

# Thread Pages

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

**OU\_152565**

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

# IDEALS AND ILLUSIONS

*By*

L. SUSAN STEBBING

*Author of *Philosophy and the Physicists* ;  
*Thinking to Some Purpose*, etc.*

LONDON:

WATTS & CO.,

5 & 6 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4

*First published 1941*

CHECKED 1956

TO  
H. GAVIN



## PREFACE

DURING the last twenty-five years many of us in this country have become, for the first time, uneasily aware of failure in our national life; in the last ten years some of us have felt ashamed. We realize that we have failed, but we do not quite know wherein exactly we have failed.

At the opening of the twentieth century it may well have seemed likely that a new century of hope had begun. In fact, in no other century have so many human beings—men, women, and children—suffered pain, anguish of heart, bitterness of spirit, despair, and unnecessary death. Paradoxes abound. The technical advances in science have created a world of plenty; yet, in peacetime and in war, millions are under-nourished, thousands starve. Never before in the history of the world has there been so deep, so widespread, and so articulate a hatred of war; yet for the second time in less than thirty years the greater part of the civilized world is at war, and these wars are more bloody, more devastating, and more destructive of the things we value than had ever been the case before. Millions of human beings are subjected to tyrannous and stupid dictatorship; yet there has been a growing awareness that without freedom no society is worthy of men.

None of us can rightly disclaim responsibility for the evils that beset us; it is as a community that we have failed, but the character of a community depends on the characters of the men and women who compose it. There

are many causes that could correctly be cited to account for this profound failure. In this book I am concerned almost entirely with one only of these causes—our unwillingness to make definite to ourselves what it is we believe to be worth the seeking. The world to-day is in discordance with our desires. What is it that we desire, or, to use a popular expression, what do we believe to be the ends for which it is worth while to live?

To answer this question fully would be to make explicit our ideal. This means that we should have set clearly before our minds what it is we most deeply desire, the attaining of which would bring us inward peace—that is, happiness. In my opinion our most urgent need to-day is to know clearly what are the things that belong to our happiness. To know this is to begin to formulate a way of life. Some seem to desire power above all, power over other men to be used as means to the attaining of still more power over more and more human beings. This is a self-defeating ideal; the seeker after power cannot attain a state in which he can enjoy the contemplation of what he has; always he must be seeking more of the same kind, so that he does not experience the joy of resting in what he has. This joy is the mark of love—of love of persons, of art, of any good thing; it is known to the poet and artist, to the mystic and the scholar, and to the lover; it is withheld from the tyrant and the man whose heart is wholly set on making money and yet more money.

I do not think that anyone has a right to speak dogmatically for others in the matter of ideals. Accordingly, discussion concerning ideals is bound to be unpleasantly personal. It is unpleasant for the hearer because the speaker must keep saying “I”, “I”; it is unpleasant for the speaker because he must reveal his heart’s desire

and thus make manifest the manner of man he is; he must say what he really thinks and not be afraid of his own futilities. This personal aspect cannot be avoided. In writing this book, therefore, I have not been able to take refuge in the agreeable anonymity of "we". I have thought myself to be justified at times in saying "we believe this" or "we desire that", because I, you, they, are all human beings alive together, having many common experiences, sharing certain fundamental attitudes. I recognize, however, that there is some danger in this use of *we*. The danger vanishes whenever the author and the reader can definitely specify the group of persons for whom *we* stands. I have tried to make such specification possible.

One thing only I wish to assert dogmatically (and to myself I justify this dogmatism by whispering "I *know* I am right about this!"): we need to be definite. For too long we have been content to drift, perhaps believing that our civilization is Christian and so will work out "quite nicely", or perhaps believing that the achievements of science will of themselves lead us to an earthly paradise. Comforting creeds and platitudinous phrases are accepted without any hard thinking with regard to the way in which they bear upon the definite situations in which we are called upon to act. As soon as we begin to ask definite questions about "our civilization", and begin to examine true answers to these questions, then surely we cannot fail to notice the disparity between our hopes and our professions and what we have in fact achieved. Personally I get impatient, or disheartened, when I listen to vague exhortations to improve our world, platitudinous abstractions masquerading as statements of ideals. I leave this sentence deliberately without an example of such platitudinous abstractions,

for the sentence is itself designed to serve as an example of this annoying vice. I am convinced that to think in abstractions, when one's concern is moral philosophy, is to fail as a philosopher. Not to be abstract is difficult; moreover, definite specification takes time (in speaking) or space (in writing). In reading the proofs of this book I saw that I had failed, even more badly than I had realized when writing it, to be definite enough. I have failed partly from lack of space; still more, from lack of thinking coherently and definitely enough.

My advice to myself as well as to others is : *Be definite*. To formulate one's ideals is not to set out a string of maxims; it is to answer questions of the form : *What is worth having in such and such specifiable circumstances?* Who is to be the subject of these questions? Morality concerns actions : *my* actions, *your* actions, *their* actions; and it starts from *my* actions. Accordingly, in writing this book, I—the author—have had to use “I” and “you” (in the singular) to stand for a *definite* person, although not, as a rule, a specified person. But in writing this book I, the author, have sometimes to speak *in propria persona*. Accordingly the reader will find a double use of the word “I”; sometimes “I” stands for Susan Stebbing, sometimes “I” stands for any one definite person taken to be situated in the circumstances that are indicated. I have tried to make clear when this usage occurs. There is no reason to fear that you, who are reading this now, will not have understood the reference of “I” in the two preceding sentences.

In order to be definite it is not necessary to say all that could be said and would be the better for the saying. Definiteness is not the same as completeness. Our lives are not rounded wholes; we have diverse interests, various desires, divergent and even conflicting needs;

we grow and change in the growing; our circumstances change, and we change with them. Our duty, as I see it, is to find out what we hold to be worth seeking at all costs, to know clearly what it is we are in fact seeking, and to discover whether there be any way of remoulding this sorry scheme of things so that it be nearer to our heart's desire. This is a task that has constantly to be undertaken afresh. I believe that we shall fail in this task unless we are willing to think steadily; we shall also fail if we wholly lack any tenderness towards the traditions of our past—the wisdom handed down to us by men who were ignorant of the marvels of science, but not of the delight of loving and being loved.

I have read and thought much about the topics dealt with in this book. I do not know exactly what are my obligations to other writers beyond those whom I have cited in the text. I have learnt much from discussions with my friends at home and with my students of many generations, and with students of other departments than my own at Bedford College. I am especially indebted to one old student, my friend Miss F. Eddy, whose letters and conversation have helped to set me thinking. I have not been able to avoid serious blunders. As is one's philosophy, so is one's way of life.

L. SUSAN STEBBING.

*Tintagel,*  
*April, 1941.*



# CONTENTS

| CHAP.                                        | PAGE |
|----------------------------------------------|------|
| I. IDEALS AND UTOPIAS . . . . .              | 1    |
| II. "MATERIALISM IS NOT ENOUGH" . . . . .    | 24   |
| III. THE NEED FOR REFLECTION . . . . .       | 44   |
| IV. "THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS" . . . . .     | 52   |
| V. "WHILE ROME IS BURNING" . . . . .         | 79   |
| VI. "WE WILL BUILD A BETTER WORLD" . . . . . | 101  |
| VII. CONFLICTING IDEALS . . . . .            | 125  |
| VIII. SPEAKING PLAINLY . . . . .             | 153  |
| IX. THE LAST ILLUSION . . . . .              | 180  |
| SUMMARY BY WAY OF EPILOGUE . . . . .         | 201  |



## CHAPTER I

### IDEALS AND UTOPIAS

“The quality of greatness does not consist in having weaker passions or greater virtues than ordinary men, but in being inspired by nobler aims.”—La Rochefoucauld.

“THE intellect, the judgment are in abeyance. Life is running turbid and full; and it is no marvel that reason, after vainly supposing that it ruled the world, should abdicate as gracefully as possible, when the world is so obviously the sport of cruder powers—vested interests, tribal passions, stock sentiments, and chance majorities. Having no responsibility laid upon it, reason has become irresponsible.” These words, written by Prof. Santayana in 1913, in an essay, “The Intellectual Temper of the Age”, are applicable to-day. Naturally enough he had no prevision of the war that was so soon to follow the publication of his essay, nor of the hopes that were to be born during it, only to be followed by so bitter a disillusionment. We, wise after the event, can discern in Santayana’s diagnosis of the characteristics manifested in the first decade of this century some of the factors that have led to the contemporary situation. “A chief characteristic of the situation”, Santayana wrote, “is that moral confusion is not limited to the world at large, always the scene of profound conflicts, but that it has penetrated to the mind and heart of the average individual.” Since the book, *Winds of Doctrine*, in which this essay is published, has long been out of print, I make no apology for quoting

at some length. How, he asked, "shall we satisfy ourselves now whether, for instance, Christianity is holding its own? Who can tell what vagary or what compromise may not be calling itself Christianity? A bishop may be a modernist, a chemist may be a mystical theologian, a psychologist may be a believer in ghosts. For science, too, which had promised to supply a new and solid foundation for philosophy, has allowed philosophy rather to undermine its foundation, and is seen eating its own words, through the mouths of some of its accredited spokesmen, and reducing itself to something utterly conventional and insecure." The last twenty years have but given greater point to this comment. No industrious searching of the correspondence columns of *The Times* is needed to reveal how often a bishop or higher dignitary of the church, and other prominent Christians, have sprung to the defence of things as they are, finding in the conception of "my station and its duties" an adequate guide to human action. Distinguished scientists have been proud to insist that at the heart of the universe unreason rules and have most curiously found hope in the chant of unreason.

Further, "Nationality", said Santayana, "offers another occasion for strange moral confusion. It had seemed that an age that was levelling and connecting all nations, an age whose real achievements were of international application, was destined to establish the solidarity of mankind as a sort of axiom." "But even here," he goes on to say, "black men and yellow men are generally excluded; and in higher circles, where history, literature, and political ambition dominate men's minds, nationalism has become of late an omnivorous all-permeating passion." To-day it is no longer necessary to enlarge upon this theme. We are but too familiar with the disastrous consequences of a rampant nationalism combined with the

pursuit of autarky (or national self-sufficiency in economic matters), adopted primarily for the sake of being prepared for war. Consequently, we have seen the principle of nationality—which inspired Mazzini and provided the foundation for the liberal movements of the nineteenth century—first degraded and then replaced by the bogus concept of racial purity invoked in the interests of world-domination by a nation that sees itself as “the superior race”.

It is not my purpose to add still another to the numerous discussions of our present disasters, nor to attempt any diagnosis of the diseases that are bringing about the collapse of our civilization and the present triumph of barbarism. I can but echo Santayana, that in the arts, in religion, and in philosophy, “we are still in full career towards disintegration”. To this judgment, made in 1913, the subsequent years have but added an emphatic postscript. Santayana was able to end on a note of hope : “the spirit is not dead in the lull between its seasons of steady blowing. Who knows which of them may not gather force presently and carry the mind of the coming age steadily before it ? ” To-day we with difficulty share this hope. It is not necessary here to repeat the oft-told tale of human miseries, of misuse of our intellectual powers, and of our failure to appropriate the goods that nature and science could so copiously provide. We are living in a period of agonizing strain, of grave anxieties, and of manifold disillusionment. Cause for despair is not lacking. Nevertheless, I share Santayana’s hope.

To have had high hopes, then to be disillusioned by the outcome of events, to be profoundly dissatisfied with our actual circumstances—these are experiences that usually lead us to form ideals and even provide us with some motive enabling us fitfully to hold them fast. We

could not be disillusioned had we not been previously hopeful; we could not be anxious unless there were something upon which our hearts were set; we could not know the meaning of despair had we no hopes for ourselves, or for our country, or for mankind. So negative an attitude as dissatisfaction, so crippling an emotion as despair, could not, however, suffice to make us formulate an ideal worth pursuing. It is not given to the merely fretful and despairing spirit to separate what is fine in his wishful dreams from what is crudely selfish, nor to make definite what was but vaguely conceived, rejecting what is inconsistent. I know this of my own experience. Who does not? When personal unhappiness, or even a more disinterested despair of this world, pervades our souls, we may dream dreams of a better world; yet if these dreams were realized we might well, in a calmer moment, be surprised by their triviality and incompleteness. Spiritual vigour and hard thinking are needed for discerning an ideal better than the actual state of affairs and not remote from the conditions of human life.

I have not hesitated to use the word *ideal*. No doubt it is a dangerous word to use, for we are often confused as to what it means. I use "ideal" in the way in which it is used in such sentences as the following: "Norway is an ideal place for a holiday"; "This is the *Ideal Homes* Exhibition"; "The ideal of Liberalism is out of date"; "Practice falls short of the ideal." As thus used "ideal" does not *mean* "imaginary"; it does not connote *non-actual*. That is to say, it would not be a contradiction in terms to say "The ideal has been realized", even though we have good reason for believing that this could never be truthfully asserted. What is common to these usages is the implication of something *worth having*. "Ideal", then, is to be taken to mean something worth having.

But in saying "So-and-so is worth having" we very easily pass to "This *would be* worth having", with the implication "But it can't be had". I repeat, however, that this implication is not part of the meaning of the word "ideal" in all contexts.<sup>1</sup> It is essential to emphasize this because sensible people are sometimes seriously misled owing to their confused use of the word "ideal". We are confused in the usage of a word when we pass from one usage to another without noticing that the usages are in fact different. In the case of "ideal", confusion is very easy because there is a cognate word "idealist" which is properly used in quite different senses which nevertheless have a common root. In this chapter we are not concerned with the use of "idealist" to denote someone who holds a certain metaphysical doctrine, but in the next chapter we shall see that the metaphysician's use of the terms "Idealism" and "Idealist" has also been confused by implications drawn from the usages which we are now discussing.

When in the affairs of life we call a man an "idealist" we ordinarily mean that he is influenced in his actions by *ideals*—that is, by his conception of what it is worth while to achieve, or to attempt to achieve. Often our ideals are not clearly thought out; we neglect some of the conditions in which they have to be realized. Accordingly, we come to think of an idealist as one who seeks to realize what is not in fact realizable. But, it is necessary to insist, *to have ideals* is not the same as *to have impracticable ideals*, however often it may be the case that our ideals are impracticable. Failure to remember this has led to the use of "idealist" as a term of condemnation, or at least of gentle rebuke. The idealist thus conceived is more rightly to be regarded as a visionary, for we do use the

<sup>1</sup> It is, of course, extremely important to pay attention to the context in which a word is being used.

noun "visionary" to mean "one who lives in a world of his own and forms impracticable, unsubstantial projects, and plans that are impossible to carry out."<sup>1</sup> The point, however, is that no sharp line divides the visionary from the man who seeks to regulate his conduct by his conception of what it is worth while to achieve—that is, by *an ideal*. But to see no difference between these extremes leads us to talk nonsense. This is seriously meant. In my opinion it is strictly nonsense to assume that *to have ideals* is equivalent to *being a visionary*, and that to be a visionary is equivalent to being a *utopian*—i.e., one who builds ideal schemes which have no relevance to the facts and are *therefore* incapable of being achieved. Those who make this mistake regard the opposite of an idealist as a "realist"—that is, one who takes note of the facts and, presumably, is not in any way guided by ideals. Herein lies the justification of my accusation that those who talk in this way talk nonsense. I shall try to show this by examining a definite example.

My example is provided by Prof. E. H. Carr in his recently published book, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*. Prof. Carr claims to explain this period of crisis by giving us a strictly scientific analysis of historical and political processes during the last hundred years. He denounces as utopian nineteenth-century liberalism, internationalism, and in particular the League of Nations. He argues that, since (on his view) the League of Nations was a utopian scheme it was bound

<sup>1</sup> I quote this definition from the only dictionary I have at hand at the moment—i.e., *The Universal Dictionary of the English Language*, edited by Henry Cecil Wyld. It is worth while to note that the same dictionary gives as the definition of "utopian", "pertaining to a Utopia, ideally perfect but impracticable". This is, I submit, the sense in which we do use "utopian", which, be it noted, *adds to* "ideal" the further meaning "but impracticable".

to fail. Sensible politicians are not, according to Prof. Carr, guided by ideals, but by realities. I must admit that I am responsible for the epithet "sensible"; Prof. Carr uses the word "realist," but it is clear that he regards realist politicians alone as sensible. Unfortunately his use of the term "realism" is so confused that he ends by falling into contradictions. Although his professedly scientific analysis of political processes is based upon the distinction between utopianism and realism, his method is so unscientific that he nowhere clearly defines these terms, but uses them in a vague, popular sense. It is certainly not difficult to see what he means by "utopian"; he means an entirely unpractical, not to say foolish, visionary. Prof. Carr makes much of the point that a utopian takes no note of facts, of realities, of the connexion between cause and effect in politics. The utopian is regarded as wholly taken up with considering ideal aims, principles, moral ends; he is interested in political problems but not in their conditions; accordingly the utopian propounds a solution that would be quite satisfactory were it not that it is impracticable, having been conceived without any reference to the needs of the situation. Where, we may well ask at this point, is such a utopian to be found? The answer is not, as might have been expected, Sir Thomas More, or William Morris, or even H. G. Wells. It is Woodrow Wilson.

Prof. Carr's own statement of this example is so illuminative of his point of view that I shall quote it in full:—

To establish a general principle, and to test the particular in the light of that principle, has been assumed by most intellectuals to be the necessary foundation and starting point of any science. In this respect utopianism with its insistence on general principles may be said to represent the characteristic intellectual approach to politics. Woodrow Wilson, the most perfect modern example of

the intellectual in politics, "excelled in the exposition of fundamentals. . . . His political method was to base his appeal upon broad and simple principles, avoiding commitment upon specific measures." Some supposed general principle such as "national self-determination," "free trade", or "collective security" (all of which will be easily recognized by the realist as concrete expressions of particular conditions and interests), is taken as an absolute standard, and policies are adjudged good or bad by the extent to which they conform to, or diverge from, it (*op. cit.*, p. 20).<sup>1</sup>

Since the failure of the League of Nations to prevent war became evident it has become fashionable to deride Woodrow Wilson as a woolly-headed idealist; it has been remembered that he was a professor and forgotten that he was a political leader whose ideas made a wide popular appeal. I well remember the enthusiasm with which he was greeted in Europe, greeted by ordinary men and women who shared his belief that we must never again have war. This is a fact of political importance; Woodrow Wilson's ideas were shared by thousands who could not at all be accused of being "intellectuals", and were not in the least interested in expositions that were confined to "fundamentals"—whatever precisely is meant by that charge. The Fourteen Points did not strike these ordinary people as having no contact with realities; on the contrary, they seemed to provide a method of preventing war. It is true that the statement of the Fourteen Points is not a statement of "specific measures". On the contrary, it was, and was meant to be, a statement of broad principles in accordance with which the terms of the Peace Treaty were to be formulated. The detailed application of these principles was the business of the Peace Conference.

<sup>1</sup> The page references given in parentheses are to *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*.

I am not here concerned to argue the merits, or demerits, of the Covenant of the League or of the Versailles Treaty, in which it was so unfortunately incorporated. My present concern is with Prof. Carr's conception of an "idealist" politician. He seems to think that a politician in touch with realities cannot be guided by fundamental principles. What does this mean? Does it mean that realist politicians have no aims which they seek to secure? To answer these questions we need to know exactly what Prof. Carr understands by "realism". Unfortunately it is difficult to find out exactly what he does understand by the term, in spite of the fact that he claims to be giving us a strictly scientific analysis. Clearly he holds that a realist is one who is in touch with "realities", but it is really impossible to find out what he really means by "realities".<sup>1</sup> He usually speaks as if he thought that power and conflicting interests of nations were the sole realities. In the latter part of his book he seems to admit that there really are some common, international, interests. It is very confusing.

The clearest statement is his explicit reference to Machiavelli as "the first important political realist" (p. 81). He is thus contrasting—to quote Machiavelli—those who "have pictured republics and principalities which in fact have never been seen and known" with those who recognize that "how one lives is so far distant from how one ought to live that he who neglects what is done for what ought to be done sooner effects his ruin than his preservation." Prof. Carr adds :—

The three essential tenets implicit in Machiavelli's doctrine are the foundation-stones of the realist philoso-

<sup>1</sup> Words derived from the word "real" are dangerous words; perhaps a philosopher should allow himself to use "really" only when he is thoroughly exasperated, and "realist" only when he can make quite clear what he understands by the opposite of a realist.

phy. In the first place, history is a sequence of cause and effect, whose course can be analysed and understood by intellectual effort, but not (as the utopians believe) directed by "imagination". Secondly, theory does not (as the utopians assume) create practice, but practice theory. In Machiavelli's words, "good counsels, whencesoever they come, are born of the wisdom of the prince, and not the wisdom of the prince from good counsels". Thirdly, politics are not (as the utopians pretend) a function of ethics, but ethics of politics. Men "are kept honest by constraint". Machiavelli recognized the importance of morality, but thought that there could be no effective morality where there was no effective authority. Morality is the product of power (p. 82).

The realist, then, is one who thinks only about "realities" and has no concern with principles and morals; he places politics above ethics; he opposes power to morality. It is significant that in his exposition Prof. Carr contrasts the tenets of realists with what the utopians "believe", "assume", "pretend". It would have helped us to understand if he had given an example of a utopian who believes that the course of history can be directed by "imagination". What is to be understood by "*imagination*" here? Does it mean "constructing imaginary utopias"? I think it must, but am not sure. What is meant by the assumption that "theory can create practice"? Presumably it means the assumption that some definite actions of mine (or of yours) may be performed because I (or you) hold such and such a belief, have such and such a principle of action. Certainly Woodrow Wilson sometimes performed actions because he held certain principles. Is the same not true of Hitler? But perhaps Prof. Carr would not regard Hitler as a realist. Bismarck was a realist if anyone is. Yet clearly he had principles, ideals, or aims. He made moral judgments—i.e., judgments of value. One such judgment was that

the unification of Germany under Prussia was desirable, since it was to the interest of Prussia, the most powerful of the German States. "The sound basis of a great power", Bismarck declared, "which differentiates it from the petty State, is political egoism, not romanticism, and it is unworthy of a great State to fight for what does not concern its interest."<sup>1</sup> This is a moral judgment. But this statement, which I have just made, is not a clear statement, for we have yet to see how the word "moral" is being used.

Everyone (I shall assume) roughly understands what is meant by the contrast between those who are mindful of "morality" when they are pursuing their ends and those who disregard "morality" in order to achieve by any means whatsoever the ends which they desire. The word "morality" is here used in a rough and undefined popular sense—the sense, in fact, in which Prof. Carr seems as a rule to use it. The distinction can be less unclearly expressed as the distinction between those who hold that a worth-while end justifies any means, *even though these means are judged to be evil*, and those who hold that the judgment of the means used is relevant to the judgment of the end achieved. (In this sentence *judgment* means *judgment of value*.) The former are often called "realists". It is a stupid word to use. It suggests that only those who are unscrupulous can pursue a successful policy. The connexion with the doctrines of Machiavelli and the statesmanship of Bismarck is clear; a realist takes for granted that the sole efficient method of achieving his aims is by a pitiless use of coercive power—in short, by adopting the policy of ruthlessness. This policy was stated by Bismarck in a declaration that has become

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from D. M. Ketelbey: *A History of Modern Times*, p. 238.

famous : “ Germany is looking not to Prussia’s liberalism, but to her power. . . . The great questions of the day will not be decided by speeches and majority resolutions (that was the blunder of 1848 and 1849), but by blood and iron.”<sup>1</sup> This is the essential characteristic of Bismarck’s policy, and of Hitler’s, and of Stalin’s. If these are to be called realists, then we can contrast with them, for instance, Abraham Lincoln, who was not *in this sense* a realist.

The distinction thus made is an important one. It has to do with judgments concerning means and ends. The realist judges that the end justifies evil means and that the evilness of the means is not to be taken into account. The non-realist, unfortunately called an “ idealist”, judges that the end does not justify the use of evil means. These judgments are judgments of ethics. Further, the judgment that certain means are *evil* (which is contained in the realist’s judgment regarding means and ends) is another ethical judgment, and it is certainly not a judgment based upon politics. How, then, are these judgments supposed to show that “ ethics is a function of politics ” ? The answer is, I think, to be found in an addendum to the judgment so far given—namely, that in political affairs the ends sought by statesmen can usually be attained only by the use of evil means. There is no good reason to suppose that this is true, but it is a belief widely entertained by politicians and other men of affairs. “ Few”, said Lord Acton, “ would scruple to maintain with Mr. Morley that the equity of history requires that we shall judge men of action by the standards of men of action; or with Retz : ‘ Les vices d’un archevêque peuvent être, dans une infinité de rencontres, les vertues d’un chef de

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from D. M. Ketelbey: *A History of Modern Times*, p. 241.

parti'." Lord Acton continues: "Most successful public men deprecate what Sir Henry Taylor calls much weak sensibility of conscience, and approve Lord Grey's language to Princess Lieven: 'I am a great lover of morality, public and private; but the intercourse of nations cannot be strictly regulated by that rule.' While Burke was denouncing the Revolution, Walpole wrote:

No great country was ever saved by good men, because good men will not go to the lengths that may be necessary'." <sup>1</sup> Many other instances of this attitude could be cited. They represent very well what Prof. Carr evidently understands as the realist's point of view. But it should be noted that, in the instances given above, the realist himself judges that the steps he has to take are evil; he judges that in order to attain his ends he must act in ways which, apart from the aim in view, he would judge to be evil. This is a moral judgment, and it is not based upon political expediency; on the contrary, political expediency is urged as an excuse for the adoption of means antecedently judged to be evil.

Prof. Carr does not himself speak of good and evil means; his favourite word is "morality". But, as in the case of his other fundamental terms, he does not clearly indicate exactly what he understands by it. It is clear that he sharply opposes morality to power; he then uses opposed pairs of words as corresponding synonyms of morality and power. These pairs are: conscience, coercion; goodwill, enmity; self-subordination, self-assertion; altruism, self-seeking; Utopia, reality. The last pair reveals the nature of the confusions into which he has fallen. Morality and Utopia are taken to mean the same; power

<sup>1</sup> *History of Freedom and Other Essays*, p. 219. The quotations above occur in an essay entitled "Introduction to L. A. Burd's Edition of *Il Principe*, by Machiavelli."

and reality are taken to mean the same; Utopia and reality are contradictory; it thus follows that morality and power are contradictory. Accordingly, the realist (now meaning "the statesman who gets things done") must disregard morality. These facile changes of the *words* used leave completely unexplained how "morality" is to be understood in Prof. Carr's primary opposition of morality and power, morality and reality. They merely help him to believe that conflicting interests are significantly "real" and goodwill and common interests importantly "unreal".

It is not true that the only reality is power.<sup>1</sup> What men believe—i.e., their ideas—what men seek to attain—i.e., their ideals—are also factors in determining social change. Prof. Carr himself recognizes this in the latter part of his book. He approves of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, and he sees that its failure does not imply that it was necessarily unrealistic. Indeed, Prof. Carr in the end is anxious to insist that both power and morality, reality and Utopia, altruism and self-seeking, must be admitted as "dual elements present in every political society". He continues:—

The State is built up out of these two conflicting aspects of human nature. Utopia and reality, the ideal and the institution, morality and power, are from the outset inextricably blended in it. . . . The utopian who dreams that it is possible to eliminate self-assertion from politics and to base a political system on morality alone is just as wide of the mark as the realist who believes that altruism is an illusion and that all political action is based on self-seeking. . . .

. . . The attempt to keep God and Cæsar in watertight compartments runs too much athwart the deep-seated desire of the human mind to reduce its view of the

<sup>1</sup> See further, p. 165 below.

world to some sort of moral order. We are not in the long run satisfied to believe that what is politically good is morally bad; since we can neither moralize power nor expel power from politics, we are faced with a dilemma which cannot be completely resolved. The planes of Utopia and reality never coincide. The ideal cannot be institutionalized, nor the institution idealized (pp. 124, 125, 129-30).

This is an extraordinary conclusion to what has been offered as a strictly scientific analysis. Since Prof. Carr has opposed power to morality, as a pair of contradictories, it follows that power cannot be moralized nor morality be made powerful; just as it follows that black cannot be whitened nor white blackened. But this is no iron necessity of the nature of States; it is a consequence of the way in which Prof. Carr has chosen to use the *words* "power" and "morality". His belief that power and morality are inevitably opposed one to the other results from his failure to think clearly about his fundamental terms. Sometimes he thinks of morality as the sum total of rules commonly called "moral rules", sometimes as altruism or benevolence, sometimes as conscience—or what conscience enjoins. But always he opposes morality to power, and he thinks of power as coercion in the form of physical force. This is for him the ultimate fact. The distinction he makes between Utopia and reality is in terms of "morality". Since "utopian" is expressly used to connote "imaginary ideal", it follows that "morality" cannot be realized. But the statement that "morality cannot be realized" is without sense until we have given a meaning to "morality". We have seen that Prof. Carr gives *no* definite meaning to the word. What, for instance, are we to make of his assertion that the utopian dreams that it is possible "to base a political system on morality alone"? In my opinion it does not

make sense to talk of basing a political system on "morality alone", but Prof. Carr probably means "establishing a political system wholly by means judged to be moral—i.e., good". This brings us back to the consideration of means and ends which we have already discussed. But this cannot be the main point in Prof. Carr's rejection of utopianism, since that is bound up with the contention that utopias are imaginary, unrealizable ideals. It is exactly to this point that Prof. Carr always returns. Yet it is difficult to believe that any scientifically minded professor could deliberately intend to use "morality" and "imaginary ideals" as synonyms. If he does, then there is no point in elaborating the truism that a political system cannot be based on an imaginary (i.e., impracticable) ideal. Nor, on this interpretation, could we make sense of the assertion that every political situation contains mutually incompatible elements of impracticability and practicability—i.e., reality. Prof. Carr's conclusion is nonsensical, and reveals that something is seriously wrong with his scientific analysis.

In view of these confusions it is not surprising that Prof. Carr falls into the further confusion of supposing that those who get things done—i.e., the realists—have no ideals in view—i.e., are not actuated by principles. It does not make sense to distinguish between Bismarck and Woodrow Wilson on the ground that the latter had an ideal in view and the former had not. All statesmen are actuated by ideals. Each of the two under consideration sought to achieve an end—i.e., each had in view an aim which he regarded as worth achieving. Is Bismarck a realist because he succeeded or because he had no ideal? Is Woodrow Wilson not a realist because he failed or because he had an ideal? Sometimes Prof. Carr seems to suppose that success is the criterion of a realist policy;

at other times he speaks as though he thought that the characteristic of a realist is not to have any ideal and never to reason from accepted principles to the conditions within which they are to be applied. Neither of these criteria will work. To make success the criterion is to fall into the mistake of supposing that whatever has in fact happened inevitably happened. Prof. Carr does not even use this criterion consistently, since he judges that Chamberlain's appeasement policy was realist, although it failed. Certainly that it did fail does not prove that it was not realist. Likewise, that the League of Nations failed does not show that Woodrow Wilson's ideal was necessarily impracticable. We should probably all agree that Bismarck succeeded. But in *what* did he succeed? Clearly in achieving his *ideal*. So we return to the conclusion that a realist statesman has an ideal—i.e., he seeks to achieve a state of affairs that he judges to be worth while. Further, Bismarck, no less than Woodrow Wilson, *reasoned*; he made his judgment of value (viz., the unification of Germany under Prussia is a desirable end); he took note of relevant facts, he made use of past experience, and he reasoned out the steps which he deemed must be taken to achieve his aim—i.e., his ideal. On this point there is no distinction at all between Bismarck and Woodrow Wilson.<sup>1</sup> On this point there is no distinction between a company promoter (whose ideal is to get rich quickly) and Madame Curie (whose ideal was to isolate radium and have it used for the benefit of mankind); or, again, there is no distinction between Al Capone and

<sup>1</sup> They differed in the nature of their respective ideals and in the assumptions they made with regard to the course of history. Bismarck thought of the relations between States in terms of power-politics; in this he followed his predecessors. Wilson tried to think of States in terms of mutually beneficial relations. One reason for his failure was that the reasoning from fundamental principles was not *sufficiently* rigorous.

Mahatma Gandhi. The distinction lies wholly in the nature of their respective ideals and in their acceptance or rejection of certain methods of achieving them.

I conclude, therefore, that Prof. Carr's distinction between utopianism and realism with regard to ends is just a muddle. Hitler, Mussolini, and their companions, certainly have an ideal—namely, the establishment of “a new order in Europe”, or “a new order in Asia”, or “a new world-order”. The complaint to be brought against them is ill-conceived as a complaint that they are realists, and so have no use for morality because a realist has no ideal. The complaint (if we wish to make one, although I suspect that Prof. Carr does not) is that their ideal is *evil*. Hitler pursues his ideal with the fervour and unrelenting cruelty of a religious fanatic. He believes that his ideal of a “New World-Order” is so splendidly worthwhile that to attain it any means may rightly be used. The fact that among these means are professedly included large-scale and long-continued lying, prolonged deceiving of his fellow-countrymen, murder of those who oppose him, war, and the long-drawn suffering of concentration camps, affords no sound reason for describing his policy as “realist” and for failing to notice that he is inspired by an ideal. Perhaps Prof. Carr would admit this, but it is not possible to determine from what he says whether Hitler is to be regarded as a realist or as an idealist. For certainly Hitler exalts physical power, and this was taken as a distinguishing mark of a realist. Yet, again, Hitler has equal claims with Woodrow Wilson to be regarded as an idealist who reasons carefully from fundamental principles. Would Prof. Carr's verdict be that, if Hitler is finally successful in achieving his aims, he is a realist, but that, if he fails, he is an idealist? This would be absurd, and we must reject as useless a distinction that leads to

so foolish a conclusion. An idealist need not be a utopian, nor a realist a man without ideals, or with ideals and without moral compunction.

Prof. Carr's attempt to provide a scientific distinction between idealists and realists has, then, in my opinion, failed. But his failure is instructive. We do wish to distinguish between Bismarck and Hitler on the one hand and Woodrow Wilson and President Franklin Roosevelt on the other. There is a popular usage of "idealist" in which it would be correct to say that the two latter were idealists and the two former were not. This is the sense in which to say that a man is an "idealist" is to say that he strives to attain a worth-while aim, to improve upon the actual state of affairs. This is equivalent to saying that he has a good or worthy ideal. In this usage to call a man an "idealist" is to approve his aims; to say that Hitler, for instance, is not an "idealist" would be to condemn his aims, if we were using "idealist" in this sense. But surely this is a very inconvenient usage, and there is no corresponding usage for "realist," since, even on Prof. Carr's view, we are not intending to express approval of his aims so much as approval of his getting things done. In short, the *realist-idealist* classification seems rather to confuse than to clarify our thinking about politics.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, I wish to insist that we have ideals. To say "I have an ideal" means "I conceive (have an idea of) a state of affairs which I judge to be good—i.e., worthy of attainment." This leaves open the question whether the ideal is realizable. It also permits the condemna-

<sup>1</sup> Since writing the above I find the following pleasant comment in Prof. G. H. Hardy's *A Mathematician's Apology*: "Many people of course use 'sentimentalism' as a term of abuse for other people's decent feelings, and 'realism' as a disguise for their own brutality."

tion of an ideal as evil; I may wrongly judge what is good.

