclaims :—

> "If 'you ought' is identical with 'you'd jolly well better, and if 'this is good' is only another way of saying 'I find this pleasant' then the moral consciousness is an illusion and a cheat."

Here most people would certainly agree with him, but when he adds to the above "—and the sooner we stop talking about it the better," some may feel that the most effective way to deal with illusions and cheats may be not to stop talking about them but to expose them to objective analysis. However this may be, it is clear that Dr. Waddington, far from regarding ethical ideas as merely one among the many forms of self-deception with which

the human mind from time to time seeks to fortify itself against the sense of its own inadequacy, often sees them as an essential ingredient in the evolutionary scheme of things. Of course, in a sense, every entity, whether physical or psychological, is a factor in the evolutionary process, but what Dr. Waddington seems actually to mean is that ethical systems have the power to help along or retard the evolutionary plan; for he says :—

> " A tendency to evolutionary or development change is a general characteristic of biological entities, including societies, and it is certainly true of Western European civilization that the ethical systems engendered within it are not simply conservative but are among the agents of this change." [1]

Furthermore, if he does *not* mean this, his exhortations to us to develop our ethic in conformity with the findings of science seem to be pointless, and ethics is left at best with the status of a brass band accompanying the march of the Natural Forces and constitutionally incapable of ever playing a false note. Yet again, much of what Dr. Waddington writes *does* seem to boil down to some such conclusion, as when he says :—

> " We must accept the direction of evolution as good simply because it *is* good according to any realist definition of that concept."

This is too much even for the more sympathetic of Dr. Waddington's critics, and exemplary mincemeat is made of this astonishing dictum by Dr. Stebbing and Prof. H. Dingle. But the moralists who emerge with most credit from this discussion are the theologians, and this is because they take their stand firmly upon divine intuition as the basic fact of ethics, with the result that they are able to be far more consistent than Dr. Waddington or any of his sympathizers who try to derive ethical principles from their own inferences as to what evolutionary developments evolution itself approves of.

It is noticeable that with only one exception, all the contributors to this symposium, whether they are clergymen, scientists, psychologists, or Marxists, take it for granted that in some sense

[1] *Science and Ethics.*

or other ethics is a good thing; that we must think and act morally if we are to evolve, or to live at peace with one another, or to behave in the kind of ways in which it is desirable that we should behave. The exception is Dr. G. Burniston Brown, from whose contribution I quote at length, for reasons which will soon be apparent.

He writes:—

> "I am sorry that Dr. Waddington allows the word 'good' to be spelt with a capital, even if only once. The use of a capital letter makes an adjective appear to be a noun, that is, a thing, which has an independent existence, and this leads to endless confusion, such as that involving 'Eternal Values,' etc.
>
> A more serious lapse (especially from one who has written on the scientific attitude) is the lack of definition of the terms used. . . . Now when we consider the subject of ethics we find at once that the words 'good' and 'evil' have never been clearly defined, and consequently the application of scientific method is impossible. Words are, of course, only symbols, and unless we know clearly how they are related to events in our actual lives, that is, their meaning, the use of them in sentences is mere word-spinning and leads only to confusion. As regards the intimate connection between science and ethics. . . . (1) We strive for the greatest mental and bodily well-being, that is, happiness (fact of experience). (2) This is greatest when others are also happy (fact of experience). (3) To achieve (1) we should therefore strive for 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number.' (4) To achieve (3) we require knowledge of facts about the actual world, and what would be the result, or probable results, of given actions in it. (5) This knowledge is most reliably obtained by the exercise of scientific method. (6) In order, therefore, to distinguish between good and bad conduct (good conduct being defined as that which conduces towards the greatest happiness of the greatest number and vice versa), we require knowledge obtained by science. Thus science is intimately connected with ethics." [1]

[1] *Science and Ethics*, pp. 49–50.

It will be seen that Dr. Brown is not any kind of moralist; he is not a Utilitarian, for he contends, not that it is our *duty* to try to increase the sum of human happiness, but that it is in our interests to do so. He is, in fact, if he is anything, a social pragmatist, and what he means by a scientific ethic is not an ethic at all in the normal sense of the term, but simply a principle of universal expediency advocated for no other reason than that in his view it is expedient. That he argues from the standpoint of universal benevolence, although not stated, is evident, for it is not in fact the case that, as he seems to imply, it is a " fact of experience " that the happiness of every individual is in ratio to the happiness of all other individuals. This, from the social pragmatist's point of view, represents an ideal state of affairs *towards* which it is expedient for us to strive, but which is far from being realized as yet, and which is not, indeed, realizable. It may be admitted that Dr. Brown's failure to be clear on this point gives an impression of ambiguity and introduces an unfortunate appearance of arbitrariness into his statement of his position; but for all that his contribution is so challenging in the novelty of its approach, his criticism of the vagueness and absence of definitions in the ethical pontifactions of Waddington so eminently just, that one might have expected it to evoke the liveliest response and give an entirely new turn to the whole discussion. The fact is, however, that although his letter appears less than half-way through the published symposium there is, apart from a brief reply by Waddington in which he calls Brown's standpoint Utilitarian, and says that he, Brown, does not " refute or circumvent the well-known difficulties of the theory," no single reference to it occurs in any of the subsequent contributions either by way of agreement or dissent—it is completely ignored.

It can hardly be supposed that this is really because Dr. Brown's arguments were found so completely unanswerable that the other contributors realized they must ignore them if they were to continue their discussion at all, although that his intervention introduced an inconvenient element of realism and common sense into the debate is very plain. His letter has almost the effect of one of those regrettable " disturbances " in church which are sometimes reported in the press, and which it is customary for the rest of the congregation to pretend not to notice. But I think the ultimate reason why Dr. Brown's challenge was not

taken up seriously by anybody is to be explained by the fact that in a sense it really was completely irrelevant to the rest of the discussion; for he alone of all the eminent thinkers represented had a mind freed from the trammels of moralism, and so he was no more capable of meeting the disputants on their own ground than they were of meeting him on his. He stood alone, a social pragmatist among moralists whose ethical preconceptions were so much a part of their mental make-up that they were literally incapable of finding any interest or significance in a point of view which dispensed with *every* sort of moral preconception.

Now this, I think, is a most significant reflection upon the mental climate in which we live. It suggests that the ethical habit of thought is so deeply ingrained in the minds of our generation that, despite the total lack of evidence that ethics has helped to make men either co-operative in their behaviour or intelligent in the conduct of their affairs, detachment from it is the rarest phenomenon even among people habituated to thinking scientifically in their own fields. Naturally it might be said that the contributors to this symposium must not be taken as a representative cross-section of educated opinion even in our own country. They are all persons particularly interested in ethics or they would not have taken part in the original correspondence in *Nature*; plenty of other equally eminent scientists forbore, and it is safe to infer that some of them did so because the whole angle of approach was alien to their mode of thought and seemed to them irrelevant to the real problems of our time.

That this is probable may be conceded. Yet the fact that no one but Dr. Brown took the trouble to shatter the harmony of the ethical symphony with a discordant blast from the pragmatic trumpet seems at least to show the prevalence of a regrettable attitude of complaisance towards moralism, and a failure on the part of contemporary thinkers to find anything of social significance in the perpetuation by distinguished men and women of the idea that ethics, despite the demonstrable and demonstrated illogicalities inseparable from it, is all we have by way of guidance in our lives as social beings. This indifference reflects, I think, the general dreary acceptance of moralism as being, even if it is not much good, better than nothing; and the assumption that "nothing" is in fact the only alternative to moralism; so wide a gulf is there between theory and practice in a world where all

our institutions are of necessity founded upon, sound or unsound, pragmatic principles.

Universal benevolence is now so widespread among the intelligent and imaginative that the failure of our intelligentsia even to examine the claims of moralism to be an influence for good argues a most dangerous state of mental inertia, above all dismaying as it is reflected in the writings of those best fitted by their exceptional gifts to separate out the rubbish of outworn tradition and semi-barbarous fantasy and superstition which still clutters up the minds of our generation.