We have seen that Prof. Carr objects to utopianism on the ground that it flies in the face of reality and is thus impracticable. He will not admit that my having an ideal is a factor that must be taken into account, or, in other words, that ideals may be effective in initiating and guiding social changes. A quite different objection to utopianism is urged by Mr. Vidler in his interesting book, *God's Judgment on Europe*. He has a much more profound grasp of the nature of ideals. He recognizes that Fascism and Marxism are alike ideals, accepted by their respective supporters with such fervour and worked out by their leaders with such clarity and attention to detail as profoundly to affect historical processes. These ideals are familiar to us under the name "ideologies". I doubt whether anyone could deny that these ideals have in fact deeply affected our lives. Mr. Vidler correctly (in my opinion) points out that "we English people have been at a disadvantage by comparison with some other nations in that we have had no clear idea as to what our nation stood for, no clear sense of a national purpose."<sup>1</sup> He insists upon our need to answer the questions: "What body of beliefs (if any) are we as a nation determined to live for and, if necessary, to die for? What is the goal for which we are making?" Our profession that we believe in "democracy and freedom and the preservation of Western civilization" is not enough; our beliefs are too vague and, I would add, too insecurely held. The Liberal

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 9. He adds: "In the current jargon it may be said that we have had no definite ideology." I see no reason why anyone should wish to deny that to accept "an ideology" is to accept "an ideal". But if Hitler and Mussolini, for instance, are not to be regarded as having an ideal, then it would have to be denied that they "have an ideology". No one can deny this who has noted what these leaders say.

ideal, he contends, is dead and we have put nothing in its place.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Vidler, then, demands that we should formulate an ideal; he complains that we are satisfied with utopias—Communism or Fascism. There are two strands in his disparagement of these utopias: their optimism and their secularity. These strands are, of course, closely interwoven. He puts this point very clearly:—

I am going to suggest that the modern secular interpretations of history, however much truth each may contain, have this in common—that they all illustrate one fundamental error, which is most conveniently described as utopianism. When men have ceased to believe in a goal of history beyond history, they are driven to imagine some consummation of the historical process within history itself, if they are to make sense of the process at all. “Most moderns”, says Reinhold Niebuhr, “are utopians. Imagining themselves highly sophisticated in their emancipation from religion they give themselves to the most absurd hopes about the possibilities of man’s natural history.”<sup>2</sup>

The quotation from Niebuhr stresses Mr. Vidler’s root objection to what he calls “secular utopias”—namely, “the belief in an ideal state of human society which is not only *wished* and *hoped*, but confidently affirmed may be and indeed must be realized in this world, in history.” This belief, Mr. Vidler asserts, is an illusion; the Christian faith alone can provide a clue to history, and in so doing point the way to a super historical goal.

Secular utopias are, in his opinion, always guilty of falling into one or more of five serious errors: (1) It is assumed that “man is naturally good and naturally reasonable.” Hence utopian idealists are optimistic and,

<sup>1</sup> See further, Chapter V.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 12. The quotations which follow are taken from the same chapter.

in consequence, forget that "the corruption of human nature is an intractable datum of the human situation and of every particular situation." (2) It is supposed that the goal of history can be realized within history. This is an illusion. (3) It is believed that the ideal can be achieved by human effort as "the result of the enlightened labours of mankind or of the inevitable law of progress." (4) God is put into a subordinate position, and "Glory to man in the highest" is adopted as a motto. (5) The utopias are ways of escaping from the painful contradiction of being called upon "to prepare without relaxation for the coming of the kingdom of God in an order of existence where in the nature of the case it can never be consummated."

These "errors", as Mr. Vidler points out, tend to go together. The two important points in this indictment are that secular utopians are unduly optimistic and that they rely upon men to achieve the ideal by their own efforts. The first criticism has, I think, some weight. In our own day we have seen secular utopians confidently believing that they can very speedily achieve a stable and satisfying state of affairs.<sup>1</sup> There were such optimists in the nineteenth century. We are less likely to be optimistic now. At the same time, it is a mistake, in my opinion, to suppose that a secular utopian (in Mr. Vidler's sense) must necessarily believe either that his own ideal is thought out in every detail or that it will be completely realizable. With regard to the second objection, it must be pointed out that those who do not share Mr. Vidler's standpoint will not agree that it is a defect to rely upon human effort. He is mistaken in thinking that hope with regard to the future of men upon this earth necessitates a belief in any

<sup>1</sup> Consider, for instance, the boast several times made by Hitler that he has "settled" so-and-so for "a thousand years".

“inevitable law of progress”. To speak of a *law* of progress is absurd, and to regard progress as inevitable is equally foolish. Progress is not a property permitting generalization, whereas a law involves generalization. Those who look for a “law of progress” are probably confusing law with command and are thinking of the law as divinely ordained; in that case, the assertion that there is a law of progress reduces to the assertion that progress is inevitable. It is true that such a belief has been entertained by those who have had hopes of a secular millennium, among whom must be reckoned Marx and probably Bentham and J. S. Mill. It is certainly desirable that we should recognize the absurdity of this belief. There is nothing in the least inevitable that makes for progress. We are far too prone to overlook the difficulties in the way of achieving such progress as it lies within our power to promote. There are difficulties arising from the natural egoism and limited outlook of human beings, as well as difficulties that come from evil ideals. The significance of some of these difficulties will, I hope, become apparent, in the course of this book. Our first task is to examine more closely the doctrine that, unless there be a goal for man beyond and outside of the historical process, our lives are without significance and our efforts futile.

## CHAPTER II

### “ MATERIALISM IS NOT ENOUGH ”

“ Just when we are safest, there's a sunset touch,  
A fancy from a flower-bell, someone's death,  
A chorus-ending from Euripides—  
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears  
As old and new at once as nature's self,  
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,  
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,  
Round the ancient idol, on his base again—  
The grand Perhaps ! ”—Robert Browning.

THE recent introduction into our language of the ugly word “ escapism ” is a sad commentary on our lack of fortitude. So much in our world is evil, so often are we unable even to alleviate the evils we partly cause and partly suffer, that it requires fortitude to face these evils steadily, neither denying them to be evil nor falling back into vague dreams of a better time to come or thinking about something else. The impulse to escape is not to be derided, but the relapse into an escapist mood must be condemned, for in such a mood we shirk what is hard to bear without making any effort to find a remedy. It is perhaps significant of our sickly state that anyone who takes a hopeful view of possible social progress should be regarded as an escapist and, alternatively, that we should be prepared to recommend one another to indulge in “ escapist literature ”. It is altogether too simple-minded to dub those who find consolation and strength in religion as escapists. Religious people are no more all of one kind than are the non-religious, or

indeed than those who are proud to be anti-religious. Even the notorious dictum of Marx—"Religion is the opium of the people"—may, as Mr. Middleton Murry suggests, have been distorted by Marxists and anti-Marxists. Mr. Murry thus renders the passage: "Religion is the sob of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of conditions utterly unspiritual. It is the laudanum of the poor."<sup>1</sup> As Mr. Murry says, this is, in its context, "a phrase not without tenderness, or understanding, or pity." Religion could not be an opiate for the people unless they had unsatisfied longings. It would be a grave mistake to suppose that these needs are solely for physical comfort.

Man is a strange creature. Whatever his origins, he differs fundamentally from the other animals. These can be ill-treated, suffer pain and neglect, be diseased and die; but they do not know the long-ranging fear of death, they do not suffer from oppression of spirit. They cannot (so I presume) regret the past nor have hopes for the future. Man, however, does not live by bread alone, nor is kindness enough to satisfy him. He has spiritual powers, creative energies, forward-looking hopes. If these be left undeveloped and unsatisfied, nothing else that man acquires can be felt as sustainingly worth while. "Conditions utterly unspiritual" are not fit for such a being as man.

To say this, however, is not to say anything clear. Its significance depends upon what we mean by "unspiritual" and by "such a being as man". So far as the latter expression is concerned, all that need be said

<sup>1</sup> *The Defence of Democracy*, p. 38. Mr. Murry gives the reference to the quotation from Marx: *Zur Kritik der Historische Materialismus*, vol. I, p. 264. I have not been able to verify this quotation, so that I cannot be sure whether the "tenderness" is due to Marx or wholly to Mr. Murry's rendering.

here is that "man" stands for any and every individual human being, who has lived, is living now, and will live. The expression emphasizes the distinction between *men* on the one hand and all other animals on the other hand. You, I, our friends, our enemies, are men; what we are and what we have it in us to be indicate what such a being as man is. Animals, I shall assert, have no spiritual capacities; men have.

I have no doubt that many of those with whose philosophical outlook I am in the main in agreement would not at all agree with me in holding that the specifically human excellences are rightly to be called *spiritual* excellences. They dislike the word. I understand the reasons for their dislike, but I should not be willing to dispense with the word; to do so is to make oneself more inarticulate than is necessary.

Certainly the word "spiritual" is much abused; it suffers from considerable ambiguity in many of the contexts in which it occurs. Accordingly, I recognize that I must try to make clear what I intend to convey when I speak of "spiritual excellences", and when I condemn "conditions utterly unspiritual". Clarity will not be achieved merely by consulting a dictionary. It will be best to begin by contrasting *spiritual* with its opposites. For it has more than one opposite. Two of these are especially important for our purpose: *materialistic* or *material*, and *worldly*. These words are also used confusedly, sometimes as synonyms, sometimes not. Those whose aims appear to be limited to the acquisition and display of wealth, who mistake comfort for well-being, or those who are preoccupied with the pleasures of the senses are said to be materialistic and to have material aims. In this sense a synonym of "material" is "worldly" as used in the expression "a worldly woman".

That these words should thus be regarded as synonymous is significant as indicating that those whose interests are centred upon *this world* are regarded as mainly concerned with comfort and elegance (for example, good dinners and good wines, fashionable clothes and well-appointed houses) and with attaining success with like-minded people. Contrasted with this sense of "material" it is clear that "spiritual" means "not concerned with worldly things". This usage of "worldly", however, begs the question we need to discuss. If by "worldly" we mean "carnal", then *worldly* and *spiritual* are indeed logical opposites; if, however, we mean "appertaining to this world", then there is no logical opposition. We must understand what is to be implied by the reference to *this world*. To speak of *this world* is significant only in contrast to some *other world*—the unseen world, the supernatural world, the "world to come". In such contexts the spiritual world is sometimes opposed to the temporal world, where "temporal" is used in the sense exemplified in the phrase "lords spiritual and temporal". It is just such an opposition that I wish to avoid. There are spiritual excellences in and of this world, this temporal world—i.e., our world.

These spiritual excellences are intellectual and moral capacities lacking which the life of human beings would be nasty and brutish; length of days could not redeem it. The excellences I call *spiritual* include love for human beings, delight in creative activities of all kinds, respect for truth, satisfaction in learning to know what is true about this world (which includes ourselves), loyalty to other human beings, generosity of thought and sympathy with those who suffer, hatred of cruelty and other evils, devotion to duty and steadfastness in seeking one's ideals, delight in the beauty of nature and in art—in

short, the love and pursuit of what is worth while for its own sake. In this pursuit an individual does in fact have at times to suffer pain and to surrender what it would be good for him to have were it not for the incompatible needs of others, needs which he recognizes as claims upon himself. This is another spiritual excellence. These excellences are to be found in *this* world; no heaven is needed to experience them.

Lists of excellences, such as I have just given, always strike me as absurd. They are as unenlightening as the curt *credos* and brief "I Believes" published from time to time in our more popular newspapers. No blame attaches to the eminent personages who, interviewed by reporters and accredited with wisdom on account of their well-deserved fame in special fields, record for us their creeds. We ask them for a summary statement of their more important beliefs. They respond with a list. What else could they do? Often they achieve brevity by the use of large abstractions, of which the favourite are Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Being a philosopher, I do not like abstractions. I do not, for instance, find help in Einstein's statement: "The ideals which have lighted me on my way, and time after time given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been Truth, Goodness, and Beauty."<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly to Einstein it was a significant statement, summing up briefly his reflections upon his own experiences. "Everybody", he says, "has certain ideals which determine the direction of his endeavours and his judgments." He tries to formulate his own ideals, with the brevity appropriate to an article in a Sunday newspaper. "I have never",

<sup>1</sup> A. Einstein: *The World as I see It*, p. 2. The essay from which I quote is entitled "The Meaning of Life"; it was first published under the title "I Believe", in the *Sunday Dispatch*, November 2, 1930.

he says, "looked upon ease and happiness as ends in themselves—such an ethical basis I call more proper for a herd of swine." We understand, then, that Einstein has rejected a swinish ideal. Men are not swine; they need more than good food to satisfy them, more even than soft cushions and fine raiment. It is just this *more* that requires such careful examination. Einstein puts ease and happiness on a level, to be rejected as "ends in themselves". The rejection of ease we can understand; we know very well what it is to be at ease, to have an easy life, to seek one's ease at the expense of other experiences. But happiness is not *in pari materia*; to reject happiness is to reject a vicious abstraction. About this more must be said later.<sup>1</sup> Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, if not vicious abstractions, are at least abstractions utterly useless for our purpose. I imagine that what Einstein is saying is that he has found delight in discovering how natural processes are connected and in devising theories which render these connections intelligible to us; he has found courage and cheerfulness in being good; he has enjoyed experiences of apprehending beautiful objects. The first and the last of these are not difficult to understand. Perhaps it is not quite so easy to know wherein being good consists. For a moment we can ignore this.

Einstein's statement of his ideals at least suggests to us how there can be conditions "utterly unspiritual". To be unable to pursue knowledge, to have no opportunity of delighting in beauty, is to be deprived of conditions fit for men although not required by swine. But, it may be objected, can we not be loyal, self-sacrificing, and full of sympathy even in an overcrowded, ill-smelling air-raid shelter, or in a concentration camp? Certainly

<sup>1</sup> See p. 76 below.

we can. To raise such an objection, however, is to miss the point, indeed several points, which I am anxious to make clear. As a first step to clarity we should do well to ask ourselves whether we should judge it worth while to be kept alive for years (supposing this to be possible) on condition that we were, throughout those years, confined in a crowded shelter while a perpetual air-raid was in progress, and finally to die without emerging from the shelter. The answer, I assume, is clearly that it would not be worth while. Mere life is not enough; a human being is not merely a living organism; he is a creature with spiritual needs. It is these needs that could not be satisfied if one were living perpetually in an air-raid shelter. These spiritual capacities can hardly, if at all, be developed under the conditions of sweated labour or of acute poverty. In slums, in factories, in dreary mining villages, in poverty-stricken northern farms, is it not idle to suggest that the ideals to light us on our way are Truth and Beauty? The goodness to be achieved by those who dwell in such conditions must be strictly limited by the prefix *moral*. Such also is the goodness attainable by the Stoic sage, happy even upon the rack—or its modern equivalent, within the concentration camp.

For my part I cannot understand how it can be denied that conditions of extreme poverty, conditions of excruciating pain, are conditions in which no spiritual excellences can flourish except the excellences of moral character. I do not deny that this is a big exception and, from a certain point of view, an all-important exception. I do most emphatically deny that, given moral excellence, nothing else matters. Further, as I shall try to make clear later, moral excellences cannot be so sharply cut off from other spiritual values.

The opposite view has been recently defended by Miss Rosalind Murray in her book, *The Good Pagan's Failure*. She is concerned to point out the reason why our civilization has failed. This civilization she calls "Pagan". To the Pagan she opposes the Christian. Those whose values are temporal—that is, are "this-worldly"—are Pagans; those whose values are spiritual, or eternal, are Christians. She admits that the terms "Pagan" and "Christian" are misleading unless properly explained. Accordingly, she sums up clearly the essential difference which she is trying to define :—

Deprived of labels, we may see the contrast as an emphasis on other-worldly value as opposed to this-worldly, on eternal as against temporal, on supernatural as against natural, on spiritual as against material, or, including and summing up all alternatives, recognition of God as the ultimate reality of life, or Man (*op. cit.*, p. 20).

The terms in which Miss Murray expresses her set of antitheses make clear her point of view and show that she has prejudged the point at issue. This-worldly values are identified with material values; other-worldly values are alone recognized as spiritual. This is, of course, the identification I am concerned to deny. I shall maintain that spiritual good and evil are to be found in the daily intercourse of us men one with another in this world independently of any relation of man to God; further, that the significance of spiritual value does not depend upon God or upon the continuance of human beings after the death of the body.

It is difficult to avoid muddles if we talk about material and spiritual values in abstraction from definite situations. From Miss Murray's point of view I have, no doubt, myself begged the question by refusing to regard spiritual values as synonymous with religious values. It may be

a help towards understanding the point at issue if we consider in detail Miss Murray's own statement :—

The Christian strikes the Pagan as indifferent to justice; he often takes less trouble to right abuses, he is apt to show less indignation at oppression or cruelty, he does not bother enough about putting the world to rights, and this is deeply shocking to the Pagan, to whom all these things stand for love of justice.

Yet the Christian, too, would claim that he loved justice, he would perhaps claim that he loved it more; but justice for him would consist in different things. He would not say that cruelty and oppression did not matter, but he would say that they were not ultimate; he would say that how you endured or faced an evil was more important than the evil itself, that the sum of all material evil was of less matter than one venial sin, that the final value was not here or now (pp. 43-44).

The Christian attitude is, she says, well exemplified in the life of St. Peter Claver. He worked to save the souls of the slaves "through the cruellest and most heart-rending phase of the slave trade"; Miss Murray adds, "but, so far as one can learn, he made no attempt to stop the trade." Such cases as this, she says, "are 'to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks folly'."

I can myself admire, indeed even wish to emulate, such self-sacrificing devotion as that shown by St. Peter Claver. I cannot admire Miss Murray's approval of his having made no attempt at all to stop the slave trade despite its recognized cruelty. The ground of her approval is not difficult to discern: nothing matters in comparison with the saving of souls. From this standpoint to be oppressed and suffer cruelty is not an "ultimate" evil; it is a "material" evil, and "the sum of all material evil" has been judged to be "of less matter than one venial sin".

The notion of saving souls is fraught with confusions, which I shall later try to unravel. Here I am concerned with the opposition of material evil to venial sin. A venial sin is one which Catholic theologians regard as pardonable—i.e., as entitled to remission of punishment. A venial sin is contrasted with a “deadly sin”. Miss Murray does not give any example of a venial sin, but her declaration reminds me of a famous judgment of value made by Cardinal Newman, which I shall quote at length :—

The Church aims, not at making a show, but at doing a work. She regards this world, and all that is in it, as a mere shadow, as dust and ashes, compared with the value of one single soul. She holds that, unless she can, in her own way, do good to souls, it is no use her doing anything; she holds that it were better for sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, for all the many millions who are upon it to die of starvation in extremest agony, so far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, though it harmed no one, or steal one poor farthing without excuse. She considers the action of this world and the action of the soul simply incommensurate, viewed in their respective spheres; she would rather save the soul of one single wild bandit of Calabria, or whining beggar of Palmero, than draw a hundred lines of railroad through the length and breadth of Italy, or carry out a sanitary reform, in its fullest details, in every city of Sicily, except so far as these great national works tended to some spiritual good beyond them.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to decide whether we agree with Cardinal Newman or not. Yet it is impossible to decide unless we see clearly what are the alternatives offered to us. Saving a soul is one alternative; improving the

<sup>1</sup> *Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, 4th ed., pp. 210–211.

sanitation of Sicilian cities is an example of the other alternative. But in what does saving a soul consist? It consists in reconciling and uniting the soul to God. "The Church", says Cardinal Newman, "aims at three special virtues, as reconciling and uniting the soul to its Maker—faith, purity, and charity."<sup>1</sup> These may be said to be specifically personal virtues in the sense that they are not primarily manifested in the relations of a man to his fellow-men. This is, I have no doubt, the finest ideal of the Catholic Church. It does not make sense apart from a doctrine of Hell, and of a Hell that is not on this earth, within the mind of a man, but in a world to come in which the unsaved soul is everlastingly damned. From this point of view it may be reasonable to hold that nothing matters in comparison with having one's soul saved. Miss Murray sums up the contrast as "the alternative ideals of Personal Sanctity or Social Usefulness, with the Saint or the Social Reformer as their types."<sup>2</sup>

Miss Murray does not regard as in itself important the alleviation of those who endure "heart-rending" suffering, since such suffering is on the level of material evil; nevertheless she admits that it is wrong that there should be slums. She says:—

It is wrong that people should live under slum conditions because it implies injustice and avarice on the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 216. Cardinal Newman contrasts "natural virtues" with virtues that are "the fruit of grace". The former include "personal courage, strength of purpose, magnanimity, honesty, fairness, honour, truth, and benevolence"; these "do not reach so far as to sanctify, or unite the soul by any supernatural process to the source of supernatural perfection and supernatural blessedness". The natural virtues do not qualify us for heaven. Let this be granted; it remains difficult to see on what grounds these natural virtues are to be regarded as "*material*". From the examples given both by Cardinal Newman and Miss Murray it would seem that love of one's fellow-men *as men*, not as souls to be saved, has, on their view, nothing spiritual in it.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

part of the rich ; it is the sin of the rich, not the hardship of the poor, that is the most serious element in the situation ; if the same conditions and the same hardships occurred from natural causes, the harm involved would have been negligible. As it is, the wrong is there and must be dealt with, but let us know what we are doing and why we do it ; good done on a wrong basis may be useless (pp. 142-143).

Why does Miss Murray consider that the avarice of the rich is sinful ? It is not easy to answer this question, since she holds that, were the same conditions and the same hardships due to natural causes, the harm done would be negligible. Why, then, is the harm done not negligible when it is caused by the sins of the rich ? *Ex hypothesi* the harm done is the same whether produced by natural causes or by sinful men. Her answer must be that the evil lies wholly in the state of mind (or soul) of the sinning rich, not in the harm that results from their sins, so far as these results affect other people. In my opinion this answer is absurd. I do not see how there can be sin unless something other than the sinning is also evil. If I, an owner of a factory, taking advantage of certain economic conditions, force you to live in a slum, to work monotonously for long hours, and thus be deprived of the ability to develop as befits a human being, then I harm you by creating for you conditions that are utterly unspiritual. I do you spiritual evil ; since I am responsible for creating this evil, I thereby sin.

There are then two kinds of evil, which it is important for us to distinguish. First, there are evils resulting, for instance, from living in slums ; from earthquakes, from famine, and from wars. Secondly, there are those evils exemplified in the actions of men responsible for bringing about any evil of the first kind. In my opinion it is of the utmost importance to insist upon this sharp dis-

inction. We are making one kind of judgment when we say that slum conditions, *however produced*, are evil because they result in diseased bodies and frustrated persons. We make a totally different kind of judgment when we say that a human being has brought about this evil and that he has, in so doing, sinned. Miss Murray holds that only the second kind of evil is important, for it alone is "ultimate". It is ultimate because it is relevant to the losing of one's soul.

Miss Murray's exaltation of the Saint and her depreciation of the Social Reformer (to use her own nomenclature) lead her into some curious and, in my opinion, indefensible statements. She argues: "You do not make people good by good conditions any more than they become bad in adversity." This judgment follows her declaration that the harm involved in slum conditions would be negligible were slums not due to the sins of the rich. Presumably, then, the slum-dwellers do not suffer from serious evils, but only from hardships which are no bar to goodness. Certainly not all rich men are good nor all poor men bad. It would indeed be absurd to suppose that unhappiness, sin, and other evils spring only from poverty. Reflections such as these are, however, entirely unenlightening unless some attempt is made to face the question why it is wrong for the rich to be unjust and avaricious, and, further, to decide wherein lies the "goodness" of good conditions. Miss Murray makes no such attempt. She is content to accuse "good Pagans" of being concerned to improve social conditions only in order to be able "to blame outward circumstances for shortcomings in themselves". One might suppose, were there not reason to assume the contrary, that Miss Murray had been unfortunate in her experience of good Pagans and Social Reformers. But no doubt

her depreciation of kindness, sympathy, and tolerance springs from her conviction that these are “natural virtues” of little worth compared with virtues that are the “fruits of grace”. A like judgment was made by Cardinal Newman in the sermon from which I have already quoted. Stressing “the extreme difference between the Church and the world, both as to the measure and the scale of moral good and evil”, he says :—

Take a beggar-woman, lazy, ragged, and filthy, and not over-scrupulous of truth—(I do not say that she had arrived at perfection)—but if she is chaste, and sober, and cheerful, and goes to her religious duties (and I am supposing not at all an impossible case), she will, in the eyes of the Church, have a prospect of heaven, which is quite closed and refused to the State’s pattern-man, the just, the upright, the generous, the honourable, the conscientious, if he be all this, not from a supernatural power—(I do not determine whether this is likely to be the fact, but I am contrasting views and principles)—not from a supernatural power, but from mere natural virtue.<sup>1</sup>

“*Mere natural virtue*” is condemned not because of the nature of the virtue itself but because it is *natural*; it is not the “fruit of grace”. The Catholic Church is no doubt able to determine what excellences and how derived fit a man for heaven. We who are not members of that Church may well be surprised at those who are excluded—Regulus, Socrates, Bentham, J. S. Mill.

This estimate is not confined to Catholic Christians. The fine Hindu scholar, Professor Radhakrishnan, makes a similar judgment :—

The heart of religion is that man truly belongs to another order, and the meaning of man’s life is to be found not in this world but in more than historical reality. . . . God and not the world of history is the true environment of our souls. If we overlook this important fact, and

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 219.

make ethics or world affirmation independent of religion or world negation, our life and thought become condescending, though this condescension may take the form of social service or philanthropy. But it is essentially a form of self-assertion and not real concern for the well-being of others. If good will, pure love, and disinterestedness are our ideals, then our ethics must be rooted in other-worldliness.<sup>1</sup>

So far as I can see there is no evidence at all that "good Pagans" and those who do not negate the world are condescending in their love of men; there are no grounds for the judgment that their services result from nothing but self-assertion. Truly not all who are called "philanthropists" are lovers of their fellow-men, not all who busy themselves in the social services are striving to serve those in need because they are moved by love and compassion. It is enough that some who do not negate the world are thus moved.

It is significant of Miss Murray's attitude that she takes for granted that a non-Christian's failure to believe in God has no other cause than that for him "belief in God is of secondary importance compared to more urgent material advantage" (p. 68). It does not occur to her that anyone could honestly seek to inquire whether the doctrines of Catholic Christianity are true, and that the outcome of such an inquiry might be the conviction that they were not true. Questions of truth or falsity do not arise for her; her conviction is complete. It may seem strange that anyone should be so insensitive as to remain unaware that for others the question of truth is more urgent than the question of comfort. The only obstacle to acceptance of the Christian belief that she can conceive is the urgency of "material needs". Moral blindness and selfishness are, in her view, to be expected

<sup>1</sup> *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 83.

of men, for “the Fall of Man is assumed in his [the Christian’s] position. The perverseness, the blindness of fallen human nature is the basis on which his *Weltanschauung* rests.”<sup>1</sup> From this point of view the history of mankind is immensely over-simplified and grotesquely distorted. The “good Pagan civilization” is said to be “one long progress of diminishing horizons”. Hence, she summarizes :—

The philosopher dethroned God in favour of Sovereign Man, the scientist dethroned Man in favour of Animal Nature, and finally even the Animal is now yielding to the Machine (p. 58).

This may sound well, but what does it mean? In what relevant sense is the animal now yielding to the machine? It is true that we now make machines to do much of the work we once did for ourselves; it is true that motor-cars are now fitted with self-changing gears. This particular mechanical device is cited by Miss Murray as an instance of our tendency to avoid effort and choose the easier way wherever possible. In her view this is to be condemned both because it encourages “our natural taste for laziness” and because it puts skill at a discount, thus fostering the trend towards an equalitarian level.<sup>2</sup> These objections I shall dismiss as absurd. But

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 60. She continues : “In so far as he is a whole-hearted Christian, he has a message directly for the fallen; the fact that the sinner is bad or stupid, or both, does not upset his case, it strengthens it. In the great pattern of life, as he sees it, even the sinner, as such, has his place :—

‘*O certe necessarium Adae peccatum quod Christi more deletum est ;  
O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem !*’ ”

<sup>2</sup> See *op. cit.*, p. 148 : “A machine civilization is essentially proletarian in character because the machine neutralizes natural excellence and puts the unskilled on a level with the skilled.” I confess that this is the most curious conception of the proletarian

that Miss Murray makes them is important. She sees the use of machines as leading to "a progressive shirking of responsibility", and to our "projecting responsibility for our actions increasingly on to outer circumstances". It is in this way that she attempts to connect the Pagan's "self-assertion" in social service with his ability in devising machines. "It is our contention," she urges, "in complete contradiction to the usual view, that concentration upon reform and social use, as against the ideal of personal behaviour, is but one sign of the general tendency to avoid or postpone responsibility and effort. It is an attempt to do, in the moral sphere, what has been done in the material world, to find a short-cut effort-substitute" (p. 149).

I am far from wishing to deny the need for anxious reconsideration of what it is now fashionable to call "the mechanization of life", if by that be meant our submission to the standards set by mass-production, the common dislike of unconformity, and the shrinking from solitude. But this talk about the machine is far too glib. To say that "the animal is now yielding to the machine" is no doubt a way of saying that journeys once performed on horseback are now performed in trains, motor-cars, or aeroplanes. But a saint may be none the less saintly in an aeroplane than on the rack. There are, moreover, saintlike as well as devilish uses to which aeroplanes may be put. We get no further along this line of reflection. Unfortunately we too easily, pursuing this line of thought, fall into confusion.

Machines are material objects. To regard the World

---

that I have met; surely the skilled are to be found among the workers. This condemnation of the machine age seems to me to be simply funny.

(i.e., the physical universe) as a vast machine was characteristic of the philosophical theory of materialism as held by thinkers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The two main tenets of this view are (1) that matter is prior to, and more fundamental than, mind, (2) that all happenings in the universe are determined by the nature of the material units and their mutual relations. When fully developed this theory takes the form of "mechanical materialism". Opposed to such views are the various forms of "idealism". Common to these is the assertion that mind is more fundamental than matter.<sup>2</sup> From this nothing at all follows with regard to the nature of human actions. The metaphysical idealist, F. H. Bradley, held that human actions are determined; so also did Spinoza. Bergson insisted that they are free. It is a sheer mistake to suppose that materialists alone have belittled and denied the freedom of man. It is no less a mistake to suppose that a metaphysical idealist must, in virtue of his metaphysical views, deprecate this "machine-age". For, in his view, the machine also is mental in nature. This amounts to saying that the behaviour of machines and the reactions of men to them are alike independent of the metaphysical theories of materialism or idealism.

Nevertheless, it is very commonly assumed that a metaphysical materialist must also be materialistic in morals, and that a metaphysical idealist will necessarily have an "idealistic" (i.e., lofty) conception of moral duties. Such an assumption is, I think, implied in the statements which preface each of the volumes in the

<sup>1</sup> Consider, for instance, the title of La Mettrie's famous work, *L'Homme Machine* (1748).

<sup>2</sup> It is not the place here to discuss these metaphysical theories. The reader should, however, be warned that confusion on these topics is prevalent. I have discussed some of these confusions in my *Philosophy and the Physicists*.

“ I Believe ” series, edited by R. Ellis Roberts.<sup>1</sup> The authors of these volumes are said to be “ all agreed in believing that materialism is not enough ”. The editor asserts :—

The most extreme conflict is that between those who believe in the world of freedom and those who believe in the world of fate. Between the disciples of reason and the instruments of the unconscious. Between the children of the spirit and the servants of the machine.<sup>2</sup>

The editor is himself a Christian, but the series is designed to include Jews, Agnostics, Atheists, mystics, Rationalists, and orthodox heretics as well as Christians. He declares that “ he would not put forward the arrogant and ridiculous claim that no religion but Christianity is opposed to the worship of the mass and of a mechanical determinism, which are our peculiar foes ! ” He excludes those who do not believe that “ there is a world other than the sensuous phenomenal world ”. No explanation is given of what is meant by “ the sensuous phenomenal world ”. It may be a mistake to interpret the phrase as equivalent to “ this world ” in opposition to a super-historical world; I think, however, that this must be what is meant. Again, the phrases, “ the world of freedom ” and “ the world of fate ” are too facile; neither these phrases nor the opposition of “ the children of the spirit ” to “ the servants of the machine ” make clear what is to be understood by the agreed declaration that “ materialism is not enough ”.

To say that materialism is not enough is surely very

<sup>1</sup> Each of these volumes contains a personal statement, and is independent of the rest. Those which I have read seem to me to be valuable contributions to our thinking about morality and religion.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from “ The Argument ”, which appears in each volume. Cp. below, p. 188.

odd. It suggests that we need materialism and then *something more*. But this does not make sense. What we need is to free ourselves from confused usages of the words “ material ” and “ materialistic ”, “ machine ” and “ mechanical ”, as these words are applied to our morals, our civilizations, and other people’s philosophical views. In my opinion materialism and idealism as philosophical theories do not make sense.

### CHAPTER III

## THE NEED FOR REFLECTION

“The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.”—Socrates.

WE have already seen that, if we are to have clear ideas about the conduct of our lives, we cannot dispense with ideals. It is a grave mistake to urge, in the interests of practice, that it is futile to examine the foundations of our moral code. Those who make this mistake are uncritically espousing a set of beliefs or prejudices belonging to their climate of opinion. Of these it may be said that they “enact the part of those who thank providence that they have been saved from the perplexities of religious inquiry by the happiness of birth in the true faith.”<sup>1</sup> It would be as foolish as it is impossible to attempt to isolate problems of practice from the consideration of theoretical principles. To answer the question what I ought to do in any given situation I must know what I judge to be of value. To ask myself what is indeed worth while initiates an inquiry that must become, if rigorously pursued, an examination of principles of the sort condemned by the Gradgrinds of this world as uselessly theoretical.

Ordinary people are prone to reproach moral philosophers with being academically detached from practical problems while indulging themselves in the profitless pur-

<sup>1</sup> A. N. Whitehead: *The Principle of Relativity*, p. 6.

suit of splitting hairs. I do not say that the reproach is never merited, but it is a reproach that carries a sting only when it can be shown that the detachment is unwarranted and that what is split really is a hair and not a tangled skein. For my part, I admit that I feel considerable dissatisfaction when practical moralists belittle our need for careful and exact inquiry on moral affairs. Exhortations to play the game are without point unless we deem the game to be worth playing and also know the rules for playing it. May not a practical man need enlightenment and assurance on both points with regard to the so-called "game of morality"?

An example of what appears to me to be muddled thinking on this topic is afforded by a brief introductory discussion in a recently published book by the Master of Balliol :—

When we look back on our conduct we can often see in the light of what has happened that we made a mistake. We say : " Yes, that was stupid of me. I did A and I should have done B "; much as we say : " I see now. I shouldn't have moved that pawn." We sometimes see that the situation before us was more complicated than we realized, and we say, " I ought to have thought about it more." But all that, we realize, is the way the world is made up. It is our business to play the game as well as we can. We shall not play it perfectly whatever we do. We have to act, and events do not give us much time for reflection. It is quite easy to be over-scrupulous and waste time in discussing the pros and cons of this or that question when we should be much better occupied in " getting on with the job ". I once heard a group of moral philosophers discuss for about an hour this question : " Supposing I had one ticket for a concert and supposing I knew that X would appreciate the concert just as much as I should and no more, ought I to give him my ticket or go myself ? " The philosophers may have had theoretical reasons for their discussion, but no sensible man dis-

cusses questions like that. Life is too short and there are too many things to do. We have to go ahead and act, and not worry too much over our mistakes if we can learn by them to be wiser next time; and about such problems as are involved in much of our ordinary conduct we do not, most of us, worry. We should not be better off but worse if we did.<sup>1</sup>

This passage will repay careful examination. There is about it an attractive air of bluff breeziness—"Be damned to all nonsense; go to it." On reflection, however, it is more perplexing than stimulating. Dr. Lindsay admits that sometimes we make a mistake through not having thought more about a situation; still, to make mistakes is "the way the world is made up", and our business is "to play the game as well as we can". His advice is that we should learn from our mistakes but not worry about them; life is too short for worrying. It is, he thinks, "quite easy" to be over-scrupulous instead of "getting on with the job". Yet the sole example he gives of over-scrupulousness is taken from an academic discussion by moral philosophers. He does not suggest that the concert-situation they were discussing was an actual situation in which any of them was then being called upon to act. On the contrary, it is clear that the concert-situation was taken as a hypothetical example expressly designed to test a general ethical principle. It is surely a sheer confusion to offer this discussion as an example of over-scrupulousness hindering "getting on with the job". Perhaps Dr. Lindsay did not intend to give any example. In that case it is difficult to see why this reference to the discussion carried on by the philosophers was made at all. I

<sup>1</sup> A. D. Lindsay : *The Two Moralities ; Our Duty to God and to Society*, pp. 2-4.

was myself present at this discussion.<sup>1</sup> I should have thought it was clear that the philosophers did in fact have "theoretical reasons for their discussion", even if "no sensible man discusses questions like that".

There are two answers to Dr. Lindsay's objection to the philosopher's discussion. These answers belong to different levels, owing to the fact that Dr. Lindsay has switched from one level to another without noticing that he has done so. The first answer consists in calling attention to the nature of the problem. The discussion was admittedly academic—that is, it was a discussion of *principles*. It was intended to clarify the apprehension of ethical principles; it was not directed to solving an immediate problem of actual conduct. By "an immediate problem of actual conduct" I mean, in this context, "a question concerning how I<sup>2</sup> ought to act *now* in *this* definite situation in which I am being called upon to act." In such a situation it might well be the case that I should have no time to consider in detail—i.e., to discuss—whether I ought to keep the ticket for myself or give it to X.<sup>3</sup> Even if I had time to deliberate, it might well be that it were better I should act generously and self-forgetfully, desiring that X rather than myself should have this enjoyable experience. Whether it is indeed *better* raises a question of principle. If it is better then it follows that something else counts besides maximum enjoyment since, *ex hypothesi*, the amount of enjoyment is the same whichever of us goes to the concert;

<sup>1</sup> On reflection I cannot be sure that I was present at this discussion. I clearly remember a meeting of philosophers, among whom was Dr. Lindsay, in which examples of this sort were taken in order to test the ethical principle that pleasure alone is good.

<sup>2</sup> "I" here stands for some *one* definite person.

<sup>3</sup> "X" must here stand for some *one* other person, who is not an unknown *x*.

the difference of value, if any, lies wholly in whose enjoyment it is. This example serves to test a familiar ethical principle that the *sole* justification for an action is to be found in the amount of happiness it produces. If this principle be accepted, then it is morally indifferent whether I keep the ticket or give it to X. If it is decided that I ought to give it to X, then the principle must be rejected, since something other than amount of enjoyment has been taken into account; likewise if it be decided that I ought to keep the ticket for myself. To test a principle in such a way has considerable practical importance. We can test principles only by thinking about their relevance to definite situations and their adequacy for the solution of a quite definite problem.

It is odd that anyone should be anxious to insist upon the danger of thinking about our actions. Is Dr. Lindsay afraid that we shall be tempted to reflect *instead* of acting, or does he also wish to counsel us against reflecting *before* acting? The latter seems to be the case. Certainly the advice to "look before you leap, but if you mean leaping don't look long" is sensible. Still, it does permit us to *look* though not to *look long*. No general rule could be laid down to help us to distinguish *looking* from *looking long*. In each case which demands a leap the decision must be made anew. But we are not always being confronted with a chasm to be leaped: moreover, whether it is worth while to leap at all depends upon the value to be attained by crossing the chasm or lost by remaining upon the hither side. The philosophers whose discussion Dr. Lindsay so scorns were not at the edge of a chasm. To drop unprofitable metaphors, they were not at that moment called upon to do something, in the sense in which *doing* is opposed to *thinking*. They were making some attempt to clarify the basis of

their moral code; they were testing an ethical principle by applying it to the consideration of a detailed case. Dr. Lindsay would not, I presume, deny that attempts at such clarification are necessary. Or would he? I at least cannot answer this question, for I do not find it possible to regard Dr. Lindsay's example as an instance of over-scrupulousness. In any case, having dismissed it contemptuously, he contents himself with the remark : " If we do want advice on such questions we go—if we are sensible—to a good man whose judgment we trust, and not to the moral philosophers." The consideration of this recommendation brings me to the second answer I wish to make to Dr. Lindsay's objection.

Certainly Dr. Lindsay is wise to distinguish the good man from the moral philosopher. It is, however, academic pedantry of the worst sort to refuse to see that anyone who reflects critically upon the nature of his duty is thereby raising a question that falls within the scope of moral philosophy. If, through moral or intellectual weakness, he fails to prosecute his inquiry to its end, he does not surely merit, *for that reason*, the description "sensible man". Moreover, must not the good man—whose advice we are exhorted to seek—himself have reflected upon the nature of his duty? Dr. Lindsay does not tell us. Reading what he does say I am reminded of Wordsworth's description of some who heed "Duty, the Voice of God":—

There are who ask not if thine eye  
Be on them; who in love and truth,  
Where no misgiving is, rely  
Upon the genial sense of youth :  
Glad Hearts ! without reproach or blot ;  
Who do thy work, and know it not.

To know these glad hearts is fortunate, but, just because

in doing their duty they “know it not”, it is not to them we go in the perplexities that press upon us.

The second answer, then, which I wish to make is that none of us can always escape this need to reflect upon the principles of our action. This means that we must each of us take the trouble to examine carefully the principles in accordance with which we act; we must not be content merely to follow the rules of our accepted code. It is true that only a morbid conscience would make out of every demand for decisive action a case of conscience. It is no less true that where our duty lies is not always clear. At times something of value has to be achieved at the cost of some other value; something worth while must be lost: to lay down one's life for one's friend or one's country, to surrender a fruitful leisure spent in good work to do something that the urgency of circumstances requires to be done now, or—more humdrum demand—to give up the chance of an interesting career in order to look after one's family. It is not seldom the case that such a painful choice is forced upon us now because of mistakes we formerly made and did not worry about. Many people, including apparently Dr. Lindsay, seem to suppose that there is something peculiarly forthright and sensible—perhaps “very English”, as English as the metaphor (or is it worse than a metaphor?) “playing the game”—in just going ahead and acting with no damned nonsense over discussing the pros and cons. “Stop worrying,” such people say; “playing the game is enough for your betters, so why not for you?” To hesitate and reflect before joining in the game, whatever “the game” of the moment may be, is to lay oneself open to the taunt of being over-scrupulous or pedantic or conceited, or all three.

I am content to run this risk. I should not be writing this book unless I were convinced of three things. First, I am convinced that we are too unready to reflect upon our conduct for the sake of making explicit the principles upon which we act. We are too eager to act first and to think, if at all, only when it is too late to affect our action. Even then our reflections are muddled more inconclusive than they need be, or than would be if only we attached some importance to clearly discerned principles of conduct. Second, I cannot agree with Matthew Arnold's dictum that it is not difficult to know what we should do but the difficulty lies in doing it. Third, I think that there is no clear and certainly true answer to any of the questions that press upon us most urgently. We are tempted to simplify the questions by the hope of obtaining an answer that is quite unmisleadingly right. I do not find the questions simple; I do not discern any clear principle, or set of clear principles, in the light of which I could unravel all my perplexities. In this respect I am, I believe, a normal person.

## CHAPTER IV

### “THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS”

! these truths to be self-evident: that all men are  
‘al; that they are endowed by their Creator with  
ights; that among these rights are life, liberty, and  
of happiness; that, to secure these rights, govern-  
stituted among men, deriving their just powers from  
the governed; that, whenever any form of govern-  
destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people  
lish it, and to institute new government, laying its  
such principles, and organizing its powers in such  
n shall seem most likely to effect their safety and  
*merican Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776.

a thought that the preamble to the American  
n of Independence contains the most succinct  
t of the democratic ideal in the form in which  
influenced modern democracies. For this reason  
quoted it above. The statement is, as its authors  
ded it to be, truly revolutionary; it is indeed more  
lutionary than some of its originators could sub-  
iently stomach. I shall not attempt to discuss the  
orical context of this Declaration, much as I should  
to do so. I can only recommend the reader to  
dy it in detail and in its setting. I must, however,  
use to call attention to details of its phraseology em-  
odying certain fundamental metaphysical assumptions,  
belonging to the climate of thought of its authors but  
not acceptable to most of us to-day. They speak of  
“inalienable rights”; they think of individuals as  
“endowed by their Creator” with these rights. If our

primary concern in this book were with political philosophy, we should need to criticize and reject these assumptions and to discard the language in which, in the American Colonies in the eighteenth century, they found their natural expression. Criticism of this kind is useful, and, in its proper place, essential. For our purpose, however, it is enough to concentrate our attention upon the principle itself: *all men alike ought to be free and happy*. It was appropriate for these eighteenth-century Americans of British descent to say "all men are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights". This was their way of asserting their fundamental belief with regard to the moral basis of political society. It is idle to discuss in what sense men are equal and in what senses they are unequal, if the purpose of such a discussion is merely to show the falsity of the democratic contention. For it is not possible thus to discredit the contention, since the postulation of the equality of men is not essential to it save in the respect of life, freedom, and happiness.<sup>1</sup> If we dislike the language used in the Declaration because we have rejected the assumptions which led to this language, we need not thereby reject the ethical principle thus expressed. All that is necessary is to restate it in a form acceptable to our climate of thought and thus in accordance with our linguistic habits. This I have tried to do in the sentence italicized above, which expresses an ethical principle without any theological admixture and without making ambiguous statements with regard to equality.

Like all short statements, the principle needs to be interpreted. *Freedom and Happiness* are abstractions of a high order of abstractness. The corresponding adjectives

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, p. 147 below.

tives, *free and happy*, though less objectionable in use are not, apart from a context, very helpful words with which to formulate our fundamental ideals. Nevertheless, the purport of the principle is not unclear, however difficult it may be to work out its precise application to a definite set of people. It would be absurd to expect a short statement to be at once profound and adequate to all we need to know. It is enough if we are stimulated by its brief enunciation to ask questions requiring answers that go deeply into the matter. This the statement contained in the American Declaration does. We are not talking gibberish when we speak of "the pursuit of happiness" any more than when we speak of "the pursuit of learning". Both phrases are indefinite, though the latter is less indefinite than the former, and consequently gives fewer openings for divergent interpretation. To what extent there is any serious difference of opinion with regard to the constituents or ingredients of happiness is a question with which we shall be concerned later. At present it is enough to say that happiness depends upon the enjoyment of both spiritual and material things. If this be granted, it follows that a right to happiness entails a right to have these material resources and to be given these spiritual opportunities. Undoubtedly this consequence is implied by the American Declaration, even though not all of its authors would have been willing to assent to it.<sup>1</sup> Nor indeed did they understand by "all

<sup>1</sup> In 1787 Madison opposed direct election of the Senate because he saw that a democratic society must lead to an attempt to distribute property equally. "An increase of population", he said, "will of necessity increase the proportion of those who will labour under the hardships of life, and secretly sigh for a more equal distribution of its blessings." He feared that equal suffrage might change this secret sighing into an open and violent attempt to alter the distribution of property. He asks significantly: "How is the danger, in all cases of interested coalitions, to oppress

men " all human beings ; they did not intend to include men of all races, nor would they have included women among those whose consent was necessary for the institution of just government. Nevertheless, the Declaration involved this tremendous assertion : *All men, whatsoever may be their race, skin-colour, social status, creed, mental or physical ability, ought to lead free and happy lives, ought—that is—to be free each to shape his own mode of living in accordance with his own abilities and needs.* However far acceptance of the purport of the principle lagged behind its explicit declaration, it was no small advance thus openly to declare it.

It is no exaggeration to say that the recognition of this ethical principle marks a decisive moment in human history. It was a surprisingly novel idea that every man, simply in virtue of being a man, has an equal right with every other man to happiness, and that governments were instituted for the purpose of securing to each and every man the conditions without which happiness is not attainable. Perhaps we may have some difficulty in realizing how extremely novel and revolutionary this idea must have seemed in 1776. The idea that all men are alike with respect to their capacity for happiness had never before been accepted in principle ; it had, indeed, not even been conceived by any group of statesmen. It has not yet been anywhere translated into practice. " On inequality ", says Clive Bell, " all civilizations have stood. The Athenians had their slaves : the class that gave Florence her culture was maintained by a voteless proletariat ; only the Esqui-

---

the minority, to be guarded against ? " Like many another statesman, he saw no reason why a minority might not oppress the majority. (The quotations are taken from J. S. Penman : *Irresistible Movement of Democracy*, p. 44.)

maux and their like enjoy the blessings of social justice.”<sup>1</sup> It is true that the great ancient civilizations of Babylonia, Egypt, India, China, and Greece required in various forms the distinction between the free man and the unfree, the wealthy and cultured on the one hand, the poor and ignorant on the other hand. In Western Europe in the Middle Ages there was the serf; in the eighteenth century the “lower classes”. Everywhere it was unquestioningly taken for granted that the sort of happiness appropriate to the one must for ever remain out of the reach of the other. The feeling that the lower classes belonged to a different order of men was fostered by the climate of thought that had prevailed for centuries. It is not to be wondered at that the change of feeling has been very gradual. Nevertheless, our climate of thought has been permanently affected by the French Revolution of 1789. This was the first attempt made in Europe to carry into effect the ethical principle laid down in the American Declaration. Certainly this attempt largely failed. But it did not wholly fail. In consequence of it we to-day must either assent to the contention that ordinary men no less than landowners and wealthy men ought to be free and happy, or we must be prepared actively to dispute this contention. It is, of course, possible to give an intellectual assent and remain in all other ways unaffected by the principle. But to be unaware of it is no longer possible.

The difference in attitude of our own time and that of the eighteenth century can be illustrated by two quotations from well-meaning people of the former period.

<sup>1</sup> *Civilization*, Chapter VII. It has, indeed, been denied that Athenian civilization was based on slavery. Certainly there were leisured citizens, but many of those who had full civic rights worked as farmers, sailors, and craftsmen. Nevertheless it is true that the social structure was pyramidal, and the base of the pyramid was composed of slaves.

Miss Hannah More was a woman much given to good works. In the year 1801 there was something approaching to a famine in the West Country. She addressed the poor women of the parish of Shipham as follows :—

I wish you to understand also that you are not the only sufferers. You have indeed borne your share, and a very heavy one it has been, in the late difficulties; but it has fallen in some degree on all ranks, nor would the gentry have been able to afford such large supplies to the distresses of the poor had they not denied themselves, for your sakes, *many indulgences to which their fortune at other times entitles them*. We trust the poor in general, especially those that are well instructed, *have received what has been done for them as a matter of favour, not of right*—if so, the same kindness will, I doubt not, always be extended to them, whenever it shall please God to inflict the land.<sup>1</sup>

Hannah More simply took it for granted that God had created men unequal, that He had set apart the poor from the gentry in such a way that the sufferings of the poor from famine—starvation, in fact—were not to be alleviated by right but only by favour of the rich, who, in their kindness, were willing to dispense with “many indulgences” that are theirs by right. It would be a mistake to regard her attitude as one of condescension to the poor. On the contrary it is rather one of thankfulness to God who has created the poor and afflicted them so that the rich may be charitable to them.

The same temper of mind may be seen in Archdeacon Paley. In a pamphlet entitled *Reasons for Contentment Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public*

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J. L. and Barbara Hammond : *The Town Labourer, 1760–1832*, p. 229. (The italics are mine.)

(published 1793), he preached resignation to the poor in the following words :—

The wisest advice that can be given is never to allow our attention to dwell upon comparisons between our own condition and that of others, but keep it fixed upon the duties and concerns of the condition itself. . . . We are most of us apt to murmur when we see exorbitant fortunes placed in the hands of single persons; larger, we are sure, than they can want, or, as we think, than they can use. . . . But whenever the complaint comes into our minds, we ought to recollect that the thing happens in consequence of those very rules and laws which secure to ourselves our property, be it large or small.

The Archdeacon certainly makes some attempt to justify by argument the disparity in income between “the labouring classes” and the landowners, and a very poor argument it is.<sup>1</sup> But the point that concerns us here is the untroubled assumption that our “condition” in life is appropriate to our sort and that, if we be poor, we could not be fitted for the “condition” of those who are rich.

Common to both Hannah More and Archdeacon Paley is the belief that the difference between rich and poor was ordained by God and must, therefore, be maintained. The belief finds expression in a well-known hymn, written by Mrs. Alexander <sup>2</sup> :—

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them, high or lowly,  
And order'd their estate.

The belief that earthly happiness is unimportant while heavenly bliss awaits the righteous poor has been a

<sup>1</sup> I have quoted his argument more fully and have criticized its defective logic, in my *Thinking to Some Purpose*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Alexander lived from 1823 to 1895.

characteristic Christian belief. It is no accident that Voltaire, who was revolted by the spectacle of human misery, should have been an opponent of Christianity. The humanitarianism of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Bentham springs from a passionate sympathy with the oppressed and unhappy. They judged their suffering to be *evils* and, as such, calling for remedy here and now, in *this* world.

It is from this point of view, I think, that the utilitarian doctrines of Bentham can be most properly appreciated. The principle of utility, understood as Bentham understood it, is an ethical principle with regard to the right distribution of happiness. This principle constitutes the foundation of Bentham's theory of morals and legislation. It was somewhat unfortunately named "Utilitarianism" by J. S. Mill; it was much more unfortunate that its exposition was mixed up with a thoroughly mistaken psychology and that its main doctrines were expressed in clumsy and unsuitable terms. The familiar formula "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" is by no means clear; the substitution of the word "pleasure" for "happiness" gave to the doctrine an air of frivolity wholly at variance with the sober and indeed solemn character of these nineteenth-century social reformers. They seemed always to be talking about the pleasures of life, whereas their real concern was with misery and pain. What profoundly moved them was the prevalence of unnecessary human misery. Suffering did not seem to them to be a beneficent sign of divine wisdom appropriate to man since the Fall of Adam. On the contrary, they regarded these sufferings—sufferings directly arising out of their poverty-stricken condition—as an outrage upon human nature, as a sign that here was an evil not to be tolerated since

it *could* be remedied. Everywhere they saw men and women living in conditions that hindered their free and happy development as human beings, conditions that were in no small measure the result of social institutions arising from the structure of society on the basis of the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged classes.

In my opinion it is important to insist upon this aspect of the work of Bentham and John Stuart Mill. It is not my purpose here to examine their writings nor to dwell, as would be necessary in the case of a detailed examination, upon their inconsistencies. I am concerned with the English Utilitarians only in so far as they put forward an ideal for action. It is my contention that to understand this ideal it is essential to understand the motive that led them to formulate it. Their interests lay in practical situations; they saw the need for reform of social institutions and they directed their energies to that end. They were not concerned with the careful analysis of moral consciousness; they lacked dialectical subtlety, they were content to express their convictions in vague and ambiguous language, and they were prone to use catchwords. Hence it is easy to subject their writings, especially the hastily written *Utilitarianism* of J. S. Mill, to a devastating criticism.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in spite of these defects, the direction of their efforts is clearly to be discerned and the ideal they so carelessly

<sup>1</sup> I, in common with other academic lecturers, have often indulged in such criticism, which in its proper place is not without justification. But it must be remembered that no one understands Mill's ideal who has read only the ill-expressed and ill-planned pamphlet, *Utilitarianism*, compiled from previously written papers, and directed almost entirely to the defence of Bentham—a defence that must be regarded as singularly unsuccessful. Mill's *Autobiography* and his pamphlet *On Liberty* show clearly what his ideal was; these writings provide the most effective criticism of his *Utilitarianism*.

formulated is worthy of serious consideration. F. H. Bradley, in his detailed analysis of Mill's *Utilitarianism*, remarks contemptuously of "the Utilitarian monster" that "its heart is in the right place, but the brain is wanting."<sup>1</sup> To which I should reply: Certainly its heart was in the right place; its thoughts also were in the right direction, but unfortunately the language used was downright misleading and foolish.

A comparison of F. H. Bradley and J. S. Mill is, at this point, instructive. Bradley was passionately interested in moral philosophy, but his passion was purely intellectual. J. S. Mill was passionately interested in his fellow-men as individuals, and, consequently, in the reform of man-made institutions. Conditions which can be changed by human effort and which are such as to thwart the development of a human being's latent capacities are the proper concern of the moral philosopher. So J. S. Mill believed, and upon this belief he consistently acted. The difference between these two great Victorians is profound and is, rightly, the outcome of a fundamentally different metaphysic.

Bradley was content to take the world as he found it. In his ethical writings "the world" means for him the society of which he was a member—i.e., England round about the middle of last century. His moral ideal is summed up in the conception of "my station and its duties". It did not in the least matter to him that "my station" is the outcome of a feudal organization as transformed by an industrial system within which individuals are of no account. In his view what is "real" is the social organism; the individual is "real" only in so far as "the universal self is in his self, as he

<sup>1</sup> *Ethical Studies*: "Pleasure for Pleasure's Sake"; First edition, p. 104.

is in it".<sup>1</sup> Appropriately he quotes from Hegel's glorification of the State. I shall not requote, but will give Bradley's own statement which immediately precedes his quotation from Hegel :—

The non-theoretical person, if he be not immoral, is at peace with reality; and the man who in any degree has made this point of view his own becomes more and more reconciled to the world and to life, and the theories of "advanced thinkers" come to him more and more as the thinnest and most miserable abstractions. He sees evils which cannot discourage him, since they point to the strength of the life which can endure such parasites and flourish in spite of them. If the popularizing of superficial views inclines him to bitterness, he comforts himself when he sees that they live in the head, and but little, if at all, in the heart and life; that still at the push the doctrinaire and the quacksalver go to the wall, and that even that too is as it ought to be. He sees the true account of the State (which holds it to be neither mere force nor convention, but the moral organism, the real identity of might and right) unknown or "refuted," laughed at and despised, but he sees the State every day in its practice refute every other doctrine, and do with the moral approval of all what the explicit theory of scarcely one will morally justify. He sees instincts are better and stronger than so-called "principles". He sees in the hour of need what

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 169. This is a view, derived in part from Hegel, in which the individual is regarded as merged in the whole and as nothing apart from the whole, and, so far as I can see, nothing much *in* the whole. Bradley's own statement is as follows :—

"Once let us take the point of view which regards the community as the real moral organism, which in its members knows and wills itself, and sees the individual to be real just so far as the universal self is in his self, as he is in it, and we get the solution of most, if not of all, our previous difficulties. There is here no need to ask and by some scientific process find out what is moral, for morality exists all round us, and faces us, if need be, with a categorical imperative, while it surrounds us on the other side with an atmosphere of love.

"The belief in this real moral organism is the one solution of ethical problems. It breaks down the antithesis of despotism and individualism; it denies them, while it preserves the truth of both."

are called "rights" laughed at, "freedom", the liberty to do what one pleases, trampled on, the claims of the individual trodden underfoot, and theories burst like cobwebs. And he sees, as of old, the heart of a nation rise high and beat in the breast of each one of her citizens, till her safety and her honour are dearer to each than life, till to those who live her shame and sorrow, if such is allotted, outweigh their loss, and death seems a little thing to those who go for her to their common and nameless grave. And he knows that what is stronger than death is hate or love, hate here for love's sake, and that love does not fear death, because already it is the death into life of what our philosophers tell us is the only life and reality.

It is significant that Bradley rises to his greatest flight of eloquence in describing the unification of a people through the overmastering influence of war-fever. Truly when this fever besets a people they are more conscious of themselves as a unity over against the enemy than of themselves as individuals; true, again, that they will then do and approve "what the explicit theory of scarcely one will morally justify" (unless, indeed, these *ones* be each and all adherents of the totalitarian theory of the State). This mood of exaltation, induced by war, is for Bradley the highest expression of the moral life upon this earth; it has for him the supreme glory of a mystical transcendence of the fretful self. In the end, almost as it were by way of postscript, Bradley allows some modification of this doctrine that my station and its duties suffices for the moral life and the "realization" of the individual. "The moral man", he says, "need not find himself realized in the world."<sup>1</sup> His community may be in such a rotten condition that in it "right and might do not always go together". Further, "there are afflictions for which no moral organism has balm or

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 184 *et seq.*

physician, though it has alleviation." Lastly "the member may have to sacrifice himself for the community". In such cases, Bradley agrees, the member cannot "see his realization". When this befalls us "we must", says Bradley, "wrap ourselves in a virtue that is our own, or seek a higher doctrine by which, through faith and faith alone, self-suppression issues in a higher self-realization."

Bradley is fond of tilting against "advanced thinkers"—a term of abuse which he has made peculiarly his own. His favourite accusation is that these advanced thinkers (e.g., the Utilitarians and Kant) deal with "the thinnest and most miserable abstractions". Coming from him it is a curious accusation. Certainly his conception of the "individual" is *thick*, since, in his view, the "individual" is merged in the whole, of which each political society, or State, is an exemplar. The accusation of indulging in the "thinnest abstractions" has, however, no point when directed against Mill's doctrines, even although his language may sometimes justify it. To see men and women as individuals and the State in terms of individuals standing in various relations one to another is not to see them as abstractions. It is Bradley rather who, regarding *the individual* as an abstraction, is forced to take refuge in the thickness of undifferentiated reality—whatever that may mean.

It is impossible to understand the ideal of Bentham and Mill unless we notice how deep was their concern for individuals—i.e., this, that, and the other human being. "The worth of a State, in the long run," says Mill, "is the worth of the individuals composing it; and a State which postpones the interests of *their* mental expansion and elevation to a little more of administrative skill . . . a State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may

be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes—will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished.”<sup>1</sup> So far from thinking in thin abstractions, Mill makes his most important remarks always in the context of his thinking on social and political conditions. Thus the remark just quoted occurs at the end of a discussion concerning the activities of governments. Mill was well aware that our happiness and misery are by no means unaffected by what governments do. Always before his mind was the thought of the unsatisfactory conditions in which many of the members of his own community were then living. And with this thought came the unwavering conviction that these conditions could be remedied. Mill believed that it was the duty of moral philosophers to show how “in England’s green and pleasant land” the Jerusalem of their dreams can be built. Passionately Mill proclaimed :—

Yet no one whose opinion deserves a moment’s consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within narrow limits. Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals. Even that most intractable of enemies, disease, may be infinitely reduced in dimensions by good physical and moral education, and proper control of

<sup>1</sup> *On Liberty* (concluding paragraph). Compare also this statement from Chapter II of the same work : “The greatness of England is now all collective ; individually small, we only appear capable of anything great by our habit of combining ; and with this our moral and religious philanthropists are perfectly contented. But it was men of another stamp than this that made England what it has been ; and men of another stamp will be needed to prevent its decline.” This was written between 1854 and 1859. Its relevance to the contemporary situation hardly requires to be emphasized.

noxious influences; while the progress of science holds out a promise for the future of still more direct conquests over this detestable foe. And every advance in that direction relieves us from some, not only of the chances which cut short our own lives, but, what concerns us still more, which deprives us of those in whom our happiness is wrapt up. As for vicissitudes of fortune, and other disappointments connected with worldly circumstances, these are principally the effect either of gross imprudence, of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect social conditions. All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow—though a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this world becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made—yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part, however small and inconspicuous, in the endeavour, will draw a noble enjoyment from the contest itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of selfish indulgence consent to be without.<sup>1</sup>

We may smile at the optimistic hope that inspired this passage; we may smile still more broadly when we remember Mill's faith in the power of education to reform the world. Yet must we not agree with Mill that it is not beyond the capacity of human intelligence to abolish poverty "in any sense that involves suffering"? Must we not agree that in this country to-day (and not only in Mill's time) many people suffer from diseases that could have been entirely prevented, or that could be mitigated, or even cured, were the resources of medical science fully exploited and available to all at an early stage of the onset of the disease? Perhaps after all a sigh would be more appropriate than a smile.

If we wish to criticize Mill we may find more scope in

<sup>1</sup> *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II.

the consideration of his list of positive evils. We must, however, notice that Mill included among "the sources of physical and mental suffering" unkindness and worthlessness on the part of those we love. Since these are perhaps not remediable by social effort, Mill does not further discuss them, for he was primarily concerned to argue that we could, if we would, make the world a better place. To this it may be replied (as Miss Rosalind Murray would surely have replied) that poverty and disease are not in themselves evil but only in so far as they are due to the sins of the rich. They are conditions, it will be urged, out of which may spring noble or ignoble lives. Or we might take the attitude, suggested by Bradley, of the man "at peace with reality" and thus "reconciled to the world and to life" who remains undiscouraged by evils, "since they point to the strength of the life which can endure such parasites and flourish in spite of them." For my part, I cannot agree either with Miss Murray or with Bradley.

More profitable than criticizing Mill would be an attempt to answer for oneself the question: What are the positive evils? I do not think that a complete list can be given, except in vague terms; at least I know I cannot be both comprehensive and precise, leaving nothing out. But I am quite sure that my list includes nothing that is not without qualification evil. Anything that hinders or makes impossible a right relationship between people: hatred of anyone; delight in the suffering of anyone, including deliberate cruelty; obtaining power over anyone and exercising it for his hurt; unkindness (i.e., a milder form of cruelty) in all its various forms, including insensitiveness to other people's needs; using people exclusively for my own aims, as though they were things and thus without regard to their being also persons;

indifference to truth; lack of self-control; fear. These are in my opinion indubitably spiritual evils.

Intense bodily pain, if it be at all prolonged, is also without qualification evil. The consideration of this evil is, I think, helpful if we wish to get our ideas about good and evil as clear as we can. In my opinion there is a fair amount of muddled thinking on this topic; sometimes, indeed, people talk nonsense about it. I do not pretend that I can myself be as clear as I should like to be. I made things a little easier for myself by adding the qualification that the bodily pain was prolonged. It is certainly less difficult to start from that. What is one like when one is suffering intense and prolonged bodily pain? (This question is not of course *definite*, since it leaves out of account what one is suffering the pain for—or perhaps not *for* anything—and how one came to be in the condition of suffering it at all. Both these points will have to be considered for they are of vital importance in any final judgment we may wish to make with regard to the pain-situation. But first there does come this question of the bodily pain itself.) Intense and prolonged bodily pain reduces one to the level of a merely sensitive organism. *How* intense and *how* prolonged the pain must be vary with different persons. Great self-control, the outcome of rigorous self-discipline, will enable a person to remain at the level of personality to a much greater extent than is normally the case. But even for such a one there is a limit. We are concerned with the case when this limit has been reached. At this extreme there is no awareness of other persons as persons, no response of love nor desire for it, no possibility of creative activities. Almost one might be said to *be* the pain rather than to *have* it. To be thus pained is, in my opinion, unqualifiedly evil.

If what I have just been saying is correct, then it also follows that a brief agonizing twinge of pain is evil. But it is not an evil to make a fuss about. For, owing to its brief duration, the bodily pain does not impair me as a person, nor even prevent me from carrying on whatever I happened to be doing. If the sharp twinges of pain constantly recur, then a bodily state may be set up which will impair my activities; in that case there is not a total difference between recurrent pain and intense prolonged pain. There are a great variety of cases ranging from the pain of severe toothache or being cut with a knife to the pain of cancer in its last stages. I judge that in each case we can truly say that suffering bodily pain is intrinsically evil.

In saying that suffering bodily pain is intrinsically evil I am saying that the judgment that *it is evil* is logically independent of the circumstances in which the pain occurs—that is, how it came about, and what is going to be done about it now that it has come. If this be granted, then I can explain how it was that it was easier to consider first the case of intense *prolonged* pain. In speaking about this I spoke almost as if I were judging the evilness to lie in the impairment of personality—about, that is, what are perhaps loosely called “the results of the pain”. And I think it would commonly be agreed that these results are evil. We must, then, as it were, make the judgment “This is evil” twice over: once when “This” stands for *the suffering of pain*; again when “This” stands for *losing the characteristics distinctive of a human person*. This loss may be brought about in other ways than by suffering bodily pain—for instance, by being intoxicated, which is, I believe, not unpleasant.

Once this distinction has been made it becomes possible

to clear up some very common muddles about "the value of pain". It is assumed that one may be made "perfect through suffering". I do not think this statement, in its original context, referred chiefly, if at all, to bodily pain, but I am ready to grant that it may be so used. I am willing to admit, and am indeed anxious to insist, that a person may be ennobled through suffering bodily pain bravely and so self-forgetfully that he behaves almost as though he were not suffering pain at all. But this ennoblement comes through the enduring of something hard to be endured, something evil. To me this statement seems to be both clear and true. But I am afraid that not everyone finds it clear and still fewer would find it true.

I remember, for instance, a discussion I had long ago with a serious and rather sentimental but otherwise charming and intelligent woman. She steadfastly maintained that pain is *intrinsically good*, at the same time asserting that she did *not* mean that pain is (or might be) good in the outcome of experiencing it. She gave reasons for her judgment which, so it seemed to me, showed that she was in fact thinking of the results. She said that pain ennobled, that people who had never suffered intense bodily pain lacked something good which those who had so suffered (or some of them?) possessed.<sup>1</sup> I do not dispute the contention that enduring pain bravely and self-forgetfully, and thus without bitterness, may enrich a personality in a way in which perhaps nothing else does. But from this it would not follow that pain was not intrinsically evil but that it is an evil not to be dispensed with. Certainly people sometimes judge that they have learnt much from pain and

<sup>1</sup> She then remarked disarmingly that she had herself never suffered any worse pain than a brief but severe toothache.

would not wish to have been without the experience. Perhaps this is what Miss Murray is asserting when she says that a Christian would hold that "how you endured or faced an evil was more important than the evil itself". It will be remembered that she argued that the evil of cruelty and oppression was not "ultimate" because "the final value was not here or now". This suggests that the final judgment regarding what is ultimately evil must be made from the standpoint of heaven. It remains uncertain what sort of judgments are appropriate to this standpoint.

Returning to earth, I wish to maintain that the refusal to admit that pain is intrinsically evil involves two confusions that lead eventually to contradiction. There is first the confusion between what is worth while on its own account independently of what it may lead to, and what it is worth while to have only because of what it leads to. The former is what is meant by "intrinsically good" and its opposite is what I have called "intrinsically evil". The second confusion consists in supposing that if something intrinsically good follows upon something evil, then that evil cannot be *intrinsically* evil. This confusion sometimes takes the form of supposing that the evil is nullified by the good, and thus the evil is made of no account. I do not think it makes sense to talk of nullifying evil, and I suspect that most of those who do thus talk are confusedly thinking not of nullifying but of overcoming evil. This is quite different. To overcome evil is not to deny the evil but to achieve value despite it.

Consider, for instance, the case of cruelty. I assume that everyone will agree that cruelty is evil. But cruelty is the deliberate infliction of pain for no other purpose than the delight of the person who is inflicting

the pain. His state of mind, I take for granted, is unquestionably evil. Why is it evil? Surely because pain is evil and he finds delight in causing some person, or animal, to suffer pain. If suffering pain were not evil, cruelty would not be evil. The infliction of pain can be justified only if without it something intrinsically good cannot be secured. The purposeless infliction of pain is evil because pain is itself evil and to enjoy causing pain to anyone is to love what is evil. It may be that a person subjected to such suffering may by his manner of enduring it—his courage, patience, and lack of resentment—cause his tormentor to repent of the cruelty, and seek forgiveness. There is a sense in which we can say in such a case that the evil is overcome; there is no sense in saying that it has been nullified, or that it was not really evil at all. Not all cruelty takes the form of inflicting bodily pain, and certainly there are pains worse than those of the body. But this consideration is not relevant here. What is relevant is to insist that to inflict unnecessary pain, whether mental or bodily, is evil, and that to permit unnecessary pain to be suffered when it lies in our power to remove or prevent the conditions that produce it is also evil, quite independently of the question whether those who suffer are ennobled or degraded by their sufferings. If degradation ensues upon pain there is a further evil; if the sufferers be ennobled there still remain the evils of the pain and either of deliberate cruelty or insensitiveness to conditions that make for pain. Notwithstanding Miss Murray's argument on behalf of "totalitarian Christianity" I venture to interpret differently the teaching of Christ, which seems to me to condemn cruelty and to admit the evilness of pain. Moreover, it is inconsistent to lay stress, as many

Christians do, upon the bodily pain Christ suffered on the Cross, and then to reject as of no great importance the pains suffered by their fellow-men. Christ is indeed presented to us as healing bodily disease, not ignoring it.