It would be absurd to deny that we do, most of us, at times experience irrational feelings of one sort and another, including a sense of being drawn, or compelled, to perform some act which is neither spontaneous nor yet rationally defensible on grounds of its expediency. Sometimes this feeling is experienced as a kind of compulsion from outside, sometimes rather as a stirring of Adam Smith's "little man within the breast"; feelings as odd and unaccountable as the conviction which sometimes seizes us that what we are experiencing now we have experienced, identically in every particular, on some former occasion; as mysterious as our dreams, as irrational as the fears which may assail us when we are alone in the dark, or as the automatic thrill of awe and reverence which some highly civilized persons confess to feeling when suddenly encountering a royal personage, whom they know quite well to be as a human being hopelessly inferior to themselves in every important respect. It is no use pretending that we are altogether rational creatures, or that our minds do not contain all kinds of strange flotsam and jetsam from our individual pasts, and also, it may be, from our racial past as a very different sort of creatures living in circumstances very different from those of our present period and culture. But surely not the least curious—although it is to be hoped, not the most automatic and inevitable—of these unaccountable freaks of our minds, is that so widespread disposition to magnify these infantile or atavistic feelings into intimations of portentous significance and ascribe to some of them an importance far transcending the more normal and useful activities of our brains.

Why should we set a halo on our hallucinations and make humble obeisance to the little madman within our breast? Wallowing in mysteries and the occult is not supposed to be a

fitting activity for civilized people. Granted that mankind has up to now shown a marked tendency to " think ethically " ; this approach to our problems is surely not so innate a part of our mental make-up that we cannot even contemplate the possibility of dispensing with it and relying upon our intelligence, rather than upon our queerer feelings, to cope with the difficulties which beset us.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INDICTMENT OF MORALISM

We have seen—it has been fully demonstrated by the moralists themselves—that it is impossible to make consistent sense of ethics; that duty, moral "good" and "evil," "right" and "wrong" mean so many different things that they mean in effect little or nothing. To this extent we assumed ethics to be a socially bad thing, on the view that confused thinking is undesirable. As to the claim for didactic moralism that it induces people to behave better than they otherwise would, it may be conceded that it probably makes them more *manageable* in many ways, more amenable to that kind of discipline which is necessary for the survival of primitive groups isolated in a hostile environment and without the knowledge or the power to co-operate for the improvement, as distinct from the maintenance, of their conditions. This however, is no argument for the perpetuation of supernatural-ethical thinking in our own culture, or even for its preservation among more primitive peoples as soon as they can be liberated from their material exigencies and taught the advantages of taking part in the adventure of universal co-operation.

On the credit side we have noted that ethical thinking, besides providing unlimited material for fascinating academic discussions, has, like the Christian religion, considerable subjective consolation-value, and that it is capable of contributing greatly to the pleasures of self-esteem. This remains the one considerable and distinctive sort of benefit that moralism is still able to bestow.

Yet, assuming it to be the case that moralism has survived in our culture not simply because it has been found a convenient method for the control of children by adults, and of majorities by minorities, but also because, like the religious mysticism from which it derives, it affords all kinds of subtle palliatives for mental distress, and certain positive spiritual pleasures as well, it by no means follows that moralism is desirable. Probably

a fairly strong case could be made out for the desirability of moral thinking at certain periods in the past, when human misery was often so unavoidable that it was more practical to concentrate upon the pursuit of consolation than to look for relief. Even so, it is arguable that indulgence in these forms of consolation hindered the discovery of practical remedies, making people stupidly resigned to oppression, and humble before those who fattened upon their misery and weakness. In any case, neither view of the matter has much relevance to the circumstances of to-day, which are altogether new in one fundamentally important respect. We can now, without being Utopians, envisage a time in the not-distant future when the material resources of the world will be sufficient to satisfy the primary physical needs of everybody. So much to the credit of science.

Now this means that moralism is already losing one of its chief *raisons d'être*; its value as consolation in the face of miseries felt to be absolutely inevitable, and even the services it could still render as a source of what, for want of a better word, may be called self-satisfaction-feeling are likely to be felt less important when other sources of satisfaction are more easily available for pursuit. If it be true that moralism is not, as against ideas of expediency, effective in influencing human conduct, and if it further appears that the actual usefulness which it has as a consoler and uplifter of the human spirit is likely to progressively decline, the enormous importance which is still attached to it does not seem to be rationally justified, and we can look forward to a time when the curious contorted, sidelong approach to questions of conduct which it involves, will be recognized as anachronistic, as the more queer and cruel of primitive religions are now.

We can: but only if we are sufficiently optimistic to believe that this stage can ever be reached now that ethical thinking has gone so far in its work of destroying our reason with the deadly weapon of the two-edged word. Ethics, as I have tried to show in the preceding pages, is not to be regarded as a kind of transcendental *reinforcement* of our pragmatic evaluations of conduct. This is what the Utilitarians tried to make of it, and their efforts ended in confusion worse confounded. If ethics has *any* distinctive characteristic as a mode of thought, it is that of *cutting across* pragmatic evaluations, of ousting, as it were, or at least attempting to oust, our normal criteria of desirability in

favour of its own different criteria, for which it claims an absolute superiority.

The hall-mark of ethics is the categorical "ought." Sometimes, indeed, it is hidden, but any philosophy of conduct from which it is absent—in which it cannot be revealed by a little probing beneath the surface—is not a moral philosophy. (The question is sometimes raised as to whether the ethics of Aristotle is a true ethic in this sense. For Aristotle's system is set forth in the form of an inquiry as to how the object Happiness can most successfully be obtained, by those few whom he assumes to be capable of grasping it. Yet Aristotle reveals himself, I think, as a true moralist when he sets the mystical ideal of Perfection before us and argues that happiness is to be found only in the process of striving towards it. The pleading is so "special," the refusal to regard anything but this ideal as worthy of pursuit so marked, that the oracular "ought" emerges by itself, as it were, through the interstices in the argument. And so I think Aristotle is rather to be seen as one of the earliest progenitors of utilitarian ethics, than as the hedonist which moralists of the austerer type are apt to regard him.)

Morality, then, is fundamentally antagonistic to expediency, and only manifests itself, indeed only exists, as a system of thought by its implicit or explicit affirmation that other principles than those of expediency can be and "ought to be" practised. (Kant, however, was not even at all sure that they *could* be practised, although this did not affect his view that they *ought* to be.)

This we must understand if we are to appreciate the distinctive role played by ethics in human thought:—Ethical "good" and "bad," whatever they may be, are not the same as pragmatic good and bad; they are not hedonic sympathy-words but are used to usurp their place and impair their function.

What are the fundamental propositions of ethics concerning behaviour? First, that non-expedient action is more meritorious than expedient action. Secondly—suddenly appropriating without acknowledgments the expediency-assumption that co-operation is better than conflict—that without moral principles socially-good, i.e., co-operative, conduct would be impossible. Thirdly—a point particularly stressed in the ethics derived from the Christian religion—that kind actions are moral actions and that without morality there could be no kindness.

Now these propositions are hardly ever stated in so many words; if they were, there would be a strong reaction on the part of most normal people against their evident absurdity and their insulting implications about the human mind and the human heart. Stated, they would be the death of ethics. Implied, creeping about among our thoughts and drawing sustenance from our difficulties and indecisions, they thrive, and moralism thrives with them, at our expense. Ethical thinking follows its own complicated and erratic course, trailing across the lines of pragmatic judgment, confusing issues, darkening counsel. It is desirable to recognize this and to understand how it comes about that we submit to this discipline, and it is desirable to consider the probable consequences for humanity of continuing in thrall to this elaborate system of mental and volitional stultification.

The mycelium of moralism is introduced into the immature mind by means of precepts employing the categorical " ought "; reinforced by overt or implied threats and promises, as " you ought always to speak the truth "; " you ought not to be selfish," etc. The idea of moral duty, to parents, to God, and to other people is continually rubbed in and the emphasis laid upon the incompatibility between doing what one desires to do and doing what is Right. This is an ingredient of all our education, sometimes strongly and sometimes only lightly stressed, and often, oddly, alongside the teaching that it is not even really advantageous to be altogether " selfish " and never bother at all about other people's interests. But this is presented as a secondary consideration, and is apt to be received with scepticism by those whose first introduction to the idea of considerate behaviour has been in the form of moral precepts about " duty " with all its disagreeable self-frustrating implications. In this way the minds of children are well prepared to respond in later life to the exhortations of their intellectual leaders when they proclaim that it is our moral duty to succour the unfortunate, and to sacrifice our own advantage for the sake of upholding the principles of duty and obligation as between man and man.

To respond, but as might be expected, not in the way of impelling them to perform the acts and pursue the policies which are represented as being so truly unselfish. Naturally enough, to any but those who suffer from the form of obsession known to psychologists as " masochism," the idea that performing some

particular action is inexpedient or at least non-expedient seems the best of reasons for not performing it. It is not even as though only our own personal interests were involved; we have our families to consider. How can we help caring more about what becomes of them than about the interests of strangers? Or we love our country. Granted that it is our duty to be unselfish in our foreign policy, how *can* we be so when it means sacrificing some measure of our national good for the sake of a pack of foreigners we have never even met? We are a moral nation, of course, but you really can't expect us to be as moral as all that. "Charity begins at home"; that's human nature. Such is the inevitable normal response to exhortations which seem to bear implicit testimony to the ultimate eternal irreconcilability of benefiting ourselves with benefiting others. And because the necessary effect of all this great pressure of suggestion is to make us feel that it is a law of nature that "*their*" gain is "*our*" loss, and vice versa, we are taught, and many of us believe, that only the most absolute, the most sublime and completely impossible self-forgetfulness will enable our species to survive upon the earth. That we need more and ever more morality, more Christian teaching in our schools, more other-worldliness to save the world.

This state of hysterical near-despair, which has now invaded the minds of innumerable benevolent and imaginative people, admirably suits the caste of priests and mystery-men, who were dismayed at the decline in their influence during the brief period of shallow optimism, based upon a reckless confidence in the automatically beneficent operation of a few so-called economic laws, which prevailed among the more fortunate classes three-quarters of a century ago. "We told you what would happen," they say impartially to everybody; "you see now what comes of being selfish. And yet you *still* harden your hearts, you *still* refuse to face the truth, the simple and yet profound truth that it is only by *complete* renunciation of *all* self-interested motives . . ." etc., etc.

To our hard-headed business-men this line of talk is not at all unacceptable; everybody enjoys a good cry now and then; moreover, as a tiny minority who owe their exceptionally fortunate circumstances to a failure on the part of other people to act upon rationally thought-out principles of expediency, they

are, many of them, not insensible of their debt to moralism, and are assiduous in fostering it in the most practical ways, giving generously to the support of churches and Sunday schools; while the political parties which represent their interests insist upon more religious teaching for our children, more broadcasting by religious propagandists, and so forth. And they get their way. For the others dare not appear, in the morally conditioned minds of the public, as anti-religious-bad, unmoral-bad. They must be " good " Christians and " good " moralists or nobody will have confidence in the integrity of their motives.

So ethics thrives upon the mental disorder and the fatal thought-muddle which it has itself created, rotting-away at our desirability-concepts, and making us despair, not of our world of things, but of ourselves. Truly moralism exacts no mean payment for the little personal consolations it affords us.

This above all we must understand if we are to appreciate the role played by ethics in our society. Moral thinking is the parasite of pragmatic thinking, that kind of thinking which nobody, not even the most implacable moralist, can dispense with, so that to pretend that moralism performs a necessary function in regulating our conduct as social beings is as though we had pretended that the function of those balloons which floated so comfortingly over our cities during the recent war, was to hold up the world. Whatever may be the function of ethics it is not to give us higher or better values, for the source of all our values is in our volitional systems; nor to make us more socially minded, nor to make us more benevolent than we should otherwise be. It can do none of these things, but by pretending to do all of them it confuses our values, corrupts our thinking on social issues, and makes love and kindliness appear the most unnatural, indeed the most supernatural, of all our incentives.

" But—but, without ethics, without moral guidance, how could people be induced to behave themselves? Granted that there are a few exceptional individuals who are *naturally* well-behaved, how do the ordinary sort of people behave when moral restraints are removed? They lie and cheat and bully the weak; that is a fact of human nature which only the crassest sentimentality makes it possible to ignore."

Now, to anybody but a moralist it would surely be apparent that people with a disposition to lie and cheat and bully are

restrained, when they *are* restrained, from indulging these proclivities, not by moral precepts, but by the controls which self-regarding society imposes, and the penalties it inflicts. Also, and this applies particularly to children, they may be educated into seeing unsocial activities in a new light as being in themselves less pleasurable and more hedonically precarious than other less unsocial sorts of behaviour. *Teaching* can influence conduct by imparting fresh knowledge of the relevant facts, *reasoning* can do the same by bringing together known facts in fresh juxtapositions. (" Don't you see that as *this* is the case, and *that* is the case, what you are doing is likely to lead to so-and-so? ") But telling a burglar, for example, even in the most exalted language, that it is morally wrong to steal cannot possibly alter his behaviour because this is neither to tell him anything new, nor to show him his conduct in any new relation. He knows already that stealing is frowned upon as " wrong " by the society to which he belongs. Either he disagrees with society's verdict, in which case he will remain uninfluenced by a statement of an opinion he does not share, or else, quite probably, he agrees that it is morally wrong to steal, in which case evidently the sense of wrongdoing does not constitute for him an effective motive-force, and cannot be transformed into one by a restatement of that which he already believes.

So it is also in the case of that type of individual who far more than the burglar benefits at the expense of his fellows, by inflicting cruelties upon them, exploiting them for his material advantage or using them as the tools of his personal ambition. Such a man is not to be converted by preaching; he is, so to speak, already in possession of all the facts concerning his own conduct. He knows that he inflicts suffering and exploits others for his ends, and he does these things either because he directly relishes these activities, or because he finds them advantageous for specific ends.

The late George Lansbury paid a visit to Hitler a few years before the war. We do not know exactly what passed between them at that interview, but Mr. Lansbury returned to England satisfied that by talking to Hitler in a spirit of Christian goodwill and expressing exemplary sentiments about the brotherhood of man, he had influenced him in the direction of giving up his ambition to dominate the world. Perhaps there were not very

many people even then who thought this could have been actually decisive, but many were convinced that Mr. Lansbury's method was the right one, and that the best hope for peace lay in a widespread preaching of the Christian message, interpreted as one of co-operation by all men for the improvement of the world.

But Hitler, naturally, had heard all that before. He was undoubtedly familiar with all the main features of the Gospel story—may indeed have believed it, for all we know—and was also aware of the Christian doctrine that God is love and that we are his children. Only it happened that he was not interested. He did not allow the fact that many people subscribe to these ideas to affect his actions or deflect him from his chosen course. Why should he? Brotherly love can hold no appeal except for those to whom the idea of brotherly love appeals.

There are, it is true, some few well-authenticated cases of the phenomenon known as sudden conversion: the blinding light, the agony of remorse, followed by a complete change in behaviour. Psychology has been able to reveal something about the underlying forces which cause such spiritual crises, and it can safely be said that only a very exceptional combination of predetermining factors already at work in the mind can produce such an effect, which is more of the nature of an explosive release of tension than a sudden volitional reorientation. In any case, such results are seldom produced by preaching. For preaching must always be sterile. The most it can do as a rule is to produce a state of temporary exaltation, fizzling out as soon as action is called for.

Experience shows, and common sense affirms, that the only effective way to deal with the confirmed anti-social elements in our society is to penalize their activities, or to alter the conditions under which they are able to flourish at other people's expense.

As for all the rest—whose chief defects are ignorance, indifference, self-mistrust, others-mistrust, and general mental and spiritual debility—we shall never know what their innate intelligence and goodness can achieve until their minds are liberated from the suffocating grip of moralism. What have we to put in its place? Nothing really new. Nothing which has not been there all the time.

CHAPTER IX

TRUTH

By now it must be sufficiently clear that social pragmatism has very little affinity with the school of thought called pragmatism, whose best-known exponent was William James, and whose main subject-matter is Truth. At the same time, I believe that social pragmatism too has some slight contribution to make to this subject.

I think the best way to approach the question here will be to briefly analyse and discuss James's thesis and then show wherein the social-pragmatic view of truth differs from it. This procedure will also reveal the essential differences and similarities between the two systems.

James's theory of truth is based on a conative assumption, the assumption, namely, that we believe that which, for one reason or another, we find it useful, or satisfying, to believe in. The one comprehensive " reason " that we have for believing in anything is, James thinks, that it enables us, or *may* enable us, to act expediently. Because of his dictum, " An idea is true so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives," James has been freely denounced as the supreme apologist of " wishful thinking." To what extent is this charge justified?