The other "great positive evil" which Mill condemned was poverty. Much has been written, or sung, in praise of poverty, but those who praise it do not usually seek it. Poverty is indeed often regarded as a good example of a "material evil". It affords, however, a good example of the unhelpfulness of the distinction so lightly drawn between material and spiritual evil. Poverty is not something which one has, as one has a toothache or a broken leg. It is a condition determining one's mode of life. This condition is relative to the economic system.

What is it to be poor? Why does it matter if one is poor? These questions must be answered if we are to decide whether it is evil to be poor. Answers are to be found only by considering how those who are poor live. To be poor (i.e., in our economic system, to lack money) is to be hindered in diverse ways from living as one would wish to live. *This* first of all. People who are poor are often forced to live in overcrowded rooms, amidst dirt, sometimes hungry, sometimes cold, sometimes suffering from diseases resulting from dirt and from insufficient or unsuitable food. These are conditions that make for human misery. It is futile to say that these are merely "material evils" and that all that matters is how they are faced. A husband may have to watch his wife, or a wife her husband, or parents their child, dying for want of things that money can buy, or lingering through months, even years, of bodily pain and weakness that could be remedied were it not for lack of money. Again, from lack of money some

men and women are forced to work without dignity—afraid of their “boss” because they are afraid to lose their job and thus their means of livelihood. In this way subservience and obsequiousness are fostered. These are spiritual, not material, ills. Those who argue that the evils of slum conditions are negligible apart from their causation through the sins of the rich do so because they regard these evils as merely material. It might be well for such people to ask themselves the question what it would be like to be herded together *always* in an overcrowded room without chance of solitude. Would they not admit that never to be alone is to be deprived of an essential condition for spiritual growth? The conditions may be dubbed “material” by those who are fond of the word, but the outcome is spiritual evil. If it is argued (as I have heard it argued) that “the poor” *like* to be over-crowded and to live in dirt and squalor, I should reply that, if this be true, “the poor” suffer another evil—contentment with conditions not fit for such a being as man.<sup>1</sup> To live without beautiful things—indeed, in positive ugliness—to be untrained to appreciate fine music or fine literature or plastic art, never to have opportunities of discovering the joy to be found in seeking knowledge, is to be deprived of conditions necessary for the development of the human spirit. It is true that from the most unpromising conditions some emerge. Nor would I at all wish to maintain that slums and poverty-stricken areas (so rightly called “depressed”) harbour “mute inglorious Miltons” who would be neither mute nor inglorious had they had money for travel and education. Quite the contrary, even though I am not one of those who think it well that Keats, for

<sup>1</sup> If it be replied that we, in Great Britain, are “remedying all that”, then my point is granted—namely, that these conditions are intolerable and are not to be tolerated.

instance, should have suffered as he did for lack of easy circumstances. It is, however, those not specially gifted, with no super-abundance of energy or inner conviction of genius, who suffer most, usually without knowing it, from the deprivations that come from poverty. It is easy to sneer—after the fashion of a distinguished Churchman, comfortable in his circumstances and proud of his family tree—at the way the poor take their pleasures and spend their leisure. But the finer enjoyments of life, apart from loving and being loved and from the consciousness of a job well-performed or of duty well done, are not to be had without training; leisure of mind and body are essential for such training. One has first to learn to outgrow the childish taste for sweets.

It is only too easy to become muddled at this point. Hints of the muddles appeared in Chapter II. What kind of lives are worth the living? Miss Murray and Cardinal Newman seem to say that nothing is needed, nothing really worth while, except “being good” and “performing one’s religious duties”. Is it an accident that both these Catholic moralists mention filthiness and raggedness as not uncommon characteristics of their saints? If nothing else matters except performing one’s religious duties, then it is understandable that stress should be laid upon the unimportance of dirt and sickness. From this point of view the whole significance of this life lies in its being a prelude to life in the world to come. Hence, those conditions are good which promote saintliness (in Miss Murray’s sense of “saint”); it is then argued that those conditions which social reformers stigmatize as “bad” have been in fact most prolific of saints. If our ideal is to fit ourselves for a Heaven to come, not upon this earth but only after death, then it is reasonable enough not to care about making this

world a place where men and women can be free and happy.

We have seen also how Einstein rejects ease and happiness as "ends" fit only for swine. This is another muddle. Happiness is not an *end* to pursue;<sup>1</sup> it is a sign, perhaps, that something worth while is being pursued, a characteristic of a state in which a human being's capacities are being fulfilled. I do not believe that Einstein is not happy in doing his work. It is not swinish to be happy unless one is happy in swinish ways. These muddles seem to me to come from thinking of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, as three ends, or one great *END*, and then supposing that weaker, or more swinish, folk set up a rival end, Happiness. But Happiness is not an end to be chosen *instead* of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness; it is a character of experiences of knowing something to be true, contemplating something beautiful, fulfilling one's duty. We must think in adjectives, not in capitalized abstract nouns. In making or enjoying a poem, a picture, or any work of art, or any beautiful natural scene, in acquiring knowledge of various kinds, and in teaching what we know, we some of us sometimes find we are happy. In intercourse with friends, in sharing their hopes and successes and finding they share ours, we are sometimes happy. In doing our duty even at a cost, in being kindly and compassionate, in overcoming pain and fear, we sometimes find we have been happy. In activities such as swimming, riding,

<sup>1</sup> I quote the concluding lines of an unpublished poem by Dr. C. W. Shepherd:—

What is happiness? the gleam  
Of a dream within a dream.  
While you know it not, 'tis with you,  
Grasp the vision and 'twill leave you,  
And your empty arms confess  
Its counterfeit, forgetfulness.

fencing, playing chess or football, and so on and so on, we are sometimes happy. In other words, these are activities the performing of which is enjoyable.

A list such as this is tedious, yet its tediousness does not save it from evident incompleteness. It is much easier to talk in large abstractions, and to do so enables one to use more elegant English. Nevertheless, I think it is important to ask ourselves on what different sorts of occasions we have been happy. I once asked a class of adult students, all of whom were training for social work, to write an account of some occasions in which they had judged themselves to be happy. To my surprise and no small dismay most of them had found themselves happy only in doing their duty. A few had enjoyed art. None seemed to remember having been happy in experiencing what Mill so unfortunately called "the lower pleasures", nor in intercourse with friends, nor in the pursuit of knowledge. Human activities are very various. The complexities of living ought not to be ignored in the quest for what is worth while. Most reflective people are prone to over-simplify, not by the simple process of leaving out a great deal as unreflective people do, but by finding common characters which are, however, less significant than the diversities we conceal by using abstract nouns.

The temptation to over-simplify in this manner is peculiarly attractive to moral philosophers; it is a temptation that an academic moral philosopher finds it hard to overcome. Preachers, so far as my experience goes, nearly always succumb. Would it not, however, be entirely surprising that our diverse activities, if they have any worth at all, should have it for the same reason? The world is not in the least tidy and unitary. Human beings are many-sided creatures, growing from an animal

origin and capable of reason and love. To forget this community with the animals and the difference from them is to bereave the spirit or to exalt the senses.

The distinction between spiritual excellences and moral excellences is indisputably important. Morality in the narrower sense of the word consists in using our opportunities for achieving excellence of any kind; it is an affair of conduct. The consciousness of morality is the consciousness of being obliged to do something. It arises when we are aware of something that needs to be done although we would like to leave it undone, or that something is not to be done although we want to do it. Some of us, for instance, find we are happy in managing a great business with a ruthless disregard of the welfare of those affected by our activities; others find themselves happy in dominating other human beings to their hurt. But what we ought to do is not independent of what other people ought to do and be required to do; likewise, with regard to what we ought not to do. It follows that we ought not always to pursue experiences in which we should be happy. This is a platitude but, like most platitudes, it is often denied and still more often misunderstood. If we admit that all men alike ought to be free and happy, we see reason why we should at times forgo our own happiness. To admit this is not in the least to admit that it is swinish to be happy. It is to recognize that not everything which, in other circumstances, would be worth while can be achieved in such a world as this. We see that not all good things are added to the righteous man. This we have surely always known.

## CHAPTER V

### “WHILE ROME IS BURNING”

“Though it is only in a very imperfect state of the world’s arrangements that anyone can best serve the happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own, yet so long as the world is in that imperfect state, I fully acknowledge that the readiness to make such a sacrifice is the highest virtue that can be found in man. I will add that in this condition of the world, paradoxical as the assertion may be, the conscious ability to do without happiness gives the best prospect of realizing such happiness as is attainable.”—J. S. Mill.

“I do so want them to be happy,” said a mother to the headmistress of the school to which she had just brought her young children. It is a natural wish. How is it to be fulfilled? That depends upon the ways in which we conceive happiness to be possible. At Christmas and on birthdays we send to one another “all good wishes for your happiness”. It would be false to say that the wish is without significant content; it would be foolish to suppose that what we wish our friends is a continuous round of pleasures. We think more highly of them than that. Grant that the wish is seriously said and gravely meant: I (any one person) wish you (someone loved) “a happy New Year”. What is it I wish for you? That you should not this year suffer some great grief—the loss of someone much loved, the misery of knowing someone loved has done wrong, the loss of your means of livelihood, the cutting off of your activities by serious disease or any bodily calamity, failure in doing your duty, the need to be distressed by your country’s suffer-

ing. This at least, and much more; not only not to suffer but also to have some times of joy—intercourse with friends, work well done and enjoyed, leisure and the relaxations of leisure. At the end of 1940 (now, as I write, very near) it will hardly be possible for any normal adult person to wish any other adult a happy year in 1941. We cannot expect to be happy while we and other countries are engaged in so great and terrible a war; we ought not to expect to be saved from griefs now so widespread. It is sobering to reflect how few people in the world to-day can be deeply happy, save for comparatively brief periods, except the children. And for them we do not wish nothing other than pleasures. We wish for them experiences through which they may grow and develop happily.

By the *pleasures* of life we commonly mean amusements and relaxations of various kinds. It is characteristic of an amusement to come to a full-stop. The game is over and done with; the detective novel is read and put on the shelf; the crossword puzzle is solved and forgotten; the play is ended and the spectators depart. While it lasted it (each of them) was a good experience, worth having, for it was a change in the routine of daily life or a pause from work, and it was not prolonged. An oft-repeated pleasure satiates, though some people, it must be admitted, take a deal of filling before saturation point is reached. But it is reached and then a "new pleasure" has to be found, and the finding of it is a burden, and the new pleasure ceases to be new and it palls; it has then ceased to be pleasant.

There is no doubt that the language we use makes difficulties for us. It would, in my opinion, be convenient if we could keep the term "pleasures" for those activities that come to a natural full-stop. There may

be some exaggeration in saying that a game comes to a full-stop; although the game is ended, playing it may have increased our skill in playing future games, and that, too, is pleasant. But each game is, so to speak, a rounded whole in that the moves in one game have no effect upon the moves to be made in the next game; each game starts from scratch. There is thus some justification for regarding a game as a completable activity. No one wants to play twice a game, say, of chess, or football, or bridge, with exactly the same moves. I do not, however, wish to say that a sharp distinction can be drawn between *games* as pleasures and *other pleasures*—such, for instance, as swimming, listening to music, looking at pictures, reading a book. These activities, too, may be merely relaxations: the picture looked at, the book read, may be put aside as “finished”. But this is not always the case; the picture may be felt worthy of being looked at again; the book may be re-read and a more subtle enjoyment derived from the re-reading. I suppose no one would deny that a sonata, a symphony, a concerto, does not yield us full enjoyment on a first hearing. More exquisite delight will be obtained when the ear of the mind is trained. And for this reason we often call listening to music “an intellectual pleasure”; and so with the other arts. Yet we should not say that a man whose time was mainly spent in listening to music was leading a “pleasure-loving life”. Even if we do not agree with Shakespeare that

The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils,

we do commonly hold that it is good to enjoy music. If we were to condemn a man for spending his time

mainly in listening to music (or in looking at pictures), we should do so chiefly on the ground that he was "a Nero fiddling while Rome was burning"; we should not condemn him for the same reasons as we should condemn a man for whiling away his time in an idle round of disconnected amusements—whose very disconnection is likely to bring him the nemesis of boredom.

I do not pretend to be able to make precise who "we", in the preceding sentences, stands for. It is enough if it be granted that "we" may there stand for a considerable number of ordinary people. The two cases deserve some consideration. A man who spends his life in disconnected amusements behaves *on the level of* a kitten or a child, but not *as* a kitten or a child behaves; the kitten and the child play; their play ends; after a while they are ready again to play, and in playing they develop after their respective fashion. The man who passes from one amusement to another is continuing something that ought to have a natural end, as though it led on to something else. He does not behave in a manner fitted for a being who is capable of diverse activities; there is in his life nothing serious. The same charge is not to be made of the fiddling Nero.<sup>1</sup> His fault, I assume, was that he fiddled while Rome burnt, instead of putting down his fiddle and helping with buckets of water. I entirely agree with the popular verdict that he ought to have helped to put out the fire. Always in our world to-day there is the equivalent of a fire to be put out. Sometimes the fire is localized; sometimes the conflagration is almost world-wide. For this reason we judge that

<sup>1</sup> I do not know whether Nero did fiddle while Rome was burning but I assume the popular charge to be correct. Further, for the purpose of my illustration, I assume that he really was a fiddler, who fiddled for love of music; also that he did not himself set Rome on fire.

no one ought to be for ever fiddling, or enjoying the arts, or delighting in scholarly research, or contemplation. We ought to fiddle (letting *fiddling* stand as an example) only upon a condition—only, that is, if no urgent demand is made upon us. To enjoy playing the fiddle is itself good, but having this good may conflict with something that needs to be done, that *ought* to be done. This is surely the point of the charge against Nero.

It is, in my opinion, important to be clear about this. People sometimes talk as though enjoyment of art was nothing but play—although, of course, refined play and “quite nice” as a social asset. I have already admitted that we may pass insensibly from enjoying music, books, and pictures as mere relaxations to the subtler enjoyment characteristic of appreciating a work of art. I have also insisted that play is itself good. But play comes in between serious activities. The appreciating of art is a serious activity. I cannot define what I mean by “serious”; all I can do is to try to make the reader see for himself what I mean. It is not true that no activity is serious except those which directly promote changes in our world; the serious is not the same as the useful. The notion of serious activities has to be connected with human capacities. I start from the assumption (which, to me, seems indisputably true) that human beings have spiritual needs.<sup>1</sup> These are the needs that differentiate men from the other animals; if they are left unsatisfied, then men are nothing other than animals. A man’s activities are not in the least like a set of pigeon-holes, of which some may be filled while others remain empty. His spiritual activities react on his animal activities, and what is purely animal in him may help or

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II.

hinder his spiritual development. In men appetites soon become something more than animal needs; they revert to mere animal needs, that must be satisfied *at all costs*, when men, through starvation, cold, wounds, are nothing but suffering bodies. To be thus is to be non-human; deliberately to bring men down to this level is to be inhuman.

The fact that men have spiritual needs affects also the modes of satisfying their animal needs: animals devour food; men make an art of dining; animals (at least some of them) enjoy air and sunlight; men (though too few of them) delight in the beauties of nature; animals respond to the beautiful colours and characteristic sounds of their mates; men can find in colours and shapes and ordered sounds a more than sexual gratification. The enjoying of art and of beauty in nature is specifically human. Those who experience such states of mind know them to be without qualification good. Such experiences are serious in that they are significantly connected with the growth of the human spirit. What I have said about art holds also of the enjoyment of learning—scholarship and the research into natural processes that we call science.

I shall without more ado take for granted that art and learning are serious activities, having worth in themselves. But I have also admitted that Nero must forsake his fiddle when Rome is burning. An urgent demand is made upon him to save the city and its inhabitants from destruction and death. The demand brings into opposition two values: music and saving lives. This opposition is not well stated, as I have just stated it; but that is how it presents itself in the Nero-dilemma. It sounds odd to say that "saving lives is a value" and to oppose it to "music" as another value; and it is odd

but its oddness does not prevent it from being truly said. If we could manage to see why exactly it sounds odd and yet is truly said, we might succeed in coming to grips with the problem known to moral philosophers as "the problem of conflicting values".

Two good things, or, as it is often convenient to say, two values, do not conflict apart from a situation in which one but not the other is realizable—i.e., can be had by someone. There would be no conflict worth the mentioning were it not that, in a definite situation, one good thing cannot be had without surrendering the other good thing. To recognize that this *must* be surrendered is to recognize a moral demand. It is characteristic of human beings to recognize that there are certain claims that demand to be honoured; the demand takes the form: something *ought to be done*. The demand upon Nero was to save someone's life. A demand is not moral unless its fulfilment would realize something worth realizing. When we said "Nero *must* forsake his fiddling", the *must* is an expression of a moral demand. Unless it is worth while that men should live out their normal span of life, should not be burnt and mutilated, there was no moral urgency in the demand that they be saved. Its morality consists in the fact that Nero by responding to the demand could save what is worth while, for human beings have and are capable of creating value. Making music is also worth while. If we were to consider these two activities in abstraction—that is, without referring to any definite situation such as Nero's dilemma—it would not make sense to ask which is better. (The question would be as silly as to ask: "Is blue better than green?" or "Is the note A on the piano better than the note F?") But the question: "Would it be better for Nero to go on fiddling or to help put out

the fire?" is a definite question to which a definite answer can be given. To me the answer seems indisputable: "Nero ought to help put out the fire, rescuing whomsoever he can from the flames."

This answer rests upon certain assumptions, which I take for granted, but which must be made explicit. Men stand in relations one to another which are such that out of these relations arise moral demands. A moral demand is that something should be done with reference to good and evil. Morality, that is to say, is concerned with actions; not doing something may also be an action—e.g., Nero's not doing anything to help put out the fire. Actions take place in definite situations. Judgments with regard to the morality of an action are about the action in *its* situation. A situation is always complex; it has, so to speak, no definite boundaries. An ethical situation is one in which good or evil is present; an ethical situation thus contains at least one sentient being.

I do not here offer any defence of these assumptions; I believe that they are assumptions commonly made and presupposed in our ethical judgments. What I am most concerned to do is to call attention to the complexity of an ethical situation. By *complexity* I do not mean *perplexity*, but just complexity—i.e., an interweaving of elements which in their interrelations constitute the situation. In each situation there are elements peculiar to that situation. Nevertheless, certain situations resemble other situations in essential characteristics; these situations we can refer to by using the same words in each case. For example, there are many situations in which promises are made. Each of these will be a *promise-making-situation*; these will resemble one another in containing persons having expectations

with regard to the future. This must be so, since it would be nonsense to say that a promise is made although there was no one who promised, no one to whom the promise was made, and no expectations with regard to the possibility of future actions. Further, in such situations one person wants another person to do certain things in the future, believing that not otherwise would these wanted things be done. To take other examples : we speak of *enjoying music*, *visiting our friends*, *visiting a sick and irritable aunt*, *bombing a city*, *taking the children to the Zoo*, *giving money to hospitals*, *going to College*, and so on. The italicized words in each case incompletely describe a situation by naming an important element in that situation. Importance is relative to a point of view and essential characteristics are those without which what is important would not be present. Human beings resemble each other ; we are members of the same kind or sort. Consequently we often do find the same things to be important, finding ourselves in the same sort of situation. There are many different roses ; each is a single thing which grows and finally dies. But each rose is a member of the natural kind *rose*—that is why we have a single name for referring to each one of them ; each rose needs the same sort of conditions as other roses for its growth. In the same way human beings each need conditions which are the same for all—for example, food, water, warmth, play, loving and being loved, and so on, indefinitely but not infinitely.

All this sounds very elementary. So it is, and rightly so, for what comes first is essential for what comes after ; it is elementary in the secondary sense of “ trivial ” only because it is always taken for granted. But something that can be taken for granted must not thereby be forgotten. In the elaborate complexities of our present

stage of civilization we are likely to take for granted and forget the resemblance between human beings because, for many of our usual purposes, it is the differences between one human being and another that are important—i.e., must be taken into account.

If we consider resemblances between situations we can make generalizations; thus, for instance, we can say: "Enjoying music is good." This statement does not require any qualification. But from this it does not follow that it is always good *that I should enjoy music*, for this depends upon a *definite* situation. Again, it is true that giving money to a hospital is good; thus pleas for hospitals figure among "The Week's Good Cause." But it does not follow that it is always good *that I should give money to a hospital*. Whether it is good depends upon my circumstances and the circumstances of the particular hospital at a definite time—that is to say, the judgment: "It is good that so and so" relates always to a definite situation. In generalizing we abstract from definite situations, and in thus abstracting we leave out of account certain factors that are present in the situations. Thus to generalize and abstract is necessary; thinking, and therefore speaking, involve abstraction. Our difficulty may be that we are tempted to be more abstract than is necessary. The importance of noticing and then resisting this temptation will, I hope, become more evident as we proceed.

Consider again the situation which constitutes Nero's dilemma. To be situated is to be set in relation to other things. Nero (I assume) is in a safe place enjoying music; there are relations holding between him, the fiddle, the part of the earth on which he stands, the attendants around him, and also the sounds he makes on the fiddle. He might choose to limit his situation to

factors such as these, isolating himself from the burning city to which, however, he also stands in various relations. But (we are assuming) he has observed the city to be on fire and he knows there are people burning in it. Whether he likes it or not, he is within the wider situation. It is an ethical situation—i.e., a situation to which judgments of good and evil are relevant. The question that confronts him is, then, not at all whether music-making is good; that question is already answered; nor is it whether saving people's lives is good; that question may also be regarded as answered; nor is it the pseudo-question whether enjoying music is better than saving lives; it is the question whether in this definite situation (known to Nero with a fullness of detail that our verbal descriptions cannot give) it is better to stop fiddling and save lives by helping to put out the fire. There would be no dilemma if to stop fiddling were not to give up something good; there would be no moral dilemma if having this good *now* were not incompatible with responding to a moral demand.

If the buildings in the city have no value, if the lives of the citizens have no value, then there cannot be a moral demand to save either from destruction. Moral values depend upon non-moral values. If Nero did not stand in definite relations to the city and its inhabitants, there could not be any demand upon him to take action with regard to them. But he does stand in relation to them, and upon these relations the moral demand is based.

It is certainly annoying to be interrupted just when one is mastering a difficult musical phrase; it is annoying to be called upon to lay aside one's interesting historical research; it is annoying to have to relinquish one's delighted and solitary contemplation of a master-

piece of art. Why should one allow oneself to be thus interrupted and prevented from following an enjoyable occupation? For what reason can one be called upon to surrender something good which is being experienced as good? Any answer to such questions must be based upon the relations in which one human being stands to other human beings. These relations are inescapable. Is it possible to make more definite than I have yet done which relations between men are inescapable?

We may find some help in answering this question by considering a carefully reasoned judgment made by Mr. Clive Bell in his book, *Civilization*.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bell believes that to be civilized is "to experience the most intense and exquisite states of mind"; the completely civilized man possesses "Reasonableness and a Sense of Values", from which spring "a taste for truth and beauty, tolerance, intellectual honesty, fastidiousness, a sense of humour, good manners, curiosity, a dislike of vulgarity, brutality, and over-emphasis, freedom from superstition and prudery, a fearless acceptance of the good things of life, a desire for complete self-expression and for a liberal education, a contempt for utilitarianism and philistinism, in two words—sweetness and light." We can recognize in this description an ancient Athenian ideal. It includes nothing that is not good. If all people, or a large majority of people, were thus "civilized", we should all be living happier lives to-day. Mr. Bell, however, maintains that the production of such completely "civilized" beings must be at the expense of the many who will remain incompletely civilized, or not civilized at all. His conception of the good society is pyramidal: at the top

<sup>1</sup> I do not in the least wish to break a butterfly with a hammer; I have been greatly entertained by Clive Bell's *jeu d'esprit*, and, when I first read it, in 1928, learnt a good deal from it. Certainly I recommend it to anyone who is interested in human affairs.

those who are completely civilized, below them those who have received some "civilizing" influences, at the base slaves who will have no share in the sweetness and light of civilization. He argues :—

. . . To discredit a civilization it is not enough to show that it is based on slavery and injustice, you must show that liberty and justice would produce something better.

All else being equal, I should prefer a civilization based on liberty and justice : partly because it seems to me the existence of slaves may be damaging to that very élite from which civilization springs; partly because slaves too deeply degraded become incapable of receiving the least tincture of what the élite has to give. A sensitive and intelligent man cannot fail to be aware of the social conditions in which he lives, and the recognition of the fact that society depends for its existence on unwilling slavery will produce on him one of two effects : a sense of discomfort, or callousness. And it does seem to me that a state of mental malaise, inducing either a turning away from one important side of life or a hardening of heart, is bound eventually to lower the value of the civilized man as an end and impair his efficiency as a means.

What interests me most in Mr. Bell's pronouncement is his uneasy and unwilling admission that "a sensitive and intelligent man cannot fail to be aware of the social conditions in which he lives". If only he could shut himself up in an ivory tower how delightfully and valuably he might pass his time. But a "civilized man" must be sensitive and intelligent, so, as Mr. Bell is reluctantly forced to admit, either he must harden his heart or be discomforted. It is very unfortunate, but that is how things are. How satisfactory would it not be for a civilized Nero, if only Rome were not burning? But it is burning, and he cannot, if sensitive and intelligent, be unmoved by its plight.

To-day, although Rome is not burning, not a few of

the cities of Europe are, or have been, in flames—deliberately set on fire. What does it matter to us, if we be sensitive and intelligent men, provided that our own city is not in flames or, if it is, if we can take refuge in California and there produce masterpieces, or at least enjoy the masterpieces of others? Mr. Bell has, I think, given us the answer. We cannot remain unaware of what is happening; we may escape the danger and the discomfort; we may still, far removed to a safe place, continue our civilized pursuits; but we do so at a cost—the cost of callousness or a sense of discomfort.

There seems something wrong here. The “civilized man” was not pictured as callous or as discomforted; he has no need to turn away, hardening his heart to the suffering of others, for he is innocently unaware that any suffer. The *Hoy Polloy* do not exist for him as persons. Mr. Bell’s “civilized man” can be but a Bloomsbury dream; and in Bloomsbury, if not in ancient Athens, the dreamer must at last awake.

It is surely not difficult for us now to see that Mr. Bell’s “civilized society” is not a good society. The slaves at the base are not themselves regarded as having worth; they are merely useful in supporting the apex, the “civilized” élite. But slaves also are persons. Since the time of Kant it has been usual to put this point by saying that a man is an end in himself, not a means to anything else. By saying that a man is “an end in himself” we mean that a man ought to *be himself*, and not *be for* anyone or anything else. It is *not* to say that a man is an isolated unit. On the contrary, a man cannot be himself apart from his fellows; to be in good relations to other people is necessary in order that he should himself develop what he has it in him to be. We have seen that, in this present stage of the world’s

history, it is not possible to remain wholly unaware of what is happening to other people in our own society; at least, not if one is at all sensitive and intelligent. It seems to me true to say that nearly all people would like to be in good relations with other people but to be in these good relations involves that these others should not be prevented from developing and using their capacities. I have been careful to say "would like to be in good relations", and not "seek to be", for we are apt to sneak a loophole and add, "would like to be, if *only* so-and-so"; and, unfortunately, "the so-and-so" is not the case. But, just because we would *like* to be in good relations (if only so-and-so), we do feel some discomfort because we are not. There is some slender ground for hope in this discomfort.

Hume denied that there is such a passion as "the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself". Certainly *mankind* is an abstraction and not a possible object of affection; if, however, we interpret "mankind as such" as meaning "each and every individual human being", there is more to be said, and I propose to say it shortly. Hume's point is rather that we love only those whom we know and either admire or regard as benefactors to us. Nevertheless, he adds:—

"Tis true, there is no human, and indeed no sensible, creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in lively colours: But this proceeds merely from sympathy, and is no proof of such an universal affection to mankind, since this concern extends itself beyond our own species.<sup>1</sup>

Hume is surely correct in saying that we are affected by the happiness or misery of other "sensible creatures"

<sup>1</sup> *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. III, Pt. ii, sect. 1 (Selby-Bigge edition: p. 481).

(i.e., men and animals) provided that this happiness or misery is vividly present to our minds. Sympathy is a natural excellence. The word "sympathy" is, however, ambiguous. It may mean similarity of feeling—as, for example, when I and my neighbour are both made afraid by bombs exploding near us. We have a fellow-feeling, which is primarily contagious emotion. If, however, the realization of his fear inclines me to reassure him (even though I myself be afraid), then I am sympathetic, that is, I feel *for* him and not merely *with* him; my feeling goes out to him. There is a further development when I am able to "put myself in his place", imaginatively realizing what he is feeling and feeling *for* him no less keenly than I should feel for myself. This kind of sympathy is an outcome of imaginative intellect; it is comparatively rare and very precious. A little might be done towards cultivating something like it, if the imaginative powers of children were fostered in a way not at present common in our educational system. At its highest, however, it is likely to remain as exceptional an excellence as any other great imaginative achievement. Such sympathy is akin to love and always accompanies intense love between persons.

A great catastrophe does awaken widespread feeling *for* its victims. Magnitude and suddenness are perhaps important factors in bringing the catastrophe vividly before our minds. For instance, the great earthquake in Turkey (January, 1940) aroused sympathy among people in no way directly affected. This sympathy found its practical expression in sending help in the form of Red Cross ambulances and in raising a large sum of money for the victims—all that most people could do to aid. Such facts as these are important as showing that men and women can be moved to feel for others once

there is vivid awareness of their sufferings. The difficulty is to imagine vividly and not too easily to tire. In the last five years disasters, mostly of men's own making, and cruel persecutions have been so frequent and widespread that at times imagination has been dulled and emotions stifled. At such a moment we may be tempted rather to escape from the thought of human suffering than to do what can be done to alleviate it.

Last August I received a letter from a friend of mine in South Africa, which raises a problem that must be faced. I shall quote from this letter as the writer puts the point better than I can put it. The letter is dated July 23, 1940, so that it was written soon after the bombing of England had begun :—

It is unbearably painful to know that England is being bombed and that one can't do anything to help. . . .

I suppose in time we *shall* grow less capable of being moved to great sorrow and indignation, steel ourselves, as it were, against the onset of these feelings. Yet I do not think that this is desirable. If we keep on "steeling" ourselves we might arrive at a stage of numbness and be mere "automatons" without freedom of feeling.

You see, the tragedy of Poland and of other countries fills me with horror. But I have a different sort of feeling about the bombing of England. It worries me that this should be so. I have tried to reason about it and it seems to me that the great general tragedy of this war is a sort of pattern made up of individual tragedies of millions of human beings.

Therefore our feelings become intensified when we get beyond the abstraction of world tragedy and come in contact with individual suffering (i.e., when pain is suffered by those we know). Perhaps this is necessary to retain our reason in face of the beastliness of war. I wonder if I (anybody) *ought* to have the same sort of feeling for a young German pilot who is shot down as I

would for my own brother, should he be shot down. . . .  
If I can't, is the inability due to a limitation of sympathy?

I wish I could think clearly on this subject. It worries me to know that I can bear the bombing of the Chinese (and stay put) but that I can't bear the bombing of the English in England (and not try to get to England). I wish I could find adequate reasons for this difference in feeling. I have been thinking much of this problem since the air-raids in England.

It is natural, I think, to feel more intensely the sorrows (and joys) of those we love than of those whom we do not even know. Love is a going out of oneself to the loved; what affects them affects us. This seems to me not only natural but also right and fitting; it fits the relation of loving, for that is the nature of love, and love is supremely good. What is unfitting and wrong is the desire without sound reasons to differentiate between the treatment of those we love and those we do not. Love alone does not provide such reasons, but to feel with those we love is itself good. What needs to be remedied is the too narrow extent of our love.

I have sometimes found it convenient to think of men in general as arranged, in relation to one's self, in concentric circles with one's self as the centre. In the first circle are the people whom I (*any* I) know personally in varying degrees of intimacy. Here "intimacy" means entering into my life in the sense of affecting and being affected by my ordinary doings. This circle includes my friends and the members of my "home circle." Ranged beyond these, at various distances, as it were, from the centre come those with whom I am acquainted in person but not intimately so—colleagues, business associates, fellow-villagers, or townsfolk belonging to my own group, foreigners with whom I have common

interests uniting us across our national boundaries, and "great men" of my own and other countries whom I seem to know without the ceremony of personal introduction. Beyond this circle lies another containing those not known to me by any definite description but lumped together as "the rest of mankind".

Although *I* am the centre of this set of circles radiating out from me *I* am also contained within many other sets of circles, each set having a different *I* for centre. The figure of concentric sets of circles is not indeed quite apt but it corresponds roughly to a not uncommon mode of speech. Visual imagination boggles at the thought of the complicated pattern that could properly represent every set of people to whom I stand in varied relations. The point to be emphasized is that relationships hold between individuals, not between groups as groups. In trying to think out these relations we must start from a central *I*. But it does not follow that *I* must always regard the relation to *you* from my end of the relation, so to speak. Love is the relation holding between *me* and each of my friends. In my opinion love such as we have for a friend cannot unite persons not known one to the other. For those with whom I associate in various ways but who do not enter into the circle of my friends I have affection; this affection may be described as "fondness", "loving feeling" (to be distinguished from love proper), or friendly feeling. In correct English we do distinguish between "being friends with" and "having friendly feelings towards". It is possible to have friendly feelings for persons with whom one is but slightly acquainted, and even a not dissimilar feeling for those *about whom* one knows something without being acquainted with them. Such friendly feeling is at the root of most work described as "philanthropic"; there is nothing of

condescension in it. When by vivid description unknown persons are brought to our attention sympathetic interest may be evoked and pass into friendly feeling.

It is my contention that it is not psychologically impossible to extend the circle towards whom we have friendly feelings. Our tendency to shut ourselves up in a small circle is due, I think, partly to lack of imagination, fostered by appalling ignorance about foreigners, strangers, and men in other parts of one's own country; partly our withdrawal is due to fear. We are afraid of what we do not know, and fear makes us huddle together and put out spikes to ward off the unknown persons, felt to be dangerous because unknown. We are afraid of change because changes may interrupt our ordinary doings and perhaps imperil that warm familiarity with our environment that is so dear to frightened children. Fear makes us hostile to (i.e., enemies to) strangers; we are afraid of injury to ourself and to those we love; we fear to lose our property, the things we need—i.e., our *goods*. To regard the stranger as a man *like* ourselves is a step towards friendly feeling. But when we are afraid we act irrationally; later, when the fear has gone, we may be ashamed of our irrational behaviour. Experiencing this sort of shame is hopeful, provided we can admit our shame to ourselves and face the consequences of it. Often, however, we are afraid and do not know ourselves to be afraid. Then, having behaved irrationally we find "reasons" for our behaviour and thus, unfortunately, we remain unashamed.

Just as love is an intensely personal emotion uniting only those known to one another, so, too, is hatred. Hatred is a strenuous emotion, very tiring and destructive of oneself. But just as we can feel friendly to people not near enough to love so we can feel unfriendly to

people we hardly know and even to those whom we do not know at all save by a description. If, in a quiet hour, we begin to think of people beyond our own intimate circle, and to think of them as individuals ("mothers' sons and daughters, all of them"), we are more likely to feel to them in a friendly rather than in an unfriendly manner, but on a condition—that they do not appear to us as hostile, ready to thwart us and destroy what we love. Fear, indignation, or moral disapproval is a necessary prelude to hatred. I think that evidence to support this contention is provided by the fact that Hitler, for instance, has had to "whip up" the German people to hate the British; his skill is shown in his careful presentation of the British (and other nations whom he wishes to be regarded as enemies) as monsters of iniquity. In similar fashion, in the war of 1914–18, the British represented the Germans as guilty of behaviour outraging a decent man. Hate needs continually to be fortified.<sup>1</sup> So, to a less extent, does love.