At least as regards one aspect of his theory of truth it is clear that it is completely unjustified. James continually reiterates that what he calls " true ideas," i.e., ideas which we can " assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify," are true because they correspond with the facts of life.

[1] I hesitated as to whether this chapter should properly be included in this study, since its subject-matter, Truth, has no very close connection with questions of conduct. My excuse for including it after all is, firstly, my belief that our social consciousness does influence our life-view over a wider field than is apt to be supposed—wide enough to include ideas about truth—and, secondly, my view that there is a practical sense in which our notion of conduct affects our notion of truth.

> " The importance to human life of having true beliefs about matters of fact is a thing too notorious. We live in a world of realities that can be infinitely useful or infinitely harmful. Ideas that tell us which of them to expect count as the true ideas in all this primary sphere of verification, and the pursuit of such ideas is a primary human duty." [1]

(The word " duty " suggests that James is a moralist, but in fact this word as he uses it never means anything in particular, and can be ignored, as also the word " obligation " as he uses it. In one place, for example, he says, " our obligation to seek truth is part of our general obligation to do what pays.")

James continues :—

> " (Since) almost any object may some day become temporarily important, the advantage of having a general stock of *extra* truths, of ideas that shall be true of merely possible situations is obvious. We store such extra truths away in our memories, and with the overflow we fill our books of reference. Whenever such an extra truth becomes practically relevant to one of our emergencies, it passes from cold-storage to do work in the world and our belief in it grows active. You can say of it then either that ' it is useful because it is true ' or that ' it is true because it is useful.' Both these phrases mean exactly the same thing, namely, that here is an idea that gets fulfilled and can be verified. True is the name for whatever starts the verification-process, useful is the name for its completed function in experience."

James, it will be seen, is an uncompromising realist, and essentially his contention about truth here is that the word " truth " stands for the system of beliefs which enables us usefully to deal with objective reality. What is distinctive about this is the emphasis upon the utility-element in our beliefs, and a great deal of angry controversy over James's pragmatism could have been avoided if people had noticed that in the passage just quoted James outspokenly advocates the accumulation of a stock of " ideas that shall be true of merely *possible* situations," in fact of theories, on the grounds that we can never tell whether they may not one day be practically useful to us. In other words,

[1] Wm. James, *Pragmatism* (1907), pp. 202–03.

ideas are true which are not only *actually* but *potentially* useful, and it follows that since the only test for the potential usefulness of an idea is whether or not it can be " married "—to use James's own expression—to the ideas we have already assimilated, very little seems so far to emerge from pragmatism in its didactic aspect but a plea for sound theory based upon previous experience.

It will be seen that James's contention is not that ideas are never " true " until they have proved to be practically useful, *even* if " practically useful " means " enabling us to *think* as well as *act* expediently." For, " Ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience "; i.e., with other *ideas* as well as with external experiences in the empirical world. Thus the usefulness of an idea is allowed to inhere in its being consistent with ideas already accepted as true.

James adds :—

> " Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily . . . is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true *instrumentally*." [1]

As he has just said that " ideas are themselves but parts of our experience " it follows that any idea is true which " carries us prosperously " among our other ideas, in other words, which seems to us to fit together rationally with what we already accept as true; and it will seem to *be* true if it corresponds with the " world of realities " in which we live.

But now we find that in addition to this kind of truth there is, according to James, another—namely, that which an idea can possess by virtue of the fact that it is *satisfying* in a purely conative sense. I think it is actually correct to accuse James of arguing to the conclusion that any idea which is *preponderantly* pleasant is for that reason a *true* idea, although I do not think he wished his argument to lead to this conclusion.

Very often, admittedly, the only inference from an observation of James's about " truth " and " the true " is that he considers that the *sine qua non* for the truth of an idea is that it should be actually or potentially useful in the practical sense, i.e., that it

[1] James, op. cit.

should enable us to *act* expediently. In one place, for example, he says of pragmatism that "her general notion of truth (is of) something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment of our experience may lead us towards other moments it will be worth while to have been led to," and continues, "Primarily and on the common-sense level, the truth of a state of mind means this function of *a leading that is worth while*." [1]

The italics are James's, and they seem intended to emphasize his view of truth as identical with practical usefulness, or at least potential practical usefulness, in an idea. But elsewhere James writes of truth as *essentially* the property in an idea of being satisfying to the one entertaining it. The concept of this kind of truth divorced from *practical* utility is in fact latent in all James's statements about truth in ideas or theories or beliefs (he uses the words "idea," "theory," and "belief" more or less interchangeably). It is of the essence of his argument that that idea *is* true which helps us to "get into satisfactory relations with" those other parts of our experience which are our existing *ideas*.

Now this means, inescapably, that an idea may be true, as subjectively satisfying, and yet lack all practical utility, for until we have put a theory to the test of experience we cannot tell whether it has practical utility or not, although we may feel very confident that it has, and find it completely satisfying while we are entertaining it.

For example, a woman may believe—or, if we prefer it, tell herself—that there is a haddock in her larder. She believes this because she remembers buying it that morning and putting it there. This was, at a given stage in her life-experience, a *new* opinion acquired, we may concede, in one of the ways in which James says that we do acquire new, and true, opinions:—

> "The process here is always the same. The individual has a stock of old opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain. Somebody contradicts them, or in a reflective moment he discovers that they contradict each other, or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible, or desires arise in him which they cease to satisfy. The result is an inward trouble to which his mind till then had been a stranger, and from which he

[1] James, op. cit., pp. 204–05.

> seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. He saves as much of it as he can, for in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives. So he tries to change first this opinion, and then that (for they resist change very variously), until at last some new idea comes up which he can graft upon the ancient stock with a minimum of disturbance of the latter, some idea that mediates between the stock and the new experience and runs them into one another most felicitously and expediently."

It is pretty evident that what James had in mind when he wrote this passage was new scientific opinions and not opinions such as the belief of a woman that there is a haddock in her larder, but this is a perfectly fair example to take since James has already in another place endorsed the view of Messrs. Dewey and Schiller that " ' truth ' in our ideas and beliefs means the same thing that it means in science." [1]

So we have this woman entertaining to her entire satisfaction the new opinion that there is a haddock in her larder, which belief, by James's definition, fulfils all the conditions for its being true. She continues in this opinion—for nothing has occurred to upset it—until, say, 7.30 that evening. Then she opens the larder door and finds to her complete surprise that the haddock is not there. Thus she acquires a *new* opinion which contradicts the former. Or rather she acquires *two* new opinions. Firstly, that there is *no* haddock in her larder; secondly, that her opinion that it *was* there was—at least during the period of time when she was in earshot of the larder as she went to fetch it—an erroneous opinion. Now this opinion of hers that her former opinion was erroneous, or " untrue," has exactly as much claim to validity, i.e., to " truth " according to James's account of the matter, as had her previous opinion that the haddock was there, *up to the very moment* that the new opinion that it was *not* there, supervened. We seem to be getting into very deep water, and in pure compassion we must hope that the woman herself is not a Jamesian pragmatist; for then she will have to believe that her belief that the haddock was still there was true for just so long as she was entertaining it, and at the same time believe that her belief that the haddock was there was untrue, is exactly equally true.

[1] James, op. cit., p. 58.

Now this way of looking at things seems to me the very reverse of pragmatic, if only because it entirely does away with that most useful distinction which we are in the habit of making between the sound and the unsound in beliefs and between the true and the untrue in statements. If James had only stuck to his definition of truth as what we *say* about additions to our experience—" Day follows day and its contents are simply added (to our previous experience). . . . The new contents are not true, they simply *come* and *are*. Truth is *what we say about them*, and when we say that they have come, truth is satisfied by the plain additive formula "—then we should have some consistent notion of what he is using the words " true " and " truth " to stand for. For in this context truth means something like " accurate verbal description by the experiencer of his experience," and its antithesis, falsehood, would be " inaccurate verbal description . . . etc."

This is not very satisfactory, admittedly, for what is " accurate " and " inaccurate "? Words are not labels already attached to experiences but only symbols, and sometimes we feel, inadequate symbols, for them.

However, I think the idea of truth is of very little value except as attached to the idea of a *statement*, whether made to ourselves, as when a new experience enters our mind and becomes significant through its association with the mind's existing content, so that we say to ourselves in effect, " that is the case," or, " that may be the case," or when made to somebody else. For this reason I think it is better not to apply the term " true " to *beliefs*, at least in any context which applies it also to statements. For a belief is not a statement; it is a state of mind produced by a statement in the above sense, and as a state of mind it is " neither true nor false, it simply comes and is."

Can we properly speak of a true *theory*? A theory we may define as a formulated belief, a stated belief which is invariably in the form, " I believe that such and such is " or " may be " " the case." Now such a statement, made subjectively, is certainly, in a sense, *always* true. But to say this is to say no more than that whatever belief we are entertaining we always are entertaining it. In what other sense, then, can a theory be said to be true, using " true " as the antithesis of " false "? We might perhaps, accepting the Jamesian terminology, say that a theory in the form

" such and such may be the case " *was* " true " after we have verified it, i.e., had experience which convinces us that its content stood for that which was *in fact* the case, but at the moment of conviction the theory ceases to be. It becomes transformed into a conviction, i.e., a sense of *knowing*.

Similarly if we entertain a theory, put it to the test, and find that its content did not represent that which was the case, and so acquire a conviction which contradicts the theory, we might then say in a loose way that it was " false." Yet regarded as a *statement* a subjectively held theory cannot even be regarded as *having been* false if " false " is the antithesis of " true "; since in its form as " I think so-and-so " it would still have to be seen by us as having been true at the time. If I have a feeling which I express to myself as "I think that may be the case"—or equally, of course, "I think that is the case"—well, I *do* think so—at the time.

We can only judge our own theories as " true " or " false " *retrospectively*. For this reason it is usual to apply other terms than " true " and " false " to theories in order to convey the idea that they are respectively likely, or unlikely, to be transformable into convictions, and speak of them as " sound " and " unsound." Now, every *theory* at the time of being entertained is regarded by the person entertaining it as a *sound* theory. Thus the terms " sound " and " unsound " applied to theories at the time of their being entertained only have significance in judgments passed by *someone other than the person entertaining the theory*. It is the same with judgments of truth or falseness concerning statements. The only kind of statement which we may significantly affirm, at the time of its being stated, to be true as the opposite of false or false as the opposite of true is a *statement in the form of a communication from mind to mind*. A statement of this kind we may judge either to be false or to be true, even as we make it, or as we " receive " it.

What is meant by a true statement in this social sense? Evidently it does not mean a statement which is believed to be true by the person making it, nor yet one which its hearer believes to be true, for we may say that a statement which was made in the belief that it was false was in fact true, and we may also say that a statement which the hearer believes to be false is in fact true. Similarly in the case of statements we call false. We

may say of a statement that its speaker believed it to be true and that yet it was false, and also of a statement that its hearer believed to be true, that it is false. Moreover we may say of a statement which both speaker and hearer believe to be true that it is false, and conversely.

I think it is perfectly evident that the significance of a statement that a statement is true, or that it is false, can be nothing but *universal social* significance.

To say that a statement is true is to say, minimally, that one believes it. To say that a statement is false is to say, minimally, that one disbelieves it. (It does not, of course, follow that one really *does* believe it or disbelieve it as the case may be.) The invariable specific meaning that the statement " that statement is true " conveys from one mind to another is " I believe that statement," and the converse " I disbelieve that statement." Yet to say " that statement is true " (or " untrue ") is evidently not the *same* as saying " I believe (or " disbelieve ") that statement." The idea of the speaker's belief (or disbelief) is *contained in* every judgment of truth or untruth about a statement, but it is not the *whole* meaning; for if I say of a statement that it is true, I imply that as well as believing it myself I believe that *other people* would believe it too if they knew everything that I know about the subject-matter of the statement.

The difference between saying " I believe " or " disbelieve " that statement, and saying " that statement is true " or " untrue " is closely analagous to the difference between saying "I like (or dislike) that" and saying " that is good " (or bad).[1] The first kind of statement is *personal*, the second, *social*.

Now it appears to me that there are two causes, one *a priori* and one conative, for our taking notice of, and being influenced in our conduct by, statements of belief and disbelief, and they are the same causes for our taking notice of, and being influenced by, statements as to *any* matters of internal or external experience. Firstly, there is our assumption that the words or signs which other people use are symbols for experiences corresponding to those of our own experiences for which we use the same or similar communication-symbols, and secondly, our assumption that *in general* what other people say or sign to us is the outcome of a *desire* on their part to convey to us by means of those symbols the ideas (that is, the mental experiences), which they believe us to

be capable of sharing with them. (I will not go into the obvious difficulties of finding an accurate definition of what we mean by " sharing " experiences. For present purposes it is enough to say that I use " sharing " roughly in the sense in which two people, similarly educated and of similar tastes, listening to the same radio programme may be said to be sharing an experience.)

Now, to believe that something *is* the case is to have that feeling which we call " knowing," and our aim in telling somebody that it is the case is to make him know it too, in other words, to share our experience of knowing. This is something we habitually desire to do, and it is essential for most kinds of co-operation. This then is the pragmatic value of true statements, and the value of the term " true " as applied to statements is that it helps us to express to one another our sense of the difference we all perceive between a statement which makes us know something (by " us " I mean anybody assumed to be capable of getting knowledge from the statement), and a statement which *prevents* us from knowing something, which is a false statement. This I believe to be the essential basis of our workaday ideas of the true and the false as applied to statements in the form of communications.

James, by trying, in opposition to those who talk in large vague terms about " The True " and " Absolute Truth," to make truth something *relative*, got himself into the position of arguing in effect that any belief is " true " if somebody believes it, which made it necessary for him to leave the case of conflicting beliefs —the entertaining simultaneously by different people of incompatible beliefs—out of his analysis and out of his reckoning. This is what happens when one tries to apply the term " true " to things other than statements.

And this unfortunate procedure had even more remarkable consequences; for James, loyally sticking to his view of " truth " as something purely subjective, found himself arguing that the belief of transcendentalists in the Absolute is just as " true " as any other belief, so long as they really and truly believe it. And so long, of course, he hastens to add, remembering his pragmatism, as it really does them good to believe it.

> " (So) far as (the Absolute) affords (religious) comfort, it surely is not sterile, it has that amount of value, it performs

> a concrete function. As a good Pragmatist, I myself ought to call the Absolute true 'in so far forth,' then; and I unhesitatingly now do so. But what does *true in so far forth* mean in this case? To answer, we need only apply the pragmatic method. What do believers in the Absolute mean by saying that it affords them comfort? They mean that since in the Absolute finite evil is 'overruled' already, we may, therefore, whenever we wish, treat the temporal as if it were potentially the eternal, be sure that we can trust its outcome, and, without sin, dismiss our fear and drop the worry of our finite responsibility."

I should certainly not care to be so dogmatic as James about what people mean when they say that "the Absolute" affords them comfort; but in any case this is surely not the point. What James has said here, and no qualifying addendum can make it more rationally acceptable, is, in effect, that the Absolute "is true" *because* people believe in its existence. No other sense at all can be made of his remarks, and his going on to explain that people believe in the Absolute because it affords them a particular sort of comfort is to do nothing else but try to justify his ascription of "truth" to this belief on the grounds that it is hedonically favourable to the believer. Since he has already argued that we *can* only believe what it satisfies us to believe, this pretty well amounts to saying that whatever anybody believes at any time is true. True *in so far forth*, James would add, but since he never tells us what is true *not* "in so far forth," and indeed in many places implies that in-so-far-forthness is an attribute of *every* kind of truth, the qualifying phrase neither adds anything to nor subtracts anything from the initial statement.

A more perfectly useless conception of truth than James's it would be hard to conceive, and yet it is abundantly clear that his chief motive was to rescue the idea of truth from the hands of the transcendentalists, who, he perceives, make complete nonsense of it. How then was it possible that James should pull Truth out of the frying pan of transcendentalism, only to drop it into the fire of his so unpragmatical pragmatism? He wished to do something useful by way of idea-clarification; why did he so signally fail?