If what I have said about sets of persons related to a central *I* is true, then it follows that it is natural for me to feel more deeply the sorrows of those I love than of those I do not know. In saying that it is "natural" I

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hume: "When our own nation is at war with any other, we detest them under the character of cruel, perfidious, unjust, and violent: But always esteem ourselves and allies equitable, moderate, and merciful. If the general of our enemies be successful, 'tis with difficulty we allow him the figure and character of a man. He is a sorcerer: He has a communication with dæmons; as is reported of *Oliver Cromwell* and the *Duke of Luxembourg*: He is bloody-minded, and takes a pleasure in death and destruction. But if the success be on our side, our commander has all the opposite good qualities, and is a pattern of virtue, as well as of courage and conduct. His treachery we call policy: His cruelty is an evil inseparable from war. In short, every one of his faults, we either endeavour to extenuate or dignify it with the name of that virtue, which approaches to it. 'Tis evident the same method of thinking runs thro' common life." (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. II, Pt. II, sect. 3, p. 348.)

mean that it results from the nature of a human being, who is the finite centre of his set of circles of people. Thus it is natural for an Englishman to be less moved by the bombings of the Chinese than by the bombings of his own countrymen; to be more moved by the killing of his brother than by the killing of one of his fellow-countrymen. But it would not be reasonable to think that the one mattered more than the other, that it was any *worse*. The writer of the letter from which I quoted seems to me to be correct in saying that the great tragedy of this war (and of any great disaster) is that it is made up of "individual tragedies of millions of human beings". In each case there is *someone* for whom *this* killing, *this* wounding, is the worst that could have happened. To be reasonable is to look at a situation in the light of the whole situation. When we do this we can see that it is not true to say "never was sorrow so great as my sorrow". Yet, for me, my sorrow remains beyond comparison.

I am still optimistic enough to believe that, once we have focused our attention upon circles of people lying beyond the boundary of our intimate set, we cannot fail to recognize that *his*, *her*, *their*, sorrows (and joys) are not less important than our own; that if their sorrows be due to conditions for which we are in part responsible or which we could help to alter, we cannot without discomfort turn away from them. The "civilized man" of Clive Bell's ideal is not wholly civilized, exquisite though he be; he lacks humane feeling born of width of imagination and the response of acute sensibilities.

If our sensibilities are unblunted we cannot ignore to-day the tragic happenings in our world. Not to ignore them is to be forced to do something about them; to do something it is first necessary to make clear to ourselves our political ideal.

## CHAPTER VI

### “ WE WILL BUILD A BETTER WORLD ”

“ Home is where one starts from. As we grow older  
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated,  
Of dead and living.”—T. S. Eliot: *East Coker*.

ON Christmas Day, 1940, the King broadcast a message to the Empire and the world. I quote part of his message :—

Time and again during these last few months I have seen for myself the battered towns and cities of England and I have seen the British people facing their ordeal. I can say to them all that they may be justly proud of their race and nation. On every side I have seen a new and splendid spirit of good fellowship springing up in adversity, a real desire to share burdens and resources alike. Out of all this suffering there is growing a harmony which we must carry forward into the days to come when we have endured to the end and ours is the victory.

Then, when Christmas Days are happy again and goodwill has come back to the world, we must hold fast to the spirit which binds us all together now. We shall need this spirit in each of our own lives as men and women and shall need it even more among the nations of the world.

We must go on thinking less about ourselves and more for one another, for so and so only can we hope to make the world a better place and life a worthier thing.

There is no denying it—in these dark days of bitter warfare we need frequent encouragement. Of that need there is no cause to be ashamed ; it is the measure of our sadness and of our realization of the hideous suffering to

which we men condemn one another. We need to be convinced that the outcome of this war will not be merely victory over our enemies and what they stand for, but will be the beginning of "building a better world". That this is to be so our statesmen have again and again assured us. This faith informs the King's message. The message seems to me to be worth serious consideration. Two points are important.

First there is the recognition of a spirit of good fellowship and the desire to share burdens; secondly there is the insistence that this spirit will be needed after the war. No doubt there is some exaggeration in saying that this new spirit of fellowship binds us all together. We have not all suddenly become brave, self-sacrificing, and considerate. It is probable (though I do not know this at first hand) that in the face of danger some have yielded to panic, have been cowardly, and have sought safety at the expense of others. No doubt some have been quite unwilling to help in bearing burdens but rather have tried to shelve their own; no doubt some have grumbled even at comparatively mild inconveniences, have not welcomed the homeless, nor been prepared in any way to alter the settled routine of their lives. It would be foolish to paint too bright a picture; not all men are refined by pain nor ennobled by loss and bereavement. It would be equally foolish and more regrettable to fail to notice the surprising amount of good-fellowship and readiness to share burdens, and the calm courage displayed by ordinary men and women. It is well to have it emphasized—this courage and goodness in rather unexpected places. I think, for instance, of a woman I know—of the sort unkindly described as "drab"—very ordinary and not apparently of the stuff of heroes. Yet, as an elementary schoolmistress in a school now in one of our most devastated cities,

she has had to face frequent bombings and distressed nights and days; she takes it as a matter of course—just “doing her duty”, quite definitely not liking it, but never thinking that she could do anything else but keep calm and go on for the children’s sake. There are, I do not personally doubt, very many others like this woman, and not in this country alone. They are not recognized as heroes; nor are they, unless it be heroic to do one’s duty in the face of danger, prolonged discomfort, and almost insupportable weariness.

I emphasize this typical instance because such plain and unspectacular devotion is required for “building a better world”. The time will come, with the final cessation of hostilities, when splendid feats of daring and magnificent courage, long sustained and steady confronting of death and wounds, will no longer, or not to any great extent, be required. Bradley was right in saying that it is in the hour of a nation’s need that the citizens rise above their private, narrow selves and are capable of sacrificing everything for the nation’s good. But it is a mistake to think that war alone constitutes “the hour of a nation’s need”. It seems so, for in war the objective is plain, the evils of failure are clear, and the danger presses. Hence we feel the urgency; because of this urgent need the nation—i.e., the individual men and women—must achieve some measure of unity, and this involves the sacrifice of merely personal aims. To attain victory we make these sacrifices. But victory is the end of war, not the cause of it; victory cannot be the purpose for which we fight although it is the immediate objective of the fighting.

In achieving victory and thereby the end of the war, there will necessarily be intense relief. There ought not to be contentment. Already we need to look beyond the

war, to strive to attain something worth having, not merely as a cessation of the intolerable agony of war but as worth while in itself, a positive good. Only a deep dissatisfaction with our present mode of life combined with a definite hope for the not distant future will make this destruction of Europe endurable. We must make of our popular catchword "building a better world" something more than a glib phrase, useful for Sunday evening broadcasts and used as dope to help us to hold fast.

It is not my purpose to discuss politics and international affairs save as they enter into our ordinary lives. Unfortunately they enter very deeply. We cannot escape political responsibility; the necessity is thrust upon us of making clear to ourselves our political ideal. Have we any clear, or even moderately clear, conception of what we mean by "a better world"? We need to be definite, and to be definite is difficult. It is a grave illusion to suppose that we (the ordinary men and women of this country) can leave to our statesmen alone, or indeed chiefly, the task of making definite the conception of a better world. Upon each of us lies the responsibility of hard thinking in order to answer two questions: (1) In what ways does the world need to be made better? (2) How is this better world to be achieved?

To talk about "building a better world" is to admit that much is wrong, *which need not be wrong*, and which, therefore, *we* could, if we would, alter. The conviction that, when this war is ended, there must be no going back to "the old order of things" is more firmly and more widely held than was the case during the last war. This is important and, I believe, indisputable. That there is this widespread conviction was stressed by Lord Halifax in a speech which he made to the members of Oxford University, on February 27, 1940. Contrasting the atti-

tude of his own generation to the outbreak of war in 1914 with the attitude of the undergraduates of to-day to the outbreak of war in 1939, he said :—

We in 1914 had been born and grown up in an atmosphere of peace. Those who came up to Oxford with me lived in a world that we then thought was stable and secure. That security was rudely shaken in 1914, but not sufficiently shaken for us to have any serious doubt that it would soon be put right or to think that when the war was over the old life would not return.

And he repeated :—

We were sure, as I say, in 1914 that once we had dealt with the matter in hand the world would return to old ways, which, in the main, we thought to be good ways. You are not so sure.

I believe that Lord Halifax's estimate of the younger generation is probably correct; I hope, further, that all reflective young men and women not only do not believe that there will be a "return to old ways" but also hold that there *ought* not to be. It is not, I think, true that all young men and women in 1914 believed that the old ways were "in the main, good ways".<sup>1</sup> There was, as J. S. Mill had formerly pointed out, much that needed to be remedied. Nevertheless, there was far less of which decent men have cause to be ashamed. At the begin-

<sup>1</sup> There is nothing in Lord Halifax's speech to suggest that he has been led to modify the opinion he held in 1914, that "it would soon be put right". Indeed his discussion of the Nazi youth suggests that he is still unaware of the important part played in that movement by their dissatisfaction with the changes that had been brought about in all civilized countries as a result of the Great War. In my opinion Lord Halifax is mistaken in contending, as he does contend, that the present war is a conflict between youth and youth. It is, I think, a conflict between Ideals whose attraction or repulsion is not confined to youth, and which Lord Halifax wholly fails to understand. Further, he seems to me to misrepresent completely the part played by our own statesmen during the last twenty years.

ning of this century it was reasonable to hope for steady improvement in social conditions and the gradual elimination of the positive evils of poverty. There had been growing up in Western Europe for some centuries, very slowly and with many setbacks, a respect for law and a widening of the basis of freedom. In the Western democracies during the Victorian age and up to the outbreak of the 1914-18 war there was considerable advancement in the direction of the ideal of the American revolution. It is convenient to call this the ideal of a civilized democracy. This ideal is far from having been accomplished. That, however, is not the point that is of main importance for my present purpose. The point is that it was an ideal consciously held and, on the whole, deliberately pursued. The moral significance of this period lies in the fact that there was a widespread conviction that there was an ideal worth pursuing, that there were high aims to the achievement of which a man might fittingly devote his life; to live strenuously for an ideal is more difficult and exacting than to be prepared to die for it.

During the last twenty years this ideal has not only been explicitly denied and vilified in certain countries, it has further faded as an ideal even in those countries where the citizens continue to admire the sound of the word "democracy". For, it must be remembered, the democratic ideal is founded upon the moral principle that *all men alike ought to be free and happy*. It requires a temper of mind free from suspicion of others, from hatred of the foreigner, and from intolerance. It requires further an active sympathy with those who are oppressed. In all these respects the last twenty years have seen a serious deterioration.

Before the last war it was possible to travel from one

end of Europe to the other without a passport ; during the last twenty years it has not been possible. This may seem unimportant ; in fact, it is not. Its importance is that it is a symptom of the change for the worse that has befallen us. Each State in turn has tightened its restrictions upon the entry of foreigners. In a world which is economically so interdependent that it may be said to be a unity, certain of the most powerful States strive to be wholly sufficient in their economic requirements. The growth of economic internationalism is in conflict with an emotionally sustained nationalism. Hatred of others is fostered. In the nineteenth century there were atrocities and outrages, there were cases of scandalous harshness and injustice towards individuals. But they were *felt* to be scandalous. Two instances will suffice : the Dreyfus case and the “ Bulgarian atrocities ”. I will quote from the unbiased account given by Mr. H. A. L. Fisher in *A History of Europe* :—

It is difficult for those who did not live through the feverish years 1894–1903 to form a conception of the passions which were aroused by the fate of this young Jewish officer who had been condemned to deportation by a military tribunal on the charge of betraying military secrets to the Germans. Half France vehemently held that Dreyfus was guilty, the other half with equal vehemence that he had been cruelly wronged. Lifelong friendships were ruptured, the peace of families was ruined, the conscience of individuals was racked and tortured. A furious anti-Semitic campaign in the Catholic Press, fortunately unaccompanied by the acts of terrible violence and injustice which have characterized anti-Semitic outbursts in Central and Eastern Europe, spread its venom through the land. How, it was asked, could this Jew be innocent ? How could the soldiers be wrong ? How could it accord with the national interest to impeach the honour of the army, which alone stood between France and the German peril ? Of what account was

justice to the individual when measured against the safety of the State? Morality eventually prevailed. The testimony of Paul Meyer the palæographer, the denunciations of Zola the novelist, the confession and suicide of Henri the forger, and the courage of Colonel Picquart, a Protestant who risked his military career for the truth, established the innocence of Dreyfus and routed the military and clerical foes of the Republic.<sup>1</sup>

It was as an offence against the civilization of Europe that the unjust imprisonment of Dreyfus aroused such indignation; as a result of this indignation "morality eventually prevailed". I well remember the intense interest this case aroused among my elders at home and the relief with which the vindication of Dreyfus was greeted.

Equally significant was the public attitude to the murder of 12,000 Christians in Bulgaria by irregular Turkish troops in 1876. Gladstone emerged from his retirement in order to awaken the public conscience on behalf of these massacred Bulgarians; he succeeded. The whole career of Gladstone is significant from our present point of view. He was a "good European"; he believed passionately in the importance of the moral standards of European civilization; he regarded a violation of these standards as an offence against a common civilization not to be confined within national frontiers, and not, therefore, to be regarded as purely a domestic affair of some foreign State. These standards are constituted by the acceptance of justice, freedom, tolerance, and humanity.<sup>2</sup> Wherever

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* (one-volume edition, 1936), p. 1005-6.

<sup>2</sup> It has long been the fashion to sneer at Gladstone's "Nonconformist, Liberal conscience." Incidentally he entered Parliament as a High Church Tory and he was by temperament a High Church Tory to the end. The point, however, is that he had a conscience—i.e., a sense of values in accordance with which his policy was framed. In short, he was what Prof. E. H. Carr would call an "idealist". Yet, if success be the criterion of "realism" in

he saw these to be in danger he protested. To quote Mr. Fisher again :—

That English voters could not be indifferent to the general welfare of mankind was the main burden of his argument. "Remember", he said to the electors of Midlothian in a characteristic flight, "that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan among the winter snows is as inviolable in the eyes of Almighty God as can be your own." <sup>1</sup>

There can be no questioning the fact that a great and deplorable change has taken place during the last ten or fifteen years. Hundreds of thousands of people have been persecuted, tortured, deprived of their civil rights, treated with every form of degrading and crude brutality in European countries that were once proud of their civilization. Anything approaching these persecutions in amount and in character would have been inconceivable at the beginning of this century. But the most disquieting factor in this evil state of affairs has been the public reaction, or perhaps it might be better to say, lack of reaction to these senseless and brutal persecutions. There was no British statesman who sought to awaken the conscience of the peoples of Europe to rise in protest against this fierce persecution of men and women on account of their race, their religion, or their political views. There seemed, indeed, to be no conscience to

---

politics, Gladstone was a realist. As Mr. Fisher says: "At fifty-nine he became the head of a great administration (1868-74) which gave England universal education and the ballot, freed the universities from religious tests, reformed the army, and levelled the first courageous blows at the injustices and anomalies inherent in English and Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. Though a strong Anglican he had not scrupled to disestablish the Anglican Church in Ireland. Though a large landlord, he had passed the Irish Land Act against the interests of his class and for the relief of an impoverished and embittered agricultural democracy in the sister island." (*Op. cit.*, p. 1043.)

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

awake. It is true that public opinion in this country did take notice when 600,000 Jews were suddenly subjected by the Nazi Government to a fresh outburst of vindictive cruelty because a young Jew, half-crazed by the sufferings of his parents, had shot a member of the German embassy in Paris. Even then *The Times*, representative of a considerable section of "respectable" English people, was content to remark that we "were shocked"—language appropriate to the loss of life and devastation of property caused by the hurricane that had swept New York State in that same month.

I do not in the least wish to belittle the strenuous and sometimes self-sacrificing efforts made by individuals in this country, in the United States, and especially in France, to succour these exiled victims of malignant persecution. But I am concerned with the attitudes of peoples and their governments, and to point out the change that has come over the face of Europe since the days when, under the influence of Gladstone, the people in this country were roused to protest against the Bulgarian atrocities, against the massacre of Armenians, against the ill-treatment of political prisoners in Naples. Gladstone was able to appeal, and to appeal successfully, to "the conscience of conservative Europe". No such appeal was made in high places before the war in which we are now engaged. Nor, had it been made, could it have been made successfully. The new heathenism in Germany consciously and deliberately has approved these evil deeds. "The conscience of Europe" is now a phrase without application.

Twenty-five centuries ago another civilization was in danger of being destroyed. A prophet arose to make lamentation :—

Hear ye the word of the Lord, O Kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem ; Thus saith the Lord of Hosts,

the God of Israel; Behold I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind. Therefore, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but The Valley of Slaughter. (Jeremiah, xix.)

However foreign the words of Jeremiah may sound in the ears of my readers, it should not be difficult to translate them into a form suited to our ways of thinking. The blood of innocents—men, women, and children—has been shed, homage has been paid to primitive gods, “burnt offerings” have been made, all for the glorification of the State and more especially for the self-styled leaders, Hitler and Mussolini. And the purpose, at least of Hitler, is, as the purpose of the priests of Baal, to make his dark religion prevail.

With this condemnation of the Nazi and Fascist leaders I expect nearly everyone in this country would agree; and to these may be added the other members of the British Commonwealth, the vast majority of the citizens of the United States, and all those whose hopes lie in the defeat of Germany and Italy in this war. That being so, we may easily be tempted to say: “This is the evil that has to be destroyed; when this is done we shall have laid the foundations of a better world and, indeed, be well on the way to achieving it.” Thus to think would be, in my opinion, a profound mistake. Certainly we have first to defeat Hitler and Mussolini in order that eventually their strange and hideous religion should lose its hold

upon the hearts of their deluded followers. But this will by no means suffice. The Nazi philosophy not only has consequences in the lives of men; it has also causes. Of these I shall presently say more. We must first consider our own moral claims to be fit for building a better world.

To hear our "public spokesmen" (to adapt a familiar B.B.C. phrase) one might be tempted to think that there is nothing much wrong with the democracies which the advance of science and some increase of goodwill between class and class and individual and individual will not in time remedy—masses of unemployed, some bad housing conditions, occasional crime-waves, a few lapses in public integrity—in these we may confidently expect improvement within a not too distant period. I agree that, certainly before this war, whatever may be the case after its desolation and destruction have ceased, such expectations would not have been unreasonable. But the fulfilment of them is not enough. We have not yet considered the most serious evils of our time.

Earnest people, preachers and moralists, are fond of complaining that morals are on the decline, that our fathers behaved better than we do, and their fathers better still. It is not, of course, true that the past is always better; indeed, were it true each age would be worse than its predecessors. But this is not so. We must not belittle the substantial advance that has been made, until quite recently, towards a kindlier world. It is easy to ignore the shadows in the past while we indulge in a sentimental nostalgia for "the good old days". In certain moods we are tempted to darken the shadows of our own times, just as in other moods we are tempted to over-emphasize the high-lights. To make an objective estimate is difficult. Nevertheless we must make the attempt.

I do not think that what may be described as "the average morality" of our time is lower than formerly. So far as I am able to judge there is no evidence that people to-day more often fail to do what they believe to be right. The really terrifying sign of our times is the deterioration in moral *standards*. Most ordinary men and women try to behave "decently" (a favourite word among English people); they have, however, no clear conception why they should so behave, and have, indeed, never asked themselves that question.<sup>1</sup> There have been long periods in Christendom when, if ordinary people had been asked such a question, they would have replied that so to behave was to fulfil the commandments of God. This answer is never (as I shall later try to show) sufficient, but it has been to many simple and unreflective people a satisfying answer—that is, an answer that stills all doubts and provides a firm basis upon which to build one's daily

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Lindsay, who (as we saw in Chapter III) is much concerned to encourage us "to get on with the job", writes: "For one part of decency is to respect the general rules of the community, not to do things 'which are not done'. But the ordinary man—and that includes most of us—doesn't worry about the moral assumptions of his society. He accepts them and takes them for granted almost as if they were rules of the game and nothing else; but something more than the rules of our particular game does come in" (*The Two Moralities*, p. 32). I find it difficult to discover what Dr. Lindsay takes the "something more" to be. He adds: "Of course the difference between different codes of morals cannot be abstracted from goodness or badness as easily as the difference of the rules of different games can be abstracted from good or bad sportsmanship. The different codes of morals are not just different as fashions or games are different. Some are high codes, some are degraded codes. There is such a thing as moral progress and moral degradation. If the code is degraded, the virtues flourish with difficulty under it" (p. 34). He is concerned to maintain that in addition to the morality of "playing the game"—i.e., fulfilling the duties of my station—there is "the morality of perfection"—i.e., the challenge of Christianity. It does not seem to me that Dr. Lindsay thinks that "the ordinary man" has any need to reflect upon the question: What do we mean by saying that some moral codes are "degraded" and wherein does "moral progress" consist?

code of action. Such simple and unreflective people are to be found among those whose presence cheers and sweetens all with whom they are in contact. They are still to be found, but in decreasing numbers. They have been largely replaced by people not so simple but quite as unreflective who have in part surrendered the Christian code of action and have wholly surrendered the religious faith upon which it is based; and they have put nothing in its place; nor do they feel the need to put anything in its place. The morality of such people can be nothing but adherence to a conventional code without any understanding of the basis of the convention. This position is bound to be unstable; it cannot sustain the shock of distress nor even the onset of gloomy forebodings.

We are familiar with the complaint that the "moral fibre" of contemporary generations has been weakened. Shortly after the beginning of this war sounds of relief came from various high places; it was found that after all, the young men and women were "not doing so badly"—they had responded to the call of duty and were acquitting themselves well. This estimate is just, but it does not go deep. What do we mean by "moral fibre"? Usually, I think, the moral strength to do one's duty when one sees it. The more shining the duty, the more easily is it seen. The call to be heroes has not lost its appeal. Certainly we may be thankful that this is so; in it—perhaps in it alone—we may find hope for the human race, reason to believe that the building of a better world is not impossible. Nevertheless, this is not immediately evident. We have not yet faced the question (formulated on page 104): In what ways does the world need to be made better? To this question we have now to attempt to give a definite answer. But, as I have already pointed out, this answer can be given only if we know clearly

what is wrong with the world. To determine this is, then, our first task.

At the outset we must be clear what we mean by "the world". I mean by it "the community of which we are members". This community is not definite in its spatial and temporal boundaries; it includes whatever in any way affects me and whatever I in any way affect, for every *I* in this complicated set of inter-related persons.

I, the author of this book, can make no claim to special insight or to special competence for discussing the evils of our time. What I have to say is, and can only be, the outcome of my personal judgment. A personal judgment, however, is not necessarily a biased judgment; still, bias may be present to roll me off the straight course. I am less concerned that there should be agreement with my judgments in detail than that it should be admitted that we stand in need of reflecting about our standards of value, and that consequently we must abandon the puerile standpoint that *in our ordinary lives* all we need is "to play the game". For it is just in our ordinary way of life that so much is wrong. That is why a noble response to the calls of heroism is not enough.

There is among ordinary men and women an extraordinary lack of culture and a complete unawareness of the want of it. Culture involves activity of thought, a quick perception of what is beautiful and a passionate need for it, and humane feeling that transcends the bounds of one's own limited self. Without such transcendence there is no civilization worth the name; without appreciation of art and activity of thought the transcendence of self, if it occur at all, will remain on the lower levels of moral behaviour. Culture requires a balance of material and spiritual values. Such a balance cannot be achieved

without effort. It is a mistake to suppose that all that is needed for happiness is that we be allowed to follow our natural impulses. It is also a mistake to attempt to divide impulses into good and bad, with the intent that the latter be repressed and the former permitted whatever satisfaction can be snatched in a world of competing individuals. Human nature is not so simple; an impulse in itself is neither good nor bad. It is from the manner of their co-ordination that goodness and badness arises. A free and happy person is one whose impulses are controlled by self-discipline with an aim in view. To be disciplined is to be trained. This is the proper meaning of asceticism, which is derived from the Greek word *ἀσκέω*, meaning, "I practise"; it involves a metaphor taken from the arena of athletic training. An athlete is trained by an expert who shows him how to train his body for the sake of the end in view; but the practice of training is a self-discipline attained by his own effort alone. This will be admitted at once so far as bodily skill is concerned. It is not less true of mental activities, and of the disciplining of all one's powers as a human person. Thus, we cannot be taught to think; we can only be shown what it is like to think. Thinking is a personal activity; as we are, so we think and feel.

There are to-day far too many people who do not think and feel for themselves, and seem never to have experienced the need to do so. Consider, for instance, what is happening in the case of those people whose chief relaxation is to be found in the cinema. I am not concerned first of all with the quality of the films seen, but with the fact that it is chiefly a matter of *seeing*—i.e., passively watching a set of pictures (more or less connected, no doubt) and adapting oneself to rapid change of visual impressions, helped to some extent by reproduced

sounds. There is in this comparatively passive apprehension nothing to arouse the keener and more developed activities of the spirit. I cannot believe that it is an accident that the *quality* of the most popular films is so distressingly low. By "low" I mean without sensitiveness, without beauty of plot and character, and thus without moral significance. To suppose that moral significance means "pointing a moral, to adorn a tale" would be to make a grave mistake. A play has moral significance if it heightens our sensibilities and thus enriches us as persons who are both animal and spirit. For such enriching more than the rôle of a passive spectator is required; there must be activity of mind which is, in its own way, a creative response. The average film contains nothing to excite this response, so that those whose leisure is chiefly spent in watching such films remain spiritually undeveloped with their intellectual powers atrophied. The outcome is a general weakening of judgment.<sup>1</sup>

This weakening of judgment is a serious factor to be taken into account when we are inquiring into the evils of our time. Instead of judging for ourselves we form mass-opinions, the evil of which is not at all that they are *shared* by other people but that they can hardly be said to be our own at all. In consequence, we are easily exploited by advertisers unscrupulous enough and intelligent enough to take advantage of our passive stupidity. In this respect some politicians must be classed with advertisers. To them we must add quacks of all sorts bringing nostrums for our salvation, one replacing the

<sup>1</sup> Although I believe that what I have said above about the quality of most cinema-plays is correct, I must admit that my experience is restricted, but it is, I think, sufficiently representative to enable me to judge. Also, I hear people talk about films and have noted their attitude to cinema stars.

other after how brief a time, their inefficacy manifest, for neither they nor we knew what needed to be healed. With such weakness of judgment goes a lack of critical spirit, and thus insensitiveness to the claims of truth. The end is the denial of reason.

A civilized society, and consequently every society in which there is a high level of culture, must have a desire for and a respect for knowledge. Either of two different needs may drive us to seek knowledge : to control the forces of nature, including man, who is a part of nature ; to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of human beings seeking to understand for no other reason than to gain understanding. So far as our Western Civilization is concerned the deliberate pursuit of this second aim does not go farther back than three thousand years ; almost it may be said to have originated in the city states of Ancient Greece. The importance of this aim must be stressed ; it is relevant to our desire to build a better world. To-day it is fashionable to deride the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Some Marxian scientists are foolish enough to despise the Ancient Greeks because they sought no profit from studying mathematics. But " profit and loss " is not the only measure of value. If we like to use the language of capitalists, we can say that the Greeks " profited " by their devotion to deductive science or to " useless learning ". But the language is unsuitable since the " profit " lies in the pursuit itself, the satisfying of the intellect. In thus satisfying the intellect the critical spirit is developed. But it is not for the sake of this development that the aim is pursued, and if, *per impossible*, it were, the wished for development could hardly occur. Rather is it a case of " to him that hath shall be given ".

I do not in the least wish to deny the importance of the technical achievements in science ; nevertheless these

achievements are not a sign of a civilized society, although they may be means to its further advancement. The function accorded to science in the Nazi State is, despite the magnificence of their technical achievements, a sign of barbarism. The cultural value of science lies not at all in any brilliant application of scientific knowledge to the control of natural processes but in its power to educate and form the minds of men. Science can flourish only when men are free; its study must be dispassionate, not harnessed to the needs of the State, nor to the requirements of religious dogma, nor to the whim of individuals. Science is by its nature objective, impersonal, and independent of individual caprice, though not of the climate of thought within which it is developing. In the study of science the narrow limits of self are transcended. What matters to a scientist is not that the theory is *his* but that it is true, or an approximation to the truth. This is the scientific ideal, however much those who "profess" science may sometimes fail to maintain it. Despite the claims made for a "Nordic mathematics" and a "German physics", science remains international, or rather the distinction between nation and nation is not relevant to its pursuit and affords no criteria for its truth. This holds not only of science understood in the narrow sense of "the natural sciences" but of any rigorous study having as its aim the acquisition of knowledge and nothing but knowledge; it includes, therefore, history both in the narrower and the wider senses. It is not to be wished that all men should be scientists or any other kind of specialist. The scientific temper of mind goes beyond specialist studies; if it were widespread it would be evident in our newspapers and selection of books. When such study is perverted to ends other than its proper aim the whole community is in danger of catching the disease. In our community the

scientific temper is weak. We have become susceptible to absurdities from which we seemed to have freed ourselves. To give a definite instance : certain widely read newspapers offer to tell us what the stars foretell with regard to our coming luck or unluck. This is, to my mind, a most disquieting symptom of national unhealthiness. It is said of Hitler, with what truth I do not know, that he relies upon astrological forecasts and has faith in " lucky " months. I should not be surprised if this were true, but maybe it is exaggerated. But what are we to say of our own use of mascots ?

It may seem intemperate to object to mascots as though—a little lacking in a sense of fun—one should object to other people's harmless jokes. Yet we believe ourselves to have outgrown the age of talismans ; but a mascot is a talisman although it is one we use with no thought of a consecrated rite, seeking only to quieten unconfessed fears ; we yield to a superstition all the more deadening for not being faced. In an age that is correctly in some respects to be called " an age of science ", we reap the achievements of science but not its spirit. Not realizing how deeply this failure affects our ways of living by infecting our thinking, we fancy ourselves to be enlightened beyond previous generations, whereas we have but shed old beliefs and old traditions and have no inkling of the function they once successfully performed. We reject revelation and with it what revelation stood for—namely, traditional wisdom arising from the common experience of the community.

In short, range and depth of spiritual experience is lacking. This is a judgment about our present community as a whole. All such judgments should be made with caution and stand in need of being constantly interpreted in terms of individuals. A community is a set of in-

dividuals inter-related in various ways.<sup>1</sup> The character of the community is a resultant of the characteristic modes of behaviour of its members. In "behaviour" is to be included beliefs, hopes, and fears, and thus also judgments with regard to what is worth while and the possession of the knowledge requisite for achieving it. The moral progress of a community is determined primarily by the aims of the individuals composing it, and only secondarily by the steadfastness with which those aims are pursued. If it be said that there are here two criteria of moral progress I should not dissent, but I should insist that it is by reference to the first that moral progress is to be defined. This accords with our accepted standards in passing judgment upon peoples and civilizations. If we judge that one community is morally more advanced than another, we do not thereby judge that a higher percentage of the members of the former strive to attain their aims than is the case with the second. Indeed, we pass judgments with regard to dead-and-gone communities for which no such statistical data are forthcoming. We cannot, however, make so sharp an existential distinction as the last sentence might seem to suggest. An ideal that is not at all wrought into action belongs to the realm of dreams, and, not being manifested in behaviour, would leave no sign of its presence. Nevertheless, it is important to maintain that the degree of efficiency with which the ideal is carried into practice is not a measure of the value of the ideal.

In an earlier chapter I quoted Mr. Vidler's complaint that we as a nation have "no clear sense of a national

<sup>1</sup> Sociologists differ considerably in their terminology, some using "community" where others use "society". I have not tried to be more precise than the definition above suggests. See, on this topic: H. A. Mess: "Terminology", in *Sociological Review*, 1940.

purpose ”; our belief in “ democracy and freedom and the preservation of Western Civilization ” is too vague. With this judgment I agree. For the most part we take it for granted that we know what it would be like to have achieved the democratic ideal, but we think of democracy mainly in political terms as though it meant nothing but free voting by everyone. But democracy is not merely this; indeed it is only incidentally this as a matter of political machinery which, in fact, is required only for putting it into effect. Democracy is a vision of good living; it is not an easy ideal; it requires sacrifice to achieve and to maintain it. It would not be worth attaining unless it meant not only material welfare but also the developing of the excellences characteristic of the human spirit.

If we are to build the better world of which we talk so much, we must certainly eliminate unnecessary misery, the suffering inflicted by men upon men. For this purpose material improvements are needed : houses fit for human beings, whether “ heroes ” or not; freedom from the anxiety of economic insecurity; conditions conducive to the healthy development of the body. Good drains are required as well as good schools. These are tangible aims, and we speak confidently of securing them. Some confidence is reasonable, for much has been done since Dickens familiarized a large public with the conditions of the poor in London. There has been progress enough to afford some grounds for hope. Our danger will lie in letting vested interests stand in the way. We cannot sunder material from spiritual conditions. Essential improvements in material conditions will not be achieved without sacrifice—sacrifice not only of this or that individual or only of things cherished that are without value, but also of things it would be good to have were our world

different from what in fact it is. These sacrifices will not voluntarily be made unless we have faith that they will promote an ideal worth realizing.

Important though the material conditions are, they are not worth the having if they are achieved only by the suppression of freedom and the denial of truth. Intellectual freedom is necessary in order that the lowest achievements of science, which are its technical triumphs, may be put to good or evil purposes. Even these can not be won without patience and discipline of spirit. Within the domain of his proper work the scientist must have freedom of inquiry and steadfast respect for truth. Without intellectual freedom art also cannot flourish, and without art our better world will not be attained. If we were "lovers of the beautiful" we could not have tolerated the slums, the haphazard building schemes, the outcropping (we cannot call it "growth") of our cities, the defilement of our landscape and defacing of our villages, with which we are all too unhappily familiar. Our buildings must be fine, not merely expensive. A nation has the architecture it deserves. Our designs for our streets and houses, our "ideal homes", reflect our spiritual aims, or the want of them.

This better world will not come of itself, born of vague hopes and Sunday aspirations. It can be born only by the active and almost unceasing efforts of those who have accepted the ideal of making "the world a better place and life a worthier thing" and have rejected the illusion that the "good fellowship" engendered by war will without effort be prolonged in the time of peace. To build this better world will be difficult; it cannot be built once for all, but must be continually renewed. It may never be built; it may not even be begun. That is a

sobering reflection for those of us who have so hastily promised “to build a better world”. We intend to; we do not deliberately lie, but perhaps we have not counted the cost. Yet for the end to be achieved the cost is not too heavy to be borne.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONFLICTING IDEALS

“To be sensitive—to have an open mind—these are valuable qualities even in war-time, whatever the wireless says. Do they help us to conquer the Nazis? They don’t. They are weapons in a larger and a longer battle.”—E. M. Forster: *New Statesman and Nation*, August 10, 1940.

At the outset of his “Inquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods employed for their Realization”,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Aldous Huxley says:—

About the ideal goal of human effort there exists in our civilization and, for nearly thirty centuries, there has existed a very general agreement. From Isaiah to Karl Marx the prophets have spoken with one voice. In the Golden Age to which they look forward there will be liberty, peace, justice, and brotherly love. “Nation shall no more lift sword against nation”; “the free development of each will lead to the free development of all”; “the world shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

There is difference, Mr. Huxley thinks, only with regard to the methods that should be employed for reaching the ideal. In this judgment Mr. Huxley appears to me to be mistaken. There is not now, and there was not in 1937 when Mr. Huxley made this statement, “general agreement” with regard to “the ideal goal of human effort”, even in Western Europe, not to mention Eastern Asia. The Fascist ideal has been conceived in sharpest opposition to the values which Mr. Huxley

<sup>1</sup> This is the sub-title to Mr. Huxley’s *Ends and Means*.

believes to be so generally acceptable, and which may be said to be characteristic of the democratic ideal.<sup>1</sup> The opposition is an opposition with regard to ultimate values. Fascism and democracy differ as *ideals*. The difference is emphatically not a difference merely with regard to modes of social organization; it is not even a difference resulting from the use of different methods to achieve the same aim; on the contrary, it is the initial difference between these sharply opposed ideals that necessitates fundamental differences in the methods employed to achieve aims that are totally opposed. The ideal of Fascism is power and the glorification of the State; the ideal of democracy is the development of free and happy human beings; consequently, their most fundamental difference lies in their different conception of the worth of human beings as individuals worthy of respect.

The ideal of Fascism is opposed to peace; war is not regarded as an inevitable means for achieving a far distant goal, but as itself an end for such a being as man. Mussolini has put this point beyond dispute; the following passages are worth quoting:—<sup>2</sup>

Fascism is to-day clearly defined not only as a régime but as a doctrine. And I mean by this that Fascism to-day, self-critical as well as critical of other movements, has an unequivocal point of view of its own, a criterion,

<sup>1</sup> I realize that Mr. Huxley is not thinking about democracy or about forms of social organization, and I do not suppose that he would agree that the ideal of democracy includes the values he specifies, although he quotes from the *Communist Manifesto*. I hope that, in the course of this chapter, I shall show reason for speaking of this ideal as “democratic”.

<sup>2</sup> I quote from Michael Oakeshott's translation of “The Doctrine of Fascism”, an article contributed to the *Enciclopedia Italiana* by Mussolini, in 1932. Mr. Oakeshott gives the article in full, in his *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (1939). The page references, given in parentheses, are to this book.

and hence an aim, in face of all the material and intellectual problems which oppress the people of the world.

Above all Fascism, in so far as it considers and observes the future and the development of humanity quite apart from the political considerations of the moment, believes neither in the possibility nor in the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism—born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it. All other trials are substitutes, which never really put a man in front of himself in the alternative of life and death. . . . Fascism carries over this anti-pacifist spirit even into the lives of individuals (p. 170-1).

It follows, as Mussolini says, that "Fascism rejects universal concord".

I do not know whether participating in war (i.e., fighting) suffices to put "the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it", or whether it must be successful war—i.e., victory. It would seem to be the latter, since unsuccessful war detracts from the power of the State. Yet courage, self-sacrifice, and the ability to face death may characterize the soldier who is defeated no less than the soldier who is victorious. Properly speaking, however, it is no doubt *armies* that are defeated or are victorious, and thus, in the end, not individuals but the State. Nevertheless, the glamour of Mussolini's pronouncement is felt chiefly by those who are thinking of individual feats of nobility. For the Fascist the point is probably of no importance; the individual is simply an element in the State. As Mussolini says :—

The keystone of Fascist doctrine is the conception of the State, of its essence, of its tasks, of its ends. For Fascism the State is an absolute before which individuals

and groups are relative. Individuals and groups are " thinkable " in so far as they are within the State . . . the Fascist State has a consciousness of its own, a will of its own, on this account it is called an " ethical " State (pp. 175-6).

And again :—

But when one says liberalism, one says the individual ; when one says Fascism, one says the State (p. 177).

This is, of course, the Idealistic theory of the State, which we encountered in the writings of F. H. Bradley, who, like Mussolini, seems to find in war the highest expression of the moral consciousness of the State. So far as Mussolini has thought out the philosophical basis of his theory he seems to have accepted the form of philosophical Idealism propounded by Giovanni Gentile. Such a theory is necessarily authoritarian : there is, on this view, nothing appertaining to an individual apart from his service to the State ; indeed, the only language appropriate to this view is "*the* individual" and "*the* State", not "*an* individual", and scarcely "*a* State". The individual is a means to the State, which can hardly be said to transcend the individual ; it engulfs the individual, " swallowing " him somewhat after the fashion of the Absolute, according to Bradley. Mussolini puts the point more grandiloquently :—

The State is not only present, it is also past, and above all future. It is the State which, transcending the brief limit of individual lives, represents the immanent conscience of the nation. The forms in which States express themselves change, but the necessity of the State remains (p. 176).

It is important for us to understand this doctrine (if we can) for it is a theory about human life which entails a theory of morals. I confess to finding difficulty in

understanding it. Why is the State "*above all, future*"? Perhaps in saying this Mussolini is more aware than a philosopher should be of himself as the originator of the doctrine. He has not managed to make clear to himself the distinction between *the State* and *the Fascist State*. If Fascism is a philosophical theory about the essence of a State, about an absolute, then it does not make sense to talk about "the Fascist State"; but it might make sense to talk about "the Fascist conception of *the State*". Mussolini, however, is concerned to maintain that "the Fascist State is unique; it is an original creation" (p. 177). The point of importance is that the Fascist State is the "original creation" of *one* individual—namely, Mussolini. Once we understand this, we may see why it is that one of the ten official sayings of the Fascist State is: "Mussolini is always right." This startling statement occurs in both the 1934, and the 1938, versions of "The Fascist Decalogue."<sup>1</sup> It is startling because it accords to one man not only all authority but all wisdom and, by being placed in the official sayings, it suggests that "the Fascist State" is after all bound up with the personality and the life of its originator. This is surely inconsistent with the Fascist conception of the individual, unless indeed the position accorded to Mussolini is intended to show that he is not as other men are. Perhaps this is the correct interpretation. In the 1934 version of the "Decalogue", "Mussolini is always right" appears as the eighth official saying; in the 1938 version it is the tenth (and last) saying. The earlier version has for its last saying, "One thing must be dear to you above all:

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Oakeshott has translated these two, out of the many versions of the Fascist Decalogue current in Italy. They are curious documents and should be consulted by anyone who wishes fully to understand Mussolini's doctrine.

the life of the Duce.” This does not enter into the later version at all, from which I conclude that “the Duce” stands for Mussolini himself and not for the official.

In the expositions of Fascist doctrine there is no developed theory of Leadership, such as we find in the Nazi creed. The differences between the Fascist and Nazi philosophies are less important from our point of view than their resemblances, and it may be that the theory of Leadership will be incorporated in later developments of Fascist theory. It is not necessary for my purpose to expound this theory in any detail, and it may indeed be assumed to be well known. It is, however, worth noticing that both the elevation of the Leader and the doctrine of “racial purity” are essential to the Nazi philosophy; they follow from the fundamental principle of the distinction and inequality of races and thus also the distinction and inequality of individuals. This involves the rejection of the democratic conception of a community. Further, since one “race” must be the “most excellent race”, it follows that one race ought to dominate the world. Hence the Nazi doctrine, like the Fascist, exalts war, although this conclusion is reached along a different line of reflection.

Hitler’s working out of this theory is much coloured by his personal detestation of the Jews and his no doubt genuine belief that Jews have been a danger to Germany. The following passage brings out clearly Hitler’s attitude :—

The great revolutions of this world would have been inconceivable if their driving force had been the respectable bourgeois virtues of peace and order instead of the fanatical—nay, the hysterical—passions which they in fact displayed. And yet our world is moving towards a great revolution, and there is only one question at issue :

Will that revolution be the salvation of Aryan humanity, or will it be merely another source of profit for the eternal Jew? The true national State must make it its duty to develop a suitable system of education for its youth so that it may maintain a race of men prepared for the last and greatest decision of this globe; the first nation to take this road will be the conqueror. The whole character and education of the true National State must find its apex in its racial instruction. It must brand the sense of race and the feeling of race in the instincts and the understanding of the hearts and brains of the youth entrusted to it. No boy and no girl shall be permitted to leave school until he or she has been initiated into the deepest knowledge about the inner necessity and essence of blood purity.<sup>1</sup>

There is no reason to suppose that Hitler does not himself believe this balderdash, and he has been fortified in his belief by the sham erudition of Alfred Rosenberg in whose book, *Der Mythos der 20 Jahrhunderts*, the "myth of blood" is set forth in all its terrible absurdity. The racial myth is absurd: it has no secure anthropological basis and admits of easy refutation; the concept of race, as understood in the myth, confounds race, nation, historical traditions, and culture; it will not cover the facts for the explanation of which it was invented. If similarity of race accounts for similarity of genius it would seem to follow that Germans and Jews are racially akin since both have been pre-eminent in music and philosophy. Of all the manifold and manifest follies of our times, the "blood myth" would seem to be the most extravagant, and is indeed a folly that has made men mad. It is also terrible, for there follows from this myth a philosophy of life—a theory concerning human destiny and the relation of man to the world; this is

<sup>1</sup> I quote this from H. A. L. Fisher: *A History of Europe*, p. 1196. Mr. Fisher's quotation is from *Mein Kampf*, and I presume that the translation is his.

the theory of the dominance of one race, the "Aryan"; all other "races" are relegated to a position of inferiority as sub-human. The practical consequences of the acceptance of this philosophy are seen in the Germans' treatment of the Poles and other peoples whom they have subjugated by force of military power.

It is important to recognize that this Nazi philosophy does offer its disciples an *ideal*. That it is an evil ideal I am personally convinced; further, the profession of this ideal may well have provided opportunities for self-aggrandisement to unscrupulous men who have not been at all persuaded of its truth but are liars in their creed as well as in their policy. But this, if it be so, is not at all to the point. The Nazi doctrines are put forward as a philosophy and have been accepted as such. Though nowhere fully expounded, and while such expositions as have been offered are incoherent and unsystematic, the doctrines have been translated into action in a manner coherent enough. This philosophy is also something more than a philosophy; it has been impressed upon its devotees with all the power of a religious creed, and as such it has been accepted by credulous and ill-educated people. If any proof were needed of the value of the critical spirit, we can find it in the consequences of its absence, which can alone account for this extraordinary mass-phenomenon—the unquestioning and loyal acceptance by millions of human beings of an ideal at once so stupid and so barbaric. It involves the denial of those social values that are characteristic of civilized societies: freedom, truth, love, humanity, justice, happiness. In their place it puts discipline and "character".

National Socialism (for which I have used the popular abbreviation "Nazi") is socialistic only in the sense that it is a theory of a planned society. The name is, accord-

ingly, misleading, for, however necessary planning may be to achieve any kind of equalitarian society, this planning is regarded only as a method of achieving the aim in view, not as in itself desirable. For the Nazi doctrine the planning is essential, for it is an authoritarian doctrine; the ideal is the establishment of a hierarchical society with all power, knowledge, and moral authority concentrated in the Leader and delegated as he thinks fit to subordinate leaders. Although the doctrine was developed under the impact of events and was already designed for achieving special political purposes, the claims made for it are universal. Like Socialism, it is presumed to have a message for the world: authority belongs to the most excellent race; within that race supreme executive and legislative authority belongs to the most excellent man.<sup>1</sup> It seems to me clear that, notwithstanding many utterances of Hitler to the contrary, the doctrine of National Socialism is, like Fascism, intended for export, and that its logical conclusion is world domination by one race. Peace and order are eventually to be brought to the whole world "founded upon the victorious sword of a ruling people, seizing the world in the interest of a higher civilization."<sup>2</sup> Unlike Mussolini, Hitler (so far as I have been able to ascertain)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the following extract from a speech made by Hitler at the Nuremberg Party Congress, September, 1935: "Since the Party is called upon to form an organization through which a political élite of the nation shall be continuously recruited to all eternity, the Party is also in duty bound to ensure that the State be led on the ground of a stable philosophy. In fulfilment of this historical imperative, the Party must create an organization that assures the stability of the leadership of the State by the right selection, training, and orientation of the leaders of the State. The Party must, in this, act on the principle that all Germans should be brought up on the doctrine of National Socialism; that the best National Socialists become members of the Party; that the best members of the Party take the lead in the State." (Quoted from M. Oakeshott, *op. cit.*, p. 226.)

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from M. Oakeshott, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

does not believe that war is in itself worth while, putting "the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it"; but the domination of the world is a war-like domination, and the organization of society is a military organization. It follows that the virtues of the Nazi moral code are the military virtues: loyalty to the Leader, unquestioning obedience without knowledge, ruthlessness to all "enemies" of the order, and self-sacrificing devotion to arbitrary commands.<sup>1</sup> This is what the National Socialists understand by "character". The rule of law is annulled.<sup>2</sup> Citizens can be tried and convicted for actions that were not punishable offences at the time those actions were performed. This is an outcome of the authoritarian doctrine: "The Leader (Hitler or Mussolini) is always right."

Hitler has proclaimed that the Nazi domination is to last for two thousand years. There is not the slightest reason to suppose that he looks forward to a time, after the lapse of the two thousand years, when the rule of law could be re-established. On the contrary, the order is "eternal" (a favourite slang word of Hitler's), being

<sup>1</sup> C. Schmitt has worked out a Nazi conception of politics in which the fundamental concept is *Friend-Foe*; to this distinction all human actions and motives owe their meaning; upon it are founded the concepts of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, useful and harmful in the economic sphere. It is an "absolute category". This is an unqualified acceptance of the doctrine "Might is Right". But "Friend" has no meaning, and "Foe" is simply opponent. (See *Der Begriff des Politischen*.)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the following passage, which appeared in the *Beamten-kalendar* of 1937: "Since there is, in the National Socialist State, no difference, let alone opposition, between the State as a separate legal structure and the totality of citizens and the individual citizen; since the State consists here of the totality of citizens, united in a common destiny by common blood and a common philosophy of life and comprised in a single organization, it is neither necessary nor possible to define a sphere of freedom for the individual citizen as against the State. Hence also it is neither necessary nor possible to protect 'subjective rights' derived from such a sphere of freedom by means of constitutional law." (Quoted from M. Oakeshott, *op cit.*, p. 227.)

based upon the natural inequality of races and inequality of individuals. This "natural inequality" is supposed to be a law of Nature; Hitler thinks of different peoples (races) as different biological species—hence his revolting marriage laws. It is in these terms that we must understand Hitler's use of the word "excellent". His terminology is ethical, being based upon the acceptance of the Darwinian doctrine of natural selection understood in the crudest and most ignorant fashion. Hitler thinks of peoples in terms of a stud-book. Nature "red in tooth and claw" provides his model. There is no respect for human beings as such; there is nothing in men, regarded as individuals, worthy of being developed. On the contrary, individuals are but means to the realization of the Leader's ambition, or, if it be preferred, to "domination by the most powerful race".

Historians in the future will no doubt have much to say with regard to the causes which sufficed to bring about the submission of the German nation to Hitler. The history of Europe, the United States, and Asia between the two great wars cannot be discussed here. Certain considerations are, however, relevant to the topic of conflicting ideals. Believing, as I do, that how a man thinks so in the end he acts, I am concerned to ask what there is in the Nazi ideal that has power to attract the youth of Germany and to inspire in many of them a reckless spirit of sacrifice. For, it must be emphasized, the Nazi creed is an ideal—that is, it is accepted as a vision of a world worth having and worth dying for in order that it may be achieved. Stress has frequently been laid upon the miseries of the German people after the 1914–18 war; it has also been pointed out that after 1925 there was considerable economic recovery in Germany until the world economic slump of 1929–31. Undoubtedly

economic distress had much to do with the rise of Hitler to power.<sup>1</sup> But this was not the sole cause, nor, in my opinion, is it the one that most needs to be stressed: What was most needed was the presentation of an ideal.

Lord Halifax, speaking to the youth of Oxford, told them that an impenetrable barrier divided them from the German youth. "Their point of view", he said, "stands in stark opposition to yours. They do not understand your way of thinking. Your ideals mean nothing to them. They have their own ideals, which to our minds are distorted and deformed, but for which hundreds of thousands of them are prepared, without a moment's hesitation, to sacrifice their lives." We know now that British youth also are prepared to die for their country's need. Nevertheless it remains true, as Mr. Vidler has said, that we have "no clear sense of a national purpose." Under the stress of war we are—it is to be hoped—trying to think out our ideal. Unless we do make this attempt, all our talk about building a better world is worse than useless; it is abominable self-deception. We cannot build without any plan of the building. To seek to destroy the Nazi ideal is not enough; we must put something in its place; we must construct. Our belief is strong that ruthless domination is not a worthy goal of effort, that lying, repression, cruelty, and hatred of other people are evil. We must, then, believe that truth, freedom, tolerance, and love are worth pursuing. The more clearly we think out what it is we seek to destroy, the more clearly are we forced to recognize the necessity of formulating a constructive ideal. The attempt to be definite will reveal

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Hitler's movement itself was mainly the consequence of economic disappointment rather than political resentment; he was supported less by veterans inflamed by the past than by young men concerned with their future." Sir Arthur Salter: *Recovery, the Second Effort*, 1931, p. 233.

how sharply the totalitarian ideals are opposed to the democratic ideal.

Mr. Aldous Huxley is, then, seriously mistaken in supposing that there is unanimity with regard to "the ultimate goal of human effort". The Fascist and Nazi philosophies constitute a repudiation of the ideal of a community of individuals, each of whom counts, associated together in such a way that "the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all".

This last quotation is taken from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848):—

In the place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, an association appears in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.<sup>1</sup>

This statement appears here in the context of the Marxian theory of the class war. For this reason many people who do indeed share the ideal of a free association of free individuals will nevertheless reject the statement if its authorship be attributed to Marx and Engels. In this difficult world of conflicting opinions, rival philosophies, and muddled ideals, it is much to be regretted that ideals formulated by those who see darkly are rejected by those who see not at all, and rejected because the formulation is inevitably mixed up with a good deal that is downright mistaken as well as with a lot of nonsense that, if only it were ignored, would soon wither away, having no sensible roots. It is hard to say which

<sup>1</sup> See the English edition, 1909, p. 20. The Communist League at a meeting at its London centre in 1847 commissioned Marx to draft a manifesto on its behalf. He presented his draft early in 1848 and it was published under the title *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Marx died before the revision in 1872 was accomplished, and Engels completed it alone. It was first published in England in 1850.

have caused the most harm to weary peoples craving a vision of a better world: those Marxists who have talked pernicious nonsense by making *Das Kapital* into a Bible and have venerated Marx as an inspired prophet, thus deifying his every mistake; or, those who, realizing that Marx also was subject to the limitations of his time and was not a god but a man capable of being mistaken, have rejected his important insight into the workings of society and have consequently failed to learn from him anything at all.

The ideal of an association of human beings in a society in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all did not originate with Marx and Engels. Although this ideal is far from having been unanimously accepted, despite Mr. Huxley, it does at least go as far back as the time of Pericles—some two and a half thousand years—a short time in the long history of man's slow and halting development. This ideal is formulated in the Funeral Oration, made by Pericles,<sup>1</sup> in the year 431 B.C. I quote part of the speech:—

Our government is not copied from those of our neighbours: we are an example to them rather than they to us. Our constitution is named a democracy, because it is in the hands not of the few but of the many. But our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes, and our public opinion welcomes and honours talent in every branch of achievement, not for any sectional reason but on grounds of excellence alone. And as we give free play to all in our public life, so we carry the same spirit into our daily relations with one another. We have no black looks or angry words for our neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, and we abstain from the little acts of churlishness which, though they leave no mark, yet cause

<sup>1</sup> The "Speech" is no doubt composed by Thucydides, but it certainly represents the ideals of Pericles and probably corresponds roughly to what he actually said.

annoyance to our neighbours. Open and friendly in our private intercourse, in our public acts we keep strictly within the control of law. We acknowledge the restraint of reverence; we are obedient to those in authority, and to the laws, more especially to those which offer protection to the oppressed and to those unwritten ordinances whose transgression brings admitted shame. Yet ours is no workaday city only. No other provides so many recreations for the spirit—games and sacrifices all the year round, and beauty in our public buildings to cheer the heart and delight the eye day by day.

Our military training too is different from our opponents'. Our city is thrown open to the world, and we never expel an alien or prevent him from seeing or learning anything of which the secret, if revealed to an enemy, might profit him. We rely not upon management or trickery but upon our own spirit. And it is the same in our education; whereas they [the Spartans] are from early youth always undergoing laborious exercises to make them brave, we live at ease and yet are equally ready to face the same dangers they face. . . .

We are lovers of the beautiful, yet simple in our tastes, and we cultivate the mind without loss of manliness. Wealth we employ not for talk and ostentation but when there is a real use for it. Our citizens attend both to public and private duties. We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as harmless but as useless; and, if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of a policy. The great impediment to action is not discussion but the want of that knowledge which is gained by it. For we are noted for being able to think before we act and for acting too. And they are surely to be esteemed the strongest hearted who, having the clearest sense both of the pains and pleasures of life, do not on that account shrink from danger. In short, I claim that Athens is the School of Hellas, and that our citizens yield to none, man by man, for independence of spirit, many-sidedness of attainment, and self-reliance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have made a good deal of use of Jowett's translation in the above transcription of the speech.

I think this may fairly be taken as a statement of what Athens stood for in the age of Pericles. *What Athens stood for*, but did not achieve. Only a short time after Pericles had made his speech, the Athenians decided that the little, independent state of Melos was not to be allowed to remain neutral. At first they tried to win the Melians over by argument, stating their own ambitions with the utmost frankness. When this procedure failed, they reduced Melos by force of arms. Thucydides constructed a dialogue between the Athenian envoy and the Melians, which put their views with great clarity. I quote a small part of the Athenian envoy's speech :—

We Athenians will use no fine words ; we will not go out of our way to prove that we have a right to rule, or that we attack you now because we are suffering any injury at your hands. We should not convince you if we did. . . . But you and we should say what we really think, and aim only at what is possible, for we both alike know that into the discussion of human affairs the question of justice enters only where there is equal power to enforce it, and that the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they must.<sup>1</sup>

When the Melians decided to resist and asserted their confidence in their Spartan allies and in the help of heaven, the Athenian envoy replied :—

As for the gods, we expect to have quite as much of their favour as you : for we are not doing or claiming anything which goes beyond common opinion about divine or men's desires about human things. For of the gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a law of their nature, whenever they can rule, they will. This law was not made by us, and we are not the first who have acted upon it ; we did but inherit it, and shall bequeath it to all time, and we know that you and all mankind, if you were as strong as we are, would do as we do.

<sup>1</sup> Jowett's translation.

I have made this little excursion into Athenian history for two reasons : First, to set forth what may justly be regarded as a picture of the ideal of democracy ; secondly, to show how easily even those who consciously accept such an ideal may be led, by the pressure of events, to depart from, even definitely to deny, the ideal. It may be objected that Pericles was idealizing Athens, that the state of affairs was not nearly so satisfactory as he pretended, and that he had forgotten those numerous inhabitants of Attica who were not citizens—women and slaves—and that upon the labour of the latter Athenian civilization depended. This is true. Of course Pericles idealized Athens, for he was describing an ideal, *the ideal* of Athenians. Certainly it could not be claimed that at any time that ideal was fully realized ; but it was deliberately aimed at. Pericles did not *forget* the slaves ; he had never remembered them. It would not have occurred to him to take the slaves into account. But he could claim that all the citizens had equal opportunities of taking part in the government of the State, that they had equality before the law, and a not inconsiderable measure of economic equality. There were no large inequalities in income, and in a State in which there were no large-scale industries and agriculture was the chief occupation many of the difficulties confronting modern States did not arise.

Even so, as the incident of Melos shows, men who are conscious of a civilized ideal are easily tempted to act after the fashion of barbarians. This does not mean that the ideal has not been accepted, and that those who proclaim it are only pretending to hold it as a cloak for their ambitions. Such an interpretation would be altogether too simple-minded ; it might appeal to those who exalt the “ realist ” politician at the expense of the

“idealist”. But (as I tried to show in Chapter I) “realist” politicians also have their ideals. To keep to Ancient Greece for our illustrations: the Spartans may be regarded as the “realist” politicians of the Ancient World. Their conception of the State was the ancient counterpart of the Nazi view. The Spartan State was a military organization; its aim was to make the citizens soldiers. As Pericles said: “they are from early youth always undergoing laborious exercises to make them brave”; their sole duty was to obey, and to obey without thinking; their bravery was not based upon knowledge but upon discipline. Certainly they did not aim at achieving an association in which free men are able freely to develop what they have it in them to be, living each his own life in association with like individuals. On the contrary, the Spartans aimed at making their State efficient for waging war; the discipline and mode of life of a military barracks was their ideal. They had some measure of success in war, though not so much as might have been expected. They were remarkably successful in organizing their State in accordance with the ideal they had in mind.

The comparison which I wish to make between Athens and Sparta, by way of illustration, is this: it is not so difficult to achieve the authoritarian ideal as the democratic ideal. For consider: in the authoritarian State there is one Leader and many led; the Leader has to plan, to think, and to enforce obedience on the part of the led; the led have nothing to do but obey; they need not—indeed they must not—be allowed to think. The one and only problem for the Leader to solve is how to enforce obedience, how to prevent the citizens from thinking, how to keep himself as an object of reverence. In a democratic State the citizens are not only allowed

to think for themselves; they must think for themselves, they must exercise self-restraint just because they are not coerced by an iron discipline. In short, they have to behave as free men or abandon the democratic ideal, as we may only too easily be tempted to do.

It is perhaps not sufficiently realized how precarious are the spiritual values of civilization: freedom, respect for other men issuing in tolerance and humanity, respect for truth and delight in knowledge, love of beauty. These are civilized excellences; they are not in the least "natural" but "artificial", for they result only from cultivation, acquired with difficulty and easily lost. They are the first values to be lost when men fight one another. They are not products of Darwinian natural selection, helping individuals and races to survive in the struggle for existence. When such a struggle is the main preoccupation these values are at once surrendered and are in danger of being denied. None of us are wholly civilized; we are but too lately emerged from barbarism. War appeals to something very deeply rooted in human nature. The "roll of the war drums," calls us, and duty is more eagerly and strenuously performed because in doing our warlike duty we seem to be no longer men but rather heroes. Moreover, the lust for power, the joy of cruelty, the pride of dominance, still have their attraction. Accordingly, to maintain a civilized society we have to be constantly on guard against these primitive and natural impulses.

"We seem to talk so glibly of the enemies of freedom," wrote a friend of mine from S. Africa, last May (1940), "and they are here within our own gates, within our own *skulls*. I don't know what these people mean when they talk of freedom. It seems to me that some words cause us to stop thinking and to drift on a turbid flow

of muddled and *muddied* emotion.” I think my friend is right. We are bemused with words, we are roused to the rally of a “great cause”; the cause indeed may be great; only unfortunately we so often do not know exactly what the cause is. And so the technical enemies become—as they often are—the enemies of “the cause”; accordingly we suppose that if we defeat these enemies in war we have thereby gained our cause. But we may defeat barbarian enemies and forget the barbarian “in our own skulls”, in our minds and hearts. We may have accepted, consciously and deliberately, the ideal of democracy, and we may be engaged in a war against the avowed enemies of democracy; to lose the war will then mean that democracy is overthrown. But to win the war does not mean that democracy is saved.

These are commonplaces, but they are important commonplaces, since, though known, they are not always noted. I am not at all concerned with the procedure of the war in which my country is now engaged. I am not thinking of the danger of losing freedom through the organization necessary for prosecuting a war. That is a theme worthy of consideration, but I do not propose to consider it in this book. I am thinking of the difficulties that will beset us in any attempt to build a better world or, without metaphor, to make of our country a State which could not unfittingly be said to be a democracy such as Pericles described.

It may be tiresome to keep harking back to Pericles. Yet it is reasonable enough. Our civilization is rooted in Greek civilization, and the democratic ideal has not been more finely described than by Pericles. Fortunately for him, Pericles had an easier task than ours; he did not have to spend much time over the political machinery of democracy, for of such machinery next to none was

required in the simple, direct constitution of Ancient Athens. Nor was he concerned with the problems of "economic democracy" since the question of the right distribution of wealth was not by any means a pressing one. He was able to devote himself entirely to saying what democracy is as a vision of good living, an ideal of a moral and spiritual order; he could be definite enough to be able to recommend it to his hearers and to claim (not quite accurately) that in Athens this ideal had been achieved.

We have become accustomed to distinguish political from economic democracy and we argue whether it is possible to have the former without the latter. In my opinion it is a mistake to think of democracy in this way and to speak as though there were two forms of "democracy". "Economic democracy" means economic equality—or at least equality of economic opportunity. "Political democracy" merely signifies the machinery, or constitutional forms, through which democracy may be put into effect within the political sphere. But democracy as an ideal is a form of society, an association of free men in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all. So far all that can be said to have been achieved in "the Western Democracies" is the political machinery of democracy. With this many people are content. Thus, for example, an American writer, Mr. J. S. Penman, says:—

Democracy is a political form of government by the people and for the people. It can exist and does exist under a capitalistic régime and is not incompatible with the organization of industry under captains of industry, directing and co-operating with the forces of labour. The cardinal principle of democracy is liberty, and it is opposed to any system which tends to sacrifice men's freedom. Democracy with its responsibility to the people

legislates for the common welfare and aims to remove any barriers of economic privilege or monopoly which hinders the free development of the life of the people. It is not to be identified with any scheme which seeks to reduce men to an equality in economic conditions, or which interferes with any man reaping the rewards of his labour so long as they are not obtained at the sacrifice of the freedom and opportunities of other men.<sup>1</sup>

Comfortable words for capitalists and captains of industry, but surely not an adequate description of the democratic ideal. It is not my intention here to discuss whether democracy can exist under a capitalistic régime, for the question of the appropriate economic order, as well as the question of the political machinery required for implementing democracy, is, I am contending, of quite subsidiary importance to the question of what democracy is as a moral and spiritual order. To regard democracy as nothing more than "a political form of government" is to miss what matters most.<sup>2</sup>

We saw in Chapter IV that the fundamental principle of democracy is an ethical principle which can be expressed in the form: *all men alike ought to be free and happy*. That is, men are all individuals and ought to be treated as individuals, and as such ought to be free each to develop what he (or she) has it in him (or her) to become. In view of the many foolish arguments<sup>3</sup> against democracy that have been based upon a denial

<sup>1</sup> *The Irresistible Movement of Democracy* (1923), p. 714.

<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising that, since Mr. Penman does conceive of democracy in this way, he should suppose that democracy has been achieved. He says: "A study of the history of the democratic movement and the final triumph of democracy ought to reveal to us the direction in which it is going and the aims which it seeks to reach *now that it has obtained the ascendancy*." *Op. cit.*, p. 709. The sentence I have italicized suggests that Mr. Penman believes that the democratic ideal has been realized in, say, the United States of America and Great Britain.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, H. L. Mencken, *Notes on Democracy*.

that all men are equal, it is well to emphasize once more that the equality required for democracy is not equality in physical strength, or equality in intelligence and wit, or equality in moral behaviour, or any sort of equality with a prefix; it is equality *as individuals* who are associated with other individuals in the State. The question whether "one man, one vote" is the best means for ensuring the realization of democracy so far as the political machinery is concerned is only of secondary importance. It will not be discussed here. Again, it is relatively of minor importance whether the democratic ideal requires economic equality in the sense that no one's income should exceed any one else's income. All that is necessary is that the economic order should be such as to permit that all men should in fact have the chance to live free and happy lives. In my opinion it is extremely unlikely that the moral basis of democracy will be found to necessitate equal incomes for every one; it is even more unlikely that it should be consistent with extremely unequal incomes. In a society in which a few individuals are very wealthy and many are very poor it is probable that both the wealthy and the poor will not lead free and happy lives.

Whether this is the case or not cannot be deduced from any *a priori* principles. There is nothing either moral or immoral in wealth independently of the economic structure of the society in which the wealth is possessed. How far wealth helps or hinders men from living happy lives depends upon various economic factors at any given stage in the development of a society and upon the attitude of its members to economic affairs. I do not intend to pursue this topic here.

But it is in connection with the economic aspects of a democratic society that one of the most serious objections to the democratic ideal is apt to be made. This is the

objection that democracy is a materialistic ideal. In so far as this objection is equivalent to the accusation that "happiness is an end fit only for swine", I have already dealt with it. But the accusation has been made in a somewhat different form by Fascist and Nazi leaders. Their contention, freed from abusive misrepresentations, amounts to the charge that democracy sets before men a purely selfish goal; that the ideal of democracy is for no one to have any care for anyone except himself save in so far as may be necessary for securing his own ends narrowly conceived. It is, they preach, an easy mode of life, a low and contemptible goal to set before oneself. For them democracy spells plutocracy, and happiness means ostentatious luxury.

This charge, I make bold to assert, is not true. I admit, however, that there has been much in what Mr. Penman calls "the irresistible movement of democracy" to make the charge plausible; it is, moreover, certainly true that many "democrats" have talked, and probably many more have thought, in such a manner as to give some justification to these critics. In the comparatively free life of modern "democratic states" it is easy to see how far people fall short, and how ignoble are some of their pursuits.

But if we mean by democracy a vision of good living, an ideal fit for such a being as man, then, as I insisted in the previous chapter, democracy is neither a materialistic ideal nor one easy to achieve. If democracy is taken seriously, it is certain that it is so far from being selfish that it is concerned with the welfare of every member of the community; it is so far from being easy that great effort has been required to take the first steps to its realization, and continued vigilance is needed to maintain what has so far been achieved. The democratic

ideal does not confine a man within the limitations of his own narrowly conceived self-interest; it widens his interests to include all men, so far as this is possible to the limited intellectual grasp and the groping imagination of a finite human being. To achieve this ideal we must make such political machinery as will enable every man to have his needs considered and to contribute to the working of this machinery according to his ability. No one must be slave to another nor subject to the arbitrary will of any of his fellows, whether he lead or be led. We must create such an economic order as to allow to every man the satisfaction of his primary needs and to permit the development of himself as an individual.

It is easy to use the phrase, "the development of oneself as an individual". I have frequently used it in the preceding pages. It is not at all easy to make definite what such development means. Individuality does not mean eccentricity.<sup>1</sup> It means that my thoughts are

<sup>1</sup> In his pamphlet *On Liberty* Mill sometimes spoke as though he supposed eccentricity to be a mark of individuality. This was not his intention. He valued eccentricity as a symptom of non-conformity. He insisted: "In this age the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because a tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people, should be eccentric. . . . That so few now dare to be eccentric marks the chief danger of the time." This was written in 1859. Does it not apply to Germany, Russia, and in a lesser degree, to Italy now? Mill was afraid that the peoples of Europe would become less and less able to think for themselves, more and more echoes of one another. He said: "The despotism of custom with which these nations are threatened is not precisely stationariness. It prescribes singularity, but it does not preclude change, provided all change together." This prophetic warning has been justified; the German peoples were taught by Hitler: "The nation that allies itself with Russia becomes by that fact the enemy of Germany." This is Hitler's teaching in *Mein Kampf*. It will be remembered how the Germans "all changed together" when Hitler saw fit, in August 1939, to reject this doctrine. The Germans are not fools, but their loss of intellectual freedom has sapped their power to think for themselves.

really the outcome of *my* thinking, not the repetition of someone else's thought; that my decisions are in like manner mine; that I know and feel myself to be a growing thing utterly different from a cog in a machine or a hand uplifted at a mass meeting. Hence the first essential of individuality is freedom of thought—i.e., intellectual freedom. It is quite impossible to overstress the importance of intellectual freedom; it is the most priceless possession of the members of a democracy; without it, indeed, there is no democracy. I<sup>1</sup> must be free to make up my own mind. That presupposes that I have a mind to make up. It does not follow that you do not contribute to the making up of my mind; it may be that I need information and that you can supply it. In all matters touching public affairs I stand in need of information and usually also of guidance. Consequently relevant information must be freely accessible to me; no one ought to decide what I may know; no one ought to lay down tabus; no one ought to have power (due to wealth or any special privilege) to cut me off from the sources of information.<sup>2</sup> No one ought, by being able to withhold from me the means of livelihood, be thereby also able to bend me to his will. I, for my part, must exert myself to learn what I need to know and to think freely. This is difficult, but if I fail I am not a member of a democracy even if I am a citizen in a State that is democratic despite my failure. It is an illusion to suppose that a Dictator makes himself; at most he seizes an opportunity made for him by passive, stupid, incompetent, and above all, unsatisfied and fearful men.