Ultimately, I think, he failed because he never understood the

social function of words, nor that the word "truth," like any other word, is of supreme value as the servant of the human desire to communicate ideas. If there is universal agreement as to the meaning of a word by all who use it, then it is a useful word, the best possible kind of word; but if a word is used by different people to stand for different concepts, or by the same people at various times to stand for various concepts, then it is not merely a less useful word, but it has the tendency to become as it were cancerous, spreading its corrupting influence through our language and so damaging our chief medium of communication. From the social point of view the only criterion for a word's value, its only claim to existence, is its ability to stand as a symbol for an idea assumed to be shareable; that is, in effect, that *is* shareable, if shareability in ideas is accepted as a significant concept. Through his failure to make his pragmatism *social* James failed even to make it pragmatic. Because his system lacked the one unifying concept of the desire of human beings to co-operate in their thinking, he was unable to see any reason for contending that it is better, or preferable, or more desirable, to use a word in one sense than to use it in another, or indeed in half-a-dozen different senses. And by failing to confine the use of the word "true" to statements, he obliterated the practically valuable distinction between the present true and the present false. Nor is it possible to find anywhere in his scheme any social criterion of evaluation for the true and the false.

Why criticize him for this? Simply because he calls his system "pragmatism," implying that it is practical, i.e., that it can help people in general to determine how to act expediently; and yet, by neglecting to put forward any principles of desirability in this matter of truth, fails to carry out the promise implicit in his title. Pragmatically speaking it is of the utmost importance that words should be used consistently, because of the universal assumption that it is on the whole desirable that human beings should be able to co-operate. Given this assumption, we can argue consistently from the standpoint of social pragmatism about the utility of particular words according to whether we think they stand consistently for shareable concepts.

From the idea of words as instruments for the co-ordination of thoughts the notions of true and false statements fall into place as concepts relating to co-operative communication on the one

hand, and non-co-operative communication on the other. Thus from the standpoint of universal benevolence, which is the conative basis of social pragmatism, true statements are good and false statements are bad; a view which is all but universally accepted anyway, but which can now be significantly affirmed without once invoking the equivocal assistance of moralism, which James ever and again found it necessary to do in the attempt to fill up the gaps in his argument.

CHAPTER X

LIBERTY

MOST writers on liberty, including J. S. Mill, have been inclined to lay the emphasis on its negative side, as freedom from constraint, representing liberty as a good thing because constraint is a bad thing. To the social pragmatist, however, as also to the common man, the concept of liberty involves more than the idea of merely not being impelled to do what is painful for fear that worse should befall. It suggests being able to do positively pleasant things, and it is this aspect of liberty which has caused it to be often so closely associated with the idea of happiness, not merely with that of relative non-unhappiness.

As a definition of liberty which covers both its negative and positive aspects I have given *scope for effective choosing*. Then we should say that the state of relative liberty is the state of being relatively able to choose effectively between experiences seen as potentially possible for us, and that it is in ratio to our ability to experience whatever we may want to experience. Thus we should judge that a well-fed tramp has more physical liberty than a well-fed slave; that a historian in a democratic country has more mental liberty than his counterpart in a totalitarian State, and that a rich man in a world in which money is able to buy a great number of tangible and intangible benefits not otherwise obtainable, has more liberty than a poor man in the same environment; assuming in each case, of course, that there are not other factors extraneous to the characteristic circumstances of the people in question—e.g., immobility through lameness of the tramp—which abnormally restrict or expand their scope for effective choosing.

By the above definition, everybody in a state of consciousness has a certain minimum of liberty—at the worst he can "think his own thoughts"—but in circumstances in which this is about all he can do he will invariably wish to extend his liberty—will wish he were "freer."

There seem to be two main reasons why liberty is so generally regarded as a positively good thing. First, that whereas constraint beyond a certain point is inseparable from distress, the utmost possible liberty is not, but is on the contrary invariably associated with satisfaction, even if only of a precarious kind. The second reason is that all through the ages down to the present day the majority of human beings have been so situated that they could act less in the pursuit of positively desired experience than in the attempt to avoid contra-desired experience. Thus the expansion of liberty for them meant the possibility of enjoying a much greater amount of positive satisfaction-feeling.

The standpoint of social pragmatism in regard to liberty at the present time can be stated very briefly. A degree of liberty such that choice is exercisable between "goods," i.e., between liked experiences, more often than between "evils," i.e., disliked experiences, is desirable [1] for everybody. Thus *more* liberty is desirable for everybody whose circumstances are such that in general he can choose only between "evils." Since it is a matter of observation that the majority of people in the world at the present time are so situated—we can compare their state with that of the minority who are not—we say that it is universally desirable that the majority of people should have more liberty. This is the standpoint of social pragmatism, and of the humane individual. It should be noticed that it is also one of the acid tests of benevolence. Those who, while aware of existing world conditions, desire that the scope for effective choosing of the majority should be yet further restricted or maintained at its present degree, are malevolent, unless indeed, they sincerely hold the belief, rationally untenable in the light of human experience, that people in general more often choose to do what is hedonically unfavourable for them than otherwise. Since it is a basic assumption of social pragmatism that the hedonic situation of humanity can be improved by the agency of its units, no social pragmatist can subscribe to the above view.

Before going on to discuss the practical implications of the view that it is desirable that the majority of people should have more liberty, we must briefly consider the main conditions under which liberty is, and is not, desired, and is, and is not, desirable.

[1] The reader is particularly asked to bear in mind while reading this chapter the definitions contained in Chapter III, Part II.

To say that more liberty is desirable for a person is not necessarily to say that we think he preponderantly desires it. He may desire particular experiences for the sake of which he is prepared to submit to curtailment of his liberty. Yet this is probably not so often the case as might be supposed. Often a man who joins the army, or enters a monastery, and says that he is " tired of liberty " is either confused as to his own motives, or else is using the word " liberty " in a very restricted sense. For if we question him it will probably turn out that what he was tired of was not liberty but constraint, e.g., the constraint belonging to material want, the inability to eat when one wants to eat, go where one wants to go, in short, lead the kind of life one wants to lead. In such circumstances somebody may be very ready to forgo some imaginary " liberty " in order to enjoy the immediate increase of real scope for effective choosing involved in getting enough to eat, having a little money to spend, and, if his tastes lie in that direction, the opportunity to restrict the liberty of others, a taste which the experience of frustration is very apt to engender.

The idea that the state of being under constraint is often desired *per se* is due to confused ideas about the nature of its opposite. (This is encouraged by the promiscuous use of the word " freedom," which has so many and dubious applications. It is because the word " liberty " is used less widely and vaguely than " freedom " that I have followed J. S. Mill in taking it to stand for the opposite of constraint.) As relative scope for effective choosing, relative liberty is almost always preferred to relative constraint, for the feeling of being able to do what one positively desires to do is better than the feeling of being able only to do something as a mere alternative to doing something even more distasteful, and relatively greater liberty is, except in rare circumstances, always preferred to relatively less. By " rare circumstances " I mean to cover those cases in which the individual has reason to fear that he will exercise his liberty in ways unfavourable to himself. An example would be a dipsomaniac who chooses to stay longer in an asylum because of his fear that he is not yet cured.

There are naturally plenty of cases of a person willingly and knowingly sacrificing liberty; but this is *not* because he prefers constraint, but because only by submitting to it can he have some

particular experience whose value to him is even greater than his existing state of relative liberty. For example, a man might sell himself into slavery so as to have access to a female slave with whom he wants to associate, and another man might sell himself into slavery for the sake of money to buy food for his children. We may assume that enslavement in both cases represented a definite curtailment of liberty; that is, that the man's condition of life before selling himself really gave him more scope for effective choosing than he would have as a slave, and that he knew this. The only way to interpret these two actions in conative terms is to say that the desire to have one particular experience—in the one man's case that of being with the female slave, and in the other's that of knowing that his children have enough to eat—was felt more strongly than the desire of each to continue in his existing state of relative liberty. This conforms with the accepted view that certain things can be more precious than *even* liberty, which carries the implication, however, that liberty is very precious.

Now, even if we assume that in the given circumstances each of the men in the above examples was *in fact* acting expediently in selling himself, we should still say from the standpoint of benevolence, as distinct from any ethical standpoint, that the circumstances which determined his act were bad ones. We should say that it would have been better if he had been able to get the experience he so greatly desired without having to sacrifice so much liberty for it. This would mean that we were subscribing to the common view that loss of liberty is in general undesirable, even though in certain cases it may be a " necessary evil." From the standpoint of universal benevolence the *only* circumstances in which a person can have too much liberty are those in which the result of his having liberty of a given degree is either that he harms, or is likely to harm, either himself or others.

To regard anyone's more-liberty as more desirable for him than his less-liberty we should, of course, have to be assuming that he would use it on the whole to his advantage, but that we do assume this about the majority of people is shown simply by the fact that we do as a rule regard relatively great liberty as on the whole good (as something to be " enjoyed," not " endured "). This view is based on the experience of mankind that people who have more liberty are mostly happier or less unhappy than those

who have less. Thus we should say that although greater liberty may in some cases be undesirable, it is in general and on the whole desirable for anybody in ratio to his desire for it.

This, however, has not always been the view of even the most distinguished champions of liberty. Mill, for example, who like all Liberals of his day believed in Progress as something almost intrinsically good, and good for everybody, held that coercion—the restriction by men of other men's liberty—may be justified in the interests of "progress." He says:—

> "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end. Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when we have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion." [1]

As so often with Mill, it is not easy to tell whether he supposed himself to be enunciating an ethical or a hedonic principle. If "barbarians" are happy as they are, there would seem to be no justification, benevolently-speaking, for interfering with them unless they are menacing, or actually impairing, the liberty of non-barbarians. If they are, then hedonically speaking there is the same justification for coercing them as for coercing anybody else who uses his liberty to coerce other people, the justification, namely, that their activities have universal hedonic unfavourability. So why treat barbarians as a special case? In fact, if "barbarians" means the members of static cultures not in process of "improvement" in Mill's sense, the majority were, as now, living more or less contentedly under greater active despotism than the members of our own culture at the time at which Mill wrote. So one would have thought that if anything the interfering-benevolent would have regarded them as positively in need of *more* liberty. Of course, if their "improvement" means their being made more like ourselves and this is assumed to be the best thing that could possibly happen to them, any amount of coercion might be desirable for them in order to raise them to that blessed state. All this involves a good many arbitrary assumptions to which social pragmatists could scarcely subscribe.

[1] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*.

I don't think the simple utilitarian principle that it is desirable for everybody to have as much liberty as he wants, provided he does not use it to restrict the liberty of others, is altogether defensible, because it is possible to use liberty in ways that do not necessarily involve restricting other people's and which are yet harmful—unless indeed we are prepared to argue that every kind of harmful action is in a sense a restriction of liberty—and I think this is rather sophistic. The main harm of such acts as adulterating food or selling worthless medicines, or encouraging gambling, is not that liberty is thereby restricted but that preponderant distress is thereby caused, although admittedly it can be argued that one result of these activities is likely to be a restriction of liberty somewhere. It seems, on the whole, most consistent to say that from a humane standpoint more liberty, if desired, is always more desirable than less liberty unless it will lead to preponderant distress, and that in the latter case more liberty is undesirable, whether or not it results in less liberty. On this view we should judge that the liberty of a baby to crawl over the edge of a cliff is undesirable because it is likely to lead to preponderant distress, increasing, though only minutely, the sum of human unhappiness; similarly with the liberty of a homicidal maniac or a professional swindler or a lover of war.

If increased liberty for the majority is desirable, then, benevolently speaking, it is of cardinal importance that they themselves should be convinced, firstly, that it *is* desirable, and secondly, that it is possible.

It is unfortunately the case that although liberty in the abstract is widely believed to be a good thing, there are circumstances in which it is very easy to represent it as being both a snare and a delusion. Undoubtedly we often misuse the degree of liberty we have, choose unwisely and repent at leisure, and in these circumstances there are always plenty of propagandists at hand to lay the blame for us upon the liberty itself, and obscure the fact that our mistakes are not in ratio to our liberty, but are due to the ignorance and stupidity which lead us to make inexpedient use of it. In this way the nostalgic longing for guidance—not the same thing, however, as a longing for constraint *per se*—which disappointment and fear are always apt to evoke, are skilfully cultivated by those who for one reason or another are the enemies

of others' liberty. And so the would-be dictator gets his opportunity.

But the trouble is that our latter-day despots are seldom inspired by love such as leads the better sort of parents to exercise a necessary minimum of control over their children, in full respect for their individuality and with the aim of preparing them for a life of independence and the intelligent exercise of choice. The dictator is not like that. As a man he cannot but feel contempt for those who willingly deliver themselves over to mental and spiritual bondage, both the scared and self-effacing majority and the chosen few who jerk and prance about like puppets, and squawk out the catchwords he has wound them up to utter; and as he is an individual with an abnormal taste for domination it is unlikely that anything short of a Paulian conversion will cause him to relax his hold. Moreover, since any attempt on the people's part at self-liberation must necessarily constitute some form of menace to himself, his tendency will always be towards a progressive tightening of control, so that by the time that the agreeable sense of being looked after has become transformed into the less agreeable sense of being permanently held down, it may be too late to do anything about it. However, the wise dictator can be trusted to find an outlet, in race-persecution or in war, for the aggressive feelings which the sense of frustration engenders in his people, allowing them at least the liberty to restrict that of others. A dangerous form of liberty, however, and liable to sudden curtailment, if no worse.

Everything that can be done by way of convincing people of the drawbacks and dangers of submissiveness is all to the good, but it is not enough. Even if we were content that people should merely continue to enjoy the degree of liberty they have now it would not be enough; for even if they should be convinced, fear and despondency beyond a certain point might always make them feel that the risks are worth taking, since things can in any case hardly be worse. So if we desire, for whatever reason, that the liberty of the majority should be increased up to the point at which effective choosing is mainly positive, which means in effect, up to the point at which they actually enjoy life, then it is essential to convince them that an all-round increase of liberty is both desirable and feasible.

In the past there were many benevolent people who thought it

best that the majority should despair of ever being materially better-off. They could be benevolent and yet think that, because it seemed all too evident that for all but a few, any experience of tolerable comfort must be so brief and transitory that it could only intensify by contrast the inevitable wretchedness of their habitual state. Therefore it was thought better that they should not hope, but be resigned to the pain and frustration which was their earthly portion, and find what comfort they could in hopes of compensation for their sufferings in the Hereafter. This doctrine of despair was based on the assumption that God or Nature had decreed that most people should suffer continually from the lack of means to satisfy their material wants, an assumption so widespread that the idea that human volition could take hold of the world and compel it to furnish everybody with the means to a materially satisfying life was, even if now and then tentatively advanced, too far-fetched even to be worth denouncing for its impiety. Physical and mental submissiveness were then the prime virtues, and, for anybody living under just tolerable conditions, probably represented the safest attitude.

It should hardly be necessary to point out that things have changed since those days. . . . And yet it *is* necessary, because the implications of these changes are not grasped by one person in a thousand. And this is perhaps not so very surprising. That "man now controls his environment" is parroted everywhere, but if "man" means "nearly everybody" or even "a majority of people" the saying is mockery. What has really happened is that an exceptionally gifted few, first moved by curiosity and creativeness and then driven on by the rapacity of their masters, have, as it were by accident, made possible conditions under which for the first time in recorded history, men are presented with feasible alternatives to mutual conflict under any foreseeable conditions, for the improvement of their lot. That this development has been accompanied by a vast increase in the number of material means to satisfaction is of little significance, so long as only a tiny minority throughout the world are in a position to enjoy them. There have always been a few who led relatively luxurious lives, and a multitude who envied them; in this respect things have not changed very much on a world view. But the *potentialities* in our situation have changed out of all knowledge, and it is this fact which demands a new outlook and a new

attitude of men both towards themselves individually and towards one another.

For the best human advantage to be taken of the new situation it is first of all necessary that people should feel that they *can* take advantage of it, and secondly, should realize that methods for making the best of an inevitably bad state of affairs are not appropriate for taking advantage of a potentially good state of affairs. Above all, a new attitude towards liberty is called for, since now for the first time increased liberty for the majority is not only desirable but demonstrably attainable, in the sense that all purely material obstacles to its attainment are in process of being overcome. They are not likely to attain it however unless they themselves see it as so desirable that they are ready to struggle for it themselves, for by all the signs of our time it is no more likely to be bestowed upon them than ever it was.

" Freedom," writes the American philosopher, John Dewey, " can be had only as individuals participate in winning it." Dewey, like other intelligent observers of the human scene, is struck by the fact that increased human mastery over material things has not been accompanied, as might have been expected, by a general increase of liberty; but he does not make the mistake, so widely propagated by A. Huxley and other contemporary pessimists and misanthropes, of ascribing this to some kind of law of human nature which causes men to become " the slaves of their own machines."