<sup>1</sup> "I" stands for any one person; "You" (in the following sentences) stands for any other person.

<sup>2</sup> It will be observed that this does not forbid the withholding of information in time of war, since, it is presumed, those with the power to withhold it do not owe this power to wealth or special privilege, but to a position of special responsibility.

In a democracy government must be, as Pericles pointed out, by discussion. Such discussion must be valueless unless the participants are well-informed, able and ready to think for themselves, and not afraid to say what they think. Certainly the discussion will often be irrelevant, unnecessarily lengthy, and at times downright boring. When the discussion is over those who have been entrusted with executive power must do what is possible. Mistakes will inevitably be made, inevitably because we all lack wisdom at times; some of us are never wise. This is a risk that must be taken. The ideal of democracy does not permit of a Leader whose function it is to initiate and determine policy, leaving the citizens to be led by promises and propaganda blindly to obey his dictates and acquiesce in decisions made for them, not by them. It is a mistake to argue that a democracy must be inefficient, although this accusation is often made and frequently accepted as correct by those who nevertheless are democrats. Efficiency is efficiency *for* something. A democracy is efficient for the purposes of free men; it is inefficient for the purposes of a master seeking to control slaves.

Democracy, then, demands a great deal of the citizen. It demands self-discipline, submission to laws democratically established, willingness to participate in political discussion, willingness to serve others and thus to encourage in oneself those friendly feelings for other persons which find their highest expression in love. The sacrifices required of the individual by a community at war are hard to endure but they are not always hard to make; the sacrifices required in a democracy at peace seem easy to make because we have not seriously considered what they involve and how humdrum and irksome may be the enduring of them. To co-operate

voluntarily with free men in a free community seems attractive because "to act voluntarily" and "to be free" are pleasant sounding phrases. Then comes the clash of interests. *I* want what will frustrate *you*; to surrender my claim, however feeble the claim may be, is difficult; to know whether it ought to be surrendered may need intelligence and imagination. My natural egoism will not be gratified, as in war, by its enlargement in the notion of *my* country against an enemy, for both you and I are, *ex hypothesi*, citizens of a State at peace. Nor is it a matter of a single decision—one hurdle to be jumped and the race is won. The need for decisions recurs and the struggle is renewed. Only a sense of good-fellowship and faith in our ideal of free men freely associated can carry us through these difficult moments.

Moreover, we shall each of us make mistakes and our burdens may not be equally distributed. There is so much scope for error when men are free. That is why democracy seems inefficient, whereas it is only groping.

Once we see clearly what it would mean to achieve democracy we may prefer an easier ideal—to be automats in an authoritarian State. But I hope not.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SPEAKING PLAINLY

“There are also Idols formed by the intercourse and association of men with each other, which I call Idols of the Market-place, on account of the commerce and consort of men there. For it is by discourse that men associate; and words are imposed according to the apprehension of the vulgar. And therefore the ill and unfit choice of words wonderfully obstructs the understanding. Nor do the definitions or explanations wherewith in some things learned men are wont to guard and defend themselves, by any means set the matter right. But words plainly force and overrule the understanding, and throw all into confusion, and lead men away into numberless empty controversies and idle fancies.”—Francis Bacon.

#### I

OF the usefulness of abstract words there can be no doubt, but there are unnoted dangers in our use of them. “Paris smiled a welcome to the Royal Pair” (a quotation from a newspaper) is certainly a harmless way of saying that Parisians for the most part welcomed the King and Queen and that the sun shone. “Capitalism increases production” is probably harmless; “Capitalism can’t be blamed for slums” has in my opinion passed the wavering boundary that separates the harmless from the harmful usages of abstract words. “War brings much suffering to victor and vanquished alike” is probably harmless, but it seems to me likely to be, in most contexts, a borderline case. “Poverty is not evil provided that it be cheerfully borne” is, I think, another example hovering on the boundary.

The decision whether the use of abstract words in a

given context is harmless or harmful is necessarily largely a matter for individual judgment. Since the context has always to be taken into account, no hard-and-fast line can be drawn; indeed, harmless usages pass very gradually into harmful usages. But it is possible to lay down a principle which affords some slight help in enabling us to distinguish, in a given context, between a harmless and a harmful usage. The principle may, for our present purpose, be stated as follows: *If a sentence in which the main word is translated into an equivalent sentence in which this word is replaced by corresponding less abstract words, and if the new sentence thus obtained would be dissented from (or assented to) by someone who had formerly assented to (or dissented from) the original sentence, then the use of abstract words in the original sentence was harmful.* It is necessary to explain what I mean by “equivalent sentence”. For my present purpose <sup>1</sup> it is enough to say that two sentences composed of different words and syntactically different are equivalent if they both state the same fact, in the sense that, if the first is true, the second is true; and, if the first is false, the second is false. Equivalent sentences may be said to be translations of each other, and the process of replacing some of the abstract words in a sentence by others may be called “translating the sentence”. I translated the sentence “Paris smiled a welcome to the Royal Pair”, although I did not actually exhibit it as a translation. “The beach was packed with humanity” is translated by “men and women were crowded tightly together on the beach”. It is quite likely that the second sentence will not be regarded as equivalent to the first;

<sup>1</sup> My present purpose is an extremely limited one—namely, to point out that we are in danger of befooling ourselves with words, and that we might be saved from making fools of ourselves by speaking plainly. For this purpose it is not necessary to go into certain logical refinements that, *for other purposes*, would be essential.

in that case it is not an exact translation. But, if anyone were to make this objection, then it is clear that he understands what I mean by equivalent sentences. That is enough for my purpose.

There is one other point. I was careful to state the principle in terms of assenting to, and dissenting from, a statement. That is my interest in this question so far as my present purpose is concerned. I am convinced that we sometimes assent to a statement expressed in a given way although we should dissent from it, if it were differently, but equivalently, expressed. For instance, "*War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it*" could be (partially) translated by

*"Human beings who are engaged in an organized effort to kill, wound, starve, or otherwise injure other human beings organized in the same way for the same sort of purpose will have all their specifically human energies raised to the highest tension, and this organized effort to kill, wound, starve, or otherwise injure other sets of human beings, similarly engaged, is admittedly noble if these human beings thus organized to kill, wound, starve, or otherwise injure other sets of human beings, similarly organized, meet with courage the organized efforts of the second set of human beings to kill, wound, starve, or otherwise injure them."*

This is a clumsy sentence, not very easy to follow, but it is not at all unclear. I do not maintain that it is an exact translation of the original sentence (which is a translation of an Italian sentence written by Mussolini), because I am not sure what exactly the word "it" in our original sentence stands for. But I do maintain that I have replaced the word "war" by a phrase that is strictly equivalent to it. The point of this translation is that it brings out what the word "war" means. I do not, of course, want

to suggest that such a translation of "war" is especially suitable for a dictionary,<sup>1</sup> or that it is at all desirable that we should never use the word "war" itself. The use of abstract words is often very convenient, even of large abstractions such as the word "war". By abbreviation we keep our heads; but sometimes by abbreviating we confuse our minds and may lose our lives. By stressing the meaning of *war* as an *organized effort of individuals to kill, injure, and hurt one another in all conceivable ways* we are brought face to face with what it is that happens when nations are at war. It might seem that this is unnecessary; we all know, so it may be urged, what war means. To which the reply is that those of us who are now living in States that are carrying on war do know, and we are not likely to forget, what war means; but also some people do not seem to have realized what war is or they could hardly have talked the sort of nonsense with which Mussolini (and other people) have regaled us. I think it would be a useful moral exercise to select some passage, or speech, in praise of war, and replace the word "war," every time that it occurs, by some such translation as I have given.

Consider, as another example, Mr. Churchill's reply to a question, asked in the House of Commons, concerning our war aim. He replied: "You ask what is our aim. I can answer in one word—it is victory. Victory at all costs, victory in spite of terrors, victory however long and hard the road may be. For without victory there is no survival."<sup>2</sup> "Victory" means "defeat of the enemy"—i.e., greater success than the enemy has in the organized effort to kill, wound, starve, or otherwise hurt individuals

<sup>1</sup> It occurred to me to see how my dictionary defines war; the definition is "Open conflict between nations, active hostility carried on by force of arms."

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Debate, May 13, 1940.

of the enemy nation. It is certainly true that the aim of such an organized effort is to be superior to the enemy's organized effort. In other words, victory is the aim of the fighting, and may truly, then, be said to be the aim of *war*. But usually when people ask "What is our war aim?"—or, as they more frequently say, "What *are* our war *aims*?"—they are not speaking plainly, and so do not succeed in asking the question they meant to ask. For, what they want to know is "What was the aim in view when we decided to make this organized effort to kill, etc." And to *this* question it is not usually correct to say "Victory is our aim." I say it is not *usually* correct, but, if we believe that war is worth while for its own sake, then no doubt the aim *in deciding* to go to war is victory. This may be Mussolini's view, as I suggested in the previous chapter.

Our habit of using abstract words and thinking in abstractions without ever coming down to the particulars through which they might be translated may also lead us into confusions in talking about States. For instance, at the beginning of the war in which we are now engaged, Mr. Neville Chamberlain said that although we were at war with Germany we were not fighting *the Germans*; and it was also said that what we were fighting against was *Hitlerism* and not Germany. Now I do not want to deny that these statements meant something important, and if I understand them correctly I should like to agree with them. But people have found such statements confusing, and they have asked how *can* we be fighting *Hitlerism* and not be fighting Germans? And a lot of questions like that have been asked and left unanswered, or answered only by correspondents to the newspapers, and these have not managed to be very helpful in clearing up the confusion in people's minds.

“Hitlerism” is British slang for “National Socialism as carried into effect by Hitler and his subordinates.” In saying that we are fighting against Hitlerism, then, we are saying that we are fighting to prevent Hitler and his subordinates, or anyone who copies Hitler, from behaving in the way in which Hitler and his subordinates behave. In my opinion it is a good thing to do all we can and must to prevent Hitler and his subordinates from behaving in the way in which they have been and are behaving in carrying National Socialism into effect. It will be noticed that I have not tried to translate “National Socialism” but have retained the abstract words. That is because it would take too long, since to translate “National Socialism” would be to set out a lot of sentences embodying what are called “the *doctrines* of National Socialism”—e.g., “The Twenty-Five Points”—and also stating the characteristic methods of carrying these doctrines into practice. It is further not necessary to do this, because we are not likely to forget that “National Socialism” is a name for a set of doctrines and certain practices connected with those doctrines. (Some of these doctrines were discussed in the last chapter.) We are not likely to think about National Socialism as though it were a thing, or a person, and could *act*—e.g., oppress people, or fight, or be kind, or that *National Socialism* could be *blamed* for cruelty or *praised* for being kind. We are never tempted to think like this; we should say that “*National Socialists* are to be blamed, etc.” But if we say we are fighting against National Socialism, or Hitlerism, and have no quarrel with the Germans, then that is not so easy. For National Socialism is the set of doctrines accepted by National Socialists, and these people are Germans (not exclusively Germans, but in the context those are the ones meant). So that, when the time comes to deal with

the Germans after the fighting is over, it may be difficult to know with whom it is we "had our quarrel". It will be important to remember that the Head of the British Government did tell the Germans that we had no quarrel with them but were fighting against Hitlerism. But it may be that before the fighting ends the British Government will have changed their minds; or, it may be that a large majority of Germans will say that they are National Socialists, and in that case we shall have a quarrel with them. Whatever may be the case at the end of the war, it will be very important for us to draw these distinctions (assuming that we are victorious) or to have good reasons for holding that it is no longer important to distinguish between "fighting Hitlerism" and "fighting the Germans".

In the last sentence I used "we", and the context was supposed to make clear that "we" stood for the British Empire and her allies. "The British Empire" is an abstraction used in the personifying mode. In the same way "the British Government" is an abstraction. A few sentences back I wrote ". . . the British Government will have changed their minds". Many people would prefer to say ". . . the British Government will have changed *its* mind". Either expression is, as we say, good English. But there is a significant difference of emphasis in the change from one usage to the other. The first calls attention to the fact that the Government is composed of several members; the second calls attention to the fact that when a policy has been decided upon by these members (whatever may be the procedure through which they reach a decision) they act as a unity. Thus there is a sense in which the Government can be thought of as if it were a single person. In the same way we speak of the people constituting a State as if they were unified into a

single entity, *the State*. We have already seen that this way of speaking may encourage us to neglect the importance of individuals. But there are certainly many occasions on which it is necessary for us to speak like this and to talk about *the State*, and *the Government*. Accordingly there is a legal fiction that a State is a person. This is a convenient fiction not only for lawyers but for all of us when we want to be brief. But it is a mode of speaking that has dangers, one of which we have just mentioned. Another is that we do pass moral judgments upon States, yet these judgments cannot have exactly the same significance as judgments about an individual expressed in the same words. For example, if we say, "Germany forcibly annexed Czechoslovakia and in so doing acted wrongly" we are stating a judgment different in form from the judgment, "Hitler forcibly annexed Churchill's wallet and in so doing acted wrongly."

It has sometimes been said that "States cannot commit theft and murder in the sense in which these are moral offences." This is an example of the sort of sentence that must be translated before we can be clear whether it is being used to say what is true or not. Perhaps the following statement may bring out the point of importance in this usage :—

The personality of the State is not a fact whose truth or falsehood is a matter for argument. It is what international lawyers have called "the postulated nature" of the State. It is a necessary fiction or hypothesis—an indispensable tool devised by the human mind for dealing with the structure of a developed society. . . . The fiction of the group-person, having moral rights and obligations and consequently capable of moral behaviour, is an indispensable instrument of modern society; and the most indispensable of these fictitious group-persons is the State. In particular, it does not seem possible to discuss international politics in other terms. "Relations be-

tween Englishmen and Italians" is not a synonym for "Relations between Great Britain and Italy." It is a curious and significant paradox that those utopian writers on international affairs who most vigorously denounce the personification of the State as absurd and sinister, none the less persistently allocate moral praise and blame (generally the latter) to those imaginary entities, "Great Britain", "Italy", and "France", whose existence they deny.<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Carr finds significance in the fact that the writers whom he is pleased to call "utopians" denounce the personification of the State as "absurd and sinister" but nevertheless allocate praise and blame to, say, France. To me it is interesting and significant that it is Prof. Carr's utopians who find dangers in the personification of the State. In this respect I should like to be classed with the utopians. I have already admitted the usefulness of this legal fiction of personality, but its usefulness is not inconsistent with abuse—i.e., with dangerous usages. It is true that we all "blame States"—e.g., we have talked about "Germany's war-guilt"—either with approval or disapproval of the judgment implied in the phrase. Or, we say that "Italy made an unprovoked attack on Abyssinia", and thereby imply a moral judgment. Everyone knows that by "Italy" in that sentence we do not mean *a piece of land*; we are talking about the people who inhabit that land, but we are not always talking about *all* the Italians.

Prof. Carr's suggested translation of "Relations between Great Britain and Italy" into "Relations between Englishmen and Italians" is absurd, as he no doubt meant it to be. If he supposed that that was a correct translation he must be very insensitive to the requirements of logical analysis and the significance of

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Carr : *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939*, pp. 189-90.

abstract words used in the personifying mode. No sentence in which the word "Italy" occurs can be equivalently translated into another sentence which differs from the first simply in the substitution of "Italians" for "Italy"; other words in the sentence must be altered. For a statement about *Italy*—e.g., "Italy needs raw materials"—is an indirect statement about *Italians*; but it is not a statement that each and every individual Italian needs raw materials. Or, to take another example: "Unoccupied France needs food" does not mean that an *entity* "Unoccupied France" is in need of food; for France has no stomach and digestive system. It is certainly sometimes convenient to talk in metaphors and personified abstractions, but it is a sign of considerable confusion in thinking to suppose that what is thus said is *not* metaphorical. "Italy needs raw materials" is a statement about individuals organized in an association, in the *nation-like way*, and is a statement to the effect that these individuals thus organized require that sets among them should possess (or have access to) raw materials. Similarly, statements about *the proletariat* are statements about individuals organized into an association in the *economic way*.

There can be no doubt that to forget these elementary facts is dangerous, since it leads to confused thinking, as has been the case with Prof. Carr—and a great many other people who think and write as he does. As we saw in Chapter I, Prof. Carr believes that the only "reality" is *power* so far as the relations between States are concerned, and by "power" he means "physical power"—i.e., naked force. If we not only speak in the personifying mode of "Great Britain", "Italy", "Germany", etc., but also think in it—i.e., take these names as names for single entities such as persons, just as "Winston Churchill"

names a single person—then we are much more likely to be persuaded that the only real—i.e., important—factor determining the relations between *Great Britain* and *Germany* is naked force. For if there were a conflict of interest between Winston Churchill and Hitler it might conceivably be to the interest of both to try to settle this conflict by fisticuffs. Suppose, for example, that Hitler (an individual man) were trying to break into Winston Churchill's (another individual man's) bedroom in order to steal his wallet. Here is a plain conflict of interests; it might (I do not say it would) be settled by Winston Churchill's tackling Hitler and thrusting him bodily out of his bedroom. It might also be settled by wile on the part of Winston Churchill, or by his managing to ring up the police so that there shall be a policeman on the premises in time to arrest Hitler with the swag.

All these are quite possible ways in which one individual might deal with another individual whose interest in the possession of a wallet conflicted with his. It has in fact been found that the method most convenient for the majority of the citizens of a State is the third. This is not likely to be disputed. We are now well accustomed to accept the fact that there is a peaceful and legal way of settling such conflicting interests between individuals who are members of the same State. People who think like Prof. Carr, however, seem to forget that Germany, Great Britain, the British Empire, are not each single persons but sets of individuals; that it is not, except by way of metaphor, *Germany* that *has* such and such interests but *Germans* that *have* such and such interests. Germany is not a very large person with an immense stomach and a large fist; nor is Great Britain, or any other State. There is no inevitable reason why conflicting interests between States should have to be settled in ways utterly different

from the ways in which conflicting interests between citizens (i.e., individual members) of the same State are nowadays settled. There is indeed not any essential difference between conflicting interests of different States and conflicting interests of different individuals, so far as what is meant by "conflicting interests" is concerned. It is not true that there is a great big person, Germany, which has power, and another great big person, Great Britain, which has power. What is true is that a certain set of individuals are organized politically into the nation of Germans, and another set into the nations referred to by the name "Great Britain". We certainly speak of "national power" or of "the power of a nation". But this power does not belong to a person; it belongs to individuals organized militarily; it is exerted upon individuals by individuals by the method of war. We have already translated the word "war" into a form which reveals in language what this method of war is.

It seems to me that plain speaking of this kind is of the greatest importance. Prof. Carr likes to talk in terms of a "group-person"; I should prefer to speak of "a group of persons" just to remind myself that a "group-person" is, as Prof. Carr admits, a legal fiction. For it is a dangerous fiction if its fictitiousness be forgotten. The interests of a "group-person" are not, as Prof. Carr continually insists, simple and immutable; they are complex and unstable. Moreover, the interests of some individuals belonging to one group may be in agreement with those of some individuals belonging to another group, and the two groups may be, for instance, in Germany and Great Britain respectively. Whatever determines these interests may be, at any given moment, the most important factor in deciding how the one set of individuals will behave to the other set of individuals. Among the determinants of

these interests are the beliefs about matters of fact entertained by individuals belonging to the group, and the ideals which these individuals have. These are quite as important as the power—i.e., naked force—belonging to the group in the sense that the members of the group can force members of the other group to do as they wish them to do. By “important” in this context I mean “effective in determining modes of behaviour”, and this is what Prof. Carr means by “real”. It is most misleading to use the word “real” in this sense if its usage is coupled with a simple-minded assumption that because “Germany” is grammatically a singular name, *Germany is a single person*.

However, if we do use the word “real” in this sense, then it is not correct to say that “only power is real” or that “power is the sole reality”. For what determines how the organized set of individuals will in fact exert their naked force upon another organized set of individuals will in the first place be what these individuals aim at—i.e., their ideal, and in the second place what they believe to be true concerning matters of fact. Consequently I maintain that *power* is not the sole reality in determining modes of behaviour between states nor in determining social change of any kind, whatever Hitler, Mussolini, and Prof. Carr may say and at times seem to think. It is indeed clear that totalitarian statesmen are well aware of the importance of ideas. They know quite well that their power over their fellow-countrymen lasts only so long as their ideas are acceptable to, or at least not actively rejected by, the mass of the people. Hitler’s power over the Germans is not the power of naked force alone; one man has no physical power over an army; his power is the power of persuading those in possession of naked power to accept his ideas and then use their

physical force (i.e. their naked power) to enforce others to do as he wants.

We easily become confused in thinking about the social importance of naked power, economic power, and the power of ideas, because these three are inextricably intermingled in their effects upon social groups. It is possible partially to unravel this complexity, but the unravelling is difficult and requires a detailed analysis of a definite situation. The difficulty is apt to be concealed from us because of our use of the word "power"; we think of *power* as something possessed in the way in which a State possesses an army and a man possesses a house. But to say "Hitler *has power* to do so and so" means "Hitler *is able in such and such a way* to do so and so". Sometimes "the way" is by being able to put men in concentration camps, sometimes "the way" is by being able to sway the opinions of men at mass meetings, and so on. We can truly say that Hitler is powerful because he is able to use so many different ways of making people do what he wants that we do not notice the differences since the consequences are alike in being "what Hitler wants", even though he does not always want the same, for instance, as in the case of Russia.

I do not profess to have given a full analysis of fictitious entities—i.e., personified abstractions expressed in language by proper names. I should like to do so, and such a discussion is by no means irrelevant to the consideration of moral problems. But a full discussion would not be possible without writing, if not a volume, at least several chapters as long as this one. I hope, however, that I have said enough to show how dangerously we may be misled if we do not understand the nature of our linguistic devices.

## II

I now pass to the consideration of a quite different set of difficulties arising from our legitimate but sometimes confusing use of language. By saying that the use is legitimate I mean that it is in accordance with the correct use of the English language; in saying that it is nevertheless confusing I am saying that this usage misleads us so that we do not understand what exactly it is that we are saying. When this happens we need to speak more plainly, even if less elegantly.

We often use such expressions as, "Conscience tells me so and so", "My conscience forbids me to fight", "There is no such thing as conscience", or "Conscience is a myth". All these are quite correct English sentences. But if we think of "Conscience", whether spelt with a capital or not, as the name for a single entity, then we may be led to think of *conscience* as if it were "the little man within the breast"—to use Adam Smith's description. If we then decide that there is no such "little man" we may think we have dispensed with conscience, and that all talk about right and wrong, good and evil (words associated in usage with "conscience") is nonsense—an absurd notion from which sensible men should free themselves. That would be unfortunate, for we do think in terms of conscience, and we shall not get rid of these thoughts by dispensing with the word "conscience" while at the same time refusing to translate it into anything else.

In the Elizabethan age the word "conscience" had not been clearly differentiated in usage from the word "consciousness". A study of Shakespeare's language shows that it was sometimes used as another word for *consciousness* but was coming to be used in a distinctive sense. For example,

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, Act iii, scene 1.

I understand that Hamlet is here using “conscience” to mean *reflexive consciousness*—i.e., introspection, without any reference to moral judgments. This is shown, I think, by his subsequent remark—“sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.” He is thinking of “too much thinking”, not of “reflection with regard to acting rightly or wrongly”. At least this is in my opinion the correct interpretation, but our modern usage of “conscience” is now so fixed that most people do take the statement to be about moral judgments.

Consider next the example :—

By my troth, I will speak my conscience of the King :  
I think he would not wish himself anywhere but where he  
is.<sup>1</sup>

Here again, I think, there is no reference to moral experience, but there is a reference to *personal* sentiment.

Finally consider :—

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,  
And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
And every tale condemns me for a villain.<sup>2</sup>

In this case Shakespeare’s use of “conscience” is clearly in conformity with modern usage; what is expressed is moral condemnation of oneself.

By the time of Milton the modern usage seems to be quite well established :—

Peace hath her victories  
No less renowned than war : new foes arise,  
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.  
Help us to save free conscience from the paw  
Of hireling wolves, whose Gospel is their maw.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *King Henry V*, Act iv, scene 3.

<sup>2</sup> *King Richard III*, Act v, scene 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Sonnet to the Lord General Cromwell, May, 1652.*

And again :—

And I will place within them as a guide  
My umpire Conscience; whom if they will hear,  
Light after light well used they shall attain,  
And to the end persisting safe arrive.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage Milton is, appropriately to his story, personifying Conscience. God (who is presented by Milton as making this speech) proclaims that Conscience is an umpire guiding Adam and Eve aright. This may be hastily dismissed as a poetic fiction; nevertheless, it is a fiction which many people have accepted as non-fictitious, and, as in the case of the fictitious entity "the State", difficulties are thereby caused. In our usage of the word "conscience" we are affected by the tradition that has for a long time given a meaning to the word. Words have what may be called an historical setting as well as a context on each occasion of their use. We are, sometimes not at all, sometimes only dimly, aware of this historical setting; nevertheless it influences us in our usage and gives—to employ a metaphor—a colour to our thinking. This significance derived from the historical setting is felt and resented by those who take the trouble to make shift to do without the word. They speak as if they thought that "conscience" as used, for instance, by Milton in his sonnet to Cromwell stood for a purely fictitious entity and nothing more, in the sense in which "Mrs. Harris" stood for a fiction made up by Sairey Gamp. Once the fiction is discovered, no more notice need be taken of Mrs. Harris. In the same way, it is supposed that, since there is no such infallible umpire as Milton called "Conscience", there is no further use for the word "conscience". This, however, is a mistake. If we are in search of comparisons we should do better to compare the use of the word

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost* : Bk. III, 194–197.

“conscience” with the use of “Germany” and “Great Britain” in such a sentence as “Germany is at war with Great Britain”. This is a significant sentence; its linguistic form will mislead us only if we falsely suppose that “Germany” and “Great Britain” are names for single entities in the sense in which “Adolf Hitler” and “Winston Churchill” are names for single entities—i.e., individuals; to suppose this leads us along the line of thinking of conscience as “a little man within the breast”.

My own opinion is that we cannot dispense with the notion of conscience and that there is no sound reason for trying to dispense with the word. It can surely be safely asserted that everyone does sometimes use the word “conscience” and its derivatives; we also all of us use words associated with conscience—namely, “ought”, “duty”, “right”, “wrong”, “good”, “evil”.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, we speak of approving and disapproving, or condemning, actions, and we commonly suppose that it is our conscience that approves or disapproves. In speaking like this we are at least asserting that we have the power to regard our actions from a certain point of view—i.e., of approval and disapproval. There is not the least need to personify conscience in order to make sense of such statements as these.

Every human being is capable of reflexive consciousness; that is to say, is capable of “bending back” his judgment on himself and considering his actions and motives from the point of view of approving or condemning them. If anyone were to deny that he either can or does thus reflect, I do not think there is any argument that could convince him of his mistake, but I should consider that he was

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of brevity I speak as though everyone spoke English. So far as I know all civilized languages contain translations of these words.

mistaken. For we do distinguish between right and wrong action, and between good and evil states of affairs, and between duty and inclination. However we may differ with regard to the analysis that should be given of these terms, we must admit that they are significantly used.<sup>1</sup> Bishop Butler seems to me to be right in maintaining that the psychological analysis of human nature shows that men have a conscience. He says :—

But there is a superior principle of reflection or conscience in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of his heart, as well as his external actions : which passes judgement upon himself and them ; pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves just, right, good ; others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust ; which, without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns him the doer of them accordingly.<sup>2</sup>

By calling conscience a “ principle of reflection ” Butler is calling attention to this “ bending back ” of my consciousness upon myself. “ Reflection ” does not in this context mean “ speculation ”, but self-judgment. Conscience is reflexive<sup>3</sup> consciousness. There is nothing mysterious

<sup>1</sup> Cf. “ The peculiarity of conscience is that it reflects on actions from the point of view of their rightness or wrongness. The very fact that we use words like ‘ right ’, ‘ wrong ’, ‘ duty ’, etc., shows that there is an intellectual faculty within us which recognizes the terms denoted by these names. Otherwise such words would be as meaningless to us as the words ‘ black ’ and ‘ white ’ to a man born blind. We clearly distinguish between a right action and one that happened to turn out fortunately. And we clearly distinguish between a wrong action and one that happened to turn out unfortunately.” Prof. C. D. Broad : *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Butler continues : “ and which, if not forcibly stopped, naturally and always of course goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own. But this part of the office of conscience is beyond my present design explicitly to consider.” *Sermons* : II “ Upon Human Nature.”

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the use of “ reflexive ” in the expression “ reflexive verbs ”, and in the phrase used by logicians, “ reflexive relations ”.

about this. But conscience is only one form of reflexive consciousness; it is that form which issues in such a judgment for instance as condemning me for "a villain". It is in this sense that Shakespeare used the word in the quotation given above from *King Richard III*. It is important to notice that conscience is not speculative; it is not reflection about one's conduct, or one's moral principles, in the sense in which "reflection about" means "thinking about". On the contrary, conscience issues in action and makes judgments about action; it relates to situations in which choices are being made. I am disposed to act in a certain way; but alternative courses of action lie open before me; there is a conflict. Conscience is born of the stress and strain of the conflict; it marks a crucial moment in consciousness, and there occurs awareness of direction towards one act rather than to another. Hence conscience is felt as having authority. So it was natural to our modes of speech to make conscience the subject of finite verbs, and say, for instance, "Conscience tells me to do so and so" and "Conscience forbids me to do so and so". Accordingly conscience issues in action or conscience is violated. This being so, conscience is personal in the sense that *my* conscience is felt as directive of, and judging, *my* actions; *yours* is confined to *your* actions. Butler's way of expressing this is obscured because he uses the third person singular; still, he does use the singular and not the plural pronoun. In consequence, he seems to me to make the point clearly enough, and he insists upon the directness and inwardness of conscience; it is an "internal principle".

In acting there is involved cognition, feeling, and conation, and conscience involves awareness of moral principles, emotional attitudes of approving and disapproving, and conative tendencies to seek what I approve and turn from

what I disapprove. But conscience is not merely an intellectual faculty, or a judging faculty, but a behaviour directing faculty. To have a conscience is to have a dispositional tendency to act in a certain definite way when a choice between alternatives is offered to us.

This account of the notion of conscience is, I believe, in accordance with the conventions of the English language. It does not presuppose any special metaphysical assumptions or any special purely ethical views with regard to conscience. Butler, in the passage I quoted, goes on to make such assumptions; I quoted these in the footnote on page 171. These assumptions do not form part of what the word "conscience" means; hence, the rejection of the assumptions does not justify the rejection of conscience. It belongs to the next chapter to consider whether there are any grounds for these assumptions.

### III

Although conscience judges only my actions, since conscience is reflexive and self-directing, I do make moral judgments about *your* actions. But it is important to see that these judgments are different, and that it is nonsense to say that my conscience tells me that your conscience does not say what it does.

I quote from a verdict, made by the chairman of a Conscientious Objectors' Tribunal, who refused to accept the plea of conscientious objection :—

The applicant bases his case on moral grounds. He says that on moral grounds he would leave a wounded soldier in the streets to die, rather than attend to him. He says he would have nothing to do with a friend who became a soldier. We cannot accept the view that that is morality. We think it is not conscience but unreasoning prejudice.

The chairman is here recording his dissent from the applicant's conception of his duty. He does not (so far as can be seen from the statement quoted in the *Manchester Guardian*) accuse the applicant of saying falsely that his conscience forbids him to succour a wounded soldier, but of substituting "unreasoning prejudice" for "conscience". I suggest that he could not possibly be in a position to make such a judgment. It is certain that one man's conscience may direct him to do one thing which another man's conscience would forbid. Conscience is not infallible, but it has authority; it directs *my* actions and is, within the domain of my actions, supreme—that is, is final. There is no appeal for me to anything beyond my conscience. This follows, I think, from the account of what "conscience" means which was given in the last section.

The consideration of such a difficulty as this has led some moral philosophers to try to clear away confusions by introducing new technical terms. Thus Sidgwick made a distinction which he took to be both clear and important between what he called "subjective" and "objective" rightness. He says that an action is "objectively right" when it is in fact the best action possible in the circumstances, and "subjectively right" when the person performing the action believes it to be the best possible. An action might, of course, be both subjectively and objectively right; in that case it would be, he says, "absolutely right". I suppose this means that the action could truly be said to be *right* without any qualifying adverb. But, he adds, "it would, I conceive, be universally held that no act can be absolutely right, whatever its external aspect and relations, which is believed by the agent to be wrong." He adds, in a footnote, that it is not indispensable "that a belief that it is right

should be actually present in the agent's mind ; it might be completely right, although the agent never actually raised the question of its rightness or wrongness." <sup>1</sup>

I think this usage of " subjective " and " objective " is confusing ; it certainly has confused many moral philosophers. We already have in English a convenient word denoting what Sidgwick calls " subjectively right "—namely, " conscientious ". A man is commonly said to " act conscientiously " when he acts in accordance with his conscience, or, as we also say, as his conscience directs him to act. The conscientious objector, to whom reference was made above, was acting conscientiously, assuming (as I do, since there is no evidence to the contrary) that he was not lying in making his appeal to be registered as a conscientious objector. The chairman evidently assumed that no one's conscience could direct him to behave as the applicant said he would behave. In my opinion it seems odd that the chairman should regard the man's views as the result of " unreasoning prejudice " ; they strike me, on the contrary, as the outcome of a desperate attempt to be consistent in accepting the ideal of non-violence. There are, I imagine, few conscientious objectors who would believe that they ought to leave a wounded soldier in the streets to die *because* he was a soldier. But this conscientious objector seems to have argued that to save a soldier from dying is to help the army. Whatever we may think of the premisses he accepted, it does not seem to be correct to deny that he attempted to reason from them. Indeed, a man might well be converted from his " conscientious objection " by being led to see that such a conclusion might be its logical

<sup>1</sup> *The Methods of Ethics*. Seventh ed., p. 207. I assume that Sidgwick means the same by " completely right " in the footnote as by " absolutely right " in the text.

consequence. The mistake made by the chairman is by no means uncommon. If you (anyone) hold an opinion about what ought to be done which seems to me (any other person) to be preposterous, wrong, wicked (to speak in a *crescendo* of indignation), then I find it very hard to believe that your conscience is really directing you. But this belief rests upon a very serious muddle; it was for the sake of clearing up this muddle that Sidgwick made his distinction between "subjective rightness" and "objective rightness".

Unfortunately Sidgwick's way of making the distinction only increases the muddle. For he appears to present us with two varieties of *rightness*—namely subjective and objective. It is surely difficult to believe that *rightness* has two varieties, and, if there are these two, how are they related? Is one *rightness* better than the other, or does it not make sense to ask this question? I think it does not make sense to ask *this* question; I believe that the syntax of the question is mistaken. To say that an action "has subjective rightness" is to say that the action "is subjectively right", and "subjectively right" means the very same as "conscientious". In saying "He acted conscientiously" we have managed to get rid of the word "right" in this context. This is a gain; it enables us to ask the question, "In acting conscientiously do I always act rightly?" without being led into the difficulty of supposing that there are two varieties of rightnesses. Moreover this last question is equivalent to the question: "If I act conscientiously can I be sure that I shall be doing the best that could be done in the situation in which I now have to act?" It is equivalent because to act conscientiously is to act in accordance with my moral scruples—i.e., in accordance with a principle accepted by me in behaviour. If I reflect, in the sense of "reflect" which

means "ponder upon", I shall judge that my principle is a moral principle—that is, a principle with regard to what ought to be done. It follows that, in acting conscientiously I am acting in accordance with what I judge to be best; but it does not follow that in so judging I judge truly. Hence it does not follow that in acting conscientiously I am necessarily acting in the best way possible, although it is not only true but a tautology to say that I should be acting in the way which seemed best to me. It clearly remains an open question whether what seemed best to me was in fact best or, indeed, whether there is any point in talking about a best at all. My acting conscientiously is a claim to be doing the best possible; it may be countered by your acting conscientiously in a way that denies my claim. For me there is no appeal from my conscience to your conscience; to suggest that there could be is to fail to talk sense. It is, however, not nonsense but sober and sometimes painful sense to admit that "my conscience may need to be enlightened".