There is so much emotionalism and loose talk about this whole matter that it is often difficult to say whether the phrase about men becoming slaves of machines is simply meant as a picturesque way of calling attention to the fact that machine-tending and using call for less initiative than say, farming or handicraft, and at the same time expressing the opinion that this is a pity, or whether those who use this phrase have really been beguiled by their own metaphor into thinking of " the machine " as a kind of monster whose essential food is human liberty. If we are to speak of the machine in this symbolical way, then it would be truest to say that the machine has given some kinds of liberty to some people while taking away from them some other kinds of liberty and left them on the whole with less liberty than before; that it has done the same for some other people and left them with more liberty than before; that it has taken away liberty

from some other people and given them none in return; that it has given increased liberty to some other people and taken away none; and, finally, that for the great majority throughout the world its effects have been negligible either in the matter of giving or taking away liberty.

But, after all, this machine talk represents a superficial and not very helpful way of looking at the present state of mankind as contrasted with its earlier state. The significant fact, significant alike for human liberty and the human hedonic situation in general, is that now the means to the satisfaction of material needs can be progressively multiplied. This means that the human material environment can be made to yield the wherewithal for increased liberty for the majority of human beings.

It can be, but only if they, the majority, realize that it can be, and are not side-tracked by pessimism, moralism, or any other anachronistic mode of thought. That is the first essential. The second is that they should understand the necessity for co-operation in working to bring about the conditions for their greater liberty. The third is that they should awake to the nature of the forces that are opposed to the extension of their liberty, and, indeed, to their retaining even the degree of liberty they at present enjoy.

The magnificent slogan, "Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains," miraculously expresses the sense of all that is most essential to a successful struggle for liberty, and tracing the various factors that combined in a few short years to reduce it to mockery is a bitter task for the historian of Socialism. Largely, perhaps, it is a story of ignorance and stupidity in the rank and file, and treachery and timidity in their leaders, but it is also a story of muddled aims and confusing ideologies which prevented the "workers" from seeing that their ultimate interest was not to throw off any one particular set of chains, but individually to develop such mental muscles that they could defend themselves effectively against the future attempts of anybody whatsoever to bind them again. In short, they never learnt that *mental* liberty, the scope to discuss, criticize, select, and reject principles and policies on grounds of expediency, is not only the necessary safeguard for such social liberty as one already enjoys, but the one secure basis for any effort to extend it. That on certain issues the majority among the majority must

have their way; that the judgment of scientific experts in their own fields must be deferred to in order that things shall be done properly, are matters which all but the most stupid, or ideologically befuddled, can be brought to understand, and there is not the slightest danger in the acceptance of such working principles so long as the preservation and extension of liberty continues the constant aim and the ultimate criterion to which each separate issue in the campaign is related. . . . If only this, too, is seen *exclusively* as a matter of collective *expediency*.

For, once liberty in the abstract is set up to be worshipped, regarded as something Good or Beautiful or Right intrinsically, having an importance transcending that which it bears as a condition for human happiness, then Transcendentalism creeps in again with its armful of chains, and the last state may be worse than the first.

Always the religious or quasi-religious attitude is full of danger; even though it may lend the additional power of fanaticism to straightforward motives, the price in clarity of mind and directness of motive is far, far too high, as past human history amply and tragically testifies.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

As Mr. Leonard Woolf once complained, a writer has only to put forward a plea for a more rational approach to human problems and he will infallibly be rebuked on the grounds that people are not rational, but the very reverse. To which the spontaneous retort is "You're telling me!"

In fact, of course, the reason why Dr. Stebbing, for example, bothered to write that admirable little book *Thinking to Some Purpose* was that she believed that while muddled thinking is common, most people are capable to a greater or lesser extent of thinking rationally; that in many cases they can learn to think more rationally than they do; and that it is desirable they should. My purpose in writing this book has been to argue for a more rational approach to one particular subject—namely, conduct, about which, as it appears to me, there is a most undesirable amount of confusion, and my belief that any such attempt is not necessarily futile is based on the observation that most of us do, from time to time, think straightforwardly and reasonably about our own and other people's conduct.

It is the extension of the common-sense attitude towards conduct for which I have been pleading, and not any "new approach" except in so far as there would be novelty in the consistent and exclusive application of common-sense thinking over the whole of this vitally important field.

Exclusive of what? The answer is in the preceding pages. Exclusive of the most confused and futile and stultifying system of thought it would be possible to devise. Indeed, it might be better to say, impossible to devise: at least it is certain that nobody in fact did devise it. For it is simply an age-long accumulation, a conglomeration of muddles piled up into one vast rubbish heap of tangled concepts and out-worn consolation-fictions, blocking the path to human happiness. It was this oppressive vision of ethics as an obstructive rubbish-heap which led me to write this

study in the pragmatic approach to problems of conduct, which will give such deep offence even to some of the best kinds of people.

Certainly it is no part of my purpose to offend any but the malevolent, and if others also should be annoyed it will I think be due rather to my clumsy or faulty exposition of my case than to anything inherent in the philosophy of social pragmatism. For genuine benevolence, whether due to warm-hearted sympathy with the sufferings and the happiness of people, or to a realistic appreciation of the present state of human affairs, its perils and potentialities, can have no reasonable quarrel with the proposal to discard ethical principles in favour of principles of expediency. Quite the contrary. For every word uttered in deprecation of acting expediently is in effect a word in favour of preserving conditions under which inter-human conflict is recognized as inevitable; for if to act expediently is to do harm, man is the natural enemy of man, and the hedonic situation of humanity as a whole can never be improved. Bishop Butler wrote:—

> "The thing to be lamented is, not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough; but that they have so little to the good of others. And this seems plainly owing to their being so much engaged in the gratification of particular passions unfriendly to benevolence, and which happen to be most prevalent in them, much more than to self-love. . . . Upon the whole, if the generality of mankind were to cultivate within themselves the principle of self-love; if they were to accustom themselves often to sit down and consider what was the greatest happiness they were capable of attaining for themselves in this life, and if self-love were so strong and prevalent as that they would uniformly pursue this their supposed chief temporal good without being diverted from it by any particular passion, it would manifestly prevent numberless follies and vices."

Among the "particular passions" that it is expedient to control I would include, as Butler does not, the "passion"—who can doubt its strength?—to take refuge from life's problems in a Paradox-Land of Great Simple Truths and transcendental

mysteries, where self-sacrifice is salvation, and happiness is unhappiness, where duty is true-self-interest, and self-interest is damnation, and nothing is what it is called.

The time is past when these elaborate fantasies could be justified from a humane standpoint. We are now faced with a situation in which clear thinking on vital matters, not by a few philosophical and scientific experts, but by the majority of people in the world, seems the only hope for human survival, or, which is more important to most of us, human happiness.

There is as much misery in the world now as there ever was, but at least we can hope, as the Early Christians could not, that there is a way out from the Vale of Tears on the hither side of the grave. We have most of us noticed that the pit is this side anyway, and that it is big enough to swallow us all. We live in an age of universal fear, but it could be one of universal hope as well—rational hope based on confidence, not in our stars, but in ourselves. We shall find it only if we learn to respect our minds —that unique contribution to the scheme of things.

Faith in the existence of a transcendent purpose is very consoling, so much so that, as with Butler, the finest minds have willingly sacrificed their integrity for its sake. It is for them to choose, but at least do not let us accept them at their own valuation as necessarily a better sort of people than those others who have come to dispense with this particular kind of spiritual sustenance, and above all, do not let us give them the right to force their fantasies on uncritical and immature minds. For just to the extent that average men believe in the power of a Will more potent than human will-power, they will tend to be, not inactive necessarily, nor even fatalistic, but ductile, uncritical, and unintelligent; in every way fitted to become the tools of the power-seekers in their campaigns against one another.

If we are to control our own destinies, we must, I think, refuse to go on pretending that we know of any purpose in the universe save our own, and stand firmly aloof from the present-day transcendentalists' desperate business of inventing new gods and grafting new attributes on to old ones. The idea of a universally benevolent deity is not, to put it mildly, substantiated by experience; but that *men* can have universal benevolence we know. For it to be effective we need to bring forward in consciousness and apply to our greatest as to our least problems,

those existing, widely shared ideas of the good and the bad, the desirable and the undesirable, the expedient and the inexpedient, with which we now regulate our day-to-day activities; for in their simplest, most vital applications they are valid for humanity as a whole.

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