Although it makes sense to say "my conscience may need to be enlightened" it is nevertheless a queer thing to say, and it could not be said at the moment when my deciding to act is issuing in action. It could be said only when I am contemplating my actions as *having been* actions in accordance with a principle or am pondering with regard to modes of acting hypothetically entertained as possible modes in which I *shall* act. In such circumstances I may be hesitating, unsure, doubtful of *myself*, of my principles of action, and thus in an indecisive frame of mind. If I have ever had the experience of changing my attitude to certain modes of action, coming to believe that an action I once believed to be rightly done was in fact not the best action in that situation, then

I may feel that perhaps my ideals are at fault. But at the moment of acting conscience is absolute, that is, is unquestioned. "A man's conscience", says L. T. Hobhouse, "may be a poor thing but it is his own; and . . . though there may be many errors incident to the principle that men should do ultimately what is right in their own eyes, yet, if they do anything else than what is right in their own eyes, there is no moral law at all."<sup>1</sup> If it is permissible to interpret "moral law", in this context, in terms of moral obligation, then I agree with Hobhouse. In feeling morally obliged to act in such and such a definite way now I am aware of the authority of conscience. Conscience has authority; as Butler pointed out, authority and superintendency belong to conscience by its very nature. But authority is not power; I may recognize what my conscience directs me to do but may fail to do it. My conscience claims to tell me truly what I ought to do, but the claim to truth is not a guarantee of truth; conscience, no less than intellect, may err.

I should contradict myself if I said: "I am acting rightly, but it would be better if I did not so act." It is not contradictory to say: "I believed then that I was acting rightly, but I see now that, although I acted conscientiously, I did not act rightly." It is not contradictory to say: "He acted conscientiously, but it would have been better for the world had he acted otherwise." The judgment, "This is *better than* that", is appropriate only to situations. If I act in violation of my conscience, *that I do so act* is evil. If I act in accordance with my conscience, *that I do so act* is good. But it does not follow that the situation in the first case is worse than it would have been had I acted otherwise; nor that the situation in the second case is better than it would have been had

<sup>1</sup> *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, p. 92.

I acted otherwise. To suppose that it does would be to assume that my conscience cannot err. But it is not part of the meaning of the word "conscience" that my conscience cannot err; the claim to truth is not self-validating.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE LAST ILLUSION

“And now it is time to depart and go our ways—I to die, and you to live; but which is the better part is known only to God.”—Socrates.

“I HAVE always held”, says Canon Peter Green, “that unless man is immortal—unless, that is to say, there is a conscious life after death for the individual—the very idea of morality ceases to possess any significance.”<sup>1</sup> This seems to me a very strange view. Canon Green complains that he has encountered much opposition to it. People think, he says, that “it means that I should not speak the truth, or try to live a chaste life, if it were not for the fear of some kind of punishment, some hell, hereafter. But I do not mean that I should not try to *do* right if I were convinced that there was no future life. I mean that I should not know what ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ meant. There would still be distinctions of ‘inexpedient’ and ‘expedient,’ of ‘pleasant’ and ‘unpleasant’. The terms ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ would cease, for me, to have any meaning.”

Canon Green finds support for this view in Kant’s contention that a rational being is “in every case an end in himself.” But, unless God’s aim includes me as a part, Canon Green argues, then “I am a means to God’s ends, but not an end in myself. But in that case I cease to be a moral being. People say that in such a

<sup>1</sup> *The Problem of Right Conduct*, p. 111.

case I 'ought' to make God's ends my ends, and to co-operate with God. But why? And if I do, how is it 'moral' conduct? There seems to be no answer to these questions."

It is evident that Canon Green holds this view with great strength and sincerity. I suspect that it is not only psychologically impossible for him to think otherwise, but also to believe that anyone could seriously come to a different conclusion as the result of a reasoned argument. He does not hesitate to accuse "high-minded Agnostics" who, he says, "declare with passionate sincerity that no matter what may be their personal destiny the claims of truth, justice, and mercy remain unaffected", of holding their view with passion but without reason. "Their passion", he says, "seems to be a substitute for argument." "Why", he reiterates, "should these ideals still be binding? What is the materialist's Basis of Ethics?"

To this query he insists that there can be no reply. It is not enough for the Agnostic to say that he *sees* these ideals to be binding. Of course, Canon Green retorts, "*they can be seen* to be binding on us", but the Agnostic cannot give any rational justification of why they are binding. It is impossible to try to get out of the difficulty by talking about an "eternal law of righteousness", for how can a law be binding on me unless it is the "expression of my own nature"? and then there will arise the question, "how can an *eternal* law be the expression of the nature of a merely temporal being?"<sup>1</sup>

I do not find it easy to follow Canon Green's argument. Perhaps he did not allow himself space to develop it. Nevertheless, he has raised questions which people think to be very important and about which it would be desir-

<sup>1</sup> *The Problem of Right Conduct*, p. 112.

able to try to think clearly. To me it seems that there are several muddles in the argument, but I am quite aware that the muddle may be my own.

One point, however, is very clear—namely, that Canon Green means by “immortality” the continued life of the individual person. If we are not in this sense immortal, then, so he thinks, there is no *meaning* in the words “right” and “wrong”, and no rational justification for morality. Yet he insists that he would continue to try to *do* right even if he were convinced that there was no future life. But, on his view, there would in that case be no meaning in the distinction between *right* and *wrong*, so it is difficult to see why he should trouble to act rightly since there could be no sense in distinguishing between acting rightly and acting wrongly. Is it because he has been accustomed to make a distinction and has tried “to do right”, and would continue, as it were by habit, to prefer acting in the way he formerly judged to be right rather than in the way he had formerly judged to be wrong? He would still be making a distinction between “expedient acts” and “right acts” but, given the hypothesis we are considering, the distinction would have ceased to have meaning for him. This certainly seems to me to be a muddle: “I try to *do* right, but ‘right’ has no meaning for me” does not appear to say anything at all.

I cannot agree with Canon Green’s interpretation of Kant. What Kant means by saying that a human being is “an end in himself” is surely that a human being as such has absolute, or unconditional, worth. This does not entail that a human being “lives for ever”. I agree that *if* God uses me as a means and merely as a means, then I am certainly not an end but a mere means—i.e., what worth I have is conditional upon the end; it is

not absolute. For this is just what the hypothesis asserts. But this language of means and end is very inappropriate and muddling, although no doubt Kant is responsible for Canon Green's use of it. I (i.e., any human being) may have unconditional worth and yet also be a member of a "Kingdom of Ends"—that is, a member of a community of human beings each of whom has unconditional worth. I do not see that Kant's conception of the Kingdom of Ends requires any reference to God in order to give it sense. To the question why should I co-operate with God to achieve His aim unless this aim "includes me as a part" I cannot properly reply because it is not clear to me exactly what the question asks. Keeping as far as I can to Canon Green's language, I should say that, if I saw God's aim to be good and if He needed my co-operation, then I should believe that I ought to co-operate because the aim was good and could not be achieved without my aid. My difficulty is to see why Canon Green thinks otherwise, so I am afraid I must have missed his point.

There seem, indeed, to be two difficulties which Canon Green has not sufficiently distinguished. The first is whether the words "right" and "wrong" have any meaning if we do not live for ever. The second is why I should do what is right if I am not immortal. But if it were, in fact, not true that I am immortal then, on Canon Green's view, the second question could not logically be asked. That he nevertheless does ask it is the main reason why I find his views muddled. It is strange that he does not seem to remember that some of the great religions of the world do not include belief in immortality, while others include this but not belief in a God. Some of the Jews of the Old Testament do not seem to have believed in human immortality, but they

found no difficulty in believing in the distinction between the right and the expedient. It is true that their distinction between what was right to do and what was wrong was regarded as dependent upon the commandments of God. But it was taken for granted that what God commanded was good because God was good and thus could not command what was wrong. Good is not "good" because God commands it but God commands it because it is good. In other words, *good* is logically prior to God.

Canon Green's reference to "some kind of punishment, some hell"—in his argument about the significance of morality—suggests that he thinks a belief in hell and heaven are logically necessary to the distinction between right and wrong. I think he must be aware that many Christians would disagree with him. Still, it must be admitted that it has been, and perhaps may still be, a very common belief. I doubt, however, whether it has been an effective belief. In saying that it is not an "effective" belief I mean that people assent to it and then act as though they did not believe it. Certainly it has been supposed that if people generally ceased to believe in hell, there would be a great outburst of wrongdoing; many preachers have in consequence tried to instill fear of hell into their hearers' hearts. In my opinion this is an immoral practice and the belief in hell is itself immoral, and I do not propose to discuss it further.

There is, however, a connected belief which must be distinguished and is worth consideration. This is the belief that in order that *my life* should have significance I must continue to live after death. This is not, I think, the same as the belief that "right" means nothing unless I be immortal. St. Paul affords an example: "If after

the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.”<sup>1</sup> We are so familiar with these words, and the whole chapter in which they occur sounds so beautifully in our ears, that we may not pause to consider the reasoning. When we do so we must surely find it very odd. The beasts are, presumably, worth fighting. If so, why seek advantage beyond their destruction? To take an example nearer home. Suppose that an unexploded bomb has to be removed in order that people in the neighbourhood should not shortly be blown to death or seriously wounded. It is someone’s duty to remove it. Volunteers are asked to undertake the dangerous task. A soldier volunteers. Let it be further supposed that he feels that it is very likely indeed that he will be killed (and I imagine that that is not an absurd supposition). Nevertheless he does volunteer. Would he necessarily argue that, unless it were finally to his own advantage, if not now then hereafter, he would not understand how it could be his duty? I think not. Christ said: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” It does not seem to me that Christ argued that this laying down of one’s life would be “made up” to one by some advantage hereafter.

It may, however, be argued that to do one’s duty is an advantage whether one thinks of the advantage or not, and that it would not be *reasonable* for anyone to do his duty unless it were in fact an advantage to do so. This is, of course, very commonly said, and it opens up a wider question than that raised by Canon Green. I shall return to this question at the end of this chapter, for the sense of the answer to it depends upon the answer

<sup>1</sup> *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, chapter xv.

to the prior question : What is the rational justification of morality ?

We have seen that Canon Green believes that an Agnostic or a Materialist can give no answer to this question. Mr. Gerald Heard goes even further than Canon Green, for he asserts : " The Rationalist Materialist to-day must be immoral." <sup>1</sup> And again : " Far from the pure Ethicist actually living a nobler life, the Rationalist, as is reasonable, lives a life of continually increased material satisfactions and continually lowered achievements." <sup>2</sup> Mr. Heard offers no evidence at all in support of his contention that the Rationalist lives a life of continually increased material satisfactions and of " lowered achievements". He does not even seem to be aware that any evidence is required. This is probably because his contention is not at all based upon an examination of how Rationalists do in fact behave, but is a conclusion deduced from his own views with regard to the nature of ethics. I must, therefore, briefly sketch his argument.

Mr. Heard thinks that traditional morality (by which I think he means Christian morality) began to be undermined three centuries ago when Newtonian cosmology displaced anthropomorphic cosmology. The world was conceived as a machine, and a machine is amoral. " Ethics," he says, " if they are honest or indeed real, must be a consistent action induced from objective observation of reality. If reality is only a machine, expressing a blindly working, amoral law, then ethics cannot be moral." <sup>3</sup> It is not easy to unravel this sentence but I take the gist of it to be that ethics must be consistent with itself and based upon the nature of

<sup>1</sup> *The Third Morality* (1937), p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71. I assume that " pure Ethicist " and " Rationalist " are used by Mr. Heard as synonyms.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

reality; if reality—which is, presumably, a synonym for “the world”—is a machine then Ethics must be of the nature of a machine; but a machine is amoral, hence Ethics cannot be moral.

I shall not discuss this contention because Mr. Heard goes on to argue that in the recent development of physics “mechanism is transcended”; from which it would seem to follow that his argument would not apply to contemporary Rationalists. His own argument, however, is worthy of comment. He says :—

In physics we see the universe is to-day realized to be fundamentally immaterial. All that matters takes place outside matter.<sup>1</sup>

Again :—

The solid world is thus no more real than the coloured, the sounding, the smelling world. The whole thing is a construction made out of wave energy by a peculiar creature, the living body; a particular organism, the psychophysical being.<sup>2</sup>

In my opinion these considerations about physical theories are wholly irrelevant.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Heard does not think so because he holds that ethics requires “a complete system of the universe to which men can react with a complete pattern of behaviour”.<sup>4</sup> The urge for completeness is hardly less common than the urge for certainty, but it is doubtful whether we can attain “a complete system of the universe” and I do not think it makes sense to talk of a “complete pattern of behaviour”. That, however, may be due to my stupidity. I do not

<sup>1</sup> *The Third Morality* (1937), p. 129. If the universe is “immaterial”, it does not make sense to speak of “outside matter”.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> I have discussed this topic in my *Philosophy and the Physicists*, (see especially Ch. XII).

<sup>4</sup> *The Third Morality* (1937), p. 150.

at all deny that we (i.e., we who are alive to-day) need to think out anew the foundations of our ethical beliefs and to revise our conceptions of what we ought to do. These are problems that must be faced anew by every generation. But I do deny that the recondite speculations of physicists have any bearing upon ethics.

It is probable that those who take the contrary view do so because they are afraid that the acceptance of the metaphysical view of mechanical materialism (called by Mr. Heard "mechanomorphism") destroys "the belief in freedom, in human responsibility, in the authority of reason, in the duty of argument, in the claims of the individual".<sup>1</sup> Certainly to believe that we are not responsible for our actions, that reason is to be disregarded, that argument is not worth while, that the claims of the individual are of no account—all this would be disastrous because we should be believing what was false. My contention is that Mr. Heard and Mr. Ellis Roberts misconceive the nature of the problem of human responsibility and the nature of the authority of reason. They, and many other thinkers from the time of St. Augustine, seem to suppose that it is logically possible to have a theory of "the complete system of the universe" and *then* to raise the question how to fit in human responsibility and the claims of reason. Once the problem is approached in this way it may become insoluble. Thus, for instance, the problem was insoluble for St. Augustine because he first accepted the view that God created me and foreknew my actions, and then he asked himself the question how *I* could be responsible for so acting. Once the problem is posed in this way, no doubt the only way of dealing with it is to assert

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from R. Ellis Roberts's Preface to the "I Believe" Series. See p. 42 above.

that God *made me free*. Thus Milton presents God as saying :—

They, therefore, as to right belonged,  
So were created, nor can justly accuse  
Their maker, or their making, or their fate,  
As if Predestination overruled  
Their will, disposed by absolute decree  
Or high foreknowledge. They themselves decreed  
Their own revolt, not I. If I foreknew,  
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,  
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.  
So without least impulse or shadow of fate,  
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,  
They trespass, authors to themselves in all,  
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so  
I formed them free, and free they must remain  
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change  
Their nature, and revoke the high decree  
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained  
Their freedom; they themselves ordained their fall.<sup>1</sup>

This is not an acceptable solution once the question is posed; the notion of *forming* does not fit the notion of *forming free*.

We do sometimes say truly, "I chose freely to do this", "I am free to make up my mind on this point and act accordingly", "I decided to do that", "I am responsible for having done that". The fact that such statements are true is a datum to be taken into account, not a deduction from a theory of the "complete system of reality". If such a theory were to entail that statements of this kind must be false, then the theory is manifestly at fault.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, Bk. III. 111–128.

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed the problem of human freedom and responsibility in my *Philosophy and the Physicists*, Part III. My argument there is not free from muddles and is often ill-expressed, but I still think that it is in the main correct. I hope, if I live long enough, to deal with this topic more fully and without being encumbered by discussion of the views of physicists. But that is too long an undertaking to be attempted in this book.

It is true that we sometimes try to excuse ourselves for having acted wickedly by throwing the responsibility for our deeds upon someone or something else—Fate, God, or even perhaps “the great machine of the universe”. The excuse is a miserable failure and is self-contradictory if the responsibility is cast upon a “great machine”, for it does not make sense to attribute responsibility to a machine, nor to excuse oneself to it.

There is another sense in which we use the word “free” with reference to our actions. We sometimes say that we act freely when our actions are reasonable, or, as it is sometimes put, “are in accordance with what reason would prescribe”. Milton affords us an example of this usage also :—

But God left free the Will; for what obeys  
Reason is free; and Reason he made right.<sup>1</sup>

But this is quite a different sense of “freedom”, though legitimate enough in certain contexts. Sometimes when I (*any* I) act freely I act rightly, sometimes wrongly. When I believe myself to act reasonably, then I am not ill at ease, so that the consciousness of being free may be very strong.

There is an interesting example of an ordinary man’s reflections about acting freely in Mr. Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*.<sup>2</sup> I should like to quote it in full, but must content myself with a fragment :

“Well, what is your objection to the Categorical Imperative? ”

“It suggests that one can choose one’s course by an effort of will. And it suggests that reason is the surest

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Bk. IX, 351–352; cf. also Bk. XII, 83–85:

“True liberty is lost, which always with right reason dwells  
Twinned, and from her hath no dividual being.”

<sup>2</sup> Chapter LXVII.

guide. Why should its dictates be any better than those of passion? They're different. That's all."

"You seem to be a contented slave of your passions."

"A slave because I can't help myself, but not a contented one," laughed Philip.

While he spoke he thought of that hot madness which had drawn him in pursuit of Mildred. He remembered how he had chafed against it and how he had felt the degradation of it.

"Thank God, I'm free from all that now," he thought. And yet even as he said it he was not quite sure whether he spoke sincerely.

We do feel ourselves to be "slaves of our passions" but not of our reason. Driven by hot passion we do what we would not do if we were but cool—i.e., able to take a longer view. To be reasonable is to have regard to the whole situation that is relevant. To act reasonably is to act in the light of such relevant knowledge. I do not expect that this would be disputed, but it may be objected that what is relevant is the "complete system of reality", that lacking knowledge of it we are not in a position to act reasonably, and that if the "system of reality" be such as to make our desires incapable of fulfilment our theory of morals will suffer or be non-existent. To this I cannot agree.

I think that the *ethical* objection many people feel to any form of metaphysical materialism is that they suppose that such a theory is hostile to our moral aspirations and that unless we can hope for the fulfilment of these aspirations morality does not make sense. I fancy this would be Canon Green's position. I am glad to be able to claim for my view the support of a distinguished theologian, Prof. F. R. Tennant, who, speaking of the argument from our moral aspirations to their fulfilment, says :—

It [this argument] takes several forms . . . e.g., that which owes its plausibility and its professed independence of teleology to a double usage of the word "rational". We can only argue from needs and aspirations to their fulfilment when we have established, as a major premiss, that the world is reasonable, or "rational" in the sense of teleologically ordered. That, however, is identical with what it is wished to prove, and is not datum or ascertained fact. What is initial fact or premiss is that the world is more or less rational in the sense of analytically intelligible. But such rationality does not imply that the world is so perfectly harmonious a whole that no serious error in human judgments or no frustration of the nobler and more permanent human hopes is incompatible with it. Neither certainty nor probability that the universe will respect our aspirations can be given by moral judgments alone, though individuals may hold that belief tenaciously.<sup>1</sup>

He pushes the point home with the utmost clarity, adding :—

The Philosopher cannot plead that if such a view as that our aspirations are to be nullified were conceivable it would remain incredible because outraging the deepest convictions on which our life is built. The "thinking reed" may face the world as a judge rather than as a suppliant; but so far as moral ideals alone can inform us, the world may expunge both him and them, however intolerable the thought may be.

Prof. Tennant does not himself believe that "the moral argument stands alone", and he is thus able to come to the conclusion that our moral aspirations will be fulfilled. But he does not make the mistake of supposing that we could not have moral aspirations unless we were, by some means or other, assured of their being fulfilled, if not in this life, then in a world to come. It is the fear

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophical Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 94-95.

that perhaps our efforts to do what is right, to achieve what is good, to realize our ideals, are futile, that, in the end, nothing worth doing will have been accomplished—this is the reason why we seek for a “rational justification” of morality. This is the reason why Canon Green thinks that the Materialist can find no “Basis of Ethics”, and Mr. Heard—more strangely—that “the Rationalist Materialist to-day must be immoral”.

What, then, is meant by a rational justification of morality? At the outset we must clear away what is, I believe, a serious and common mistake. Morality is not to be *deduced* from anything else; the concept of moral obligation is not to be exhibited as a deduction from a system of the universe. On the contrary, the fact that we know what it is to be morally obliged is a datum that must be fitted in, if we are so ambitious as to construct a theory of the universe. I have already touched upon this point in connection with difficulties that have been raised concerning human responsibility. I will illustrate my point with an example that has nothing to do with morality.

She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.—  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

The fact that a human being can create such verse is a fact that must be taken into account in any attempt to

construct a metaphysical theory of the universe. Whatever "explanation"—psychoanalytical or otherwise—may be given of how Shakespeare came to write thus, or of how it is that we can be moved and exalted by it, the fact that he did so write and we are so moved is a datum for, not a deduction from, any metaphysical theory whether materialistic or idealistic. I need not have taken an example from poetry, and do so only because the example can be presented to the attention of the reader, whereas I could have cited only titles of plastic works of art or of musical compositions. Nor need the example have been of a work of art at all. The achievements of Galileo, of Newton, of Gauss, of Thucydides, illustrate the same point. No one—so I believe—professes to deduce the possibility of such achievements from, say, an idealistic metaphysical theory; likewise, no one should try to deduce morals from metaphysics. Further, suppose that a materialistic theory of the universe made sense and was also true (a large supposition I grant), then again these facts, which I cited as examples, would have to be fitted in. The case of morality raises, I submit, no further and peculiar difficulties, so far as "rational justification" means "giving a deductive argument in support of".

But that is exactly what people usually do mean by "giving a rational justification", as, for instance, when it is asked whether induction can be rationally justified. My own answer to this question is that induction cannot be thus rationally justified, not because it is too difficult but because the request does not make sense; it is asking us not to talk about induction but to talk about deduction instead. That indeed is precisely what many logicians have done.

This comparison between the traditional treatment of

the "problem of induction" and the request for a rational justification of morals seems to me to be enlightening. Nevertheless, a difficulty remains. Even if we belong to those who are not satisfied with the rationality of induction, we do see that it works, or—as it is sometimes put—it is justified by its success. And, it may be asked, is there not a corresponding problem about morality? Does morality work? Is it "justified by success"? or "Does morality pay?" These questions lead on to the wider question, already mentioned—"Will our moral aspirations be fulfilled?" This, I think, really is the question that gives the sting to the moral problem, but is taken away from the inductive problem by the fact that science is achieved.

To ask whether morality *pays* is, of course, to ask the question whether my doing my duty is any advantage to me. This is usually so asked as to mean: "What shall I get *besides* the satisfaction of doing my duty, if I do my duty?" I believe the answer to that is: "Very often you will get no *other* satisfaction, and when you do get some other satisfaction it never is a satisfaction gained as a reward for doing your duty." This answer does not seem to me to raise difficulties. If doing my duty is worth while for its own sake, then the addition of *something else* worth while does not make the doing of duty *more* worth while, for that would be nonsense. What it does do is to make the whole situation *better*. And it makes the whole situation better because *ex hypothesi* the so-called reward consists in having *another* good thing. But it is not logically necessary that there should be this other good thing, and there is no reason to suppose that it is usually, or even very often, the case that there is another good thing.

I spoke just now of the "so-called" reward for doing our duty, because it seems to me senseless to talk of being rewarded for having something worth while, and if I do my duty I do have something worth while however much else I may have that is the reverse of worth while. It is true that we sometimes encourage one another to act in the way in which our duty would lie, because we are not always willing to do our duty, since duty and our wants and inclinations may be in conflict. And the situation as a whole will be better if we "do our duty" than if we do not, even though, strictly speaking, we are not acting dutifully. This is obviously the case with children. We try to encourage them with rewards to do what is the right thing to do in the situation or to deter them with penalties from doing the wrong thing. But if the action is done for the sake of the reward, or to avoid the penalty, then it is not duty that is done but only something that it is well should be done non-morally rather than not at all. When we "put away childish things", it is not reasonable to want to be helped by rewards or deterred by penalties. But we are often not at all reasonable; so rewards and penalties are socially very useful. I am not, however, concerned with questions of moral education now, and so I am not concerned with rewards and penalties.

There is, however, still another difficulty. Even if we are willing to face the fact that it is not certain that our moral aspirations will be fulfilled—and it often looks as though it is not at all likely they will be—we do still want to know that when we act conscientiously we shall be doing the best that can be done in the situation in which we are acting. Even of that we cannot be sure. Indeed it is to be feared that we all have cause to know that in acting conscientiously we did not always do the

best that could have been done. For consider what it is to act in a complex situation, and it is in complex situations that we rely upon the direction of conscience. To act in a complex situation is to bring about changes the causes and consequences of which we know only in part; further it is to bring about those changes for the sake of what we judge to be most worth while in the circumstances. But our judgment may be mistaken in two very different respects. We may be in error with regard to the causal consequences of our actions; what we reasonably expect to happen may not happen. We may judge that something is intrinsically good which we subsequently realize was not good but evil. As partly rational beings we each have a certain ideal, vague in some respects, fairly definite in certain other respects, often insusceptible of explicit formulation. With reference to such an ideal we have now (it is assumed) to act; we accordingly act. But, it may be, we lacked some knowledge necessary for the achieving of the best possible course; there was misjudgment with regard to what it would be best to achieve; or we did not see clearly what was worth while. In one way it was the best act we could perform at that time, since we cannot do more than act conscientiously. But this is merely to say that we did act conscientiously; it does not follow that we did that which was best to be done.

It is not enough to desire what is good; it is not enough to act with due regard to the action and after careful scrutiny and deliberation; it is further necessary that our insight should be keen and our judgment unclouded, and that we should know what will be the outcome of the changes we initiate. We do not always know.

That this should be so affords no sound reason for us

to despair of making our world a better place. We already know that a great deal is wrong, that there is much unnecessary misery, much folly, much cruelty and hatred; we know that we are able, if we care enough, to get rid of some of these evils. We already know that there is much that is good in our world and that we are able to preserve and increase this good. It is not, I think, presumptuous of me to say this. For we are, especially just now, being told on all sides that we "can each of us help in making a better world". Of course people who speak to us from pulpits and on platforms and on the wireless do, it must be admitted, sometimes say what is not very sensible; perhaps they do not expect us to take much notice, or to be aware of their inconsistencies and vagueness. But that again is not always the case. We do all see the evils of the slums; a great deal has been said about it since Hitler's bombers destroyed some of the slums, though the destruction was not done with any good intentions of ridding London of an evil. Clearing away the slums and putting something better in their place is something quite definite that needs to be done. Only it is not so easy as people seem to think, or at least, to say. For the slums cannot be removed and leave our economic system unaffected. One effect may be interference with freedom. So even here we find that we do not always know for certain what is best to do. We are confronted not with logically simple questions such as, "Is love good?", "Is cruelty evil?"; we have to consider whether it is in fact possible to remove one evil without introducing some other evil, or losing something that it would be good to retain. It is an illusion to suppose that "there shall never be one lost good". Slums are an illustration; we could have taken others, but the point would have been the same.

It would be possible to approach the problem from a different direction. Instead of speaking about anything so definite as clearing away slums, we might have talked about the value of love, and agree that it is worth while to love our neighbour as ourself. My reason for not doing so is that we so often have said it is our duty to love our neighbour, but have not thought out how that love would manifest itself, that it seemed better to be definite.

The urge to attain certainty is very great. It is not at all easy to face the fact that we cannot have certainties. We like to think that there is a moral code, if only we knew it, that was wholly right, given out by God on Mount Sinai or written in our hearts. No doubt the German Youth have found satisfaction and peace of mind in the Nazi creed, with their belief that Hitler is always right; and the Fascisti, with *their* belief that Mussolini is always right. These Leaders are felt to have a wisdom that is beyond question. Unfortunately the Leaders do not always agree, and the deliverances of one wise man are in conflict with those of another. The case is not widely different with regard to the leaders of Christian opinion—Catholic, Protestant, and Nonconformist. So that we have only two alternatives. Either we must decide upon our leader, the wise man who “knows the rules of the game”, and then refuse to listen to any other; or we must, in the end, after hearing what they have to say, decide each for himself: I for myself; you for yourself. It seems then that I must be willing to make mistakes, and mistakes that cannot be remedied.

Life is not a game for which rules can be prescribed once for all; nor a rehearsal for a Great Drama the first performance of which is not yet; nor a porch leading

us into heavenly courts. It is an illusion to find the value of our lives here and now in a life to come; it is an illusion to suppose that nothing is worth while for me unless I live for ever; it is an illusion to suppose that there is no uncompensated loss, no sacrifice that is without requital, no grief that is unassuaged. But it is also no illusion but uncontested fact that here and now we know that hatred, cruelty, intolerance, and indifference to human misery are evil; that love, kindliness, tolerance, forgiveness, and truth are good, so unquestionably good that we do not need God or heaven to assure us of their worth.

## SUMMARY BY WAY OF EPILOGUE

“Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced—even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it.”—John Keats.

EVEN if ethical principles are eternal and immutable it is certain that they need to be re-interpreted for every period and re-thought by every generation. Our moral beliefs, our standards of right and wrong, our conception of our relations to other men undergo some change as our modes of living change. This is true of the individual as he develops from the child through youth to manhood, unless indeed his growth be arrested. It is true also of men associated in groups, tribes, nations, States, interrelated States, and the world. The development is not always in wisdom, it is not always for the better; all that can be certainly affirmed is that there is either change or the stagnation of decay. We cannot free ourselves from the past nor avoid affecting those who are to come after us. In the changing scenes of human history no definite pattern is discernible but there are interwoven threads which from time to time give an appearance of a pattern yet to come.

When he had completed his *History of Europe* the late Mr. H. A. L. Fisher wrote in his Preface :—

One intellectual excitement has, however, been denied to me. Men wiser and more learned than I have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can

see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations, only one safe rule for the historian : that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen. This is not a doctrine of cynicism and despair. The fact of progress is written plain and large on the page of history ; but progress is not a law of nature. The ground gained by one generation may be lost by the next. The thoughts of men may flow into the channels which lead to disaster and barbarism.

The more widely in time and over the surface of the globe we extend our view of human history the more evident becomes the truth of Mr. Fisher's contention. There is no clear line of advance, no inevitable development, no continuous progress in the affairs of men and their relations one with another. Hegel and Marx, each in his different way, sought to construct a philosophy of history and to demonstrate the inevitable arrival of the world or of man at some wished-for goal. Each failed. Those who will at all costs obtain a tidy pattern must pay the price of ending with a partial and one-sided view of the activities of men. It could hardly be otherwise in so complex a study as the history of mankind. The wisest as well as the most foolish must leave something out ; the distinction between wisdom and folly lies in what is omitted. It is not in the least surprising that the completion of the pattern has brought at one time one and at another time another of these activities into prominence. In the thirteenth century it was the religious and spiritual aspect that was emphasized ; in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries the rational, and in the nineteenth century the economic aspect. The emphasis was stressed to the point of isolation. Hence arose the myth of the

economic man, transformed by Marx into the ideal of the economic man. His brilliant survey of history explained so much to men who felt the urgent need of explanation that they cannot tolerate the thought that it too is one-sided and conditioned by the circumstances of Marx's own life and times, so that it necessarily fails to point the way to an inevitable end.

There are at least three factors that determine social change: economic structure, the possession of power—especially naked power—and ideas. It has been my purpose in this book to insist upon the importance of ideas. I do not deny the importance of economic structure or of the possession of power, but with these I have not been directly concerned.

The one-sided emphasis on power has led to the despising of ideas. In the first chapter an attempt was made to vindicate the significance of ideals. An idea of a certain state of affairs as worth realizing is an ideal. The classification of men into idealists and realists has stupidly or wilfully been based upon the denial that we must have ideals. I have examined Prof. Carr's attack on idealists and his glorification of realist politicians, and have sought to show that the attack fails. Then we examined Mr. Vidler's very different objection to idealists—now significantly named "Utopians". This is the objection that their hopes are set upon this earth instead of being turned towards heaven. This theme was taken up again in the second chapter in which we examined the depreciation of the Social Reformer at the expense of the Saint. Two Catholic writers, Miss Rosalind Murray and Cardinal Newman, were seen to be more concerned to save souls for heaven than to fit men for earth.

At this point the question was raised concerning the desirability of overhauling our moral principles. Conse-

quently in the third chapter we considered the problem of examining the foundations of our moral code with or without the help of a moral philosopher.

We had then to start afresh. Recognizing how deeply our climate of opinion had been altered by the impact of the American Revolution, we considered the ideal of the pursuit of happiness. At once we were forced to pay attention to the claim that freedom and happiness ought not to be confined to some only among human beings. This led to the discovery that "the greatest happiness philosophy" was, in the persons of Bentham and J. S. Mill, concerned rather with the removal of unnecessary human misery than with the pursuit of pleasure. Contemplation of the desperate state of our world led us, in the fifth chapter, to the conclusion that when our cities are in flames and our fellow-men are organized for mutual slaughter happiness must be forgone. Out of our miseries we snatch some optimism in the fervent hope that we can build a better world upon the ruins of the present. In the sixth chapter an attempt was made to find some indication of what such a world might be like.

A difficulty arises from the conflict of ideals. The "we" who seek to build a better world cannot be taken to stand for all Europeans, still less for all mankind. Accordingly in the seventh chapter we (and here the reference is plain—the author and the readers of this book) examined the rival ideals of Fascism and National Socialism in opposition to Democracy. It was insisted that all alike are ideals, and it was claimed that Fascism and National Socialism are inherently evil. But we are forced to recognize that more support the ideal of Democracy than are aware of what it entails.

In the eighth chapter we made a digression of importance. We considered the dangers into which we are

led because we do not understand the nature of our linguistic devices. The discussion begins evidently with verbal points; it seems to pass beyond them. In point of fact no question is merely concerned with words; yet no philosophical problem can afford to neglect words. In this chapter this contention was illustrated by a discussion of the use and abuse of abstractions, and by a plea for the admission of "conscience".

The contemplation of the demands of conscience led us to ask whether the deliverances of conscience can be justified. In the ninth chapter we attempted to answer this question, and to free ourselves from the illusion that morality derives its significance from a world to come.

We have been so much preoccupied with human suffering, so conscious of our blindness and stupidity as we survey men's halting attempts to make their ideal stable and definite, that it may well seem that the outcome is a pessimistic despair. That is not my conclusion. Human beings are too fine in their highest achievements to justify despair. As I write sadness pervades much of the civilized world: frustrated hopes, broken lives, thousands of dead; cities in ruins, cathedrals destroyed; treachery, lies, and hatred too plain to be ignored. But that is not the whole tale. Cathedrals were built by men who had faith in spiritual things and professed a religion of love. It is better that these cathedrals should be destroyed by those who despise the love of men as an unworthy weakness than that they should be saved from destruction at the expense of enslaving the spirit of men. Amidst the ruins it is still possible to preach the ideal of freedom, truth, happiness, and love. This is the choice before us now; it is a conflict of ideals. The choice offered us is evil, but it is not necessary to choose the worse. The

way before us is hard, but it is not impossible to make it lead towards a world where men can be free and happy because they are not afraid of the truth, however uncomfortable, and have learnt that love casts out fear and brings peace.

